STEPPING INTO ACADEMIA:

FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF WRITING AT MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE

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ABSTRACT

It is Mountain Day, and Claire is alone in her dorm room gazing at her laptop. She has been assigned to write an essay in the inductive style, a far cry from the five-paragraph model prevalent in her high school. *I don't want to turn in something that isn't a good reflection on me*, she thinks, *but this is due tomorrow!* Wishing she were on the mountaintop, she watches the cursor blink at her, waiting.

Only a month later, she feels she has transformed into a better writer, much more comfortable with the expectations of college writing.

When new students pass through the gates of Mount Holyoke, entering the distinct world of our campus, they are also stepping into academia. A key facet of their transition into academia is their experience with writing, which is the subject of my research. Motivated by a desire to place student voices at the forefront, I utilized a case study approach, conducting interviews with six focal students who were enrolled in first-year seminars. My study includes the dimension of second language writing because half of these students were native Chinese speakers and half were native English speakers.

I analyzed the results of my interviews in terms of my participants' conceptualizations of their secondary school writing instruction; their negotiations of professor expectations and reception of feedback from professors, writing mentors, and peers; the role of struggle and personal expression in their evolving identities; and their views of their own development, particularly in relation to how they envisioned good writing.

The existing scholarship in the field of composition studies forms the basis of my study. While there is no consensus on what defines college writing, there is widespread agreement on the importance of college students adopting the identity of producers of knowledge who contribute to the conversation within their academic field. I was especially interested in the perceptible transformations of students like Claire and the role that struggle played in their developing identities as writers. I argue that getting lost—realizing that old ways of orienteering aren't working—is a crucial way that first-year students develop as writers and thinkers.

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1.1 Purpose of study

"I'm afraid Ronnie might be getting too much help with her essays," Professor

Reynolds tells me.[1] I am serving as Professor Reynolds' writing mentor for her

first-year seminar. Although only about half of her class signs up to meet with me

for their papers, a few have latched onto me. I have met with Ronnie twice for her

current paper, and she has also met with Professor Reynolds once. My initial

reaction is, "Too much help? Is such a thing possible?" My job depends on

students like Ronnie recognizing that they need help with multiple steps of their

writing process, and she seemed to have attained an enlightened position on

seeking assistance, gobbling it up.

"We don't want to do too much hand-holding or she'll become dependent on

us. We're here to help foster independent thought," Professor Reynolds elaborates.

I nod. I understand—in the future, Ronnie might not have a professor and a

mentor willing to always make time to help her. But I also empathize with

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[1] All names are pseudonyms.

Ronnie's position. She wants to earn a good grade, which will show that she's doing well and meeting expectations, and logically turning to the writing experts—the professor and me—will enable her to earn that A.

I conducted this study because I want to better understand how students experience writing, especially students like Ronnie and the many other first-years I have worked with during my mentoring career. All participants were traditionally aged first-years at Mount Holyoke College, a private liberal arts college for women in western Massachusetts. First-year students occupy a liminal space between the expectations of high school and the new world of academia. Taking a variety of classes, students encounter diverse, sometimes divergent, opinions from their professors on what makes good college writing, and as Ronnie's experience shows, sometimes their pursuit of good writing might conflict with the professor's view of good writing pedagogy. During their period of transition, they are in a unique position to construct their own versions and visions of "college writing" by picking up some guidance and throwing out other advice. Entering the study, I hoped to learn how students—both native speakers of English and multilingual speakers—view this process in the first few months of their undergraduate career.

My personal experiences working with first-years (and as a first-year not so long ago) have demonstrated to me the significance of this segment of college. In my work with the Speaking, Arguing, and Writing Program (SAW), I attempted to help ease first-year students into college-level writing by designing and

presenting a series of writing workshops in 2012, and realized the difficulty of trying to attract such a varied cohort of students to a generalized writing curriculum. In addition, over my two semesters as an assigned mentor of students enrolled in first-year seminars—the first one was Professor Reynolds' class—I witnessed how these students often struggle to find their sea legs in the unfamiliar college environment and how professors seek to address their needs. I was interested in studying the first-year experience in a more systematic way, taking a step back from viewing them as a target clientele for mentoring work and a step toward understanding their unique experiences and perceptions. Moreover, research on the first year of college might prove especially productive because typically students undergo a great deal of change during this period.

I considered myself well positioned to do this research as a peer of my participants. While I acknowledge that my status as an upperclasswoman and a SAW mentor endue me with some academic authority, potentially producing an imbalance of power with the six first-year students I interviewed, I hold that my identity as a fellow undergraduate supported their sense of parity with me. My years and training as a SAW mentor had given me plenty of practice with trying to establish balanced dynamics with my mentees, which I found translated naturally to the interviewing process. Such balance was not artificial—by conducting qualitative research and engaging the field of composition in a sustained manner for the first time in my life, I became a novice once again, in many ways paralleling the transition to a new discourse that my participants were

undergoing. Each interview built off the ideas the students expressed in previous interviews and their recent writing activities, so they actually shaped the direction that my research took. Above all, my objective in the case study was to keep my participants' voices at the forefront to legitimize and empower the perspectives of students who, due to their age and relative inexperience, typically occupy a low rung on the hierarchy of academia.

1.2 Context of study

This year's chair of the Conference on College Composition and Communication Annual Convention, Dr. Chris Anson, used his keynote speech to question the fate of higher education as it is faced with the "consumer-friendly" prioritization of vocational training and job placement above a four-year liberal arts program with its "comprehensive experience." Demands to make higher education more efficient proliferate and some universities have complied by streamlining curricula to three-year programs and allowing students to bypass coursework based on their performance on competency exams. Open source learning initiatives like Massive Open Online Courses threaten the traditional underpinnings of higher education.

As a liberal arts college in an era when public appreciation of the liberal arts is on the decline, Mount Holyoke is enmeshed in the national and global re-imagining of higher education. For example, in 2009, the Maguire Associates wrote "Exploration of a Bold Vision for the Future" for MHC, presenting four

scenarios for the future; the first two possibilities are tying the liberal arts to

professional programs and to online education. While Mount Holyoke does not

yet offer online courses, the push to connect the curriculum with careers is

apparent in such initiatives as the Nexus Program, which seeks to give students

professional experiences like internships during their time here. The current

strategic planning blueprint, published online by the College Planning Committee

in 2012, prioritizes "Curriculum to Career" and "Enhanced Advising" as keys to

"Enhance the value of the core undergraduate offering in the liberal arts to

students and their families" (2).

With so much capitalistic focus on financial value and producing workers, the

humanistic mission of higher education appears to be under attack. Yet, Anson

encourages professors to respond to the situation by carefully considering why

students benefit from the more traditional mode of education and how particular

students engage with the coursework. This localized pedagogical thinking, he

adds, is the first step to transforming higher education. My study aspires to

contribute to this mission of critically examining how higher education works for

students.

Many colleges and universities seek to assimilate and retain students through

various first-year programs. The Mount Holyoke first-year seminar program

pertains to the context of my study since all of my participants were enrolled in

first-year seminars their first semester. Most first-years at MHC take at least one

first-year seminar. There were thirty first-year seminars offered in Fall 2012 and

seventeen offered in Spring 2013, with class capacities ranging from twelve to

twenty-five but averaging fifteen or sixteen. In the fall semester, students taking

first-year seminars also took a co-requisite curricular support class for one-credit,

"First Year Connections," which according to the online course catalog had 427

total enrollees across six sections. Over both semesters, English first-year

seminars comprised around one-fourth of first-year seminar offerings. In the

course catalog, besides the specific course description, all English first-year

seminars feature this note:

> Though sections of English 101 differ in specific content, all
> develop the skills of careful reading and effective writing essential
> to the liberal arts and sciences. Students will write frequently and
> have an opportunity to revise their work. By active participation in
> class discussion, students will develop their speaking skills and
> learn to ask critical questions, formulate answers, and frame
> persuasive arguments. Students who do not take the course in the
> fall should consider enrolling in the spring. Like other first-year
> seminars, English 101 is intended primarily for students at the start
> of their college career. (*ISIS* 2012)

The mission of the English first-year seminar is to help students develop their

literacy ("careful reading"), language ("effective writing" and "speaking skills"),

and thinking ("critical questions," "persuasive arguments"). This aligns with the

overall college goal for first-year seminars—to "teach college-level thinking,

writing and discussion"—as featured on the webpage titled "First-Year Seminars."

Also germane to establishing the institutional context of Mount Holyoke is the

rate of international student enrollment. Table 1 compares MHC to other

Massachusetts private liberal arts colleges of comparable size (1,000 to 4,000

undergraduates) in terms of the percentage of the full-time undergraduate student

body comprised of international students ("nonresident aliens"). This data, from Fall 2011, comes from the Institute of Education Sciences' National Center for Education Statistics, a research arm of the US Department of Education.

TABLE 1: International Students

Institution	*Percent Int'l Students*
Mount Holyoke College	24%
Wellesley College	11%
Smith College	11%
Amherst College	10%
Clark University	9%
Wheaton College	8%
Williams College	7%
Hampshire College	6%
Emerson College	4%
Simmons College	3%

As the table makes clear, Mount Holyoke's international enrollment percentage dwarfs that of similar institutions. Although some international students might be native English speakers, presumably the majority are multilingual and nonnative English speakers, producing a linguistically diverse student community. With so many students—nearly 550 in Fall 2011—coming from non-English linguistic backgrounds or from outside the American secondary school system, a significant portion of incoming students must perform their academic communication in a nonnative language or in an unfamiliar educational environment.

