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Writing in/on the Borderlands : (basic) writers and the writing center.

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WRITING IN/ON THE BORDERLANDS: (BASIC) WRITERS AND THE
WRITING CENTER

By

Allison Egnew Smith
B.A., University of Louisville, 2002
M.A., University of Louisville, 2005

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

August 2010

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A Dissertation Approved on

August 6, 2010

by the following Dissertation Committee:

Dr. J. Carol Mattingly

Dr. Bruce Horner

Dr. Joanna Wolfe

Dr. Susan Ryan

Dr. Paula Gillespie

DEDICATION

In Memoriam

Rachel Maxine Allison Wade (1926-2009)

who drove me to school everyday

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First and foremost, I'd like to thank my family and friends for their unyielding support and encouragement. I am eternally grateful to my parents—to my mother, Deborah Wade Egnew, for teaching me the dedication and love of a working woman, and to my father, Michael Egnew, for encouraging my academic endeavors. Thanks to my sister, Dr. Michelle Egnew Carnes, and my brother-in-law, Dr. Tristan Carnes, for their love and humor. I thank my grandparents, Phyllis and Carroll Egnew for teaching me the discipline needed to practice the arts. Also I'd like to acknowledge my appreciation and love for my grandmother, Maxine Allison Wade, who passed away while I was writing this dissertation; she loved her family, and me, with an inspiring tenacity. To Stella and Willis McClure, Mitza, Trent, and Skyler Smith—the best in-laws and sister-in-law anyone could hope for. Thanks also to my numerous aunts, uncles, and cousins who were always so inquisitive about the process. To my dear friends, Natasha McClure, for all her love and support throughout the years and to Venus Popplewell for being such a good friend that she might as well be family. Finally, thanks and love to my husband, Travis Smith, for his willingness to go with me on this long journey.

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ABSTRACT
WRITING IN/ON THE BORDERLANDS: (BASIC) WRITERS AND THE
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Allison Egnew Smith

August 6, 2010

Using Gloria Anzuldula's text *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* and Bruce Horner and Min-Zhan Lu's 2000 article, "Expectations, Interpretations and Contributions of Basic Writing" as conceptual framework, I conducted my dissertation on the effects of mandatory writing center consultations on basic writers enrolled in the class "Introduction to College Writing," at a private, liberal-arts college in south-central Kentucky.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. In Chapter I, I discuss the distancing of basic writers from writing center and composition scholarship and the need to revisit this relationship. In Chapter Two, I discuss the methodological and theoretical framework of the dissertation and my use of the quasi-experimental framework that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative data in addition to numbers, student narratives, and the various voices of myself, student writers, and writing consultants. In Chapter III, I outline how students used the writing center as a thirdspace in which to discuss their own borderland writings and the increased connection the students in the experimental section felt to the college community; in addition, I also discuss pass rates and class attendance. In Chapter IV, I outline the improvement in retention rates for the

students required to visit the writing center and the increased amount of drafts students produced in the class. Finally, in Chapter V, I conclude the dissertation and offer places where future research may go, in addition to my own shortcomings as a researcher and further implications of my work.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE CENTER'S BORDER: MAKING THE CASE FOR (BASIC) WRITERS

Why am I compelled to write?

Because the world I create in writing compensates for what the real world does not give me. To become more intimate with myself and you. To discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy. To dispel the myths that I am a mad prophet or a poor suffering soul. To convince myself that I am worthy and that what I have to say is not a pile of shit. Finally I write because I'm scared of writing, but I'm more scared of not writing.

—Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera*

Introduction: A Dissertation Freewrite or a Researcher's View of the Front Row

I had hoped the clichés were untrue, or at least that they were untrue *here*. You know the ones: that basic writers were at higher risk for withdrawing from college; that many fall at and below the national poverty line; that they often have trouble balancing multiple obligations, both familial and cultural, and this negatively impacts their learning processes. As I began observing the basic writing classes I was researching, in addition to the effects mandatory writing tutorials have on these students, I often (okay, I admit it—daily) recalled the words of Teresa Enos (and Mina Shaughnessey, as well as many other basic writing scholars) who repeatedly state that a basic writer at one institution is rarely like a basic writer at another; that they are a complex and non-stereotypical group of people who reject any one type of label. Of course, that doesn't dissuade those in our field from making a general sketch of what a basic writer is, some of which I mentioned

above. After all, I don't like stereotypes or labels or clichés, so I hoped that the group of students I was observing would go against the basic writing grain.

As the semester began, that seemed to be the case. Both sections were intelligent, lively groups of students, made up of an array of ethnicities, no one group dominating over another. There seemed to be a balance of athletes and non-athletes, and as their ACT scores rolled in for me to examine, many were surprisingly high, most ranging between 16-18 (though there was the occasional outlier such as a 6 or a 22). Everyday I noticed the front row of students in the experimental section of my class—Joan, Will, Sarah, Emily, and Angela¹. They all looked eagerly at their professor, asked questions, and were the typical front row students—the ones who try harder, ask more questions, engage in the readings. The professor told me how they were getting their work done early, writing more than they had to, staying after class to ask questions. There were no basic writing stereotypes here that I could attest to.

Then things started to change. In the second week of classes, one of the front rowers, a 21 year old student named Emily, asked to speak to me about my project after I had explained to the classes why I was observing and why I asked them to sign consent forms. We agreed to meet in the writing center (fittingly?) to discuss what she wanted to say.

We met up that afternoon, and she told me that she was so glad the writing center was a part of her class—that she was looking forward to the work she would be doing in there. She then (rather sheepishly) admitted that this was her third time taking the class because of family obligations she held. She started out by saying that she had been in a basic writing class twice before and had not passed. The first time she said she failed

¹ All student names have been changed.

because she didn't have adequate time to write her papers; the second time she had a miscarriage and had emergency surgery, which put her out of class for two and a half weeks. She went on to tell me that she had a five year old daughter who had just started kindergarten, and she herself was 11 ½ weeks pregnant. She said that the main thing she wanted to tell me was that she really liked the writing center and had used it in the past but that sometimes she had a paper due and didn't have time to type her paper herself (which immediately reminded me of Tom Fox's book *Defending Access*—he essentially discusses that “at-risk” and basic writing students sometimes have difficulty gaining access to computers to literally type their papers out). Emily went on to tell me that she was glad she was in this section (she had told me earlier she'd never been in the writing center section of the class) because it would be good for her to have mandatory visits and that she would always be guaranteed a spot. When I asked her why, she said that sometimes she felt too proud to get help or she didn't feel like she had time (which reminded me of Irene Clark's study, which states that students rarely visit the writing center unless required to do so) but that this way it was fit into her schedule and she had to receive the help. She also stated that she was glad she was getting the extra credit hour.

Emily went on to convey to me some of her life story, of how passing classes was sometimes difficult for her. She said that her father was a truck driver and that she had raised her three younger brothers since she was in elementary school. She's moved back and forth a lot between Kentucky and Alabama, and came back to the area when she was 16. She gave birth to her first child when she was in 9th grade, and miscarried this last February. Her fiancé has two other daughters, 16 and 18. We went on to chat about small

things, where we came from, her step-children in school, and where we both lived. I had a feeling she would have gone on talking to me longer (we had chatted for nearly 45 minutes), but I had another meeting to go to. She said that she had lost track of time. It was a very interesting conversation that reminded me of how complicated our students' lives are, especially ones that have been labeled "high-risk" by the institution.

I left the conversation feeling good about my study. After all, this student wasn't letting her obligations keep her from continuing her education. And despite the fact that she was a busy and young mother, she had taken time out of her day to discuss with me, an unknown graduate student, her experiences with the writing center out of no benefit to herself. She was engaged in her classes—she was going against the grain.

And then she was gone. When I say gone I mean totally out of the system, mysteriously gone. I asked her instructor if she'd received an email (no), phone call (no), warning from advisor (no). I had wondered how she would balance it all, and I guess I had gotten my answer: she wouldn't be able to.

Emily wasn't the only one of the front row to disappear. Sarah left class crying at the beginning of the third week after her professor pointed out that she had exceeded her number of excused absences (seven). Angela had withdrawn from the college a week earlier with no explanation. And now Will (also in his third semester of taking the course) was meeting with his professor to ask her opinion if he should quit school to take a managerial job at Wal-Mart. When she stated that she thought he wanted to be a police officer (which requires 60 hours of college credit) he said, "Yeah, that is my dream. But this is just a lot of money." Suddenly it seemed like only one front rower would be left, Joan, and I knew that her husband was in a wheelchair after a work-related accident and

that she had returned to school after 25 years. Like Dicken's Spirit of Christmas Present, I suddenly had a vision of another empty chair.

* * *

This dissertation presents the results of research conducted at a private, liberal arts college (PLAC)² in south-central Kentucky, of a basic writing class, Introduction to College Writing with Lab. This course provided a mandatory writing center component to aid the student writers in a four-credit course, in which students visited the writing center weekly and met with an undergraduate peer tutor. Part quantitative, part qualitative, this project examines pass rates, retention rates, and other data in addition to student narratives, self-motivated writings, interviews, and individual student and tutor voices. Not only does this project highlight ways in which the writing center helps with classroom attendance, retention, and revision, but it also presents how writing center tutorials help students feel more comfortable with their own writing and, subsequently, examine their own borderland statuses as students marked as "other." Finally, this dissertation attempts to explain in-depth why writing center consultations prove helpful, beyond statistics. It also examines how the writing center aids these students in cultivating agency through borderland knowledge and experimental writings.

Keeping it on the Down Low: A History of Basic Writing & Writing Center Scholarship

Forgive me if I'm stating the obvious, but allow me to use a popular culture metaphor for a moment: the term "down-low" is slang popularized by rappers in the 1990s, initially meaning to keep something secret or hidden. However, another, more complex meaning later became attached to the phrase. Associated with underground gay culture, the term, popularized in a *New York Times* article "Double Lives on the Down

² In an effort to protect student and teacher anonymity, the college will not be identified by name but rather as PLAC throughout this study.

Low” in 2003 is articulated as the “rejecting [of] a gay culture perceived as white and effeminate, [in which] many black men have settled on a new identity, with its own vocabulary and customs and its own name: Down Low” (Denizet-Louis 1). The author goes on to write that “the creation of an organized, underground subculture largely made up of black men who otherwise live straight lives is a phenomenon of the last decade” (1). The term, in turn, does not only mean to keep something secret but also implies hiding a difference that is identified as a weakness by both the individual and the larger cultural sphere.

It’s no wonder then that as I began reading the (thin) intersections among basic writing, writing center, and composition scholarship, I drew a correlation between the treatment of basic writers in our scholarship and the concept of being on the down low. Before the 1970s, many college administrators and writing teachers considered basic writing students to be an institutional embarrassment and felt their mere presence in higher education should be kept under-wraps or down-low. Indeed, when basic writers were referenced within the institution or culture at large, they were often referred in derogatory terms, such as the case of the 1974 *Time* magazine article that described the “Bonehead English” course at University of California, Berkeley, a class titled that by the students and faculty alike. Even as late as 1979, Andrea Lunsford wrote the piece “Cognitive Development and the Basic Writer” in which she argues that basic writers are lacking in cognitive development.

More personally, I knew as a composition instructor and writing center administrator that basic writers were a large percentage of writing center clientele, and that basic writing courses made up a significant number of the offerings at the college

where I also taught. Not only that, but as a former instructor at a large, urban university that mainstreamed and did not offer basic writing classes, I had previously had quite a few basic writers in my Composition I class. Outside of basic writing scholarship, however, I was having difficulty finding pieces that (fairly) treated basic writers in our lore. The gap between what I knew to be the reality in the classroom and the scholarship in the general composition field didn't seem to correlate in my mind. When basic writers, and the courses intended to help them, did come up in our mainstream scholarship, the relationships among teachers, students, and the programs/institutions that supported them seemed relatively strained.

To illustrate my point, I recently came across a piece in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* entitled "Teaching Grade 13," an article by Kathleen Kennedy and David M. Perry. The piece said nothing in its title or byline about basic writing, but I assumed it would be about basic writers, with its somehow deprecating title (which I felt implied that if a student was/is in grade 13, s/he aren't *really* a college student). Describing grade 13 students as "cover[ing] a broad range of phenomena resulting from the arrival, in our classes, of many students who are ill-trained in the basic skills needed for college. Although the students in Grade 13 hold high-school diplomas and have been admitted into our colleges, they are not ready." The authors go on to lament that the latest "ACT report's results should sound a warning clarion to American universities: If we want to make up for the disastrous effects of No Child Left Behind, then we must put our considerable talents and funds toward helping our faculty members teach Grade 13 successfully." Moreover, the authors call for universities and colleges to reconsider their entrance criteria, either making standards more stringent or helping students make up for

their “academic deficiencies.” Accompanying the article is a picture of a professor in his regalia, interesting to me that it is a white male, being drowned by the demands of these students, as if the academy itself is somehow being threatened by their presence.



As this article illustrates, the scholarly trend of distancing one’s self, institution, or interest from basic writers, outside basic writing’s own scholarship and journals, is a move that has seemingly existed for quite some time. Despite the fact that the creation of early writing centers was a direct response by the administration to the apparently worrisome quality of student writing in the early 20th century, over time writing centers have become anxious to prove that their clientele should be and are more diverse than merely the marginalized “basic” writer. Peter Carino states that in “fighting marginalization, a tendency in center scholarship of the past 10 years is to play down work done with under-prepared students. Indeed it has become less prestigious to claim affinity with basic writers than to tout services for the more accomplished” (102). Nancy Grimm seconds that sentiment when she writes that there is an undeniable attempt to escape “the sticky history of remediation” that “haunts the scene of writing center work” (530). It seems that in an attempt to flee our own relationship with basic writers and their work, writing center scholarship has feverishly distanced itself from these student writers.

In another of her articles, “Rearticulating the Work of the Writing Center,” Grimm discusses the often-expressed resistance of writing centers to acknowledge and embrace this history of working with remedial students. The author points out that the

academy's ambivalence towards underprepared students and the close association the writing center has had with them caused and continues to cause writing centers to "remain anxious about remedial history" (105). Similarly, writing centers avoid basic writers not only in their research but also within the public sphere. This is not only evident in our journals but also in writing center websites and advertisements which play up working with students on their resumes and graduate school applications rather than with basic writers and their legitimate struggles with academic discourse.

Unfortunately, despite all that writing centers and basic writers have been through, together and separately, their places within the university are by no means sacred. Neal Lerner, in his 2008 article, writes of the lessons we can learn from the tale of Dartmouth's ill-fated writing center: "In the current climate of excellence, many institutions in their quest to rebrand do not have the resources or history that favors colleges such as Dartmouth. In their quest for high annual rankings in *US News and World Report*, many institutions are casting off remedial instruction and the underprepared students who fill those classrooms, rebranding themselves in a Lake Wobegon-ish way with all students as 'above average'" (12). As institutions make these sweeping changes, writing center administrators, consultants, and scholars must decide how they should respond, both in matters of methodology but also in the public sphere of scholarship.

Helping or Hurting or Who Would Know?: Basic Writers and Writing Tutorials

While several studies, most published within the *Journal of Basic Writing*, have generally concluded that writing center components, in addition to other variables such as an extra semester or class meetings with the instructor, are helpful for basic writers (see

Glau 1996; Soliday & Gleason 1997), no recent studies have specifically addressed why or how mandatory writing center visits, in particular, prove advantageous. For instance, in her 1977 landmark text, *Errors and Expectations*, Mina Shaughnessy wrote that “[i]n a class of fifteen, at least one teacher and two student tutors should be in attendance during the writing sessions” (288). She goes on to say that the lessons of the classroom “should be supplemented by practice sessions in a writing center under the guidance of tutors who have access to various types of instructional materials” (288). Yet Shaughnessy does not indicate why working with writing center tutors is beneficial to underprepared students. Similarly, in a study conducted at Belmont University by Robbie Pinter and Ellen Sims (2003), students were self-placed in English 103 (the first course in the FYC sequence) after their basic writing course, English 90, was eliminated from the curriculum. The “basic” writers were still required to take the equivalent of English 101, thus English 103 gave students an extra credit hour for working with a consultant in the Writing Center. While the course was deemed a success with its high pass rate, the authors fail to detail why this particular means of instruction was helpful (“Sharing Power, Forming Relationships, Fostering Reflection”).

Though none of these studies indicates how the writing center component was helpful, a 1987 study by Karen Greenburg might illuminate why, though Greenburg does not specifically mention the writing center. Greenburg discovered that errors in basic writing texts often appear because of three issues: “1) distorted notions about writing and the composing process, 2) intense writing apprehension in certain contexts, and 3) a tendency to block while writing specific academic tasks” (202). These three issues, which most writers struggle with from time to time, are issues that writing consultants are

particularly adept at dealing with. As Muriel Harris writes in “Talking in the Middle: Why Writers Need Writing Tutors” (1995), “no one doubts that student writers too often lack confidence in their skills or that they find writing to be an anxiety-producing task, but the classroom teacher cannot attend to the variety of worries that inhibit some student writers” (35).

More recently, in the 1997 study “From Remediation to Enrichment: Evaluating a Mainstreaming Project,” Mary Soliday and Barbara Gleason created a new writing course at CCNY, replacing the basic writing class with the two-semester Enrichment curriculum in which students received full college credit and were not labeled as being in a basic writing class. Forty-one writing consultants were assigned to work with the 1,000 students enrolled in the Enrichment program, though students were not required to work with their tutors on a regular basis. Results were positive as “most students produced very good or good analytical, descriptive, and narrative essays that reflect the standard conventions of college essay writing. And most students demonstrated an ability to evaluate their own writing to reveal growth over time in a portfolio” (72). Moreover, students in their own self-assessment stated that they felt a “significant change” in their relationship to their teacher, tutor, and peers. The authors reported that the work with writing consultants, in addition to an extra semester with their teacher and peers, created a stronger sense of community for their students. In my view, this may have eliminated some of the feelings of being “othered” by the institution since students felt strongly connected to their instructor, fellow classmates, and writing consultants.