1.3 Chapter guide

This thesis is arranged into six chapters including the introduction. In Chapter 2, the literature review, I synthesize scholarship from the fields of composition and English as a second language to situate my case study in a theoretical and institutional context. Chapter 3 explains my methods in detail, including my decision to utilize a qualitative case study approach and my data sources and analysis. It also supplies brief profiles of each of my focal students. Chapters 4 and 5 present the results of my study. In Chapter 4, I focus on how my participants experienced the transition to college writing, considering their secondary school writing instruction, the ways they negotiated professor expectations and responded to feedback, and their conceptualizations of disciplinary conventions. Chapter 5 revolves around how my students developed identities as college writers and the roles that struggle, personal expression, views of practice and development, and visions of good writing played in this process. Finally, in Chapter 6, I discuss my results in light of the scholarship presented in my literature review, posit some conclusions, and reflect on the transformative effects of this project on me as a researcher and writer. Overall, my study seeks to provide insight into the confluence of writing and identity in the first year of college.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter outline
2.0 Introduction
2.1 Conceptualizing writing
2.2 Negotiating the expectations of academic discourse
2.3 Perceptions of development
2.4 Multilingual writing
2.5 Institutional and pedagogical context
2.6 Conclusion

2.0 Introduction

This study draws on research in the fields of composition and English as a

second language. In this chapter I provide a review of this scholarship, broken

into five sections, to contextualize my questions and findings. (1) I seek to

explore how some scholars have conceptualized the nature of writing. (2) Next I

present views on the role of writing in the college classroom. Closely linked to the

teaching of writing is students' acculturation to academic discourse and more

generally to the university register of communication. (3) I describe how scholars

have defined "writing development" and some of the factors that potentially

promote this development. Although this study primarily covers a few brief

months, it aspires to be longitudinal enough to reveal some changes in the

participants—not empirically measured evolution in their writing, but experiential

and perceptual transformations—which I hope to define as development. (4)

Students who enter a university in a nonnative language face further complications in their transition to college writing, so I introduce several studies from the multitudinous literature on multilingual students. (5) As this study focuses exclusively on the first year of college, I present ideas on this pivotal time of transition, some from an institutional level; although my study focuses on individual experiences, it must be grounded in the context of first-year and writing programs.

2.1 Conceptualizing writing

What is writing? What does it do to us, and what do we do with it? Every theory of teaching and doing writing has its biases and flaws along with its strengths. When students engage in academics in college, writing is one of the primary ways that they demonstrate their mastery of the subject material to their professors, each of whom adheres to their particular writing ideology. But of course the students have their own concerns and objectives affecting their view of the nature of writing, so negotiation ensues.

Divergent ideologies mark the history of teaching writing. As this study does not seek to present an exhaustive history of the field of composition, I pull my short gloss from the first chapter of *Teaching ESL Writing* by Joy M. Reid. Until the 1960s, composition teachers focused on the written product. In contrast, several upstart schools of thought focused on the various threads connecting writing to the self, to time, and to society. For the expressivists, the purpose of

writing was to find oneself—writing is a journey to self-discovery. The cognitive school focused on writing as a process involving multiple steps rather than privileging only the final text produced. The social constructivists emphasized how the forces of history and society condition cognition and one of its outlets, writing. Ideas about the significance of progress, personal expression, and context to writing drive each of these schools.

Writing is personally fulfilling, helps students to learn disciplinary content, will be done in many college courses, will be demanded by employers, and serves democratic justice. These beliefs, held by many composition teachers, are called into question by Ilona Leki. For example, she questions the reality of the concept that writing should be personally fulfilling and help the writer to discover herself, a concept propounded by the expressivists. For lovers of writing, writing can be incredibly cathartic, but she argues that they cannot expect everyone to have that experience. Further, personal fulfillment is a need met perhaps more naturally by conversation. Many of the common claims about writing are open to critical deconstruction.

Even the apparently innocuous language—"express," "convey"—we use to address these questions about the nature of writing stems from underlying ideologies, many of which have evolved into codified writing theories. For instance, the conduit metaphor as described by Philip Eubanks configures language as a container of meaning: the writer places meaning into the text and sends it to a reader who extracts the meaning from the text, so the language is a

conduit for the writer's message, an idea evinced by common phrases like "getting the message across," "putting thoughts into words," and "getting a lot out of the text" (95). Although this particular metaphor has been critiqued for obfuscating the instability and generative sociality of language, Eubanks argues that it promotes ethical objectives like accessibility, clarity, and directness (113). That even apparently apolitical metaphors have provoked intellectual contention illustrates the plurality of conceptualizations of writing.

2.2 Negotiating the expectations of academic discourse

Although students probably do not wonder, "Is my professor more of an expressivist or a cognitivist?" when working on a paper, they certainly try to ascertain what their instructor expects of their writing and tailor their composition to meet those expectations, which often are conveyed through feedback. Yet these negotiations are complex—students receive multiple, sometimes contradictory, pieces of advice, and deliberately ignore and employ what they see fit (see Pomerantz and Kearney 2012). Although feedback shapes the way students learn to write, its success depends on their openness to instruction and critique and on their ability to bridge to future writing assignments (Sommers 2006). The process of critically gleaning and applying guidance is part of a student's journey as a college writer.

Students receive feedback not only from their teachers but also from their peers. Whether the peer is a roommate, a writing tutor (or Speaking, Arguing, and

Writing mentor), or a classmate, peer feedback tends to provoke questions of usefulness, as highlighted by a study done by Tony Silva. Seeking answers to the questions, "Are [second language] writing students wrong to see their teachers as their primary readers and to value teacher feedback over peer feedback? Are students wrong to see peer feedback as potentially bad advice or to feel uncomfortable about asking for such feedback?" (111), he gathered literacy narratives from advanced second language writers. Many of the contributors expressed discomfort with having peers review their work, either because of the peers' perceived incompetence, a feeling that editing was plagiarism, or insecurity about disclosing their language abilities. One writer, in graduate school, discovered that "even the professors would give their own papers to a colleague for feedback" (107), which apparently legitimized the practice of peer feedback. It seems that, wrong or right, his participants needed to see evidence of the efficacy of peer feedback to dispel their skepticism.

Peer feedback has been institutionalized in the writing center and the work of writing tutors/mentors. Many eloquent arguments have been made for the usefulness of writing tutors and writing centers, notably Stephen North's "The Idea of a Writing Center," which sustains the value of giving students a place to talk about their writing. Feedback from a tutor or mentor plays a special role because of the ambiguous position of the mentor, who, in the words of Muriel Harris, "inhabits a world somewhere between student and teacher" (28). This unique position of the mentor as a person with expertise but without evaluative

(grading) power, she argues, permits them to work with student writers in a way that professors cannot. In line with writing center theory, Kenneth Bruffee argues that collaborative learning has "harnessed the powerful educative force of peer influence" (638) by engaging students in conversations that enhance thinking and the creation of knowledge. Advocating collaboration in such a way is predicated on the idea of knowledge as socially constructed (Lunsford 1991-1992).

Although students might have prerogative over where they seek feedback—going to the writing center, for example—or what feedback they accept or ignore, resisting feedback would constitute resisting one of the key activities of the college community. Jérémie Séror studied the socializing role of feedback at his Canadian university, using several Japanese students as case studies. He grounded his study in language socialization theory, which investigates the processes through which new community members figure out how to communicate by participating in the activities of their new community. Identity, struggle, and transformation are key: "Language learning [is] a complex negotiation process with learners making decisions about how they will choose to adopt, adapt, or resist various discursive practices and the way these position them" (13). His students sometimes found writing projects frustrating when they could not show how much they actually knew. Compounding this frustration was feedback that was illegible, too specific, and did not provide clear direction for growth. Professors and students seemed to agree that ideal feedback would be detailed,

timely, readable, formative (allowing multiple drafts), and dialogic (allowing back and forth exchange).

Séror's study showed that feedback had several sometimes conflicting functions: (1) a socialization process, sending messages about identity and requirements for success; (2) part of pedagogy aimed at developing literacy, language, and content knowledge; and (3) an institutional and economic mechanism. In this last function, feedback relates to access to resources. For professors, job pressures might curtail the feedback they can provide. For students, access to alternative sources of feedback such as social networks and resources like the writing center and paid editors affects their success. As elucidated in this analysis of feedback's linkages to power, Séror holds that academic writing is an issue of social justice linked to equity and access, since it winnows people out of programs, affecting their educational and social status.

The debate around the justice of socializing students to academic discourse has been going on for decades. With the rise of Open Admissions in the 1970s, Mina Shaughnessy initiated research into basic writing, encouraging teachers to help their students learn academic conventions to allow students to meet expectations. These conventions of academic writing include a clear introduction and conclusion, formal language, and correct citation and incorporation of sources. Much scholarship has sought to further define academic discourse, nailing down those teachable conventions.

On the quantitative end, linguistic scholars have used corpora to figure out what academic discourse actually sounds like. Douglas Biber, Susan Conrad, Randi Reppen, Pat Byrd and Marie Helt used the TOEFL corpus to study some usually neglected registers of academia—conversations in office hours, service encounters (between university staff and students), textbooks, and class sessions—to better prepare international students for the requirements of American college. A register is a type of communication defined not linguistically but by situation; for example, "fiction" and "academic discourse" are two general registers. Writing—both in textbooks and nonacademic written materials like brochures—was found to be dense with information. All university registers of speaking were more involved and narrative than informational, including classroom teaching, marked by indicators of personal interaction like "I" and "you." Conversely, written materials were not overtly persuasive, were impersonal and non-narrative, and had elaborated references. The primary implication of their study was that students need "facility in a tremendous range of registers" to succeed in college (41).

First-year composition classes claim to impart this versatility—rhetorical agility at least in writing—but Melanie Kill asks whether having an adaptable identity is prerequisite to gaining this skill. She sees instructors and students negotiating their presentations of self and their interactions with others, which leads to resistance (215). Kill gave her students a literacy narrative assignment in an attempt to close the gap between personal and academic writing. Without

specifying a genre, she asked students to tell her about their background. Yet, from the responses she received, she realized that giving students a putatively genre-less assignment actually made it more difficult to write (225). Some students saw through this guise and recognized it as a literacy narrative, so they focused on their background in reading and writing. Others wrote more autobiographically, describing their life and personal history beyond the borders of academia. When it came time for Kill to respond to those latter papers, she found herself resisting, for discussing personal topics would undermine her professional position with the students (228). Bringing the personal into academic discourse forces both students and professors to negotiate and perform their identities. She suggests that participants in this process need to examine it critically or risk perpetuating detrimental power relations. The broader implication is that acculturating students to academic discourse might force them to relinquish significant parts of their identities.

Some scholars wish to entirely abolish the concept of academic discourse as it applies to writing. Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle argue that many studies have found that general composition courses cannot usher students into some sort of universal academic discourse because this discourse simply does not exist (553). They assess several misconceptions of academic writing. To the belief that it is generally universal, they rejoin that it is not universal, for each discipline has its own way of writing and even composition teachers unconsciously define "academic writing" themselves, infusing it with English rhetorical analysis. To

the conception of writing as a basic skill independent of content or context, they argue for its dependence on both content and context. To the view that writing abilities automatically transfer from first-year composition to other courses and contexts, they assert that there is no evidence for easy transfer—transfer probably happens, but not in a neat way. They envision first-year composition shifting away from claiming to teach "academic writing" to "teaching realistic and useful conceptions of writing" (557) so that "students come to see writing as a conversation, research as historical and contextual, and research findings as messy, complicated, and inconclusive" (571).

2.3 Perceptions of development

Initiation into academic discourse is one form that writing development, inarguably a key goal for college students, can take. Although writing development is subject to a range of perceptions, most of them converge on the objective of the writer joining the greater academic conversation as an active participant. Another view of development is self-development—the way writing can enhance the writer as a person.

One way to view development is through the byproducts of academic writing, or the personal development that happens en route to producing pieces of writing, which Hadara Perpignan, Bella Rubin, and Helen Katznelson researched. Although courses in writing for academic purposes are often framed pragmatically as instruments to help students succeed in other areas, the authors

believe that these classes impart more than competency in writing in a nonnative language—namely, that they contribute to the educational project of not simply transferring knowledge but changing the person. The results of their questionnaires and interviews corroborated this view, as the responses fell into several main themes: these courses aided with development of ways of thinking, social interaction, self-confidence, and learning professional behavior (171-172). Academic writing courses have the "added value" of affective byproducts, changing the writers, not just the writing, to borrow Stephen North's writing center maxim.

Because the writer intertwines with her writing in an intimate manner, the emotions students invest in their writing can influence their personal development. As Michael Dubson writes, "Writing is personal, emotional, visceral. To dig into one's own mind and pull up memories, values, experiences, and ideas and put them out there is a very brave and sometimes frightening act" (97). He observes that the sting of evaluation can make students feel that their identities are exposed. Ellen Lavelle and Nancy Zuercher offer a quantitative exploration of the varying ways undergraduates relate to their writing. They used an inventory survey to separate students into five types of approaches: Elaborative Voice (self-express), Reflective-Revision (to make meaning), Low Self-Efficacy (acquire skills and avoid pain), Spontaneous-Impulsive (to get done), and Procedural (please the teacher) (389). The first two approaches are considered "deep," perceiving "writing as primarily related to changing one's own thinking about the topic, a

feeling of satisfaction and wholeness," while the latter three are "surface" (382). Their study makes clear that some students do not take emotional ownership of their writing or view writing as a recursive process. For those students with surface approaches, taking pride in progress "may be a key to helping" them (384).

Students' views of themselves in relation to their writing forms the basis for how they see their writing development; especially for unconfident writers, recognizing their development might enable their success. Sometimes students need to be guided so that they can better understand their self-concept as writers. David A. Nickles conducted a study on a first-year seminar he taught, designed to explicitly teach first-year students how to understand their needs as learners and thus take a more active role in their education. He found that at the beginning of the semester, the students attributed the requirements for their success to extrinsic elements like environment and teacher quality, while by the end of the semester they focused on intrinsic elements and used more informed language like "procrastinator" and "introvert/extrovert" (137). He found this to be a positive outcome of the course, seeing it as students taking responsibility for their educational success.

It is a two-way street: in order to change as writers, students need to approach their writing with an openness to change. Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz examined the attitudes that enable college students to develop as academic writers using the Harvard Study of Undergraduate Writing. The researchers followed approximately 400 students, a quarter of the class of 2001, through their years of

undergraduate education. The authors investigated the habits and views of writing that students develop in their first year, when most students "become aware of the different expectations between high school and college writing, that something more is being offered to them and, at the same time, asked of them" (125). They conclude that the most successful student writers accept their status as novices and see a greater purpose to their writing assignments than pleasing the teacher and earning a grade. This "recognition of novice status" means that students perceive that they are beginners in a field, although the assignments ask them to claim some level of expertise. In their words, "Being a novice allows students to be changed by what they learn, to have new ideas" (134). Of course, being a novice doesn't necessarily lead to excellent analyses from the outset—instead, freshman tend to write into expertise by summarizing their sources, allowing the leaders of their field to lead them. The stronger writers also see writing as permitting them to delve into their uncertainty and engage more deeply with the course material than taking exams or listening to lectures allow. While many students at the beginning of college wrote of writing as a means for teachers to evaluate, by the end of their first year many respondents spoke to the notion of writing as joining a greater intellectual conversation (139). This shift in the students' perception of the significance of writing could certainly be termed development.

Some postmodern and structuralist theorists dismiss any attempt to show development as constructing an artificial grand narrative; they view development

as the result of environmental factors rather than of individual effort. Marcia

Curtis and Anne Herrington, however, prefer to position themselves with theorists

who view development as a result of the convergence of personal agency and

context. The authors, diverging from the comprehensive scale of the Harvard

Study in favor of intimate case studies, followed two UMass students through

their years of college and found that although their writing progress was more like

a wave with crests and troughs than a direct linear path toward improvement, their

participants did perceptibly develop. The students brought themselves into

ostensibly distant, impersonal academic writing, using it as "a vehicle for both

self-reflection and self-fashioning" (71). One participant started her college career

with self-focused writing on abuse, bringing her personal experience to the

attention of the public, and ended by writing a thesis pursuing abuse as a public

issue through her personal work. Thus she maintained her personal investment

while moving from self- to subject-focused writing. The other participant

underwent massive changes in his undergraduate years—recovering from

alcoholism, overcoming suicidal urges, and understanding his sexuality. He used

writing as therapy. By the time they graduated, the students' writing showed more

mastery over the language and theories of their fields. Their move toward subject-

focused writing harmonizes with Sommers and Saltz's finding that as students

mature they start seeing writing as joining an ongoing intellectual conversation,

connecting the personal with the public. Curtis and Herrington purport that by

giving students opportunities for both academic writing and personal reflective

writing, institutions of higher education can help students acquire the cognitive, emotional, and ethical byproducts crucial to their personal development.

2.4 Multilingual writing

As I devote only this section to the expansive field of multilingual studies, it should be noted that this review merely scratches the surface. Half of my participants were studying in their nonnative language, so their experience of transitioning to college life was imbued with learning to communicate in English at a high academic level. Furthermore, many multilingual students are international; Mount Holyoke, like many American universities, matriculates increasing numbers of international students. All of my multilingual students were also international, citizens of China. As the numbers of multilingual international students in American institutions of higher education burgeon, the issue of academic English writing for multilingual students has become prominent, sparking research into both the practicalities of teaching English as a second language and ideological discussions about linguistic identity. These students confront not only their second language but also classrooms invisibly permeated by Western social norms valorizing the individual, often contrasting with the socialization of non-Western societies (Ramanathan and Atkinson). For writing, their university classes emphasize clear, overt, and assertive voice, process, peer review, and critical thinking, which conflicts with the less direct approach valued in countries such as China and Japan.

Although it seems obvious that composition and issues of language and culture will coincide in the college classroom, composition and ESOL studies diverged for several decades starting in the 1960s (Matsuda 14). Scholars such as Tony Silva and Ilona Leki are now trying to bridge the two fields with publications like the *Journal of Second Language Writing*, founded in 1992. Yet, as Bruce Horner explains, composition scholarship manifests a belief in or assumption of monolingualism: "the 'norm' assumed, in other words, is a monolingual, native-English-speaking writer writing only in English to an audience of English-only readers" (569). This might stem from composition teachers expecting ESOL professors to take care of multilingual needs. However, given the increasing multilingualism of the classroom and the ineffectuality of the usual "containment" strategies for multilingual students (placement and entrance exams, admissions requirements), Horner asserts that cross-language writing needs to happen in composition classes.