Correspondingly, in a 2007 study, “Re-Modeling Basic Writing” by Rachel Rigllino and Penny Freel, the authors studied the implementation of the Seamless

Support Program, which was a part of the Supplemental Writing Workshop Program at SUNY New Paltz, intended to “keep students, instructors, and tutors together” (p. 52). Built into the SWW basic writing course, Seamless Support provided students with a writing center tutor whom they worked with for one hour a week, and an extra hour with their instructor in a workshop setting. Ultimately, the course proved helpful to students, both in their own assessment as well as in the pass rates:

By Fall 1997, the pass rate of our SWW students (75%) was closer to being equivalent to those of students in “regular” sections of Composition I (91%). Pass rates continued to improve, and by 2002, data revealed that not only were our students’ pass rates into Composition II nearly equivalent to those of their cohorts, but so were retention and graduation rates. (56-57)

In a 1985 study by Irene Clark, “Leading the Horse: The Writing Center and the Required Visit,” Clark surveyed students who knew they needed help with writing but did not visit the writing center. Students acknowledged that they enjoyed working in the writing center and viewed the work they did with their tutor as helpful and valuable to their writing. Most students, however, stated that while they would go if a teacher required them to do so, they typically felt too busy to make time for the session on their own. “Being too busy is apparently the prime reason students claim they do not attend the writing center rather than because they do not recognize the worth in going. What seems apparent then is that to assign students to visit the writing center might indeed lead them to recognize that they weren’t quite as busy as they thought” (34).

What these studies hint at, and one hypothesis of this dissertation, is that writing center consultations provide additional support for marginalized students, and not only through their extra writing instruction, as they provide a third space for students, an issue I will address in more detail later in this chapter. I also theorize that writing consultations, in addition to the writing center's location as a "third-space" helps students acculturate to academic life through the writing center's communal effect, in addition to the support marginalized students receive, particularly in regard to their supplemental or self-motivated writings.

On the Margins: The Basic Writing Classroom and Writing Center as Borderlands

Many watershed composition texts discuss discourse communities and the tensions lying therein, such as Mike Rose's "The Language of Exclusion" (1985), Mary Louise Pratt's "Arts of the Contact Zone" (1991), and David Bartholomae's "Inventing the University" (1997). All of these authors discuss, as did M. M. Bakhtin before them, that discourse is not only words but the ways in which we as individuals, and part of larger communities, use language; moreover, our various discourses are typically dependent on context. For example, my writing here is one type of discourse, what one might label academic discourse. My free write at the beginning of this chapter might be gauged as a different discourse. The ways in which I write to my friends is another, separate discourse.

James Gee (1999) also writes about multiple discourses, in particular what he calls the borderland discourse. In his book *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Methods*, Gee discusses that borderland discourses are ones that are mixtures of various types of discourses "with some emergent properties of [their] own" (22). In

this way, discourses are uncountable according to Gee, because borders always change and emerge, “and borders are always contestable” (22).

As early as the 1980s, scholars have been writing about the clash between basic writers’ discourses and that of the academy. In her 1986 article, “What Happens When Basic Writers Come to College?” Patricia Bizzell writes that basic writers’ home-language and the language of the academy are often in opposition to one another. Similarly, Peter Elbow in “Being a Writer vs. Being an Academic: A Conflict in Goals” articulates the tension that many students and professors feel between writing for enjoyment and writing for academic audiences. Norbert Elliot also writes of the contradiction in terms of basic writers and their ability to write narrative in the classroom in his article “Narrative Discourse and the Basic Writer” (1995). He points out that while many academics use narrative in their own writing and discourse, they prohibit their own basic writing students from doing so.

In her groundbreaking 1987 book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, author Gloria Anzaldua, writes of the fluid nature of borders, particularly for Mexican immigrants on the U.S./Mexican border. For Anzaldua, and the theorists inspired by her work, the border is not merely a dividing line, but a space to inhabit that reflects one’s identity and agency. Throughout her work, Anzaldua writes in a hybrid style, one that incorporates her scholarly voice, her artistic voice, and that of a political and social activist voice. Often switching between English and Spanish, and her own blending of these languages, she writes critical essays, personal narratives, and poetry, all seamlessly blended into her unique, Chicana voice. Ultimately aimed at defining and creating her

own personal discourse, Anzaldua argues for the rights of all individuals to think about identity in their own ways, particularly in their writing.

Encouraged by the writings of Anzaldua and her concept of inhabiting discourse borderlands, Min-Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner wrote their 2000 article “Expectations, Interpretations and Contributions of Basic Writing.” In their scholarship, Lu and Horner call for research that examines not only retention rates and statistics (which they acknowledge as vital data) but also how basic writing students, teachers, and scholars might inhabit and cultivate borderland knowledge and perspectives within the academy. This type of study would accomplish multiple goals but would potentially (and simultaneously) help “create a discourse which presents Basic Writing as not only a moral imperative for an academy willing to pay more than lip service to its paper ideals but also a practical imperative—a means to improve student retention and faculty vitality, two aspects critical to the well being of any institution” (46). Moreover, Lu and Horner ask not only what instructors and consultants have learned about basic writing but also “in the process of helping basic writers revise their writings, [what] faculty and peer tutors have *learned about themselves as thinkers and writers*” (47, my emphasis).

This call for research would help create “more representations of basic writers as experienced and active—creative—practitioners of the kind of borderlands the academy officially expects the general faculty and students to inhabit” (47). Horner and Lu write that “these students’ need to respond to the dissonance between the discourses of school, home, and work when reading or writing and their reluctance to take an either/or approach to these competing ways of thinking and speaking” (46). This move, they go on to write, “should now mark them as experienced practitioners of the borderlands and,

therefore, ideal citizens of an academy aiming to inculcate diversity, interdisciplinarity, and service learning” (46). However, Horner and Lu go on to say that students, especially ones labeled basic writers, are denied the opportunity to think and write in the borderlands by their instructors and basic writing administrators. Both Horner and Lu’s article and Anzalduau’s book inspire the theoretical framework of this dissertation.

Similarly, Gregory Shafer in “Negotiating Audience and Voice in the Writing Center,” discusses ways that tutors can encourage and defend students in their choices to write in their cultural dialect, using diction to “capture the heart of their story” (430). Using the critical theories of bell hooks and Paulo Friere, Shafer writes how the postmodern writing center can be a place of resistance for students, helping them develop their organic voices. He goes on to challenge instructors who are unwilling to let students occasionally write in their own discourses, equating professors’ unease with various cultural writing conventions as a questioning of their (and the university’s) authority. The writing center then becomes a place in which writers can assert their own agency with support from consultants and fellow writers.

Likewise, Anis Bawarshi and Stephanie Pelkowski address a similar issue in their 1999 article “Postcolonialism and the Idea of a Writing Center.” They also acknowledge the various discourses basic writers bring with them to college and the ways in which the writing center can work with these students:

Today, the writing center stands as the most accessible and visible place of remediation within the university. And true to the tradition of remediation it inherits dating back to the 1920’s, the writing center is mainly a place of acculturation. Yet due to its physically and politically

peripheral place—marginalized from and yet part of the university—we argue that the writing center is an ideal place in which to begin teaching and practicing a critical and self-reflective form of acculturation, what Edward Said calls ‘critical consciousness.’ Drawing from work in postcolonial theory, we posit that the writing center can become what Mary Louise Pratt has termed a ‘contact zone’ a place in which different discourses grapple with each other and are negotiated. (p. 42)

Despite the fact that writing centers are what Bawarshi and Pelkowski label as the most “visible place of remediation” within the college community, their article does not specifically mention students who are in remedial writing classes. Similarly, in her article “Centering in the Borderlands: Lessons from Hispanic Students Writers,” Beatrice M. Newman writes of how the writing center at her institution, a university literally on the Mexican-Texas border, could also be a place of affirmation for Hispanic student writers, a space in which writing consultants could help students acclimate to the difficulties of Anglo, academic life. Nevertheless, none of these authors overtly states that the writing center could become a borderland for basic writers as well.

However, in their 2008 book *Teaching/Writing in Thirdspaces*, Rhonda C. Grego and Nancy S. Thompson write of their creation of a “writing studio,” from 1992 to 2001 at the University of South Carolina. The writing studio concept gives a fourth credit-hour to students for attending small writing group meetings outside of their classroom to discuss assignments, the writing process, or to receive feedback; these sessions are typically led by a facilitator and held with three or four other students in the class. Throughout the book, the authors examine the concept of various “thirdspaces,” places

that “turn the light of our critical faculties on the particular mix of those flows, forces, and tensions without our own compositional places/spaces, when being forced to face our location can help us better see our situation” (1). In their view, this third space can be any place where students meet outside of the classroom to discuss their writing. While the basic writing class that I examine is not specifically labeled a studio course, the work students do with their consultants (work that they receive a fourth-credit hour for) is very similar to the work the students of Thompson and Grego’s study. Moreover, I argue that the writing center becomes a third space, or a borderland, for these writers as well, a move that ultimately proves advantageous for those who garner the support for supplemental and self-motivated writings through their professor and writing consultant.

Making the Case for Basic Writers, Too: Creating Borderland Discourses in the Center

As my literature review shows, writing center scholarship has recently stated that the writing center can use its periphery status on the metaphorical and academic-structural border to all students’ advantage. Similarly, basic writing scholars have acknowledged that basic writing students should be permitted to write in the borderlands, as their fellow (non-basic) students are encouraged to do, though they are typically denied the opportunity in the writing classroom, thus the need for “thirdspaces” as Grego and Thompson argue. Yet no study has expressly examined how the writing center can become one of the premiere thirdspaces in which basic writing students can, through the writing center’s place as a borderland (and as a space literally outside of the classroom), aid these students who require opportunities and encouragement to safely write and share experimental and self-motivated writings. Additionally, while many basic writing scholars have examined the ways in which urban, minority students are overrepresented

in basic writing classrooms, few studies have examined other types of students, ones similar to those that are in the classes I observed, such as the working-class, Caucasian students from rural and farming communities.

Certainly, the lack of connection between the basic writing student and the writing center as a borderland is plainly a result of writing center and composition scholarship's gradual shift away from the basic writer; therefore, no study has addressed how a basic writing course can calculatedly provide basic writing students a secure and non-judgmental place in which to freely produce borderland and self-motivated writings, thus helping students not only gain agency within the academy but also allowing them to express the tensions between their schooling experiences and the obstacles they face in everyday life. This is what this study attempts to do.

Conclusion

The place of the basic writer within the university, and the writing center, has gradually become obscured; similarly, the ways in which the writing center can help these students and become a place of agency for these writers consequently becomes more slippery to articulate. As a result, this study examines the differences in performance in student writers who visited the writing center on a regular basis and those students who did not frequent the writing center. I also ask how students placed in this course identify themselves as writers and situate themselves within the college community. In other words, how might these students attempt to inhabit and cultivate borderland knowledge and perspectives within the academy? Also, since formerly serving as a writing center administrator and a teacher of composition at a school very concerned with retention rates, I examine if mandatory writing center visits in

developmental college writing classes improve attrition. Moreover, I attempt to answer how mandatory writing center one-on-one tutorials affect student performance in the class Introduction to College Writing. Finally, I ask if the writing center's space as a literal borderland able to help students labeled "at-risk" by the university beneficial? What might borderland texts written in a borderland space (both the writing center and the basic writing classroom) do specifically to help students be retained by the institution?

In Chapter Two, I will discuss my methodology and provide a history of the basic writing program and writing center at the college where I conducted my research, PLAC. Additionally, I will also provide a general sketch of the basic writing students in the classes that I observed. In Chapter Three, I present the results of my research, including pass rates, surveys, and passages from student portfolios. In Chapter Four, I examine the implications for students who are able to write in the borderlands and the ways in which the writing center can aid the basic writing student and instructor in becoming more aware of multiple discourses and voices. Finally, in Chapter Five I will conclude the dissertation and discuss future places research within our field may go in regards to basic writers and the writing center as a borderland.

CHAPTER TWO

BLURRING BORDERS: METHODOLOGIES AND HISTORIES

“Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition.”

-Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*

Why Quasi?: A Note on Experimental Methodology

When I initially began conceptualizing my dissertation project more than three years ago, I imagined that my study would be a quantitative study of basic writers in a basic writing course with a writing center component, offered at the college where I was a writing center administrator and instructor. My early questions considered pass rates, error analysis, and retention statistics, inspired by the works of Janet Emig, Sondra Perl, and Mina Shaughnessy. While undoubtedly these questions are still pressing (and relevant). I’ve found in my research that the terms and studies such as the one I envisioned earlier are never so definitive.

Min-Zhan Lu makes this point in her 1999 essay “Importing ‘Science’: Neutralizing Basic Writing.” She describes that in a move to establish the field of basic writing, early scholars relied on numbers to establish a “truth” about working with underprepared students. This gesture, in the name of science, proved to be a rhetorical move that neutralized the political implications of power within basic writing programs and the university writ large.

While this type of quantitative data is often useful (and required) in the areas of basic writing and writing centers, two areas often having to validate their existence to college administrators with the type of hard numerical data that true experiments yield, teachers—especially those who teach writing—are often distrustful of experiments that rely heavily on numbers and empirical data. Our premiere journals such as *CCC* and *College English* reflect this phenomenon; both rarely publish articles based on empirical designs (MacNealy 37). *Writing Center Journal* is also heavily based in case studies, personal observations, and narrative-driven articles. Muriel Harris articulates this gap when she writes that “we have some serious thinking and testing and researching to do. If we can accomplish all this, we won’t just be viable parts of our institutions; we’ll be vital” (19). Joyce Kinkead and Jeanette Harris (2000) continue this notion in their article “What’s Next for Writing Centers?” in which they too call for more research-based scholarship in the center: “At this point in their history, writing centers have not realized their potential sites of research, nor have they contributed significantly to the body of research on writing and the teaching of writing” (22). *The Journal of Basic Writing*, on the other hand, has had the reverse dilemma. Rather paradoxically, it is a journal based in the type of number-driven studies Lu discusses and indeed still acknowledges as imperative to the field; however, in recent issues of the journal many scholars are fighting to break away from data-heavy research with articles emphasizing postmodernity, student voices, and the concept of play.

Considering the political implications facing basic writing programs and writing centers, and the various research methodologies and lore they both privilege, I’ve designed the theoretical framework and thus the methodology of my dissertation as quasi-

experimental—including questions not only about pass rates but also about identity of student writers and writing consultants, and how their discourse communities may inform student agency inside and outside of academia. A quasi-experimental design, as opposed to a true experimental design which has randomly assigned subjects, is ideal because I am in an educational environment and am studying two classes not created for the purpose of my study (MacNealy 81). While my results may not be as precise as those of a true experiment (one reason why the social scientist Don Campbell referred to quasi experiments as “queasy experiments”), the quasi-experimental approach works well in this situation. As compared to Sondra Perl and Herbert H Lehman’s 1979 study “The Composing Processes of Unskilled College Writers,” in which researchers studied each student under extremely controlled circumstances, I observed students in traditional academic settings—the basic writing classroom and the writing center.

Moreover, through my use of theory and my particular methodology, I have created a hybrid academic discourse that incorporates multiple voices, i.e. mine, writing students, and writing consultants. Similarly, William DeGenaro and Edward M. White argue in "Going around in Circles: Methodological Issues in Basic Writing Research" (2000) that the field of basic writing requires studies that blend various types of data such as historical, philosophical, and practitioner work. In other words, static numbers cannot tell the whole story, particularly in the case of basic writing programs and writing centers, whose status is dynamic, complex, and typically marginalized; therefore a study such as mine requires both quantitative and qualitative data, all of which create the material, cultural, and political forces surrounding basic writing in general.

Basic Writers: What's In a Name, and What Does It Mean?

The one thing I can say for certain about the term “basic writer” is that it varies from student to student, school to school, and scholar to scholar. This is where many researchers, myself included, take issue with the term. It has become so generalized and politicized that it scarcely means anything anymore, except a negativism. Students do not want to be labeled basic writers, and we avoid titling our courses as such—so that certainly tells us something. Certainly “basic writer” is better than “bonehead” (see *Time*) or “subfreshman” (see Ritter) or “cognitively deficient” (see Lunsford), but the term (which when Shaughnessy introduced it was fairly neutral because of its newness) has lost, in my view, its initial appeal. In Teresa Enos’ introduction to the text *A Sourcebook for Basic Writing Teachers*, she asks various scholars in the field to define and/or justify the term. Karen Greenburg argues for “inexperienced writers” because these students have already mastered the basics of writing—they are just inexperienced in regards to academic discourse. And Robert Connors sums up the emotional response most teachers and researchers have to basic writers: “I tend to define it as that kind of student writing which disturbs, threatens, or causes despair in traditional English faculty members” (vi). So we know it makes almost everyone associated with it feel bad, which is why in this dissertation, I often put the term basic in quotation marks. I am also slightly uncomfortable with the term “underprepared” also. After all, most freshmen are “underprepared.” I know I was (and still continue to be as a writer). So throughout my study I refer to the students I am studying as simply student writers, though I acknowledge that they have been placed in a basic writing course, despite the fact that the title of the class, Introduction to College Writing, contains no phrasing that indicates it’s

a basic writing course. As far as defining the students I will be studying, I follow the advice of Lynn Quitman Troyka, who in her article “Defining Basic Writing in Context” wrote:

The term basic writer is used with wide diversity today, in some cases referring to a student from a highly oral tradition with little experience in writing academic discourse, and in other cases referring to a student whose academic writing is fluent but otherwise deficient. To help readers, therefore, authors should describe clearly the student population to which they are referring. (4-5)

Methodology

In this study, I compare a control and experimental group: two separate basic writing courses with the same instructor. I examine the effects of mandatory writing center tutorials on the students in the experimental class and, more specifically, how the writing center fits into the basic writing classroom to aid students in the preparation of collegiate-level writing. More subversively, I examine the ways in which the writing center (an institution often marginalized) can, through its own borderland status, become a contact zone for basic writing students, a place in which they can challenge their labeling by the institution and inhabit borderland perspectives (Anzaldua; Horner and Lu; Bawarshi and Pelkowski).

Research Questions

The research questions address relevancy to student writers, the basic writing classroom, and the writing center itself. Guiding the project are the following questions:

- ❖ What are the differences in performance in student writers who visited the writing center on a regular basis and those students who did not frequent the writing center?
- ❖ How do students placed in the course Introduction to College Writing identify themselves as writers and situate themselves within the college community? How might these students attempt to inhabit and cultivate borderland knowledge and perspectives within the academy?
- ❖ Do mandatory writing center visits in developmental college writing classes improve retention rates?
- ❖ Specifically, how do mandatory writing center one-on-one tutorials affect student performance in the class Introduction to College Writing?

For research questions one and two, I compare pass/fail rates, classroom dynamics, and the amount of experimental or borderland writings that students submitted in class and their final portfolios. I also examine student surveys and questionnaires that students responded to in both classes. In regards to question three, I study the retention rates for the semester and students' retention rates for the remainder of the academic year.