Nevertheless, first (L1) and second language (L2) writing cannot be conflated. In 1993, Silva synthesized over seventy previous studies involving L2 writing to show that L1 and L2 writing are actually quite different "strategically, rhetorically, and linguistically" (669). Even in the composing stages, L2 writers needed more time and wrote with greater difficulty than L1 students. Although they reread their work less, they revise more, but with less intuition. While a native speaker might think, "this doesn't sound right," nonnative speakers do not have that "instinct." In sum, Silva found that "L2 writers' texts were less fluent (fewer words), less

accurate (more errors), and less effective (lower holistic scores)" (668). His review suggests that multilingual writers have greater difficulty overall with college writing.

Many multilingual international students come to study in the United States and other English-speaking countries to achieve greater dexterity with English speaking and writing, with the expectation that through their studies their writing will more closely resemble the writing done by native speakers. Neomy Storch investigated whether this expectation is realized. She conducted her research in Australia, which like the United States enrolls exponentially increasing numbers of international students—higher education is the third largest export industry there (103). To help international students transition, most universities offer support services such as English for Academic Purposes credit classes, non-credit workshops, and language or writing tutors. However, many students do not utilize these services; the assumption seems to be that studying in the university will improve communication skills in both writing and speaking without auxiliary resources. The researchers administered a test at the beginning and end of a semester to multilingual students who did not use language support services. The study found that after one semester the students' writing improved in terms of rhetorical organization, content development, and formal language, but not in using sources, range of academic vocabulary, or complex and correct grammar (114-115). This apparent lack of progress could be attributable to a lack of sustained writing practice or a lack of teacher feedback on assignments. Viewed

from the results of this standardized test, multilingual writers' skills might not increase visibly after their first semester of study. Of course, the students' own perception of their growth also matters greatly. If they see their skills as stagnant, they could feel defeated; if they believe that they are developing, they are more likely to proceed with confidence. While producing an appreciably improved product is an important way to assess the progress of multilingual writers, the process of their emotional and intellectual development is also crucial.

The security or insecurity that students feel about their language identity affects their confidence in development. Particularly during the college years, after multilingual students have exited the neat linguistic categorizations used in secondary schools, the idea of being a "second language speaker" becomes fluid and nuanced, as Cristina Ortmeier-Hooper argues. She conducted case study research with three nonnative speaker students in mainstream writing classes—none of whom self-labeled as speaking English as a second language—to investigate the way that factors such as culture and educational background affect how students construct their identity and what "ESL" means to them (394). Cultural difference variously became a stumbling block, an inspiration, and a secret for her participants. One man struggled with his cultural expectations about education, alternately questioning the instructor's authority and trying to project his own progress for her. Conversely, another enjoyed writing, particularly about his personal experience as an immigrant. The final participant confounded Ortmeier-Hooper by consistently trying to veil her linguistic and cultural

background; she feared getting "outed" to her classmates due to negative experiences with ESL classes. In a similar study, Yuet-Sim Chiang and Mary Schmida found that Asian-American students did not always define their "native language" as the language they were born speaking. Some defined it as their most fluent language or the language in which they think—for many, their "native language" corresponded with the culture they associated with more. From these studies, it seems that multilingual students can view their linguistic and cultural heritage as advantageous, detrimental, or immaterial to their success.

Keiko K. Samimy's case study of a lone native English-speaking student taking her class for multilingual students helps flesh out those linguistic identities. This student, who was studying to teach English, at first felt uncertain of her identity in the multilingual community. Some readings and interactions made her question her legitimacy as an ESL teacher. As someone who learned English due to an accident of birth and not an educational effort, she felt hypocritical in telling students, "You can do this" (127). To her, multilingual teachers seemed more justified in teaching multilingual students. Ultimately, this student gained a more positive identity, thinking of herself as an advocate for multilingual students and teachers (129). Samimy claims that constructions of English literacy result in students situating themselves in imagined communities, often along a native versus nonnative dichotomy, as manifest in her case study. These imagined communities have factions: some people believe that only native speakers can truly own English; others see language learning as a long, quixotic journey toward

full proficiency; and others see being multilingual users as powerful, enabling multiple competencies (124). Clearly, multilingual students are not a monolithic entity; they encompass both a diverse array of native languages and a variety of perspectives on how those languages play into their identities.

The university education of multilingual students is fraught with issues of personal identity, international politics, imagined communities, and of course academic expectations. As colleges realize their position as contact zones for people of various language backgrounds, teachers must consider how they will serve the development of multilingual students, and multilingual students must consider how engaging in English academic writing transmutes and translates their language identities. In researching their experience of writing, it is important to elicit their personal perspectives on language, or risk overlooking a component of their identity.

2.5 Institutional and pedagogical context

American universities today typically evaluate students on their written performance rather than on alternatives like oral performance, so writing occupies a privileged place in academia. Since writing has been endowed with this evaluative power, some cast its significance in terms of gatekeeping, separating those who can master written discourse from those who cannot (Séror). Others, while cognizant of the potential injustices caused by writing's academic ascendency, view it as an excellent way to engage with ideas. For example,

Robert Davis and Mark Shadle see the genre of research writing as blemished by the need to control—"the desire for expertise" (421)—but propose a revitalized role for it as part of the academic encounter with mystery and not knowing. One of their proposed projects is the personal research essay, in which the writer explores an intimate question like a possible vocation, without worrying about providing the closure that typifies conventional research papers.

Ideas for updating and revising the writing assignments given to undergraduates abound. For instance, the researchers of the Stanford Writing Study, which gathered all types of writing done by nearly 190 undergraduates for a total of five years, surmise that composition needs to interact with performance more (Fishman, Lunsford, McGregor, and Otuteye 244). This study found that today, undergraduates perform a host of academic and self-sponsored writing activities, with the latter category further categorized as self-reflexive (writer-based) and transactional (emails, posting in online forums, proposals) (229-230). As current students are increasingly multi-literate, these researchers contend that performance should be used in pedagogy to help students learn to embody language.

Many of these proposals for revitalizing writing curricula posit claims about the idea of "college-level writing." The contributors to *What Is "College-Level" Writing?* offer a variety of understandings of this concept. For example, Alfredo Celedon Lujan argues that voice—"a student thinking on paper, using words unique to her or him"—and resourcefulness characterize college-level writing

(55). Milka Mustanikova Mosley, along the same lines, claims that "college-level writing should focus more on the student's ideas and exhibit his or her individuality" and also display sophistication greater than high school counterparts (59). Yet, in her critique of the typical expectations of academic writing, Lynn Z. Bloom argues that it is traditionally expected that "a single writer's voice" not call attention to itself because this would distract from the subject (80). Muriel Harris prioritizes the audience over individual voice, claiming that, "college-level writing should demonstrate the writer's ability to write effectively to his or her particular audience" (123). Jeanne Gunner takes a different tack altogether, critiquing the whole concept of college writing as entangled in an institutional system that sells "commodities," among them, writing skills (111). Beyond the views of individual instructors, there are the guidelines composed by bodies like the Council of Writing Program Administrators, which outlines the rhetorical knowledge, processes, critical thinking, reading, writing, and knowledge of conventions that students should ideally attain by the end of their first-year composition program (153-154). The book offers many more opinions than I have highlighted here; it is clear that there is no single definition of "college-level writing" but rather a bevy of contradictory and complementary ones.

College writing can be imagined as a space that students enter, following the way in which Johnathon Mauk analyzes his institution. When he started teaching at a community college, he realized that his view of writing's significance did not

align at all with that of his students. Academics, rather than being at the center of their lives, occupied the peripheries, edged out by jobs, family, and other more pressing responsibilities. Furthermore, college was conceptualized as a way to get somewhere else—to a job, to a four-year program, to a higher salary (372). The rhetoric of the school was geared toward the next step, toward moving on; the college was merely a temporary space. His pedagogy of teaching process writing with recursive steps did not work when students allotted only small portions of time to cranking out their assignments. His experience, which he analyzes through the lens of critical geography, demonstrates the problem with trying to measure the significance of writing dissociated from the lived reality in which the writers—students and teachers both—live. To truly understand the role writing plays in the life of a student, it is necessary to study writing in the context of the various spaces in which students live more generally—their personal background, the various extracurricular communications in which they participate, and their long-term objectives.

One of the objectives of first-year seminars at Mount Holyoke is to start students on the long journey toward college-level writing, or to begin to bring them into the space of college writing. In the first year of college, students form the academic and personal habits that propel or hinder them throughout the rest of their education. It is uncontroversial to say that this is a vital time. For the most part, they are living away from home and family for the first time, confronted with new geography, new people, new standards, and often in the case of

multilingual speakers, a nonnative language. To address the inevitable struggles that arise during this transition, many colleges have implemented the first-year seminar (FYS). Since all of my participants were enrolled in various first-year seminars in the fall semester, it is important to map Mount Holyoke's brand of FYS within the larger FYS territory. Many of the pertinent studies focus on first-year composition courses in which the primary goal is developing students' writing, usually to bring it up to the "college standard" so they will succeed in future courses.

The first incarnation of the FYS was University 101 at USC in 1972 (Pascarella and Terenzini 400). Now nearly 95% of four-year universities have some version of the class, differing in content, duration, structure, target group, and electivity versus requirement. The common goal is to improve "academic performance, persistence, and degree completion" (400). Overall, studies have shown that first-year seminars have a positive effect on retention and accomplishment (402-403). First-year seminars have become an integral part of first-year programs designed to increase student retention (persistence). Prior research has shown that students enrolled in first-year seminars are better integrated socially and academically, earning higher grades, participating in more campus activities, and forming relationships with professors. But what qualities of the FYS create these effects?

Stephen R. Porter and Randy L. Swing investigated this question, trying to find the specific qualities of first-year seminars that affect persistence by surveying

20,000 first-year students from 45 different institutions. The researchers categorized each FYS they surveyed by theme: college success/transition (e.g. the one-credit Mount Holyoke curricular support class), special academic (e.g. the Mount Holyoke FYS program), academic/professional discipline, and remedial. The majority of programs surveyed used the transition theme (93). Of the student respondents, two-thirds indicated certainty in persistence, and schools with first-year seminars that educate students about study skills and health showed higher intent-to-persist (103-104). The authors note that the significance to persistence of focusing on academic skills is not surprising, as common sense dictates that first-year students need help transitioning to college-level studies. The precedent, then, is that students learn important academic skills in their first-year seminars; it is important to figure out what role writing plays in that skill set.

Doug Brent, dean of the Communication and Culture faculty at the University of Calgary, assessed the effectiveness of his FYS program, founded in 1999, through satisfaction and attitude change surveys and interviews with both students and faculty. His program resembles that of Mount Holyoke in that it aims to empower first-years to explore a topic in-depth and to create knowledge just as students in upper-level courses do. These first-year seminars bring students into "research culture" (257). His faculty said they enjoyed the latitude to form close mentoring relationships with students and to delve into a narrow topic rather than feeling pressured to cover information as they do in survey classes, and they emphasized how exciting it was to instill their passion for research into their

students (267). When Brent talked with the students, he observed that while their

research for other courses usually aimed at finding sources to support

preconceived points of view, the slower pace of research for the first-year

seminars encouraged the students to delve deep into their chosen topic of inquiry,

and in some cases to become emotionally affected by their investigation,

demonstrating a heightened personal investment. In addition, he noted that due to

the collaborative nature of some of the courses, with students convening in the

library to do research, they had a sense of the social nature of knowledge

production (270-271). However, he found that students did not understand how

academic journals work, how to glean sources from works cited lists, or the

purpose of citation beyond avoiding plagiarism (272). He concludes that, although

the first-year seminars of his case study do not introduce students to every facet of

academic discourse, they successfully combine a focus on writing with first-year

coursework to start students on "the long journey toward understanding how

academic knowledge actually works" (273).

A discussion of writing classes should be grounded in the theories of Writing

Across the Curriculum (WAC) and Writing in the Disciplines (WID), which hold

sway in many universities. Susan McLeod and Elaine Maimon, teachers who have

promoted WAC since its early days, assert that it is one of the most important

educational reform movements of the twentieth century (582). They quote

Laurence Peters' definition of the philosophy of WAC: "an exploratory tool to

understand thought, to allow words and ideas reciprocally to nourish each other,

as well as a vehicle for the transfer of information" (577). WAC promotes

practicing writing skills throughout the curriculum to keep them activated,

conceives of writing as learning, and distributes responsibility for teaching

writing among all departments, not just English. It seeks to move teachers away

from the knowledge transfer model of education toward a classroom where

students write to learn and learn to write in the disciplines. Writing to learn entails

writer-based prose—exploring ideas without concern about an outside audience.

Learning to write involves thinking about and responding to audience

expectations—in short, communicating effectively with the reader. WAC

programs encompass first-year composition and other writing courses,

administration, writing centers, faculty development, and other structural

elements (580).

One of the tenets of WAC is that all departments—all disciplines—share

responsibility for the teaching of writing, so the concept of discipline is integral to

the college writing classroom. In the current model of higher education,

disciplines have become specialized and separate. In contrast, writing is often

considered generalized, a skill taught to everyone in freshman composition.

Michael Carter addresses this paradox, proposing that if each discipline must be

specialized, then writing is also specialized for each discipline. He defines the

discipline as both a way of knowing and of knowledge—that is, both mastering

concepts and thinking in a certain mode (387). Each discipline requires students

to write in certain genres (e.g. a lab report), which can be grouped into meta-

genres (e.g. empirical inquiry, problem solving, research from sources, and performance). He argues that writing is not separable from but rather integral to ways of knowing and doing in each discipline. Nevertheless, first-year composition persists, often teaching writing as a generalized skill. In 1998, Michael Moghtader, Alanna Cotch, and Kristen Hague surveyed the writing requirements at colleges and universities. Despite earlier predictions of the decline of writing requirements, the opposite has occurred (460). Assuming that the trend has continued over the past fifteen years, composition is a growing field.

On the ground, inside and outside of freshman comp classrooms, what is happening with student writing? In a 2006 study of student error in writing, Andrea and Karen Lunsford observed two main shifts since a previous study in the 1980s: students were writing longer papers (1,000 words average) and the most assigned genre had shifted from personal narrative to researched argument, which suggests "that student writers today are tackling the kind of issues that require inquiry and investigation as well as reflection" (793). They were surprised at the dearth of more experimental writing projects given the scholarship devoted to "creative" assignments. The top errors they found were wrong words, missing commas, and missing documentation/citation (795). Some of the errors seemed to result from a lack of careful proofreading—allowing spell-check to make automatic and incorrect changes. Although their study focused on error, their observation about the commonality of the research genre links to another line of questioning about how students engage with the world through writing.

2.6 Conclusion

Several concepts recur throughout this literature review: identity, negotiation, and development. This chapter can be synthesized around these anchoring ideas and their intersections.

Both students and professors bring their identities into the college writing classroom. For professors, the writing ideology they adhere to comprises part of their identity as teachers and scholars. First-year students, new to their identity of "college student," carry in their background from secondary school, extracurricular communications, language, and culture. Their latter two sources of identity are particularly relevant to how they view themselves in relation to college writing. For domestic students learning in their native language of English, perhaps coming to college constitutes less of an explicit challenge to those identities. But for international multilingual students—a growing constituency in many English-language universities—cultural and linguistic heritage might collide with their new environment. There are the cultural differences in pedagogy, with Western professors typically demanding clear, overt, assertive voice and explicit citation, and then there are the linguistic issues. Multilingual writers compose in a quantifiably different way from native language writers and generally struggle more.

As students struggle to bring themselves into line with the expectations of their institution, linguistic and otherwise, they negotiate their identities, situating themselves in imagined communities that can help or hinder their progress. When

students imagine themselves as novices, this adaptable identity helps them engage with the feedback they receive from professors and peers. This does not necessarily entail submitting to all the feedback given, but rather to understanding themselves as being in a position to grow. First-year transition programs like first-year seminars can help students achieve this empowered identity by instructing them in study skills and networking and promoting serious intellectual engagement and self-understanding. Many writing courses, often targeting first-years in the "freshman comp" model, also seek to provide students a platform for understanding themselves as performers, contributors, and investigators. Of course, students cannot achieve total power over their identity negotiations in any institutional context; they must compromise with the expectations of academic discourse and learn to communicate in the university register or risk failure. In addition, when students have other pressing concerns—jobs, family, moving onto a career—writing can get pushed to the margins of their lives. The unspoken first step of negotiating identities in writing is the logistical negotiation of time and effort between commitments, so academic writing raises issues of social justice like access to resources.

Writing development arises during the process of negotiating identity, resulting both from the individual actions of the student and from the pressures of the student's environment. While there are empirical ways to measure writing development through analyses of linguistic and rhetorical factors, more relevant to the concept of transforming identity is the way the individual perceives her

own development. A general way to define college writing development is the

individual's movement toward joining the greater conversation, seeing herself as

part of an intellectual community aiming to produce new knowledge and thus

arriving at a more expansive self-understanding. Identity, negotiation, and

development converge in the first-year experience of writing.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Chapter outline

3.0 Introduction

In *Qualitative Inquiry in TESOL*, Keith Richards provides compelling reasons to do qualitative research. Quantitative measures like experiments and surveys will only take our understanding of the social world so far; qualitative research extends this understanding by exploring the complex world of people. This kind of research is transformative for the researcher, who is an active participant in his or her own research rather than a distant observer, and it also aims to have a generally transformative effect. I used the qualitative case study approach in an effort to investigate the experiences of my six participants in some depth.

All of this is not to aggrandize the potential of qualitative research. While doing this study, I kept referring to a virtual sticky note of a maxim that Richards

repeats throughout *Qualitative Inquiry*: a single research project will not change our world. Rather, it will modestly help to advance our understanding. My case study approach has two primary limitations: number of participants and timeframe. As I interviewed only six students from a class of over 500, the results cannot easily be seen as generalizable to all first-years at Mount Holyoke. Rather, the results should be seen as unique, providing insight into the experiences of my participants, but in conversation with the greater field of composition research. My case studies were longitudinal in that I interviewed participants over a period spanning five months, primarily concentrating on the students' first semester. Because of the relatively brief time span, my study does not purport to cover the full arc of students' first year at college.