Finally, for question four, I examine attendance rates and all the previous data I mentioned.

The Institutions: PLAC, The Basic Writing Program, and The Writing Center

PLAC

PLAC, located in south-central Kentucky, opened its doors in 1903 as a training school for teachers. Affiliated with the Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, the school educated grades one through twelve, and prepared students

to continue their teacher training at Vanderbilt University (which was at the time also a Methodist Affiliated college), the Methodist-affiliated four-year institution closest to the South-central Kentucky campus. The Model Training School was kept open until 1979; the school became a junior college in 1934 and eventually became a four-year liberal arts college in 1985 (The History of PLAC). Yearly tuition for the average resident student is \$25,365.

The college's student body is made up primarily of students from surrounding counties and serves the rural area in Kentucky in which it is located: 85% of all students at PLAC are from Kentucky. Bordered by farms and working-class families, 95% of students at PLAC receive some sort of financial aid for their tuition—the median income of families in the surrounding areas is \$29,779 (2000 United States Census). Additionally, 84% of students are the first in their family to attend college. The college continues its history of educating future teachers; Education remains the second highest degree granted by the college, behind the BA in Human Services and Counseling. In 2008, the average composite ACT score of entering freshmen was 20.

I would also like to briefly discuss the ways in which PLAC is on the metaphorical and physical border. The ways in which these locations are themselves on the margin may encourage students to more easily see their own places within the margins. In my view, these spatial and figurative locations are imperative to student writers' abilities to locate themselves within the borderlands.

Many scholars, particularly ones of cultural rhetoric (Nan Johnson; Ralph Cintron; Nedra Reynolds; Roxanne Mountford) discuss the ways in which physical and geographical space and dividing lines affect those inside and outside perceived borders.

In her book, *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Difference*, Reynolds writes that “places, whether textual, material, or imaginary, are constructed and reproduced not simply by boundaries but also by practices, structures of feeling, and sedimented features of habitus” (2). This is certainly true in the case of PLAC, which as I stated earlier, is located in south-central Kentucky. What is interesting about this private college is that it is described as “on the hill,” and literally rests upon a hill on the border of a small Kentucky town. From all sides of town, one must travel “up” to get to the campus, which has a structured and self-encompassing perimeter that includes signs at each entrance and various campus streets that clearly define the edges of campus.

There is a strong perceptible division between the townspeople and students at the college, more so than the typical “town and gown” mentality. Many locals refer to those who administer and teach at the college as “from off,” a colloquial term meaning not from the area. Outside the college, the town is small and made up primarily of Caucasian, working-class citizens, many of whom are farmers. The college in and of itself is not regarded as part of the town but rather as a separate entity segregated from the community. Many of those in the town are skeptical of the ways in which the locals are educated at PLAC, as many students come to question their previously held political, spiritual, and social positions and those of their families. For some students, particularly ones from the area, they are literally crossing up and over the border to PLAC, between their literal homeland and a new academic institution.

Furthermore, students placed in basic writing classes often feel on the border. While many incoming freshmen are placed into Composition I or occasionally even Composition II (for those who test high enough), the students in Introduction to College

Writing may feel further ostracized and marked as “other.” After all, they are in a class in which they receive credit but no grade; the class does not count as part of their English courses but rather as an elective. While their Composition I and II counterparts write longer essays and are permitted more creative assignments, these students are often obliged to write papers that focus on sentence and paragraph-level concerns. It is simple to see how these students sometimes feel on the edges of academia, or as Kathleen Kennedy pointed out, placed into “grade 13.”

Finally, those in the experimental section who were required to go to the writing center may find themselves again on the border. As Bawarshi and Pelkowski articulate, the writing center is often seen on the periphery of the university and the most perceptible place of remediation. Consequently pushed to the outmost rim of academia’s boundary, these students may feel thrust to the margins in an array of ways. However, perhaps this pushing to the most absolute borders of a space and place may help students further acknowledge their positions as individuals potentially “othered,” not only by the university but also the culture at large.

Basic Writing at PLAC

Basic writing has a rich history at the college, which has, since the 1980s, offered “developmental courses” in several areas such as writing, math, reading, and science. From the 1980s until the fall of 1993, the English department offered two basic writing classes: ENGL 1000, Writing Fundamentals (3 hours) and ENGL 1001 Basic Writing (3 hours). The fact that the “typical” basic writing course, a pre-cursor to Composition I, was divided into two separate courses, speaks to the need of many of PLAC’s students and the focus of its faculty on the instruction in the “basics” and “fundamentals.”

The introductory course, Writing Fundamentals, included a course description that emphasized shorter writings with a focus on mechanics. The class “concentrates on the essentials of the composition process and on the basics of grammar, usage, mechanics, and organization. Students concentrate on writing well-developed one-paragraph essays. Sections are small to provide attention. P/F” (1990-91 College Catalog). The follow-up course, simply titled “Basic Writing,” was intended to “provide a review of grammar and organization, allowing students to work on one, three, and five paragraph essays. Sections are small to provide individual attention. P/F” (1990-91 College Catalog). Accompanying the course was the required text *Evergreen: A Guide to Writing*, a book designed to address the “basics,” such as developing sentences, avoiding errors, tense agreement, and sentence variety, in addition to broader issues such as “types of essays,” and “discovering the paragraph.” The two courses were consolidated in 1993 into the course Introduction to College Writing, the system currently used by the college. The course is pass/fail, but students receive credit hours towards their degree for the class; however, the course counts as an elective, so students enrolled lose an elective credit option. The basic writing course has a cap of 20 students, while other composition courses are capped at 22. However, during the semester I observed the classes, PLAC had an over-enrollment of students and raised the caps of all basic writing classes to 22. In the experimental section of the course, 22 students were enrolled; in the control group 21 students were enrolled.

The experimental section, Introduction to College Writing with Lab, was created in 2005 with the implementation of the college writing center and the Title III grant (discussed below). The course was intended to serve the needs of at-risk students who

needed additional help in their basic writing class. Worth four-credits rather than three because of the extra time students spend in the writing center, the course is also pass/fail. The course description, written by the English department, states that the class

Provides assistance with all aspects of writing—with organization and development, as well as with grammar, usage, and mechanics. In addition to being introduced to college-level writing, students will learn writing as a process; the relationship between writing, thinking, and reading; and how to prepare their work for portfolio assessment. By the end of the semester, students will be ready to write longer, more focused compositions, as well as be better prepared to write more effectively in all college courses. Students are not allowed to withdraw from this course as it is a developmental course. (PLAC 2008-2009 College Catalog 156)

The course description illuminates an interesting aspect of developmental classes at PLAC. Students are not permitted to drop any developmental course; therefore, if students exceed the amount of allowed absences or know they are failing the course, they simply stop attending but are not allowed to officially drop the course. Therefore, these students stay on the roster for the duration of the semester and are figured into any end-of-the semester data, such as failure or retention rates.

Dr. Mason's approach to the course is one that incorporates frequent peer reviews, in-class writings, discussion postings, student conferences, and revisions on all papers throughout the semester. At the end of the semester, Dr. Mason determines if students have earned enough points in the class to submit final portfolios. Without the submission of a portfolio, a student automatically fails the course. Additionally, without a "passing"

portfolio, Dr. Mason fails the student if she determines the writer to be unprepared for Composition I. She lists the requirements of the course as the following:

1. Four papers, edited and polished.
2. Complete drafts, comments, and revisions for each of the four formal papers.
3. Two scheduled 20 minute conferences with the instructor during the semester.
4. Weekly conferences with a writing center consultant.
5. Thoughtful, active, and responsible participation, including oral discussion, preparation for the class, in-class informal writing assignments and meaningful contribution to group work. (Mason syllabus 2)

The Writing Center

The college writing center was piloted in 2005³. PLAC had recently received a Title III grant, intended to expand the institution's "capacity to serve low-income students by providing funds to improve and strengthen the academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal stability" (U.S. Department of Education). The Title III grant subsequently funded the creation of the college writing center and the new position of writing center coordinator, in addition to the basic writing lab course designed to provide additional support for students who struggled with college-level writing. The writing center is housed within the English department, which is under the Humanities division.

³ I was hired by the college in July 2005, after graduating in May with my MA in English, to implement the new writing center. After opening the writing center, I directed it, and I also taught the writing center course, The Teaching and Tutoring of Writing, a class designed to train the tutors in writing center theory and methodology. After receiving an Appalachian College Association fellowship for the 2009-2010 academic year, I was replaced by another recent MA graduate, who is currently running the writing center. During the duration of my research I had no administrative role with the writing center nor did I teach the tutoring training class.

Since the grant funds have diminished, the Humanities division now controls the writing center budget. Approximately 10 consultants staff the writing center from one semester to the next; they are made up of upper-level English and Education majors (though occasionally other majors work in the writing center). Appointments are available on a walk-in or scheduled basis. The students from the experimental class were required to meet with the same tutor at the same time on a weekly basis for 30 minutes. The students in the control group were not required to go to the writing center at any point (though they were encouraged to do so) and received three credit hours for their course—also towards the degree. Attending the writing center was geographically convenient for the students in the experimental section of the course; both classes took place in the same classroom, next-door to the writing center.

Subjects: Students, Consultants, and Professor

Students

Twenty-two basic writing students (those with an English ACT score of less than 18) were placed into the course “Introduction to College Writing with Lab” either by self-selection or on recommendation from their advisors. Often times, students considered to be extremely “high-risk” by their advisors, coaches, or former instructors are placed in the lab section of the class. While nowhere in PLAC’s advising literature is this explicitly stated, it is understood by professors and advisors alike that students who may need extra help should be placed in the writing center section of the class.

The experimental group was then compared to a control group, 21 students placed into an “Introduction to College Writing” course in which students were not required to visit the writing center, though they were encouraged to visit. The charts below contain

basic demographic information about each student enrolled in both the control and experimental groups.

Experimental Group Demographics

<u>Race</u>	<u>No. of Students</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>No. of Students</u>
Caucasians	14	Females	6
African American	6	Males	16
Other	2		
<u>Ages</u>		<u>1st Generation</u>	
18-20	21	1st Gen.	20
20 +	1	Non-1 st Gen.	2

Fig 1.

Control Group Demographics

<u>Race</u>	<u>No. of Students</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>No. of Students</u>
Caucasians	15	Females	9
African American	5	Males	12
Other	1		
<u>Ages</u>		<u>1st Generation</u>	
18-20	21	1st Gen.	19
20 +	0	Non-1 st Gen.	2

Fig 2.

In the following charts, I list the ACT composites of students' test scores, high school grade point averages, gross family income, and personal contribution towards tuition. As one can see, not only does the experimental group have lower scores on the ACT and high school GPA, but they also have a familial income of \$5,742 less of that of the control group. Additionally, the control groups' personal tuition contribution is \$1,470 more than the experimental group.

Experimental Group Scores and Incomes

Average ACT Score	Average High School GPA	Average Gross Family Income	Average Personal Tuition Contribution
15	2.50	\$27,465.96	\$833.43

Fig. 3

Control Group Scores and Income

Average ACT Score	Average High School GPA	Average Gross Family Income	Average Personal Tuition Contribution
16	2.80	\$33,207.70	\$2303.85

Fig. 4

While the graphs here are somewhat rather un-aggregated, they are helpful in that they briefly outline the general demographics of both sections. Below is a more detailed comparison of the groups.

Comparison of the Groups

In classes that I observed, students had scored below 17 on the reading section of the ACT to be placed in the class; their ACT composite is listed above. The mean ACT score was 15 in the experimental group and 16 in the control group. In each section, all but two of the students were first-generation college students. Additionally, both sections were approximately two-thirds Caucasian and one-third African-American. This number

is disproportionate from the college's general population, as African-American students make up 20% of PLAC's population. Gender was also disproportionate in both sections of the class. In the experimental section, 27% were female despite the fact that PLAC's student population is 60% female. The control group was slightly more proportionate in regards to gender: females made up 40% of the class. The over-representation of males is typical in basic writing classes at PLAC, as the rural culture where the college is located does not privilege males who are "good" students, particularly in writing and the arts. Most students' familial income hovered near the national poverty line—70% of the experimental group received some form of government aid while 50% of the control group did so. As we can see from these numbers, the experimental group was generally more at-risk in that more students received government aid and their mean ACT score was lower.

The Consultants

I observed and spoke with the writing consultants who worked with the basic writing students in the writing center. Consultants were all juniors and seniors, either English or Education majors. Some were currently enrolled in the course "The Teaching and Tutoring of Writing," taught by the instructor who taught both the control and experimental group. Some of the consultants had had the class in the previous academic year when I had taught it. I observed five consultants on a regular basis: Dorothy, Marie, Mary, Dante, and Michael⁴. All of the consultants are Caucasian and considered to be strong students. Dorothy was a non-traditional student in her forties, while the other consultants were between the ages 20 and 22. The consultants I observed were chosen based on the students they were working with on a regular basis.

⁴ Consultants' names have also been changed.

The Professor

The instructor, Dr. Mason, received her PhD in Rhetoric and Composition from a large, urban university in 2008 and was hired at PLAC as Assistant Professor of English in the fall of 2008 immediately following her graduation. She had taught basic writing at three institutions, and had taught basic writing for two years at PLAC. Dr. Mason had also worked as a consultant in writing centers at both of her graduate schools.

Data Sources

Classroom and Writing Center Observations

At the beginning of the semester, I explained my study to both classes and distributed participation forms despite the fact that I did not need IRB approval from either institution. I observed the experimental section of the classes on an almost-daily basis, and I observed the control group weekly and whenever they conducted peer reviews. In both sections, I was cautious not to participate in the class. During every class period I observed, I sat quietly and took field notes.

I observed writing center consultations with the basic writing students and recorded the audio of sessions digitally. Because observing all of the writing consultations would have been logistically impractical, I chose a sub-group of students to observe: Will, Joan, Cody, Jay, Stephanie, and Adam. These students were chosen as a representative sample to reflect the demographics of the class.

Despite the fact that I had already gained permission from the students in the subgroup when they signed their participation forms in class, I also asked them separately if they would mind if I observed their sessions. All of them agreed. On the days that I recorded sessions, I asked both the student and the consultant if they were comfortable

with being recorded that day. I did so because writing consultations can sometimes be about personal writings and/or subject matter. Similarly, I did not record the first two writing consultations since they are often times spent building trust and rapport between the student and tutor; I felt that a third person watching or recording the session might disrupt this process. Ultimately, I observed approximately six sessions a week, digitally recording and downloading them to a computer for transcribing.

Surveys

In my study, I used two sets of surveys to gather data. I chose surveys because I was working with 43 students; surveys were the most straightforward and efficient way to ascertain students' attitudes on writing and the writing center. Moreover, as MacNealy writes, "because questions on a paper questionnaire have no intonation, as is the case with phone or person-to-person surveys, they may be less subject to questioner bias" (149).

I began by surveying both the control and experimental groups using a writing attitude survey based on Ruth E. Knudson's article "Development of a Writing Attitude Survey for Grades 9 to 12: Effects of Gender, Grade, and Ethnicity" (1993). The survey (included in the appendix) asks students to rate their attitudes using a numerical scale. Students were asked to gauge their feelings on issues such as writing, the writing classroom, the writing center, and college community as a whole. It also included open-ended questions in which they responded to questions in their own words. Students were then surveyed again at the end of the semester to see if their attitudes had changed, specifically regarding the writing center. Mid-semester, I also created and distributed a writing attitude survey (also in the appendix) based on a 1995 study by Davida Charney,

John H. Newman, and Mike Palmquist entitled “I’m Just No Good At Writing: Epistemological Style and Attitudes Towards Writing.” This survey gauges students’ epistemological styles: absolutism, relativism, and evaluativism, terms I define in the fourth chapter. As Charney, Newman, and Palmquist concluded, college freshmen seemed to score higher on the absolutist scale; it was my hypothesis that the students who visited the writing center on a regular basis would score higher on the relativist and evaluativist scales.

Student Papers and Portfolios

Throughout the semester, when able, I made copies of student papers after the instructor had completed grading and commenting on drafts. Occasionally, this was not possible: for instance when the instructor took the papers home to grade over the weekend and then returned them to students on Monday morning. However, when I was able to make copies, I did. Similarly, at the end of the semester, I copied each student’s portfolio, which included early drafts, peer reviews, final drafts, and instructor comments.

Class Demographics and Pass Rates

At the beginning of the semester, after both classes were fully enrolled, I contacted PLAC’s Data Analyst and collected the following demographics of each student: race, gender, high school GPA, composite ACT, family income, amount of government/institutional aid, whether or not the student was a first-generation college student, and whether or not family or personal income was below the national poverty line. At the end of the semester, I gathered the pass/fail rates from the instructor.

Interviews

Throughout the semester, I occasionally interviewed the instructor and writing consultants. Typically these interviews occurred at the prompting of the instructor or writing consultant. Usually it was when something unique had happened and the consultant or instructor wanted me to make a note of it. For instance, Dr. Mason at one point suspected a student of plagiarizing, and she called me into her office to discuss the student and her suspicions. Once, in the writing center, a consultant had his client request that they meet outside of the writing center because he found other students around him a distraction. However, at the end of the semester, I met with most of the consultants individually to see if there was anything else they wanted me to make a note of or discuss with me. Only Dante and Marie added information. I also conducted two follow-up interviews with Dr. Mason to discuss her views on both classes and how she felt the study had gone.

Conclusion

Because of the various methods of data collection, my experimental design/methodology has evolved and was modified to accommodate both the quantitative and qualitative data that I was able to collect. In chapters three and four, I discuss the results of my research and the ways in which my study illuminates the effects of writing center tutorials on basic writers and their motivation to write in the borderlands.

CHAPTER THREE

BORDERLAND DISCOURSES IN THE WRITING CENTER AND BASIC WRITING CLASSROOM

My stories are acts encapsulated in time, enacted every time they are spoken aloud or read silently. I like to think of them as performances and not as inert and dead objects (as the aesthetics of Western culture think of art works). Instead, the work has an identity; it is a “who” or a “what” and contains the presences of persons, that is, incarnations of gods or ancestors or natural and cosmic powers. The work manifests the same needs as a person, it needs to be “fed,” *la tengo que banar y vestir*.

—Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera*

The above passage from Anzaldua’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* came to mind when Jay, a student in the experimental section of the class, came to discuss his raps with me at the end of the semester. I had emailed him and asked if he would talk to me about the class and my study—anything he would like to expand upon in regards to motivating student writers who are enrolled in basic writing classes. As he sat across from my desk and took his headphones out, I noticed the large tattoos on the underside of his lower forearms. His right arm tattoo, written in heavy, black calligraphy said *Grind*, and his left arm tattoo said *Hard*, a phrase I recognized as the title of one of the raps he’d written for Dr. Mason’s class. “I like your tattoos,” I said. He smiled at me and said “Yeah, I’ve lived a hard life, but I’m working hard, too.”

When I asked Jay about the raps he had written in Dr. Mason’s class and showed to his writing tutor, Marie, he said “I don’t care to write something for a teacher if she lets me write something I like to write. Then when I have to write something again, I don’t care to because she let me write something I wanted to. Those raps I wrote for Dr.

Mason, I probably only got like 5 or 10 points for those, but it wasn't about the grade for me." What Jay articulates is, I believe, similar to Anzaldua's sentiments in the above quotation—the desire for writers to be “fed,” as she put it, with their own creativity, their ability to speak their own voice.

Jay and I continued talking for a few more minutes. As we wrapped up the conversation, he asked me what I was teaching next year. When I said I taught writing most of the time, he said, “Yeah, I think I'm gonna be taking some more writing classes, even ones I don't have to. I know now that I really like it.” Certainly, it seemed that the writer in Jay had been “fed.”

In this chapter, I answer the first two research questions listed in Chapter II: 1) What are the differences in performance in student writers who visited the writing center on a regular basis and those students who did not frequent the writing center? 2) How do students placed in the experimental course identify themselves as writers and situate themselves within the college community? How might these students attempt to inhabit and cultivate borderland knowledge and perspectives within the academy?

Data Analysis/Results

Several discernable differences in performance between the experimental and control groups emerged from my position as researcher. In the following section, I will discuss an array of distinctions corroborated by surveys, student portfolios, transcriptions of writing consultations, class observations, and interviews with students, consultants, and the professor of the class. The primary variants that I will be discussing are the following:

- More self-motivated or borderland writing was submitted in the experimental group: 7:1 or 33% to 4%. Of the students who submitted these writings, all passed.
- Attendance in the experimental section was higher on a regular basis.
- According to my survey, students in the experimental section related that they felt more connected to the college community and invested in their writing classes.
- The pass rate was slightly higher for the experimental group despite the fact that more “at-risk” students were in the class, ones who had failed before, etc.

Marginal Writing: Student Expression in and on the Borderlands

Primarily, I feel that the major difference in performance between the students in the experimental and control groups were that the students in the experimental group submitted more self-motivated creative and personal writings. This fact, in my view, comes from the relationship between tutor and student. In two of the cases that I will be discussing, Jay and Cody, both students were encouraged by their tutors to express themselves in unique ways and were subsequently supported to submit these writings to their professor and other forms of publication, such as the campus literary journal. It seems that in the relationship between tutor and tutee, students who would perhaps feel negatively marginalized were encouraged through their tutors to publicize their voices in the public sphere, either in the classroom or in other spaces.

A third case, between a tutor, Dante, and his client, Will, was somewhat similar, although Will did not submit any self-motivated writings. Throughout the semester, Dante and Will worked together on actually submitting Will’s final drafts to Dr. Mason. Will had failed the class two times before—not because he had not done his writing, but

because he suffered from what he described as “extreme anxiety” about turning in his final drafts to his professor. Through his work with Dante, Will was ultimately able to submit all of his drafts to Dr. Mason and pass the class.

In all of these cases, as I will discuss in detail below, the students, through one means or another, felt alienated, marginalized, or apprehensive about submitting their writings either to their teacher or to a broader audience. Ultimately, their writing consultants were able to work with the students on a one-to-one basis and motivate them to submit their writings.

Student Borderland Writings

While initially I certainly found the self-motivated and supplemental writing and, therefore, extra credit opportunity that Dr. Mason offered intriguing, I later realized that it was more significant than I had anticipated. As I observed and recorded writing consultations with students required to visit the writing center, I began to notice that several of them were bringing in self-motivated writings that were experimental in nature. Indeed, at the end of the semester as I began to investigate student portfolios, I found that 33% of the students in the experimental class had submitted some form of creative or self-motivated writings, while in the control group, only one student did so. More interesting, in fact, was that the students who did submit such writings all passed.

Of course, I had noticed some students bringing self-motivated writing to the center. While I could not possibly observe all the sessions that went on throughout the semester (there were well over two hundred consultations), I had seen three students of the six whom I observed regularly bring in self-motivated writings. While one may be inclined to conclude that only the motivated students would submit such writings, I feel

that one particular case—that of Jay—contradicts that theory. It was his work in the writing center that led to his submitting borderland writings, raps, which in turn motivated him to finish well in the class.

Grinding Hard: Jay's Raps

In the fall of 2009, Jay was new to college. An African-American collegiate athlete, he was a first-generation college student whose family's income fell below the national poverty line. Also, his family, as he described, lived “in the projects” of the city closest to PLAC, approximately an hour away. I suppose if you wanted a stereotypical basic writer, he would most likely be the ideal. In class he was quiet but attended regularly. However, he failed to submit his first two papers to his professor; he was also not doing his discussion board assignments. Interestingly, though, he was attending his writing center consultations fairly frequently.

He had conveyed to his writing consultant in their first consultation that he sometimes had difficulty with his writing. While he didn't say much during the session, he told her, “I'm from the hood. We don't write in the hood.” His consultant, a junior English major, Marie, told him that she was sure he was a writer. She asked him what type of writing he did in his free time. He said he did no type of fun writing. Then after some more questioning, he revealed to her that he liked to write raps, and had a rap that he had written and performed on YouTube. She explained to him that his raps were writing and that they were very similar to the writing he was struggling with—that they had an audience, a purpose, and a “thesis” if you will. In a later session, she encouraged him to submit some of his raps to his teacher for extra credit to make up for some of the discussion board postings he had missed.

At the next session, Jay brought his raps with him. He had written two new ones to submit to his professor and brought one he had written the year before. One rap was about the basketball team on which he was a player, “Who Said We Can’t Dunk,” and the other was about his struggle growing up in the projects and choosing to go to PLAC, “Grind Hard.” He showed his raps to Marie at the end of the session. While they discussed his raps, Jay was excited, eagerly showing Marie all the raps on the computer. Particularly telling, I feel, is “Grind Hard,” which articulates the tensions between his home life and school life and the high stakes he felt and continues to feel regarding his education.

In the following transcription from a writing consultation, Jay and Marie discuss his raps. Notice how he states that after writing and sharing his raps, that in the next writing consultation he will probably come in with “eight pages,” articulating (rather humorously) the motivation he now feels.

Jay: I had a meeting with her the other day...

Marie: mmm hmmm.

Jay: [inaudible. Papers being shuffled.]

Marie: to make up for it.

Jay: and I started...cause I told her that I like to write raps. And she said
if I bring some in she'd give me the extra credit.

Marie: Well, that's good. That's some writing you actually enjoy doing.

Jay: I already got two of them. [pulling them up on the computer] I got that one.

Marie: [reading them].

Jay: I got some more but they got cussing in em.

Marie: Oh. So you wanna, maybe you could just revise them?

Jay: I got this one. And another one.

Marie: [reading them silently.]

Marie: Well, that's good. I'm glad you got to do some writing you enjoy.

Are they about basketball?

Jay: This one is.

WHO SAID WE CAN'T DUNK

Like Boosie say you don't know my struggle and with that rock in my hand its gonna be some trouble, comin through the lane like a young VC man to keep it real yall can't see me, Turn around and look up and you will see some J's Flyin who is that Jay⁵ man yall aint lyin, Snoopy Windmillin taken off from anywhere all you hear him say is Niqe throw it up in the air, Charlie comin through the lane so boy you better move Chevy D like a bomb banging like boom, and we got a freshman by the name of Villie stand under the rim and I promise you will be sore, I done said enough now watch the mix tape if you said we can't dunk bruh you way to late, I got my first dunk way back in the 8th grade ever since then I've just been amazed, Pedros windmills Mj taken off Shaq bringing down the goal that's what I saw, T Mac over Bradley LeBron over Duncan but until you saw me man you aint seen nothing⁶

⁵ All names in Jay's raps were changed.

⁶ Spacing, spelling, and line breaks were left original to the draft Jay submitted to his writing consultant, Marie.

Marie: Okay.

Jay: And this one is just about going to school here.

Marie: [reading silently.]

GRIND HARD

Grind hard on my arms and I represent that shit momma and daddy aint raise no fuckin bitch, always thought to stay calm cool and collected but if a nigga get wrong then shit might get hectic, succeed by any means is what Grind Hard means to me so I'm at PLAC tryin to do my work and stay blowin trees, I thought when I was younger that I would be a Jboy but just cause my name Jay boy don't mean I have to destroy my life, by sellin dope and ending up in the system and having my family crying like damn I really miss him, Ruthie was the best women in the world would never turn family down would put us before the world, she stayed with two jobs so she stayed grinding hard, I'm out here just like her so when Dalton get shit will be gravy and he won't have to sell them fuckin packs, I'll sit down with my family and we will all look back and say Jay was on his Grind without sellin crack.

Marie: Have you turned them into her yet?

Jay: No, I just now wrote them out today.

Marie: Oh, that's so good.

Jay: I just wrote this one a little while ago.

Marie: Oh, so you already had this one.

Jay: Yeah.

Marie: So the other one's about PLAC. And this one is about basketball.

More general.

Marie: [reading.] That is so neat. Now see, you can write. It's just taking those ideas, and putting them into academic language. So, I know you've got the good ideas. You just need help getting it into the format that *they* want it in.

Jay: Next time when I come back, I'll probably have eight pages.

[both laugh.]

Marie: I'm so glad you've done those.

Jay: I just now typed em.

Marie: That one's *really* good. Yeah, I like it.

Jay: This one goes to a video I've got on YouTube.

Marie: You've got a video? Oh that goes to this?

Jay: Yeah, it goes to a video we've got.

Marie: [reading silently.] That is so good.

In the following session, Marie again brings up Jay's raps and discusses his writings. When she discovers that Jay has failed to turn them in to Dr. Mason, she seems determined that he get them to her. What remains telling, and this is the case with other students I observed, is that Jay ostensibly lacked the motivation or confidence on his own to actually get the raps to Dr. Mason. Similarly, a student I will be discussing later, Will, also related a fear of actually submitting papers to his professor. His writing tutor, Dante, worked with him on being able to literally and physically turn the papers into her.

Marie: So, how did the raps you wrote go?

Jay: I haven't emailed them to her yet.

Marie: You haven't emailed them to her yet?! You need to do that.

Jay: I forgot.

Marie: But you did them. Get the extra credit.

Jay: I will later today.

Marie: We can email them before you leave today if you want.

Jay: Alright.

[Later at the end of the session.]

Marie: Don't forget to send those raps to her. We can do that right now if you want to.

Jay: Okay.

[both go over to a computer.]

Marie: Let me know when you get those sent.

[sends the raps].

After submitting them to his professor and getting positive feedback from Dr. Mason, Jay seemed to be a different student. He turned in the two papers he had failed to turn in earlier, and he turned his next two papers in on time. He also did his discussion board postings. At the end of the semester, when I distributed a survey to the class, I could see a change in Jay's responses. He stated at the beginning of the semester that he "seldom" enjoyed writing, but at the end of the class he stated that he "sometimes" did. He also said originally that he "never" enjoyed writing in school, but on the final survey he said he "sometimes" enjoyed it.

The open-response questions perhaps tell a better narrative, however. Jay's concepts of writing seemed to have broadened. To the question "What types of writing do you like to do?" Jay initially wrote that he only liked to write about his family. At the end of the semester he stated that he liked "any writing I can do on my own." Furthermore, in response to the question "What types of writing do you dislike?" Jay wrote at the beginning of the semester that he hated "almost all writing," but in the final survey he stated he only disliked writing "research papers." Finally, when asked "How you feel when you have to share your writing?" he wrote that "like it's no good, even if it's good." In the final survey he stated, "When I feel like it's a good topic and I've done ok on it, I have no prob sharing it." Additionally, Jay wrote that despite a "slow" start in the class, after mid-semester (which is when he submitted his raps), he "got into the groove."

Marie also saw a change in Jay. She stated in an interview that Jay's body language changed. Before the raps she said "He was all closed up. He kept the paper directly in front of him. After the raps he was more open, more inclined to put the paper between the two of us. He was more inviting with his writing." Eventually, Jay passed his basic writing class and is now enrolled in Composition I.

Jay was not the only one to submit a borderland writing, yet he is the most overt example of how allowing students to write in the borderlands can help them feel part of the academy, specifically ones who are not particularly motivated to perform well in school. Moreover, when I discussed Jay with Marie, she said that he had taught her something too-- that she herself had built a wall between her academic and creative writing, and Jay had made her see that there was oftentimes a connection between our

writings that we do “for fun” and those that we do for school. She pointed out that if he was brave enough to share his raps with his writing tutor, she could do the same with her poetry.

The Poets Society: Cody and Michael

Cody, another student I observed in the writing center, also wrote experimental writings and brought them to his writing consultations. Cody is a first generation college student from a local, Caucasian working-class family. Cody was involved in an ATV accident the year before (a topic he frequently writes about) that almost left him paralyzed. His accident has caused, as he writes, “many problems, both mental and physical” (literacy narrative 2). The accident drained his family financially, and they later lost their health insurance, leaving Cody unable to go to the chiropractor for help with his physical injuries. Additionally, as is the case with many basic writers, Cody seems to struggle with issues of insecurity and alienation. As he writes in a literacy narrative, “Everyday is a struggle to overcome myself, to prove to myself and the world that I can be something, and that I am not worthless, pointless, or insignificant (like the voices tell me)” (literacy narrative 3). Cody’s poignant statement is strikingly similar to Anzuldúa’s quotation that I began this dissertation with, in which she answers the question of why she writes with this response: “To discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy. To dispel the myths that I am a mad prophet or a poor suffering soul. To convince myself that I am worthy and that what I have to say is not a pile of shit. Finally I write because I’m scared of writing, but I’m more scared of not writing” (77). As for Anzuldúa, for Cody, writing is becoming an important part of his identity, despite the fact that he has been placed in a basic writing class.

Cody and his tutor Michael seemed to have a somewhat different relationship from Jay and Marie. While Jay looked to Marie more for guidance and encouragement, Cody and Michael had a friendlier, more peer-like relationship. I found their rapport rather noteworthy as Michael is one of the premiere students at PLAC. Named a PLAC Scholar, a distinction only three students hold each year, Michael is known as a bright student and a strong writer, winning awards for his creative pieces that were featured in the college's literary journal, of which he's also an editor. Cody considers himself to be somewhat of a developing writer and said in a session that only in this semester had he written his first poem while waiting outside his advisor's office.

At the beginning of the session listed below, Michael and Cody open by discussing the book *Gravity's Rainbow*, which Michael is reading for his English Majors Seminar class. Cody asks how he likes it and Michael describes the stream of consciousness style and how he is struggling to understand it. Following their brief conversation about the book, Cody and Michael discuss Cody's paper for Dr. Mason, an academic essay on Facebook. Towards the end of the session, they begin talking about Cody's self-motivated writings, which he has brought in to show Michael.

Cody: I also wrote a poem for Dr. Mason, as like extra credit.

Michael: Mmm hmmm.

Cody: I kind of ripped it all to shreds. It's been in my pocket for like a week.

Michael: laughs.

Cody: But it's just kind of random. Hippie dippie. But it has a point.

The title is "Verbs." And it's uh,

Hello blue sky
you're fading now.
the night will come and go.
and then we'll find out
what we truly believe
the many things that hold us back
give us hope in abstract ways
like loss of love and a promise of a better tomorrow
more so than yesterday.
The blinding light suspended in time
forever and always
in more than just words.
The crime committed on the day of remembrance
lost in a sea of meaningless verbs.

Cody: And I tried not to rhyme through the whole thing.

Michael: Mmm hmmm.

Cody: Because it kind of bugs me. But it kind of ended up rhyming a little
bit. Which is okay, I suppose.

...

Cody: I'm not a big fan of revising poems

Michael: No.

Cody: But I always think that it's good to go over them and make sure
you're making the right statement, on word choice and everything.

Cause sometimes you use a word and you don't know if that's exactly what you meant at the time. Especially if it's a strong emotion because you're just trying to get it out.

Michael: Right.

Cody: And then you look back and you can be objective and say I didn't mean it that way.

Michael: Right. Yeah, the thing about poetry is that it's never resistant to change. Um, and I, when I write, I don't normally go back and look over poems or anything.

Cody: I don't really either.

Michael: But when I do, I can't help myself but to change something.

Cody: Yeah, that's why I don't like to look back over them. Because even when I read one, I'm like, oh.

Michael: I like to write and just let it be a spur of the moment thing.

Cody: It's also fun to see how people react to your poetry. I think that's the art part about it.

Michael: Right. And I feel ultimately once you put your words on paper they really are no longer your words.

Cody: They're whoever reads them.

Michael: Right. Whatever you meant to say, it's never as important as what people think you say.

Cody: That's the difference between poetry and essays.

Michael: Yes. I guess that's kind of the tough thing. It's also the neat

thing.

The above transcription illustrates that Cody and Michael, rather than discussing the poem itself, are discussing the process of revision, particularly of poetry. Cody goes on to connect the differences in revising poetry and essays, and moreover, how audience perception is different for writing poetry and academic essays. The consultation seems to have a less hierarchal approach than some in that Cody and Michael do not discuss the writing as content but the *act* of writing as content. At the end of the conversation, Michael and Cody discuss motivation, and Michael encourages Cody to submit his work to *Oracle*, the literary journal of PLAC and to consider creative writing classes.

Michael: And something I was thinking of doing just over the summer is I've got those little memo pads that I carry around with me in my backpack and whenever I'm just chilling out and I don't have anything to do, I get really inspired, I'll just put something down because it's important that you keep yourself in practice. It's just like anything else and you know sometimes you'll have, you'll have stretches of days and weeks and months that you'll just be churning them out and enjoy everything you're writing and you think you're gonna set the world on fire and then after that, you know, it'll just fall off and you won't feel it. But you still gotta write.

Cody: Trust me, I know about that feeling. The first poem I ever actually wrote, I wrote here outside my advisor's office.

Michael: Mmm hmmm.

Cody: Waiting for her to get there.

Michael. Mm hmmm.

Cody: And I found, it all started, I just found a little blue jay on the ground and I just started looking around, looking for things to write about, and it was a two page poem, I think. And it was engaging and everyone liked it. So I actually might bring that in next Tuesday and see how you like it. It's very descriptive, it's like, it's vague as far as what it's about, but it's however you perceive it to be.

Michael: Yeah, that's right. That's the strange thing. They offer two creative writing courses here, if that's something you think you'd be interested in.

Cody: I'd definitely be interested in that. I'm taking whatever writing classes I can while I'm here.

Michael: Alright. Check that out. And you'll get a lot of feedback in there too. Like you'll write and read it out loud too. So definitely keep with it. When *Oracle*, uh, I think submissions are due probably after fall break, and they go through until we leave for Christmas, and there will be signs posted up. Keep writing. Please submit stuff to that and try to get published in there. It's not like a huge publication or anything.

Cody: No, of course.

Michael: It's always good for your writer ego to say that you're published,

even if it is in *Oracle*.

[Both laugh.]

Cody: I'm sure it's okay though. It's no big deal. But it's still cool. Just to know that it's actually in a book somewhere.

Michael: We gotta start somewhere.

Cody: I mean, if nothing else, if I were to get, to die tomorrow, somebody somewhere would know I'd done something.

Michael: Right.

Cody: Even if they're just going through an old library looking at dusty books.

Michael: laughs.

Cody: Look at these poems from 2009 *Oracle*. That was forever ago.

[Both laugh.]

Unlike Jay and Marie, Michael is not encouraging Cody to get his poems to Dr. Mason (which he implies he is going to do), but rather Michael attempts to persuade Cody to take creative writing classes and to submit his writing to the college literary journal, a move that may have made Cody feel more legitimized as a writer. Further, while discussing writing, Michael shares his own techniques and desires as a writer to Cody and states that “We gotta start somewhere,” suggesting that he and Cody are writers in the same metaphorical boat. When Cody also tells Michael that he may bring in another poem that he wrote, it gives the impression that Cody feels comfortable with Michael and with sharing his creative and self-motivated writings with him.

A Change of Location: Dante and Will's Extreme Writer's Anxiety

The sessions of Dante and Will are rather different from that of Jay and Marie and Cody and Michael. Will never submitted any creative writings, and in fact, it was a struggle for him to even pass the class. Will, a Caucasian student from the area, was from a working-class family whose income fell below the national poverty line. Will was also employed at Wal-Mart, where he typically worked the graveyard shift. Often times, he came to his 12:30 writing class after working all night, still dressed in his Wal-Mart uniform. Will was one of the front-rowers that I expressed early concern about and who went to Dr. Mason to discuss taking on a managerial job at Wal-Mart, which he eventually turned down.

It was the third time Will had been enrolled in the Introduction to College Writing class and the first time he was enrolled in the writing center section. From the beginning, Dr. Mason had her doubts about Will, whom she'd had the semester before. "He never turns anything in," she said to me. "I have no idea if he actually ever does any writing." I was perplexed by this ostensible paradox—Will was active in class, always talking and participating. He rarely missed class despite his demanding schedule. He had a lot of energy, actively leading group discussions.

The answer soon came when his writing consultant, Dante, came to talk to me about Will. While they had recorded a session of them working in the writing center, Dante wanted to make me aware of the fact that they were moving their writing consultations to the basement of the building because of Will's lack of comfort with the writing center and what he described as one of the most extreme cases of writing anxiety

he had ever seen. In a session, after discussing Will's anxiety over his own writing, what he calls "over-analyzing," they discuss the change in locale.

Dante: Has the change in location helped any?

Will: Yes. It did. A lot. Because I think it's kind of one of the reasons I just threw it out there. I mean, like, when you've got a lot of people in there it felt like...

Dante: It feels like everyone's watching you.

Will: Yeah, it does. I mean, I don't have claustrophobia or a fear of people or anything, it's just, I, like you said, you know, I over analyze my paper and then when other people are there I feel like oh, even though they are all across the room, I'm like, oh gosh, they're reading my paper.

Dante. It kind of throws you off. I was trying to do thesis research up there the other day and I had to go out in the hall, because even though it's people writing, you hear pencils moving but you also hear people talking. So for me it's not always conducive for getting things done.

In the same session, Dante encourages Will and acknowledges all his progress, and they discuss how free writing is something that works very well for Will as a writer. However, despite the fact that Will would write large quantities during his sessions, the drafts never made their way to Dr. Mason. When Dante asked Will why he never turned in his papers, he said that he feared that "she would automatically judge it negatively at first sight" (Dante interview).

Eventually, in a conference, Will explained to Dr. Mason that he has a lot of difficulty handing the drafts over to her in class and asked if it would be permissible if his writing tutor literally handed the drafts over to her after their sessions. Dr. Mason agreed. Dante later explained the following occurrence:

There was one particular incident when he gave me the draft outside the classroom, I walked in, handed it to her, and he followed immediately and gave me a somewhat thankful look. It was that simple, I handed her the draft, he didn't. It was, for whatever reason, the physical act of turning the paper in that got to him. The biggest part of me thinks that he was being sincere in this rather odd tendency, because he had the potential to perform up to her expectations. (personal correspondence)

Ultimately, Will was able to submit his final portfolio for the first time in the three semesters he had been taking the class and passed. For Will, similar to the cases of Jay and Cody, the writing center was able to work as intermediary between student and instructor.

“Bueller?...Bueller?...Bueller?: Class Attendance and Classroom Motivation

While one may be disinclined to connect class attendance to writing center consultations, I feel that the fact that the students in the experimental group may have felt more connected to the college community (as I will discuss below) influenced their attendance. In his 1984 study, “Interaction of Absences and Grades in a College Course,” C.H. Jones concluded that low attendance not only helps instructors recognize students who are more at-risk, but additionally the students who often fail to attend are those who *feel* they are performing poorly in the class and “just don’t ‘get’ the material” (135 my

emphasis). Thus, if students perceive that they are failing to grasp the material, they become increasingly discouraged and miss class with more and more frequency.

Dr. Mason did not take attendance regularly, but she would occasionally write down when students failed to attend. Also, she kept logs of when students did not attend their writing consultations. Despite the lack of tedious record keeping on Dr. Mason's part, both she and I began to notice the surprisingly high number of students who regularly attended the experimental section and the low attendance in the control group.

Both classes were at similar times and days: the control group met at 11:30 on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday while the experimental section met the same days, except at 12:30. The experimental section began the semester with 22 students enrolled in the class, and the control group began the semester with 21 students. Students could not drop the class but would be removed from the roster if they withdrew from the college. In both sections, one student withdrew early in the semester. At the end of the semester, three students would withdraw from the college in each section.

After noticing the pattern of higher attendance in the experimental section, I began taking random samplings of attendance throughout the remainder of the semester. On a weekly basis, the control section attendance ranged between 12 and 15 students. On Fridays, there would typically be as few as eight students in attendance. The experimental group's attendance ranged weekly from 18 to 22 students; the lowest number ever documented for the experimental section was 16.

Student attendance in the writing center was also consistently high—students rarely missed their writing appointments. This can most likely be attributed to the fact that the writing center would contact Dr. Mason if students failed to attend their session

or if a session went badly. For instance, during one session, a writing consultant, Meagan, had issues with her tutee, Doug; he insisted that Meagan help him with a history paper due that afternoon instead of his writing assignment for Dr. Mason's class. Meagan reported the incident to Dr. Mason who later informed Doug that she had counted the session as an absence as he did not work on an assignment for her class. Students were permitted, however, to change their appointment times throughout the week if they anticipated difficulty in keeping the scheduled time. Students such as Will and Joan, both of whom had an array of responsibilities outside of campus, would frequently change their appointment times but would typically show for their re-scheduled times.

Connection to the College Community

At the beginning and end of the semester, I asked the students in each section to complete a survey. Students answered an array of questions dealing with everything from their personal feelings on writing to their perceived treatment by PLAC. One of the questions I was particularly concerned with was the rating of how connected students felt to the college community. My hypothesis was that those who went to the writing center may feel more connected or a part of the PLAC community.

Students responded to the statement "I feel connected to the college community" on a numerical scale of 1 to 5. The ranking was as follows: 1=almost always; 2=often 3=sometimes; 4=seldom; and 5=almost never. In the experimental group, 60% of the students responded that they almost always or often feel connected to the college community. In contrast, only 35% of the students in the control group stated that they almost always or often felt connected to the college community. The majority of the students in the control group, 65%, stated that they sometimes or seldom felt connected to

the college community. In both groups, no students said that they never felt connected to the college community.

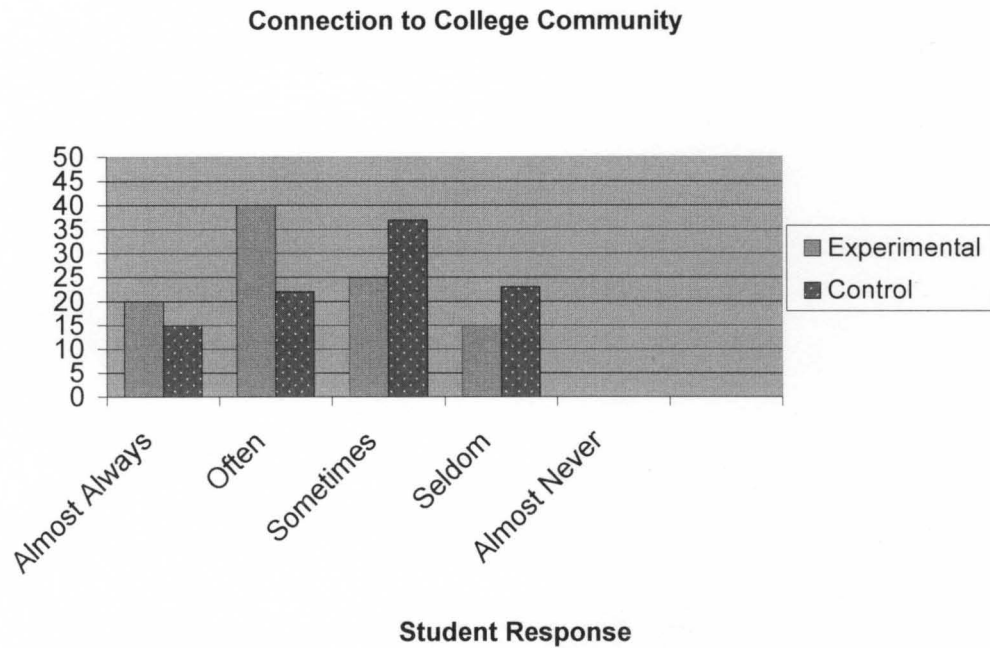


Fig. 5

Pass Rates

Early in my study, I hypothesized that pass rates would be much higher for the experimental section than for the control section, despite the fact that the experimental section was more at-risk in regard to familial income, composite ACT scores, and high-school GPA. My premise was also based on the fact that when the course has been offered in the past at PLAC, the pass rate was typically much higher for the students enrolled in the writing center section of the course. However, in my study this was not the case. The pass rate for the experimental section was 68% and the pass rate for the control group was 66%. Of the 22 students enrolled in the experimental class, 15 passed. Of the 21 students in the control group, 14 passed.

While this number is potentially discouraging, it seems that other aspects of the class were positive, as I have discussed in this chapter. Moreover, I believe that there were certain variables that lowered this number, such as class absences that I will discuss in Chapter IV and also instructor variables, which I will discuss in Chapter V.

Conclusion

As I have suggested in this chapter, there were several differences between the experimental and control sections of the classes. Overall, one can conclude the following:

1) Students in the experimental section of the class submitted more borderland or experimental self-motivated writings. What is particularly telling about these students is that they were not only encouraged by their consultants to write these pieces but also to submit them to their professor and other spheres for consumption. This move, in turn, may have made these writers feel more legitimized by the process. Yet, perhaps in regards to students who lack confidence in writing, tutors need to be more directive in helping them actually get their work to their professor.

2) Students in the experimental section attended class more regularly than those in the control group. This is perhaps a result of their mandatory writing consultations, which may have been scheduled on class days. Also, the fact that many attended class three days a week and visited the writing center on a fourth, they may have felt that it was just a daily occurrence to work on their writing, either in the writing center or the basic writing classroom.

3) On the survey, students in the experimental group related a stronger connection to the college community. This could potentially be a result of their connection to the

writing center and their use of the support system. Through the class, the students made contact with a support service that they perhaps would not have otherwise. In the control group, only one student visited the writing center despite the fact that they were encouraged to do so by their professor.

4) The pass rate was higher for the experimental section despite the fact that these students were more at risk in with lower ACT scores than the control group, were more impoverished, and had a lower high school GPA.

In the Chapter IV, I will discuss retention rates, epistemological styles, and student motivation. Additionally, I will examine some of the drawbacks of a classroom structure that implements mandatory student tutoring.

CHAPTER FOUR
BUILDING BRIDGES OVER BORDERS

Wind tugging at my sleeve
feet sinking into the sand
I stand at the edge where earth touches ocean
where the two overlap
a gentle coming together
at other times a violent clash.

--Gloria Anzuldua *Borderlands/La Frontera*

As Anzuldua articulates in the above poem from *Borderlands/La Frontera*, for students on the fringes there is sometimes a peaceful connection between their multiple spheres and other times tense rejection. In the case of the experimental section of Introduction to College Writing, that is certainly the case. While some students like Jay and Cody, in addition to the majority of other students, find ways to bridge and mesh their various discourses and worlds, unfortunately not all students acclimate to the difficulties of academic life or make peace with their various discourses. Some, as in the case of Sarah, do not represent violent clashes but rather a silent disappearance—here one day, gone the next.

In this chapter, I answer my final two research questions: 3) do mandatory writing center visits in developmental college writing classes improve retention rates and 4) how do mandatory writing session tutorials affect student performance in the class Introduction to College Writing? I discuss the attrition of those enrolled in both sections of Introduction to College Writing, and I also examine the ways in which writing

consultations affect student performance in the experimental section. Furthermore, I examine some of the drawbacks that the implementation of mandatory writing consultations in the basic writing classroom may create.

Retention Rates

PLAC, as with all colleges, works diligently to keep retention rates high. Between 2005 and 2007, the overall college retention rate was 50.5%, 53.9% and 52.6%. The retention rate for PLAC's 2009-2010 freshman class, the experimental and control groups' cohort, is 76% after their first year of college. One way PLAC attempts to keep retention rates continually improving is with various support centers such as the Mathematics Center, the Academic Success Center, and of course the Writing Center. The English Department is particularly troubled with the retention rates of basic writing classes, which have, since 2005, averaged 40% at semester's end. Particularly troubling for PLAC is the statistic that of freshmen enrolled in three or more developmental classes (English, Reading, College Study Skills, or Mathematics), only 10% are retained by the college by the end of their first year (PLAC Factbook).

As stated in Chapter II, the experimental section of Introduction to College Writing was a class more at-risk financially and academically in regards to ACT and high school GPA scores. This point is further proven by the fact that more students in the experimental section were enrolled in more than one developmental course at PLAC. Of those in the experimental section, 64% of the students were enrolled in two or more developmental classes; in the control group, 47% of students were enrolled in two or more developmental classes. In both sections one student was enrolled in three developmental classes.

Students Enrolled in Two or More Developmental Classes

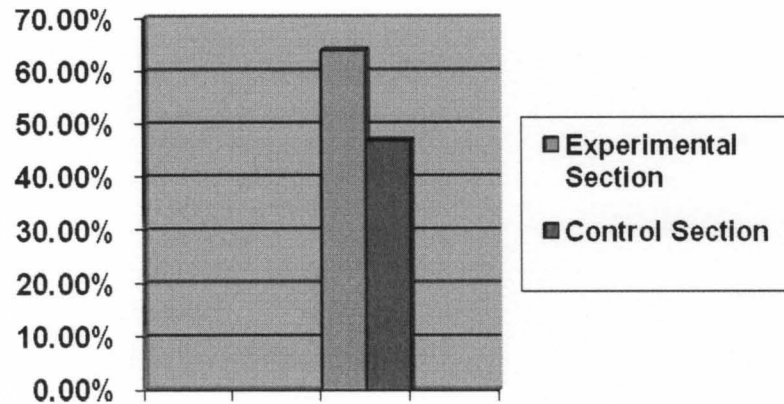


Fig. 6.

At PLAC, 40% of all incoming freshmen are enrolled in at least two developmental classes (PLAC Factbook). From the chart one can see that the control section is more representative of the overall freshman class, with 47% in at least two or more developmental classes. In the experimental section, however, 64% are enrolled in two or more classes, 25% higher than the rest of the freshman class at PLAC.

As the chart below illustrates, retention rates are higher for the experimental section of Introduction to College Writing. Of the students who received mandatory writing center consultations, 68% are retained by the college at the end of the 2009-2010 academic year; in the control group, 57% are retained by the college. The mandatory writing consultations, in addition to borderland writings, may have helped the experimental group remain more consistent with the rest of the freshman class, despite being more at risk to withdrawing from college.

End of Spring 2010 Retention Rates for Experimental and Control Sections

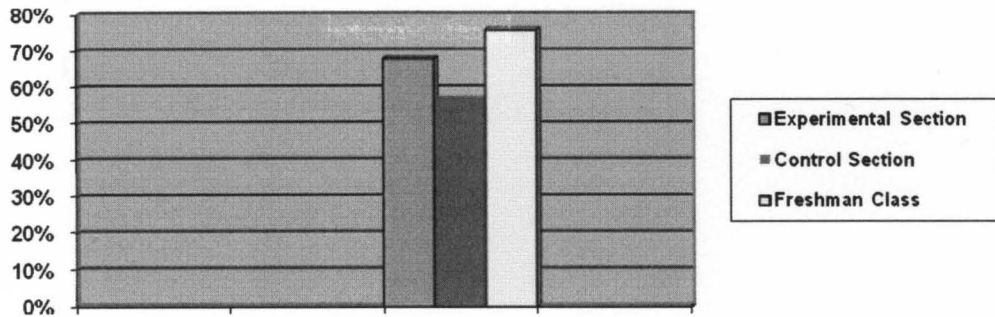


Fig. 7

Additionally, in each section, one student was enrolled in three or more developmental classes. The student enrolled in the experimental section of the class, an African-American student named Marcus, proved very consistent in his tutoring attendance. Marcus also submitted borderland writings, poetry, to Dr. Mason. In his literacy narrative Marcus discusses his interest in writing poetry and music. “I liked writing poems. Also, I soon connect[ed] poetry to how you write music. So now I write lyrics to songs and this has evolved into me doing music” (personal narrative 1). Not only did Marcus pass the course, but he was also retained by the college for the duration of the school year. Currently, he is enrolled for classes in fall 2010. Unfortunately, Harry, a Caucasian student in the control group who did not attend the writing center for any sessions, failed the course and withdrew from the college in the spring semester.