3.1 Data sources

After receiving exempt status from the Mount Holyoke Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A), I recruited participants from the Department of Psychology. This department maintains a webpage displaying research opportunities for students enrolled in classes that require a certain number of research credits, and they posted mine after ensuring it met their requirements. As advertised, my only requirement for participation was membership in the class of 2016. I accepted the first six students who contacted me, and before beginning the interviews, each participant signed an informed consent form with the following description of my study:

This project aims to gather qualitative information about how several first-year students at Mount Holyoke experience writing-intensive curriculum. For participating students, the investigator will conduct three one-hour interviews throughout the Fall 2012 semester, which she will audio record with the interviewees' permission. She will also provide the students with the link to a secure online Google form for them to record their writing activities weekly, the online version of which she will delete at the end of the semester. She will use the data gathered from the interviews and the forms for her senior thesis, written for honors in the English Department. In the write-up, all names and other distinguishing characteristics of participants as well as names of any professors and particular classes will be changed.

The informed consent form further stated that my participants were free to withdraw from the study without repercussions at any point and affirmed confidentiality and anonymity (see Appendix B for full text).

To build my case studies, I conducted individual interviews with my participants three times in Fall 2012. I also asked them to meet with me once more in spring semester for a follow-up interview, and five of them did so. These interviews ranged from around twenty minutes to an hour in length, and I used an audio recorder to record them. I actively worked to give my participants the power in our interviews by having them choose the times and locations, physically positioning myself at their level or below during the interviews, and openly admitting that I was a neophyte with this kind of qualitative research, which many of them assumed I must have been experienced with already. Between interviews, I asked my participants to record their writing activities of any type in an online log, shared between the individual student and me. For each week in the fall semester, they wrote a brief description of their writing activity,

the page length or word count, the number of hours spent, and any comments, observations, or feelings. To create individualized interview guides, I based some questions on the particular assignments they recorded, some on the notes I took while listening to the recordings of their interviews, and some on general writing themes (see Appendix C). Thus, each participant responded to a somewhat different set of questions after the initial interview. Once I completed the eighteen first semester interviews, which totaled ten hours of recordings, I transcribed them.

3.2 Data analysis

Once I had fully transcribed the first semester interviews, I did open coding using the Comments feature of Microsoft Word. In my comments, which included everything in the transcripts, I described the themes manifest in sections of text. Then, I assembled all of the open codes and condensed them into ten primary codes intended to cover everything in the transcripts: types of writing or speaking; communicating in English for nonnative speakers; negotiating professor feedback and expectations as well as disciplinary conventions; working with peer feedback; adjusting to college life socially and academically; descriptions of assignments and classes; visions of good writing; affective responses to writing; descriptions of the writing process; and how high school writing instruction affects college performance. I returned to the transcripts, removed the open codes, and recoded them. It should be noted that for the second semester interviews, rather than fully transcribing and coding them, I listened to the recordings and took notes.

Although this method was less rigorous than my approach to the first semester interviews, I decided to include some relevant quotes and comments from the final interviews to enrich my results chapters. Unless specifically noted as coming from spring or second semester, all the material in my results chapters derives from my first semester interviews.

Each of my results chapters draws its material from several of the ten codes. For Chapter 4, I drew from high school writing instruction, negotiating professor feedback and expectations as well as disciplinary conventions, and peer feedback. For Chapter 5, I used affective responses to writing, descriptions of the writing process, visions of good writing, and types of writing or speaking. Since I decided to interweave multilingual experiences throughout multiple sections of both chapters, I also pulled from the nonnative English speaker code in Chapters 4 and 5. My process in composing the chapters was to go through the transcripts focusing on a single code, taking notes and pulling out relevant quotes, and when finished, to move on to the next code.

3.3 Participant profiles

Three of my participants—Eva, Julia, and Claire—are native English speakers, and three—Grace, Xia, and Liling—are nonnative English speakers. My native speaker participants come from the United States and represent both East and West Coast backgrounds, while all of my nonnative speaker participants come from China. All of them were enrolled in first-year seminars (FYS) during the

Fall 2012 semester. The table below shows their first semester academic

information as well as their native language (L1). All names are pseudonyms. The

sections following Table 2 present brief introductions to each of the participants.

TABLE 2: Description of Participants[2]

Name	*L1*	*FYS*	*Other coursework*	*Prospective studies*
Claire	English	English	Psychology, Biology, Latin, Chorale	Biology, Premed, Music
Eva	English	English	Psychology, Chemistry, Neuroscience	Cognitive Psychology
Grace	Chinese	Music	Psychology, Calculus, Microeconomics	Economics, Psychology, International Relations
Julia	English	English	Psychology, Film, Statistics	Psychology
Liling	Chinese	English	Psychology, German, Philosophy	Languages, Literature
Xia	Chinese	History	Psychology, Chemistry, Calculus	Psychology, Neuroscience

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[2] Although there is no single Chinese language, I use the term "Chinese" to describe the native languages of my Chinese nationality participants in accordance with their self-designations in our interviews.

3.3.1 Claire

When Claire's parents encouraged her to consider Mount Holyoke, she resisted, opposed to going to college so close to home. After visiting, however, she decided that Mount Holyoke was a perfect match and applied early decision. Although she came to Mount Holyoke from nearby, she emphasized the differences between her college and high school experiences. In high school, she felt she had to "dumb herself down" to fit in with her peers, but found that at Mount Holyoke showing intelligence was encouraged. Further, her high school had conditioned her to writing and thinking in the five-paragraph style, causing her to struggle with the inductive writing (first assembling evidence and then crafting a thesis, rather than gathering evidence to support a predetermined argument) required for her English first-year seminar. In general, she found college academics harder than she anticipated after having sailed effortlessly through high school in "big fish in a small pond" style, and she worked to learn time management strategies to stay on top of her coursework. As the semester unfolded, she noted her own progress in writing, evidenced by rising grades on her papers. She also declared happily that she understood what college was about after an intense week of midterms when she got into the flow of the work and managed her time successfully. Her personal growth was intimately related to adjusting to college academics and learning to ask for help. In the pursuit of a science major, she wished to learn more about the scientific writing style. She hopes to become a doctor but to continue pursuing her love of music and music theory through her coursework.

3.3.2 Eva

Eva, an East Coast native, came to Mount Holyoke from a small high school with a graduating class of sixty students, located in the town where she had resided her whole life. By the time she graduated high school, she felt tired of her town and the classmates she had known for years and was excited by the chance to meet many people at college. She first heard of Mount Holyoke through a personal connection, visited, and found she liked it; the opportunities for studying neuroscience cemented her decision. Identifying as a creative individual, she preferred creative writing—poetry and fiction—to academic writing, and she also did art including painting and drawing. With her background in creative writing and journal keeping, she saw writing as a means of self-expression, but also engaged in other forms like journalism as a writer for her high school newspaper. Eva recognized strengths and weaknesses both in her own academic writing and that of her classmates when she did peer reviews. She also recognized differences between the argumentative writing she did for English and the scientific writing she did for other classes, which emphasized communicating steps and procedures clearly. One of her recurring concerns was getting lost in the material and losing the focus of her argument because she got overwhelmed by her ideas; after trying her English professor's suggested inductive approach, she felt that she had a somewhat better handle on this. Overall, she found that her first semester was better than she expected, especially due to supportive professors.

3.3.3 Grace

In her junior year of high school, Grace came to the United States to study abroad. Based on that experience she decided she could get the best college education in the US and sought a small liberal arts college as opposed to a larger, more impersonal university setting. She had studied English since first grade, but because it was taught as a second language, her writing assignments were not particularly deep compared to the writing in Chinese classes. In her first two years of high school, her Chinese curriculum offered many opportunities to do creative and personal writing assignments, and she enjoyed these genres. In her final year, however, she disliked the rule-oriented teaching geared toward preparing students for the major exams at the end of high school. Grace did not come to Mount Holyoke with many expectations or assumptions about college writing, which she said was part of her personal philosophy of maintaining low expectations to avoid disappointment. Some of the writing she found easy, like keeping a journal for class, while other assignments like weekly response papers frustrated her because she found them repetitive. She wanted to learn to write more scientifically, as she considered her writing style oral and informal.

3.3.4 Julia

Julia attended a small high school on the West Coast with a graduating class of around thirty students. Attracted by the students, campus, and humanities at Mount Holyoke, she applied early decision. Among my participants, hers was an

anomalous case, as she came to college with extensive experience in the writing world as a published writer and prizewinner; she started writing a novel in high school and recently got it published. Often she brought up her lack of time to do creative writing at college, especially without a creative writing class, and how she missed it. When she did sit down to write she sometimes experienced writer's block. She hoped to enroll in creative writing in the future. In contrast to academic writing, which she viewed as formulaic, she saw creative writing as allowing freedom, space, and self-pacing. Although her publishing accomplishments endowed her with confidence in her writing, she often stressed how much she still had to learn, expressing desire to get feedback on her writing, learn more about expectations, and improve. She applied her knowledge and opinions about good writing to advise her friends on making their writing clearer and their arguments stronger in sessions that resembled those conducted by SAW mentors.