More students in the experimental section of the course, despite the fact that they were more at-risk, were retained by the college. These basic writers are more consistent with the overall retention rate of all freshmen than those in the control group. Moreover, all of the students who submitted borderland writings have enrolled in the college for the

2010-2011 school year. It appears that the writing center consultations likely made a difference in regards to retention rates.

The chart below lists how many developmental classes each student in the experimental section was enrolled in, if they passed their basic writing course, whether or not they submitted borderland writings, and finally if they were retained by the college at the end of the fall and the spring semester.

Student #	Sex	Develop-mental Classes Enrolled in		Border-land Writing	Retained at end of Fall	Retained at end of Spring
			P/F			
1	Male	2	P	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	Male	2	P	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	Male	1	W	No	No	No
4	Male	3	P	Yes	Yes	Yes
5	Male	1	P	No	Yes	Yes
6	Male	2	P	No	Yes	Yes
7	Male	2	F	No	Yes	Yes
8	Male	1	P	No	Yes	No
9	Male	2	F	No	Yes	Yes
10	Male	2	P	No	Yes	Yes
11	Male	1	F	No	Yes	Yes
12	Male	1	P	Yes	Yes	Yes
13	Female	2	W	No	No	No
14	Male	2	P	No	Yes	No
15	Male	2	P	Yes	Yes	Yes
16	Female	1	W	No	No	No
17	Female	2	P	Yes	Yes	Yes
18	Female	2	F	No	Yes	Yes
19	Female	2	P	No	Yes	Yes
20	Male	2	P	Yes	Yes	No
21	Female	2	P	No	Yes	No
22	Male	1	F	No	Yes	Yes

Fig. 8

Ultimately, there proved to be a steeper decline in retention rates at the end of the spring semester for those enrolled in the control group, as the chart below demonstrates. Of those students enrolled in the control section, only twelve were retained at the end of the

spring semester. Of those in the experimental section, fifteen were retained at the end of the spring semester, all of whom are currently registered for the fall 2010 semester.

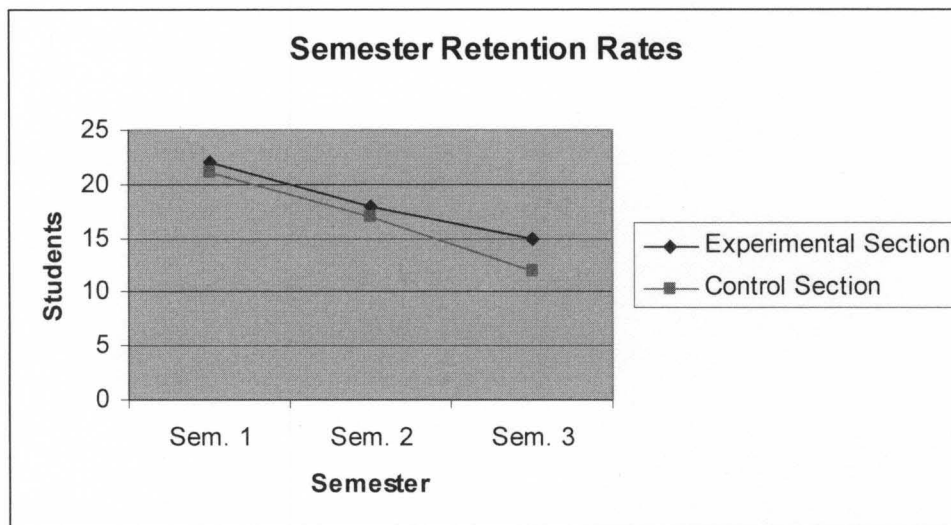


Fig. 9

Classroom Performance

As I have discussed in Chapter III and in this chapter as well, writing center consultations appear to prove beneficial in regards to the submission of student writing, both in the case of borderland writings and in the case of writing anxiety that prevented assigned writing from being submitted. Pass rates are also slightly higher, students claim to feel more connected to the college community, and retention rates are elevated for these students, despite the fact that they are labeled more “at risk.” In the following section, I will discuss more specifically how writing consultations correlated to classroom performance, both negatively and positively.

Mandatory Sessions: The Love/Hate Dynamic

As a researcher concerned with student agency and autonomy, I was initially concerned about the writing center consultations being mandatory. The fact that students receive an extra credit hour for their work in the writing center alleviated some of my

concern, yet as I observed sessions, I worried that students would attend sessions begrudgingly, or worse yet, apathetically. However, I eventually noticed that most students did not seem to mind attending their sessions, particularly as the semester went on; they seemed to view their consultations as a built-in part of class time.

At the end of the semester, I asked students on the survey if there was anything they would suggest about the writing center component of the class. Of the twenty surveys returned to me, nineteen students stated that they found the sessions helpful, most adding that there was nothing they would change about the component. Of the few critiques that I did receive, all regarded the mandatory aspect of the consultations. One student stated, “I found my tutor very helpful and fun. He made it interesting. I will be using it from now on whenever possible. Everything about it was helpful, accept for the requirement to go.” Similarly, another student wrote that while he found the sessions helpful, the consultants “sometimes [...] act like you are a high school[er] when I’m the same age as them.” Only one student said that he did not like the sessions at all. “I did not find the writing center very helpful.” He went on to write, “Do not make the writing center required. I know it might be helpful, but don’t force it on them. Instead, I would strongly encourage them to visit it.” For these three students, the requirement to go was problematic—not necessarily the help they received. In the case of the student who stated he felt like he was in high school, the mandatory requirement may have made him feel more marginalized or othered. Of the students who criticized the mandatory aspect, all passed the class.

Yet the grass is always greener on the other side. While for these three students the requirement was sometimes awkward, in the control section of the course, I received

an interesting counter-point from a student. After receiving the final surveys from the students, I prepared a brief power-point presentation the last week of classes for both the control and experimental classes to discuss the initial findings of my study. I very much wanted the students to understand the outcomes of my study and the purpose of my being in their classrooms, asking them questions and distributing surveys. During the presentation in the control group, I discussed with them Irene Clark's study (mentioned in Chapter I) in which she determines that requiring students to visit the writing center may be necessary in that most students do not mind attending if required. If students are not required, Clark observed, they simply will not attend the writing center, claiming that they do not have the time; they then miss out on the opportunity. While this was not a point I was going to belabor, especially with the control group who wasn't required to attend the writing center, a student named Keith raised his hand after I brought up Clark's study. "I agree with Clark's study," he said. "Really?" I asked, rather surprised. "In what way?" I pressed. He went on to tell me and the class, including Dr. Mason, that he had gone into the writing center the last week of classes—the first time he had been all semester. "It was awesome. I loved it. I wished that Dr. Mason had made us go. I think the rest of my papers would have been a lot better." Dr. Mason and I looked at each other rather surprised as a few other students nodded their heads in agreement.

The Secret of Success?: Drafting and Portfolios

In Chapter III I discussed the fact that the pass rates for both sections were not significantly different, with the control group pass rate at 66% and the experimental section at 68%. I also stated that while for many (particularly administrators) pass rates

may be the final word on “success,” there are other aspects of what makes a student successful, in this case, drafting and portfolio submission.

In Dr. Mason’s classes, students must submit portfolios at the end of the semester, with all of their assigned writing for the class included. In her syllabus she states that “the last day of class your portfolio will be due, which consists of papers 1, 2, 3, 4 and a reflective letter which you will complete in-class at the end of the semester” (Mason 3). Dr. Mason does not state in her syllabus that if students are failing the course at the end of the semester, they are prohibited from submitting their portfolios; however, this was her policy. Without a portfolio submitted, students automatically fail the course. For the students who do submit a portfolio, Dr. Mason evaluates each portfolio and determines if, based on the student’s writing level, s/he is ready for Composition I. Hypothetically, students could meet all of the requirements of the course throughout the semester, but if Dr. Mason does not consider them “ready” for Composition I, she will not allow their portfolio to pass. However, no student passes unless a completed portfolio is submitted.

While making copies of both sections’ portfolios at the end of the semester, I noticed differences in the stacks. The first variation I noticed was that there were clearly more portfolios in the experimental section; secondly, the portfolios in the experimental section seemed more sizeable. As I scanned the portfolios later in my research though, I noticed again that there seemed to be many more drafts in the experimental section. When I tabulated the numbers, indeed the experimental section averaged more drafts per portfolio. The chart below lists the number of total drafts for each portfolio.

No. of Students	Control Group No. of Drafts	Experimental Group No. of Drafts
1	15	21
2	16	17

3	13	9
4	20	15
5	14	15
6	13	20
7	18	21
8	19	21
9	8	17
10	12	5
11	18	11
12	9	17
13	12	15
14	17	15
15		20
16		31
17		24
18		13
19		18
Total No. of Drafts	204	325
Avg. No. of Drafts	14.5	17

Fig.10

As the chart above illustrates, the experimental section averaged 17 drafts per portfolio while the control section averaged 14.5. In the class, Dr. Mason assigned a total of four papers. Throughout the semester, I had noticed that in the writing sessions I observed, when students had not received a new writing assignment from Dr. Mason or did not have a discussion board posting to work on that week, they often worked on drafts from past assignments. In fact, several students worked on their literacy narratives consistently until the end of the semester, even though it was the first paper assigned.

Furthermore, I noticed that in the experimental section, there were several more portfolios, despite the fact that there was only one more student than in the control group. Nineteen of the twenty-two students submitted portfolios, while in the control group, fifteen students out of twenty-one submitted portfolios. While not all students who submitted portfolios passed, the experimental section's high portfolio submission rate can

be deemed a success in that all of the students that remained enrolled in the experimental class submitted portfolios.

Epistemological Styles

In October, I distributed a writing attitude survey based on a 1995 study by Davida Charney, John H. Newman, and Mike Palmquist entitled “I’m Just No Good At Writing: Epistemological Style and Attitudes Towards Writing.” This survey gauges students’ epistemological styles: absolutism, relativism, and evaluativism. Based on the survey, the terms are defined as follows:

- *Absolutism*: characterizes a belief that facts are either true or false and that truth can be fully determined through objective observation of the world or in consultation with valid authorities (parents, teachers, experts, etc.). In this view, if two authorities disagree, then one or both is wrong. Because facts about the world can be fully determined, strong absolutists reject personal responsibility for ideas and decisions--things just are the way they are.
- *Relativism*: denies the possibility of one absolute truth or falsity and credits all sources of knowledge as equal. Relativists believe that anyone's opinion is just as good as anyone else's. A strong relativist believes that decisions are only valid with respect to a specific situation and viewpoint, so conflicting positions are always possible. People bear no responsibility for their decisions, because situations and viewpoints are always in changing. The ultimate appeal is that an action seemed like a good idea at the time.
- *Evaluativism*: allows for disagreement about the truth, but it does not treat all opinions as equally valid. Rather, the evaluativist believes that we move toward truth by using good methods and sound logic, by assessing the validity of evidence and expertise, by testing ideas, and by participating in community discussion. Strong evaluativists recognize that people may operate within different perspectives or frameworks and that the choice of framework can influence the validity assigned to facts and evidence. Furthermore, frameworks themselves can be compared and evaluated. Unlike absolutists and relativists, evaluativists accept personal responsibility for decisions because the process of forming beliefs and setting values can themselves be inspected.

Charney, Newman, and Palmquist concluded that college students who scored higher on the absolutist scale viewed “writing ability [a]s a special gift, akin to talent or genius, that certain people are born with and that others can never hope to acquire” (299). It was my view that through students’ work in the writing center, which pedagogically and methodologically goes against this current-traditionalist view of writing as a “gift,” the students in the experimental section would score lower on the absolutism scale. It is worth noting here that while the study did find that “absolutism scores declined between high school and graduate school and that evaluativism scores increased across the same groups,” the study did not view a move from absolutism to relativism to evaluativism as a progression but rather that relativism and evaluativism “tended to be positively correlated” (303). In other words, a student could have high scores in both relativism and evaluativism while scoring low on the absolutist scale. It was my hypothesis that the students who visited the writing center on a regular basis would score lower on the absolutism scale and higher on the relativism and evaluativism scales.

I ventured this hypothesis as I felt it was possible that through their writing consultations, students would learn that writing was not binary in that there were “good writers” and “bad writers.” However, this was not the case. Students in the experimental section scored higher on the absolutist scale than those in the control group. On the absolutist scale, their scores averaged 82 while that of the control group averaged 77. Rather paradoxically though, the students in the experimental group also scored higher on the relativist and evaluativist scale. This ostensible oddity might be accounted for with the assumption that many of these students, particularly since they are developing writers and

new to college, may feel in flux about many of these writing issues for which they were asked to rate their varying opinions.

Control Group Scores			Experimental Group Scores		
Absolutist	Relativist	Evaluativist	Absolutist	Relativist	Evaluativist
87	98	98	93	105	108
65	64	66	29	129	140
82	79	74	67	95	85
75	99	126	86	120	111
71	95	96	86	120	111
110	108	110	61	69	87
75	85	87	98	109	107
90	93	110	75	80	83
76	83	97	92	118	96
88	94	102	98	106	105
57	74	73	81	71	83
54	56	75	83	64	82
79	94	86	87	113	124
			100	86	104
77.61538	86.30769	92.30769	106	75	110
			90	94	82
			70	95	89
			82.47059	97	100.4118

Fig. 11

Disadvantages to Sessions

Not all of the aspects of mandatory sessions were positive. For students already on the margins, there were ways in which the sessions were problematic. Primary, in my view, is that the writing center component made it easier for students to accumulate absences. Dr. Mason counted writing center consultations as regular class visits, as she writes in her syllabus: “If you miss your weekly appointment in the writing center, this absence will count as a class absence” (Mason 2). If a student missed a writing center session, Dr. Mason received a notification instructing her that a student had failed to attend. She then marked it as a class absence.

This quandary is illustrated in the case of Emily, one of the front-rowers I discussed in my introduction. By the fourth week of classes, Emily had missed five

classes and two writing center consultations. Dr. Mason, therefore, failed Emily for exceeding the number of allowed “class” absences. Emily was asked to leave class based partially on failure to attend writing center appointments. Unable to drop the class (students are prohibited from dropping unless they withdraw from the college), Emily would have automatically received the grade of NC, or no-credit. Unfortunately, Emily withdrew from the college two weeks later.

Additionally, students sometimes felt they did not have time to visit the writing center. Will stated to me that he often had to change his session times (which were at a fixed time with the same tutor every week) because his work schedule changed so frequently. He also had to occasionally cover shifts for other employees at Wal-Mart with little advance notice. Will rarely missed his appointments, but it was oftentimes difficult for him to work the time into his schedule. Similarly, Joan also felt the pressure to keep her appointments. With a job off campus, two daughters, and a disabled husband, Joan sometimes came to her sessions late or had to re-schedule. For working-class students who hold a multitude of responsibilities off campus, this additional obligation at times proved tricky to fit into their already complicated schedules.

I suggested to Dr. Mason that perhaps students could have a certain number of times they were allowed, at their own discretion, to not attend their writing center sessions, if they had another obligation or work. Dr. Mason felt that the six absences she allotted them were ample. In her syllabus, Dr. Mason writes “Since this is a MWF class, you are allowed 6 absences. The 7th absence is grounds for failure.” She goes on to write that “there are no ‘excused’ absences. **If you miss your weekly appointment in the writing center, this absence will count as a class absence**” (Mason 2, original

emphasis). However, the control section also got six absences, so they had fewer chances of failing because of absences.

What Am I'm Supposed to Work On?: Writers' Indifference and Mandatory Sessions

Students were required to visit the writing center thirteen times throughout the semester. Occasionally these sessions fell in-between writing assignments, when students had not received their previous drafts from Dr. Mason and had yet to receive their new writing assignment. In these sessions, students seemed unclear of what to work on, despite the fact that Dr. Mason had stated early in the semester that when there was not a writing assignment, students should work on either a discussion board posting (which were due every week) or on a revision of a former draft. Additionally, on the syllabus, Dr. Mason included questions that students could ask their consultants to lead the session, such as "Ask your consultant about the ways the audience for a particular assignment can affect how you write and what you write," and "Ask your consultant about proofreading strategies he/she has used to check and correct his/her writing assignments" (Mason 11).

Students were required to meet with their consultant for at least 30 minutes, so oftentimes during these sessions when the writing assignment was not available to either the student or the consultant, students seemed frustrated without a clear goal of what to write about. While sometimes these proved to be very fruitful sessions in which students like Jay and Cody brought in poetry or raps, for others it was an apparent misuse of time, as the following session between Mary (tutor) and Adam (tutee) attests:

Mary: So what cha got today?

Adam: I got nothin.

Mary: Nothing?

Adam: I've got a *hint* of what we're gonna write about next.

Mary: Hint? So what's your hint?

Adam: It's about an advertisement.

Mary: An advertisement?

Adam: [Silence]

Mary: Do you have a syllabus on you?

Adam: Uh uh.

Mary: No?

Adam: [asks someone else]: Did you get your syllabus?

Adam to Mary: She's got my folder.

Mary: Hmmmm. Okay.

Adam: And my notes, too. [silence] I can show you what we read in class today.

Adam: We read this essay in class today.

Mary: Okay. [Scans it] What did you think about it?

Adam: It was okay.

Mary. It was okay? What does okay mean?

Adam: It's not my cup of tea.

Mary: Was it the topic? The style? What?

Adam: Just what it was about.

Mary: Okay. So it was the content, it, like, wasn't your thing.

Adam: Yeah. I mean, it wasn't bad.

Mary: Do you disagree with it? No?

Adam: No.

Mary: So you agree with it? Okay. And what about the style? The way it was written?

Adam: It was boring. Maybe made for a little bit of an older audience.

[long silence].

For the duration of the session, which came in at 26 minutes rather than the required 30, Mary continues to ask Adam questions about the article, to which he gives clipped, short responses. Without his syllabus, notes, or any drafts to discuss (all of which are in his folder, which Dr. Mason has) Mary and Adam were unclear as to what they were supposed to be doing—Dr. Mason had made changes to the syllabus and failed to give the writing center a revised copy. After ten minutes, Mary asks Adam if he has any idea what type of advertisement he may use for his next assignment, and he states that he does not. She goes on to ask him what type of magazines he keeps at home, to which he simply states “Tons.” Towards the end of the rather forced dialogue, they discuss what classes Adam is currently taking and what classes he may register for in the spring.

For both tutor and tutee the session proved strained and short; no writing, other than the academic article Adam had already read in class, was discussed or produced. With Mary and Adam concerned with his not missing a session and adhering to the requirement of meeting for at least half an hour, the consultation proved ostensibly futile. Both of them seem rather aware of the fact that they must meet but neither seems to be clear about what.

This unprofitable time is problematic for another reason. During any given week, the writing center offered between 100-115 writing consultations. For the weeks that the writing center only offered one hundred sessions, Dr. Mason's class used almost a quarter of the tutoring time. For particularly busy weeks in which students often struggled to get appointments, such as at mid-term and end of the semester, one must question reserving time for students who have no clear purpose for the session.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the apparent positive outcomes as well as some of the pitfalls of a course such as Introduction to College Writing. In regards to a course such as this, instructors, administrators, and consultants should consider:

1) Retention rates are higher for the experimental section of the course, which is significant, as not only were these students at risk for a variety of reasons, but they also were enrolled in more developmental classes. It appears that because of the mandatory writing center consultations, the students in the experimental class were more comparable with the rest of the freshman cohort in regard to their retention rates.

2) As Irene Clark suggested in her 1983 study, most students in the experimental section did not mind the mandatory aspect of the writing consultations. However, of the criticisms that I received about the class, all were in regard to mandated tutorials. Yet some students in the control group suggested that they felt some type of obligatory writing center component would have been beneficial for them.

3) Students in the experimental section submitted more portfolios than those in the control group. Also, students in the experimental section submitted more drafts in their portfolio—14.5:17. While not all of these students passed the course, I believe that these numbers tell a different success story, as 19 of the 22 students in the experimental section submitted portfolios while only 15 out of 21 submitted them in the control section. As a result of their writing center consultations and, therefore, their continual writing throughout the semester, the students in the experimental group may have completed portfolios while those in the control group may have failed to complete drafts of all of their writing assignments.

4) One of the major disadvantages to the mandatory writing center consultations was the fact that it was easier for students to accumulate class absences. For students who already find difficulty in keeping their regular appointments throughout the week as a result of complicated lives, this may be an issue that instructors have to consider, allowing students more absences as a result of additional class time.

5) Despite my hypothesis, student work in the writing center did not decrease the experimental section's score on the absolutist scale. However, the students in the experimental section did score higher on the relativist and evaluatist scales.

6) As a result of the mandatory aspect of the sessions, often students did not know what to work on, and consultants were at a loss in regards to what to discuss, particularly when students did not bring writing, assignments, or

syllabi with them. Instructors and writing center administrators may wish to keep additional assignments and syllabi on file in the writing center for consultants when students have nothing to work on, or instructors may consider giving students the discretion to not attend sessions when they have nothing specific to work on.

7) Occasionally, the sessions for Dr. Mason's class took up approximately a quarter of all tutoring time in the writing center. If more sections of the course are added, administration may have to consider adding extra tutoring time or more consultants to the writing center schedule.

CHAPTER FIVE

AT THE CROSSROADS: CONSIDERING BASIC WRITERS AND THEIR BORDERLANDS

To survive the Borderlands
you must live without borders
be a crossroads.

--Gloria Anzaldúa

In this chapter, I reflect on the larger implications of my study. Additionally, I also discuss what studies such as mine suggest for teachers of basic writing in addition to writing center administrators and consultants. Not only is this commentary necessary as a touchstone for future work, my own and others', but it is also very significant for me on a personal level because I will be teaching the same basic writing classes I have observed for this study—both the writing center section and a section that does not require writing center visits; furthermore, I will be teaching the tutor-training course for writing consultants. When I began this study, I certainly had no idea that I would be teaching the exact same courses that I have been researching, but in my view, it is a very fitting end to this research project and an exciting beginning to my new role as an assistant professor of English, and as a teacher who happens to love teaching basic writing. To conclude this dissertation, I will examine the shortcomings of this study, review the findings, analyze implications, and finally offer suggestions for future researchers.

Limitations of the Study

As with many studies, my design, methodology, and other variables were problematic in a number of areas. All of the following shortcomings are issues that I will consider and potentially revise for future research endeavors.

1) Sample Size: Ideally, in a study such as this, multiple sections of Introduction to College Writing with Lab could be compared throughout the semester.

Unfortunately, at PLAC, only one section is offered each semester. A more in-depth study comparing numerous sections with a variety of instructors would be helpful in yielding more extensive data. Occasionally, as a result of the small sampling, my research took on a more case study approach. A larger study would yield more convincing evidence of the findings and might suggest a greater applicability of findings to other situations.

2) Instructor Preference and Grading: Similarly, one limitation of my study was the fact that I could only observe one professor. If a different professor had taught the course, pass rates may have been different. For instance, Dr. Mason failed two students from the experimental section in the portfolio review stage because their papers failed to meet length requirement; however, another professor may have not done so, especially considering both were strong writers who had done well throughout the semester. On the other hand, it is only because Dr. Mason gave the extra credit option for self-motivated writings to both sections (though only the writing center section took advantage of) that I was able to discover borderland writing trends. However, while the length requirement ultimately lowered the number of passes in the writing center section, the extra-

credit students earned from their self-motivated writings likely increased the pass rate number. This ultimately allows for much deviation.

3) Lack of coding: as a result of the large quantities of data that I received, coding of portfolios was not possible within my time constraints. Initially, I had planned to code student writings using blind readers, but I quickly learned that in the two semesters I had to report my findings, in addition to the lack of resources for compensating coders of such a large amount of writing, coding was not possible. As a result, I would often look through portfolios for sections that I found telling or apt, relying on my own memory or telling narratives from Dr. Mason.

Nevertheless, the large amount of coding needed to continue this project is not an aspect that I have surrendered; since I plan to continue my work on this project, coding the portfolios is the next logical step for me in this process. Given this, I will apply to for a grant from the International Writing Center's Association to help with funds for coding.

4) Researcher Limitations: Most interesting to me was the fact that I, myself, occasionally became a variable in my study, perhaps influencing or affecting my findings. Often when I was in the writing center as an observer, students in the experimental section of the course asked me questions about what they were supposed to be doing for the day, clearly seeing me as an extension of Dr. Mason or as an authority figure. Moreover, since I had been the previous writing center director and many of the tutors had been trained by me over the course of the previous two years, many did not view me as an unbiased researcher but as their former administrator, or in some cases, former or future instructor. As a result,

the consultants were extremely comfortable with me and would often seek me out to relay narratives to me that they would have perhaps not told another researcher. Additionally, the tutors and students may have worked to have the most productive sessions possible while I was observing them.

Summary of Findings

This study addressed four research questions. 1) What are the differences in performance in student writers who visited the writing center on a regular basis and those students who did not frequent the writing center? 2) How do students placed in this course identify themselves as writers and situate themselves within the college community? How might these students attempt to inhabit and cultivate borderland knowledge and perspectives within the academy? 3) Do mandatory writing center visits in developmental college writing classes improve retention rates? 4) Specifically, how do mandatory writing center one-on-one tutorials affect student performance in the class Introduction to College Writing? While I have answered all of these questions, I will briefly outline what my data revealed and the subsequent trends:

- More borderland and self-motivated writings were submitted in the experimental section. 7:1 or 33%:4%. Of the students who submitted creative writings, all passed.
- Attendance was more consistent in the experimental section of the class.
- According to the survey, students in the experimental section felt more connected to the college community.
- The experimental section's pass rate was slightly higher despite the fact that more "at-risk" students were in the class.

The questions I had in regard to how students self-identify as writers proved hardest for me to answer in that it seemed that the students, as a group, had difficulty being classified into any one category. For instance, on the Charney survey (which I also used to answer question four), the experimental group scored highest on all three aspects of the scale—absolutist, relativist, and evaluativist. In this study, it seems that the Charney questionnaire did not necessarily reveal anything about the subjects, as it seemed difficult for these students to respond to how they identified themselves as writers. While the questionnaire is certainly useful, it may not be as beneficial when comparing two groups such as these. More positively, however, students in the experimental section responded that they felt more connected to the college community as a whole. In the experimental group, 60% of the students wrote that they almost always or often feel connected to the college community while 35% of the students in the control group stated that they almost always or often feel connected to the college community. The majority of the students in the control group, 65%, stated that they sometimes or seldom felt connected to the college community. More important, perhaps, is that for the students in the experimental section, self-motivated and creative writings proved the primary ways in which they expressed the tensions between their various discourses. Students such as Jay, Marcus, and Cody all submitted creative writings (in addition to four others). In the cases of Jay and Cody, both were encouraged by their tutors to work within these borderlands and were potentially motivated by their consultants' positive responses. Students such as Jay were not only able to write in the borderlands and be praised for their work, both by Dr. Mason and their consultants, but through no

motivation other than his own, Jay was able to articulate the various worlds that he inhabited and the dangerous borderlands that lay within.

In regards to the third research question, it seems highly probable that mandatory tutoring sessions helped improve retention rates. The experimental section's retention rate at the end of the spring semester was 68% (15/22) while the control group's was 57% (12/21). The higher retention rate of the experimental group made them more comparable to the overall retention rate for the freshman class at PLAC, which was 76% (316/415). For the state of Kentucky, 71.7% of all college freshmen were retained by their individual institutions in the 2009-2010 academic year (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education). That number is surprisingly close to that of the experimental group, even though they were more at risk than many other students.

Considering the specific differences between the two groups, there are both some positives and negatives. One potential benefit to the course is that students in the experimental section submitted more portfolios than those in the control group, and of those submitted, the experimental group had more drafts in their portfolio—14.5:17. Also, 86% of students in the experimental section submitted portfolios while only 71% of students submitted them in the control section. More students in the experimental group may have completed portfolios as a result of their writing center consultations and, therefore, their continual writing throughout the semester, while those in the control group may have failed to complete drafts of all of their writing assignments.

However, one of the major disadvantages to the mandatory writing center consultations was the fact that it was easier for students to accumulate class absences. For students who already find difficulty in keeping their regular appointments throughout

the week as a result of complicated lives, this may be an issue that instructors have to consider, allowing students more absences as a result of additional class time. Finally, the negative responses received on the surveys were all in regard to the mandatory aspect of the tutorials.

Implications

The data in this study suggests that the writing center use its own borderland status—on the periphery of the academy—to allow students to feel more comfortable with their own statuses on the margin. Also, in the sessions that I observed, the writing consultants were extremely encouraging with their clients, affirming their statuses as real writers with voices to be heard. Teachers and administrators of basic writing programs may begin to consider the writing center as a place of assertion for at-risk students, particularly in regard to their various discourses and a variety of writings. While writing center researchers and scholars are beginning to make the “third-space” argument for students from various cultural backgrounds and the ways in which the center can be a contact zone, it is, in my view, worth explicitly discussing that the writing center also be a third-space for basic writers, despite their low cultural currency in our scholarship and the university writ large. Moreover, I hope this study underscores the importance of basic writing classes and writing centers working together—knowing expectations, helping to negotiate differences for at-risk students, and keeping updated assignments and syllabi on hand. The writing center may prove, for many students, to be the premiere space in which they not only connect with the college community but also their various discourses.

While I still ultimately have reservations about making consultations mandatory since I feel that students should be allowed more autonomy and agency, teachers of basic writing may consider this option useful for particularly at-risk students. Most students in this study did not mind attending the sessions even though they were required; some of the students in the control group who were not required to go to the writing center stated that they wished they had been required to do so. Instructors, administrators, and consultants may consider the following:

- Allow basic writers low-stake assignments such as freewriting, journaling or narratives that allow them to incorporate their own cultural dialects into their writing in addition to assigning the writing of the academy. These writings should not necessarily be graded but rather simply commented on.
- Discuss various discourses with students. It does not help students if instructors merely allow them to write in their own discourse continually. Rather, instructors should help students articulate the differences between various discourses and ways in which we all have various discourses in our lives and the potential tensions lying therein. This pedagogical move would allow instructors to capitalize on the different genres students bring in, to discuss politics of language, and the conventions surrounding a variety of places and discourses.
- Provide a safe space for conversations about language and writing to occur and places and assignments in which students can reflect on various discourses (the writing center or basic writing classroom).

- Consultants can help students or at-risk students by encouraging a variety of writings and by supporting students' work in various genres, such as raps, poetry, or other supplemental writings.

Future Research

For the last three decades, writing center scholarship has seemed to privilege qualitative methodology, but within the last ten years many scholars have called for more quantitative research to examine issues such as assessment, retention, and student satisfaction within writing center research (Carino 85). Many writing center administrators, such as myself, have sometimes felt maligned by the periphery status of the college writing center—pushed to the borders of the academy, fighting for not only funds but also for legitimacy. I never thought, however, that that ostensibly negative characteristic of the center, something that is usually very unpleasant for those of us who have to fight for our center's existence, could be a space in which students also on the margins could become more connected with their college community.

I hope this study can at least offer up one way in which the writing center can, through its own outside status, encourage students who sometimes, unfortunately, feel similarly outcast from the college community. Moreover, I'm optimistic that my quasi-experimental framework, one that incorporates various voices and discourses, can facilitate discussions about the ways in which writing center and basic writing administrators conduct research, in that studies such as this needn't be either qualitative or quantitative, but that we can, through our own research and theories, provide both significant and meaningful numbers and also informative, poignant narratives that help us learn more and better ways to work with students.

Similarly, I hope that my study compels teachers of writing as well as writing center administrators and consultants to consider the benefits of creative and/or supplemental, self-motivated writings for basic writers and the ways in which the writing center can be part of this process for students already on the margins. In writing center scholarship, researchers may consider the ways in which tutors can be trained to be aware of how the writing center can serve as a third-space to all levels of writers, particularly basic writers, and their own places as consultants and writers within that space.

As someone who is equally passionate about basic writers and writing centers, I will continue my research in this area, working on the myriad of ways our student writers can become comfortable with their various discourses and borderlands. Since I will be teaching this course in the fall, I have already incorporated various changes into my syllabus based on my findings. Mostly, I think it is important for my students to see that I respect and see a connection, or transference, for all of their types of writing and that no one way of communication is above or better than another. These writers have spent a very long time in the margins, and I find their stories to be as rich, if not richer, than those of other students who do not struggle as they do.

A Final View of the Front Row (another dissertation freewrite)

As I sit at my desk, the birds are chirping outside my window and the summer breeze is coming in through the screen. Only a year ago, I was contemplating my study, wondering what would be waiting for me when students filled the classrooms and writing center that I would be observing. I knew that I was interested in my own study (after all, who isn't), but I didn't know the ways in which many of these students would become more than a number to me. I didn't know how much it would bother me when some of

them disappeared. I didn't know how I would worry when they didn't show up for sessions, or how beautiful I would think their writing.

I'm still reminded of how complicated their lives are, though, especially as I ponder that front row and other students in the class. Jay came to my office the last week of spring classes and said that his friends who lived in his home city were trying to get him to leave PLAC and go to the big university in his hometown. He told me that he wanted to stay where he was—that he knew if he went back to his old friends, he'd never finish school and would get pulled back into a life he didn't want to be pulled back into. Cody asked me at the end of the last semester about a creative writing class I'm teaching in the fall, though he never registered for it, and I never heard back from him. I see Will at Wal-Mart sometimes—usually in a rush, he rarely has time to say more than hello to me. And I saw Joan on campus with her daughter just last week; even though it was summer, she said she was eager to return in the fall though she was struggling with financial issues; she was on her way to the financial aid office. Some students, like Sarah and Emily, I never heard from again and probably never will.

As I look out the window at a pristine college campus absent of students, I have to consider my own place as a part of the institution, and either positively or negatively, part of its nuances and power struggles. I must realize that from my position as a middle-class white scholar, I may never truly understand the struggles some of my students go through, but I hope through their writings that they can show me their beautifully complicated borderlands and allow me into the crossroads, if only for a little while.

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Appendix A

SUBJECT INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

The Reciprocal Effects of Student Writers and Writing Centers

You are invited to take part in a research study because you are enrolled in a writing course that is being observed. The study is being conducted by Allison Egnew Smith of University of Louisville under the direction of Joanna Wolfe, Ph.D. and Carol Mattingly, Ph.D. both of University of Louisville. Approximately 50 local subjects will be invited to participate. Your participation in this study will last for one semester, while you are enrolled in this course.

The purpose of this study is to examine a writing course, Introduction to College Writing, at Lindsey Wilson College, and the effects of writing center tutorials (required and/or voluntary) on student writers.

Participants will be given surveys and may be interviewed by the researcher. Students' writing consultations may also be digitally recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Students' names will be kept confidential; if the results from this study are published, participants' names will not be made public.

Participation in this research study is voluntary, will not affect student grades, and students may refuse to participate without any penalty. Participants may also discontinue participation at any time without their grade being affected. Questions about research may be directed to Allison Egnew Smith at (270) 384-7346, Academic Affairs at Lindsey Wilson College (270) 384-8030, or the Human Studies Committees office at (502) 852-5188 at the University of Louisville.

Acknowledgment and Signatures

I have received a copy of this form and agree to the above:

Subject name (please print)

Subject signature

Date signed

Appendix B

Writing Attitude Survey

Name: _____ Class: _____

5=very much 4=a lot 3=somewhat 2=very little 1=not at all

- I enjoy writing:

5 4 3 2 1

- Writing is boring:

5 4 3 2 1

- I write in my spare time:

5 4 3 2 1

- I write at home:

5 4 3 2 1

I enjoy writing in school:

5 4 3 2 1

- I like taking writing classes:

5 4 3 2 1

- I think I am a good writer:

5 4 3 2 1

- I think I am a bad writer:

5 4 3 2 1

- I'm comfortable sharing my work:

5 4 3 2 1

- I benefit from going to the Writing Center:

5 4 3 2 1

- I feel connected to the LWC college community:

5

4

3

2

1

Questions:

How do you feel about writing?

What types of writing do you like to do?

What types of writing do you not enjoy?

What do you think it means when someone is called a “good” writer?

How do you feel about yourself as a writer?

What do you think about writing classes?

What types of things do you enjoy writing?

What do you think it means if someone is called a “basic” writer mean to you?

Have you ever been to writing center? If so, for what reason?

What do you feel the purpose of a writing center is?

What should a writing consultant do to help students?

How do you feel when you have to share your writing?

Do you feel you belong to the college community?

Where have you made strong connections at college?

Appendix C

Knowledge Styles Questionnaire

This questionnaire should take about 20-30 minutes to complete. It contains 60 items. Each item is a statement that a person might say or think. Read each item carefully, and decide how much the statement is like you or unlike you. Is the statement like or unlike something you might say or think yourself? Please base your decision on the way you really are, and not on the way you would like to be. Use the following seven-point scale to indicate your answer.