3.3.5 Liling

Liling came to Mount Holyoke from China after struggling to gain admission to small colleges in the US because of her financial aid needs and getting waitlisted by Mount Holyoke. Looking for a way to prove her worthiness, she turned to her creative writing, which she enjoys doing in Chinese. She translated a prize-winning short story into English, sent it to admissions, and got admitted. After coming to college, she was self-conscious about her English speaking

abilities, finding it hard to understand, let alone contribute to, rapid-fire and allusive conversations with American students. Some of this difficulty also applied to her writing, as she seemed unusually attuned to the differences between writing in Chinese and in English, describing stylistic and grammatical issues. Yet she came to realize that not all Americans were expert writers in English as she had once assumed, since instructors gave writing advice not only to international students but also to native English speakers. Her most formative writing experience first semester was her first-year seminar (as with most of the other interviewees), in which she struggled through new steps in the writing process, like making an outline and developing her thoughts into arguable theses. She seemed to take pleasure in the critical thinking involved, feeling heartened when her instructor complimented her analytical skills. Liling said she loved literature and studying languages.

3.3.6 Xia

A native of China, Xia spent twelve years studying English before coming to Mount Holyoke. She assessed the English she did in high school, where she chose the humanities over the science track, as simple and easy. She applied to over ten liberal arts colleges in the US, including Mount Holyoke, which, although not her first choice, she felt was a good fit. Speaking with Americans presented some communication barriers, so she found it easier to talk with and become friends with Chinese students and expressed interest in learning to speak English more

fluently. She described herself as introverted and quiet, making socializing difficult irrespective of language. Her initial goal, which she has maintained since sixth grade, was to study psychology, but this later shifted to neuroscience. Our talks mostly centered on her first-year history seminar as she tackled the professor's expectations of primary source research and concise writing and utilized his written feedback for rewrites, even seeking verbal feedback during the writing process. She met with her SAW mentor a few times; although she preferred to get help directly from the professor, she found her mentor increasingly helpful. Overall, Xia thought her first semester was "really good" because she could manage all her work with free time to spare. She hoped that in the near future she would have an opportunity to improve her "general writing skills," which could be applied to important standardized tests like the GRE, and found that her second semester psychology class served this purpose.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided an overview of why I selected a qualitative case study approach, the general context of this study, and how I collected and analyzed data. I explained the methodology of my interviews, transcriptions, and coding, and how those codes translated into my results. I also briefly profiled each participant to set up the background for the analysis in the results chapters.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS, PART 1
EXPERIENCES OF TRANSITIONING TO COLLEGE WRITING

Chapter outline
 4.0 Introduction
 4.1 Entering the space of college writing
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4.0 Introduction

What separates Mount Holyoke from the world outside, the world from which

new students come? Is it the majestic brick buildings with dates engraved in their

lintels? The grave of Mary Lyon enclosed in its square of wrought iron? The

stacks in the library with carrels waiting to host late nights of study? Since 1912,

the iconic front gates have served as shorthand for the transition from outside to

inside the space of the college, signifying that something different exists within.

In line with Johnathon Mauk's analysis of academic space and place in relation to

composition, college writing can be conceptualized spatially. Although the space

of college writing lacks a gateway as visible as Mount Holyoke's front gate, it

similarly is surrounded by the greater world of writing, but somehow is set apart.

There is no consensus on what demarcates college writing, as scholarship

dedicated to that question demonstrates. Yet, when first-year students, previously

cartographers of high school composition, step onto campus, they step into a new

space of writing. Professor expectations and feedback from various sources

gradually map this space for them.

4.1 Entering the space of college writing

In this section, I will present my participants' recollections of and reactions to

their high school writing instruction to illuminate their transition into the space of

college writing. A key component in that transition is how they come to

understand and negotiate their professors' expectations, which are sometimes

communicated through direct instruction. Even in their first semester, my

participants were able to make some inductions about disciplinary expectations

based on these negotiations with professors, revealing a capacity for mapping the

space of college writing on a scale transcending their discrete experiences.

4.1.1 Secondary school instruction

When I started interviewing my participants, they had been in college for about

six weeks. That time seems especially brief in comparison with the three to four

years they had spent in secondary school immediately prior, working to meet the

expectations of teachers, parents, administrators, and testers. Therefore, an

analysis of how students experience entering the space of college writing would

not be complete without at least a gesture to the space they recently exited, that of

high school writing instruction. This comes with the caveat that, viewing in retrospect, the students might have forgotten or altered their memories of high school instruction, especially as they began to relate it to college rather than as an autonomous prior experience. For instance, Grace claimed, "I don't really remember the process of, like, high school writing." Two distinct strains of descriptors emerged when the students discussed their high school writing experiences: high school writing as rigid, boring, and test-oriented, and high school writing as personal, emotive, and flexible.

Before embarking on an assessment of these views, it is important to note that my Chinese participants, Xia, Liling, and Grace, did not do extensive high school writing in English, but rather in Chinese. Their English assignments like brief essays and sentence practice paralleled the types of writing an American high school student might do in a foreign language class; as Grace stated, "English is one of the subject that we just learn as a second language." Xia reflected on writing in English class as "easy" and "a part of our exam but . . . not so important." Her English instruction aimed to teach sentence structures that could be used on an exam. Liling, similar to Xia, described the in-class English writing as "very, very simple," and Grace called it "not that deep and profound." When she started the college application process, Grace had to write longer compositions in English for the TOEFL (the highest scoring sample essays provided on the TOEFL website are still relatively brief at five paragraphs long). While English writing was brief and simple, the students did literary writing in

Chinese class, which Liling compared to English class in the United States. As my only participant who participated in an exchange program in high school, Grace had the unique experience of studying both in China and in the United States at the secondary level. She struggled the most with her English literature class because the readings were "outdated," using an older vocabulary unfamiliar to her. Her teacher gave her special attention during class and after school and she succeeded in writing three or four longer papers. Liling and Xia did not disclose any comparably sustained writing projects in English, so their descriptions of high school writing should be read with the knowledge that they refer to writing in their native language of Chinese.

My participants spoke positively about their experiences with the personal, emotive, and flexible writing projects. Liling spoke about "romantic" writing (in Chinese) in high school, which I took to mean personal and creative writing—she mentioned such "very cliché" topics as influential people or experiences onstage. For her, in high school writing "you can write freely as you want," permitting liberty from strict rules or rigorous expectations. That is, analytical or critical writing was not valued as much as the ability to write about "creative thoughts" and "sparkling, inspiring" ideas. She distinguished the rationality of analytical writing from the emotivity of personal writing. Grace echoed this distinction, describing the distribution of writing assignments as mostly emotional and personal for the first two years, then becoming oriented to rules and preparation for the major exams in the last year. For her, the personal projects were more "fun"

and "happier." Similarly, Xia enjoyed keeping a weekly journal for a high school assignment. Yet even for more formal and presumably "rigid" writing, the expectations for research were lax; students could find their information on Wikipedia without repercussions. Eva appreciated the flexibility to explore an atypical topic in her eight-page senior thesis, for which she chose to write about video games as an art form. She liked this project a lot and said, "it definitely wasn't as academically based," as she did not view video games as an academic topic. Her description implies that she valued the latitude to select a topic outside the academic canon.

Whereas my participants enjoyed writing from personal experience or on a personally selected subject, high school also subjected them to repetitive assignments and test-based writing instruction. Xia used the word "stereotypes" to describe repetitive assignments, expressing their mundanity and tedium. Claire recalled that in her high school, the "stereotype" of choice was the infamous five-paragraph essay with its privileging of summary over analysis: "in high school when we only wrote five-paragraph essays I feel like it was, like, so monotonous, like the style in which we were being taught to write, so it was more about the content." The idea of monotony suggests both the lack of variation in stylistic expectations and her consequent boredom. She believed that her high school writing instruction, which was not writing intensive, left her "starting really at the bottom" at Mount Holyoke but foresaw the "writing intensive structure of the classes in Mount Holyoke" driving her "to become a better writer and to progress

in my writing maturity." Claire thus reconfigured the deficiencies of high school

writing instruction as giving her room for growth in college.

Eva gave a particularly critical assessment of her high school writing

instruction based on three shortcomings: it was too constricted, it targeted AP

tests, and it lacked rigor. Because she expounded on factors mentioned by other

participants, I will quote her at length to further illustrate the issues raised in the

previous paragraph. Regarding test-based writing instruction, she commented:

> Yeah, I felt that a lot of my—I learned how to write to get a good grade on the AP tests, and I feel like that wasn't the greatest thing. I feel like it was sort of all tricks and, like, learning how to answer the question they want and to find the argument out of the five pieces they would have for you to read and things like that where I feel that hasn't translated over so well.

Instead of gaining transferable writing skills that she could translate to future

writing, she learned "tricks" designed to earn a better score on standardized tests.

At the same time, her instructors did not sufficiently critique her argumentative

writing:

> I feel like—in high school I had some pretty lax teachers and they didn't really read your essays (*laughs*) so high school writing was all about fluff. And I'm pretty sure that sort of messed me up for college, because it was like you had ideas and you didn't really have to back them up all that much, you just had to be really, really strong in your approach and then as it went along you could sort of write less because they wouldn't read that far in.

The laxity of her instructors encouraged her to write "fluff," suggestive of writing

that is superficially compelling yet lacks profundity or evidence. She attributed

the failings of her writing instruction to the public school environment that

offered only "basic" classes compared to the "more developed" classes she

imagined were available at other schools. Because of these weaknesses, she felt "a little underprepared" for college. Yet, as the semester went on, she viewed her high school writing in a more positive light:

> I think, yeah, I'm able to reach more into what I did do in high school that was helpful, like we did have essays due and some of them, one English class they were sort of the same format as what we're doing now, so I think I'm starting to notice that more and draw more from the positive influences from high school, so I feel more prepared.