- 1- Strongly unlike me
- 2- Unlike me
- 3- Slightly more unlike me than like me
- 4- Neither more unlike me, nor more like me (Equally like me and unlike me)
- 5- Slightly more like me than unlike me
- 6- Like me
- 7- Strongly like me

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Unlike Me						Like Me

If the statement does not describe you at all, rate it a "1." If the statement describes the way you are very well, rate it a "7." Sometimes a statement might contain some parts you agree with and other parts you disagree with; parts of a statement might seem confused or hard to understand. You must decide how much this makes the item, as a whole, like or unlike you. If you feel the statement, as related to you, is somewhere between 1 and 7, use 2 through 6 to represent the degree the statement corresponds to you.

Remember:

- Please do not skip items. Skipping items may invalidate your entire sheet.
- Do not write on the question form, make your responses on the answer sheet provided.
- Take your time; speed does not affect the outcome.

1. Unless you've got a special kind of problem, like in math or science, any answer is as good as another. Right and wrong are just what anybody believes. Even my point of view is only one of many. But, no one has the right to change my mind because I've been open minded and tried to find out what is best.
2. I have been surprised many times to find out how differently people can feel about straight-forward issues. I think when it gets right down to it, there is really only one right view. That's why people naturally feel the same way.
3. I'm willing to stand behind the decisions I've made because I look at problems from all sides before I make a judgment. Sometimes, standing up for my ideas results in conflicts with other people. I'm able to take that responsibility for sharing my views, but I don't feel like I must change their opinions even if my ideas are better.
4. Other than the natural sciences, with many kinds of knowledge (you know, like in history, literature and religion) we can never know the truth for certain because no one was alive then, or it's just a matter of opinion. When you talk about opinions, you just cannot break it down and prove it the way you can with facts. This makes my ideas just as good as anyone else's.
5. From my point of view, some types of evidence are better than others. How good the evidence is often depends on how close I am to the source of the evidence. Also, the kind of source that the evidence comes from largely influences the evidence. Even the process of getting the evidence can influence my judgment about it.
6. People have different views because of what they were taught or how they were brought up. When people's views disagree it is because someone is wrong, even if they are both experts. But, people really shouldn't have different views if they are studying the same thing, unless they are being paid by someone.
7. When I use evidence to support various views, I find one view can end up in conflict with another. I still think it's crucial to use evidence to support various views of an issue. But, my primary way of making a decision now is to use logic.
8. It's not possible to say that someone is totally right or wrong in what they think. Issues are so complex it would be easy for me to be wrong; so, how could I say someone else is? I might believe something more because of the reasons for it, but I would say it might be better, not right.
9. I don't believe you can make decisions that go beyond the exact situations you're dealing with. I can say an idea is stronger or weaker for this particular time; but there aren't any rules that can decide something for all cases, so I prefer not to state things very definitely. Sometimes, you can't give an opinion because there's no way to decide.
10. What I know about reality is determined by both my senses and my ideas, but in the end I have to test what I know with the real world. There is a reality out there, and by

being critical and weighing our ideas, and assumptions, we can move closer to correct judgments of that reality.

11. I have to believe there is a real, physical world outside of me and all around; but it's impossible to know things about the world with absolute certainty. I don't care how smart the experts are, or how much time and money gets used, nobody can know anything completely for sure.

12. It's not possible for me or anyone to have real, objective knowledge because everyone interprets things. The best that I'm able to say is that some of what I think has better evidence or more rational thinking behind it. So we can't say we understand reality or even if reality is unchanging.

13. No one can say whether or not the world we see and feel is really there. Objective knowledge simply doesn't exist, everything is subjective. What I know doesn't have to be what someone else knows, because we might not have anything in common. I guess people just can't understand reality in a concrete way.

14. When I want to know the truth about something, I ask somebody in authority. Authorities know the true facts and are really the place to find out about the facts. Of course, some experts like to claim to be authorities even though they disagree with the real authority.

15. It's important to judge the authorities before accepting ideas from them. I'm happier with ideas that I've thought through myself, but sometimes only an expert can have everything that is needed to decide something. Then I'm careful to check that the authority's work is well done and thought out. It has to be up to my standards.

16. I can't have my mind changed about what I really believe just by showing me evidence and facts. I believe what I believe for a reason, and the authorities think what I think too, so it must be true. New facts are interesting, but if they are real facts then they have to agree with what we know is true.

17. It's impossible that people wouldn't have different views, because it's impossible to know things for sure. Everybody will have different interpretations of things, so there are always going to be at least two views for anything. Differences in views are simply there because people are different, and so they have separate ideas.

18. I know about things from what I see and hear, and what I've been taught. I believe in what I've learned this way because, after all, seeing is believing. Also, I'm sure that what I know is true because my teachers and my parents believe the same thing too. Why would anybody believe something else? I mean the facts are black and white.

19. I don't find it at all surprising that people have different opinions. Everybody is different, and there isn't any unquestionable knowledge in the world; so, I expect people to see things differently. You can't blame people for their views; there's so much gray

area they almost have to be different. I'm more surprised when I agree with someone.

20. A person should be calm and clear-minded when making a decision. I don't feel pressured to make quick decisions; for important questions, it is necessary to think things through and not rush into choosing. I like to develop the larger view of things in which many opinions have a place, rather than push my own point of view.

21. There are two types of information: the right kind and the wrong kind. It might not be obvious to everybody which is which, but one will come out right in the end. And, if I know what is right, then I don't have to wait to find out from some expert.

22. I believe things are the way things are, and it's not much use saying they're not. All the people who count say one thing, and I'll side with them. I know other people can have other opinions, but it's pretty obvious that most of them are just wrong.

23. When I have to decide something, I can usually feel what is right for me. It is too difficult to depend on authorities for the right answer because their interpretations are just biased. Anyway, decisions should be flexible, so if your feelings change you can rethink your stand.

24. Sometimes, there are different points of view about things, but there's only one way to make a decision. If I want to know the right idea, I'd look for the right expert. Besides, there's plenty of evidence around to help decide questions, and I can even think up good evidence on my own.

25. There isn't any way to really know the world accurately, so everyone is forced to base what they know on themselves. That means what is true for me is not necessarily true for anyone else. Everyone has to be the final judge for their own view of truth.

26. I've got beliefs about the way the world really is—everybody does. I'm pretty sure about those ideas because I've tested them. I test ideas by using them to do things, or arguing about them with other people. Better ideas are kept, and worse ideas are changed; that gives me confidence that what I think is good.

27. Even though we can't know reality itself, because all our knowledge is just personal interpretation, we can judge our interpretations. Some interpretations are better than others because of logic and evidence, and if we continue comparing and choosing better ones we get closer to reality.

28. If I don't know the answer to any particular question, the authorities will. The scientists are one kind of authority, and therefore one can know things for sure in the sciences. In other areas, there are often at least two points of view, but I can usually see that the different views are wrong or misguided.

29. I don't think you really have to prove the things we know. There is only one real answer to any problem, so there is nothing to choose between. I mean, if you pay

attention at all to what's going on in the world, you end up believing what's right. So, what's to prove?

30. When I try to make a point, I argue using the evidence. Looking at evidence sort of requires that you reach a conclusion. Therefore, I look at the strengths of the evidence for many views as carefully as I can.

31. If you want to know anything for sure, you have to ask an authority on it. But, sometimes, some of them don't know enough and can get things wrong. That makes it hard on me; because, how can I tell if an authority is bad?

32. The idea of right and wrong is different for every situation, so I prefer not to say a position is right or wrong. A view might seem better to me, maybe because it has more or better evidence, but I still would not try to convince someone else it was "right." Ideas are just too personal for the terms right and wrong.

33. Everyone has a right to their own opinion no matter what it is. One thing might be right for me and something else right for someone else. I know what is right for me, but I wouldn't say it was a better idea because people shouldn't say they are better than other people.

34. I have to accept that we can never know things for sure; all knowledge is based on personal experience. It's possible to say that one view is more probable, if there is more evidence and stronger reasons for it. But, I am biased myself, and have to admit that I really don't know how good a lot of the evidence is that I accept.

35. There are some ideas that I simply believe, and I'm "just" sure about those ideas. But, there are other things I believe, and I can tell you exactly why I'm sure about them. With those ideas, it's because somebody who really knows told me the answer, and I can tell other people who to check with.

36. I find what authorities say to be useful in reaching judgments. They are, after all, the experts; although some are better than others and they have their own preferences and biases. The way to use an authority is to realize that they are human. I look at each expert as an individual and decide how much to believe them.

37. All the evidence that's needed to believe something is the word of a real authority. The only other kind of evidence is real, physical evidence that everyone can see and touch. But, it doesn't matter which kind you have, because evidence always supports the truth.

38. When I have to decide between ideas, it's not important what I want, it's a matter of which is better or more probable. That's often a difficult decision because questions of right and wrong can be seen in different ways. It comes down to needing pretty good reasons, knowing what the situation is, and having appropriate evidence.

39. I've found out that things are not as simple as they once seemed, but I still wish they were. Now, I see there are many views on every issue. There are many possible choices and not enough information to be sure of making the right one.

40. I realize that I can't make good judgments unless I have an overall picture of the whole situation. Some evidence is better than other evidence, and I must judge the evidence qualitatively. I feel, I must understand how all the pieces of evidence and expert arguments fit together before I'll try to make a decision.

41. In order to decide on my own point of view, I use evidence from one set of views and compare it with the evidence for another set of views. Of course, I need to consider the quality of evidence within a view too. It's the quality of evidence overall that allows me to balance views or decide between them.

42. I think that any point of view is determined by the structure of information surrounding it. Even facts are different when looked at from different directions. Knowledge is just basically subjective. To achieve any sort of understanding, you have to examine the method by which the knowledge was gained, not just evaluate the facts alone. That's what makes some opinions better than others.

43. I have some ideas that I'm very certain about, but as I find out new information they might change. When I think about changing my views, I'm very careful in choosing good, new information. That's why I can see other people's views, even when my mind is pretty made up. It's because I've given things careful thought.

44. What is real in the world, and what we know about the world are identical because our senses tell us the truth. If they didn't, I couldn't understand what was going on around me, and I think I understand the world pretty well. I know the world exists, and I know what it's like.

45. Everybody knows what is right and wrong. It just seems silly that people pretend to believe something that is wrong. But, when someone believes something that isn't right, I might not tell them they were wrong, but I still would think so inside.

46. When I have decided something, my decisions are more probable than the other possibilities were, and in that sense they're better. I reach firm conclusions, but some of my conclusions are more firm than others. I use evidence, personal experience, and personal values when making my decisions.

47. I've been disappointed so often with what the authorities really know, that I don't expect too much from them anymore. There isn't a big difference between the way they think and anybody else, even me. Except, maybe they've lived a little longer; but, that doesn't mean they know it all.

48. Sometimes, when I look at evidence for an idea, I can see things that are true for me but not necessarily for everyone else. Also, the evidence sometimes can contradict what I

think. But, you can't make decisions just on evidence; opinions count for something too.

49. In this world, there may be more than one view about things, but the difference between right and wrong can be easily resolved. I think that simple solutions to problems will usually develop because the differences don't actually exist. It's sure that everything will turn out OK if you give it enough time.

50. My viewpoint is the same as the facts, because facts are not subject to interpretation. It's nice that facts do not lead to different points of view. Otherwise, people couldn't know things. A fact is one of the few things in the world that you can know for sure.

51. When people are making choices, they have to accept what the evidence and logic lead to. I can't say I don't know something just because I feel uncomfortable with what I found out. Besides, no decision is completely final; I'm always learning new things which can change my mind.

52. Reality is not something a person just imagines; it is real. That's how I know things. And, if I don't know something, there's probably someone else who does. That's because there is nothing so difficult about the real world that people can't understand it.

53. Experts have been more involved with their subjects than ordinary people; that's why they're the authorities. But it's important not to accept the ideas of authorities without careful thought, because all experts are not equal. It's up to us to judge what the experts say before we use it.

54. I'm a very open person and am willing to consider all views. But, sometimes, I cannot be as objective with my own point of view as I can be with the viewpoints of other people. On the other hand, sometimes, I feel my opinions are wishy-washy and that I am overly open to new input.

55. I think it's best to follow traditions and social conventions. That way there are no real problems when making choices. Besides, when you use the facts to decide, little true conflict exists. That's because a fact is one of the things in this world that is exact.

56. When I look at an issue, I use the rules of good logic and evidence; that's where my balanced view comes from. But, sometimes the situation of a problem is too unclear, or there isn't enough information for the big picture. Then you can only compare views, but not decide between them.

57. Most of my views have come from my parents and teachers; so, I imagine that's where other people get theirs too. I think if there are differences in views, the differences can be simply resolved. That's because there is a right way to decide things so there is little true conflict.

58. The reasons people have different ideas and opinions are very complex. Experts, often quite rightly, disagree because they interpret things according to different kinds of

evidence and areas of interest. Ordinary people can disagree because of almost anything: the kind of person they are, how much they know, where they come from, or different combinations.

59. I wouldn't want the responsibility for telling someone they were wrong; it's up to that person to think what they want. I'm responsible for me and nobody else. What I think can't hurt anybody but me, and it's my job to make sure that my decisions are good for myself.

60. All knowledge is subjective. That I can never know things for sure is part of my understanding of the world. If I look at an idea from just a slightly different view, it might mean something completely different to me. Knowledge doesn't exist in isolation from people.

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Education

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Dissertation: "Writing in/on the Borders: (Basic) Writers and the Writing Center."
Committee: Dr. Carol Mattingly, Director; Dr. Bruce Horner; Dr. Joanna Wolfe; Dr. Susan Ryan; Dr. Paula Gillespie.

M.A. English (Focus: Creative Writing). University of Louisville. 2003-2005.

B.A. *magna cum laude*, English. University of Louisville. 1999-2002.

Administrative Positions

Writing Center Coordinator. Lindsey Wilson College. 2005-2009.

Teaching Experience

Assistant Professor of English. Lindsey Wilson College. July 2010-present.

Courses to Teach: Introduction to College Writing.

Writing Studies I

Writing Studies II

Teaching and Tutoring of Writing

Creative Writing

Advanced Creative Writing

Instructor of English. Lindsey Wilson College. 2006-2010.

Courses Taught: Teaching and Tutoring of Writing

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Instructor of English. University of Louisville. 2004-2005.

Courses Taught: Introduction to College Writing
Intermediate College Writing

Writing Center Consultant. University of Louisville. 2003-2004.

Conference Presentations

“Writing i/on the Borders: The Reciprocal Effects of Writing Centers on Basic Writers.”
Conference on College Composition and Communication. Louisville, KY March 2010.

.” Popular Culture Association/American Culture Conference. Louisville, KY October
9 2008.

“The Printed Veil: Tensions among the Written and Unwritten in the HBO Series *Big
Love*.” Popular Culture Association/American Culture Conference. Boston, MA. April
2007.

Panel Chair. “Classroom Narratives: Syllabus and Grammar.” Thomas R. Watson
Conference in Rhetoric and Composition. University of Louisville. October 2006.

“The Creative Writing Center: Pedagogy and Methodology Re-theorized.” Thomas R.
Watson Conference in Rhetoric and Composition. University of Louisville. October
2004.

Invited Presentations

“Basic Writers and Discourse Communities.” English Faculty Colloquium. Lindsey
Wilson College. Spring 2010.

“Digital Media in the Classroom.” Faculty Dialogue. Lindsey Wilson College. April
2008.

Publications

Poems. Featured Faculty in *Orpheus*. Lindsey Wilson College. Spring 2008.

“The Breakfast Table.” M.A. Thesis. University of Louisville. Spring 2005.

Professional Societies and Committees

Conference on College Composition and Communication. Local Arrangements
Committee. Hospitality Booth. April 2010. Louisville, Kentucky.

American Culture Association. Member. 2006-present.

National Council of Teachers of English. Member. 2006-present.

Lindsey Wilson College Humanities and Fine Arts Division. Voting Member. August 2005-present.

Lindsey Wilson College English Program Committee. Voting Member. August 2005-present.

International Writing Centers Association. Member. 2005-2009.

English Graduate Organization. University of Louisville. 2003-2005.

Golden Key National Honor Society. University of Louisville. 2001-2002.

University Service

Interviewer. Begley Scholar's Day. Lindsey Wilson College. Spring 2010.

Rhetoric and Composition Search Committee. Lindsey Wilson College. Fall 2009.

Faculty Mentor. "Aesthetics of Language: The Correlation between Poetry and Painting." The ACA Ledford Grant. K. Gialdini. Summer 2008.

Chair. English Program Exit Committee for J. Littrell. Lindsey Wilson College. May 2008.

Television Interview. "View from the Hill." Lindsey Wilson College. February 1, 2008.

Rhetoric and Composition Search Committee. Lindsey Wilson College. Spring 2008.

Chair. English Program Exit Committee for A. Downs. Lindsey Wilson College. May 2007.

English Program Representative. Open House. Lindsey Wilson College. April 2007.

Chair. English Program Exit Committee for E. Deaton. Lindsey Wilson College. December 2006.

Web Designer. Humanities and Fine Arts Division Webpage. Lindsey Wilson College. Summer 2006.

Faculty Advisor. EDGE Orientation. Lindsey Wilson College. July 2006.

Exit Procedure Taskforce Committee. Lindsey Wilson College. May 2006.

Presenter. Honors Convocation Ceremony. Lindsey Wilson College. April 2006.

Facilitator. English Program Oral Exit Exam for R. Brown. Lindsey Wilson College. April 2006.

English Program Representative. Open House. Lindsey Wilson College. March 2006.

Committee on Employee Health Insurance. Lindsey Wilson College. October 2005.

Handbook Taskforce Committee. Lindsey Wilson College. September 2005.

Honors and Awards

ACA Faculty Fellowship. Appalachian College Association. Berea College. 2009-2010.
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Ph.D. Graduate Teaching Assistantship. Department of English. University of Louisville. 2006.

2005 Faculty Favorite Nominee. The Delphi Center for Teaching and Learning. University of Louisville. 2005.

M.A. Graduate Teaching Assistantship. Department of English. University of Louisville. 2003-2005.

The College of Arts and Sciences Creative Writing Scholarship. University of Louisville. 2002.

Research Interests

Basic Writing; Composition Theory; Popular Culture; Writing Center Theory; Creative Writing; Anti-war Rhetoric.