Perhaps the initial stress of starting college impelled her to view her high school writing instruction negatively, but when she had more experiences with college writing, this enabled her to find more consistencies between the two.

Julia started off where Eva ended up, seeing the spaces of high school and college writing as contiguous. When we first spoke, she based her vision of writing on what she knew from high school, as she had not yet received feedback on any writing assignments. She cataloged the components of an academic paper for me based on the five-paragraph structure with its introduction, body paragraphs comprised of evidence and analysis, and conclusion, and then said, "I think for me like in high school that was what an academic paper was supposed to look like, and I think—hopefully that applies to college writing as well, in that organization." Therefore, she expected and hoped that the familiar formula of high school writing would transfer to the space of college writing. After she received a grade on her first paper a few weeks later, she found this hope confirmed since she achieved a satisfactory score with "the same way I used to

write in high school." Although she characterized her high school overall as laidback, she said that expectations were "pretty high" for writing:

> . . . they wanted to make sure that you understood the material, and that you give examples of the material that you've learned in class, so style-wise we didn't use the personal "I," we just cared about how well you expressed your evidence in that paper.

While it is beyond the scope of this study to compare the quality of my participants' high school writing instruction, it is possible that Julia received more rigorous writing instruction than my other participants, and that resulted in the smooth transition to college writing. There are many other confounding factors—her own writing level, her unusual background as a published author, her ideology of writing development—that also could have contributed to the continuity of her writing experiences.

What becomes clear from my participants' accounts of their high school writing experiences is that the degree of distinction between high school and college writing varied for each student. For some, the space of college writing was barely divided from high school writing, while others had to traverse an uncomfortable gap between high school and college. It is notable that many of them entered college holding their personal, creative, and flexible writing from high school in the highest regard, as differentiated from the frustrating constraints of "academic" essays written in repetitive formats. It seems possible that the uninspiring design of analytical writing assignments in high school caused my participants to value personal writing as an escape from the drudgery of academics. College writing, which generally encourages students to actively

select and engage with their topics, holds the potential to reconcile the dichotomy of boring academic and fun personal writing instilled in high school.

4.1.2 Negotiating professor expectations

Coming to the space of college from high school, every student imagines what professors might expect from them. Eva came in expecting professors "to be more brutal" and indifferent in a sink or swim situation: "'Here's a writing assignment, have fun,' and then me to be really struggling to get like a handle on college writing." In reality, she found them to be "very understanding that this is the first time we've been doing college writing." Julia confessed a similar fear that "my professors are going to hate my writing, they're going to tell me that I shouldn't be a writer—and I haven't gotten that yet." Once students enter classes and interact with real instructors, their initial fears of overbearing, cold professors might be disproven, but they must still try to figure out just what those professors want. This often involves a series of negotiations in which students gradually accumulate knowledge of their professors' expectations, building from initial confusion or ambiguity. For instance, when writing her first paper, Xia's ignorance of her professor's expectations for the genre resulted in her confusion and in a disappointing grade: "I didn't know much about what he wanted us to write about, I'm a little confused about that and that is the first time that I wrote a narrative, a history narrative, so I don't know how to write." Generalizing from my participants' experiences, incoming students' visions of college writing and

professor expectations are continuously transformed, refined, and tested in their interactions with professors.

The most straightforward way that students learn about their professors' expectations is when professors tell them what they expect through lectures, workshops, and written guides. Several of my participants mentioned having in-class writing workshops in their English first-year seminars on topics such as sentence structure, outlining, how to write about literature, close reading, and personal voice. Eva and Liling commented that they were able to apply the lessons of the writing workshops to their essays. For Eva, a close reading workshop on a single sentence of a poem "really set up how we should be doing it on the essay." She noted that "I do think sort of the things [my professor] brings up in class sort of resonate with me when I'm writing." Liling also thought that she could apply the way close reading was modeled in class to her papers, but thought this lesson would have been more useful earlier in the semester: "Step by step, step by step would be better, because she kind of goes from start from a big paper and then at the end of semester a workshop about how to develop a paragraph, so it feels like backward." Logically, learning about what the professors expected earlier in the semester would maximize the opportunities for students to practice those lessons in their writing assignments.

Since all of my participants were enrolled in first-year seminars, they would have been required to co-enroll in the new First-Year Connections class, a curricular support course that aspired to teach students about "the writing/revising

process" among a number of other goals. English professors led one of the sessions of this course to talk about writing. Liling recalled that they suggested, "Write the most simplest sentence, don't use passive tense, use the simplest word if you are not sure about the difficult one." She was surprised that this advice was directed at both native and nonnative speakers, as she used to think American students "write like Shakespeare." Grace brought up the same lesson, remarking that she hadn't heard the advice about simple language before, but that "it's sort of useful" and applicable to her writing: "when I can't use shorter sentence like to express what I think, I write down my longer sentences into shorter sentences so it doesn't make—like it's not so complex." Although college composition was not the focus of this course, it provided a context for students to learn about writing skills more generalized than in their discipline-specific first-year seminars.

Written instructions complemented in-class writing instruction. All of my participants were enrolled in an introductory psychology class that required one short paper on a TED talk, constituting 15% of the class grade. Every week, the class watched a TED talk and then discussed it, modeling the type of analysis to be performed in the final paper. In addition, the instructor provided an exhaustive list of questions that the students needed to answer in their essay. For Eva, these questions proved helpful, informing her about what her professor wanted and how it would be graded, and enabling her "to get down on paper those ideas" in response to the questions. Claire also noted that while at first she felt stressed about the assignment when she looked at the questions, she felt "just like, oh, this

is all that she wants us to do—it's kind of, like, relaxing." Conversely, some students like Grace were left with doubts even after reading the questions. She was unsure about the style of the paper and so assumed that it should be more "scientific" and objective. After she wrote the paper, she said she wasn't able to write it scientifically, but she still hoped for a good grade. Although the written instructions guided the students through this particular assignment, they did not initiate Grace into the unfamiliar disciplinary conventions of psychology. Perhaps the specificity of the expectations did not foster transferability to future contexts, indicating the challenge of designing assignments that neither make students confused nor dependent.

This quandary raises the question of whether students felt that professors sufficiently explained their overall writing expectations—in Grace's phrasing, "to make it clear what they really want." Claire's case is instructive, because she experienced two varying approaches in how professors communicated their expectations. While her English FYS professor presented her overall expectations, her biology professor took an assignment-by-assignment approach. She reflected,

> . . . it's weird, because, like, it's so easy for me to write a lab report but, like, he's vague, I don't know what he wants, but my English teacher it's, like, harder to write the paper but she's more like concrete on, like, ok this is what I want, I want you at the end of the day to like do this. So I think, I think just, like, for any teacher just kind of be, like, a little bit more specific on, like, what you're looking for and, like, maybe just examples of what's a good paper versus what's a bad paper, or a good topic versus a bad topic kind of thing. I think that would be really helpful.

She brings up "examples," or sample papers, as a writing aid useful for "any teacher," which resembles Xia's comment that having access to sample papers would have helped with her history papers. Claire acknowledges that despite the greater clarity of her FYS professor's expectations, she still finds writing an English paper harder than a biology paper. Even when a student fully understands what the professor wants, the writing process can still be challenging—audience is after all only one factor in writing. This reveals the complexity and even occasional paradoxes that students experience as they negotiate their professors' expectations.

4.1.3 Refracting disciplinary conventions

My participants' conceptualizations of disciplinary conventions provide one window into how students view the terrain of college-level writing. Overall, they recognized different expectations between the disciplines. As Grace articulated, "for example if it's a science class and you write like you're in English class, it's not a good writing, but like vice-versa, so I think a good writing would be something that would fit the reader's like—that would make sense to readers and that would fit the requirements of the field." I am going to touch on what "requirements of the field" my participants identified for the humanities, sciences, and social sciences (specifically psychology).

All of my participants took first-year seminars in the humanities. Xia, who took a history FYS, emphasized the factual nature of history writing: "because it's

a history paper, so every sentence that I write have to be based on some facts."
For her, research was particularly important in history. Liling contrasted the
history class she took second semester with her English FYS, noting that history
required her to synthesize a greater volume of primary sources, which she found
challenging. Her greater familiarity with English papers compounded this contrast.
On the other hand, Claire understood the conventions of English writing in terms
of its unfamiliarity to her way of thinking: "I feel like I'm not so good at English
and stuff like that because like my thoughts are always like, well I don't know
why [the author] did that." Eva experienced direct instruction about English
writing when her instructor held a workshop on the conventions of writing about
literature. They discussed how voice should be "less formal and conclusive than it
would be for other things where it's like factual" and how to avoid arguing about
authorial intention, instead "evaluating their ideas through the literature" as a
reader. Even for Grace, not in an English class, English still had a reputation for
stringent conventions. Based on her roommate's English class, she thought that
English papers would be "longer" and "more intense" with "more requirement."
Her hypothetical vision of English illustrates how the space of college-level
writing with its disciplinary borders gets mapped in the realm of imagination.

Of course, "English writing" is not monolithic. Julia experienced the variety of
writing styles possible even in a single English class, extending from the close
reading she did in literary analysis essays to incorporating research on a novel's
philosophical themes in another essay. She commented on the distinctness of this

paper: "maybe writing style but also the setup was pretty different from what I'm used to." Given Julia's fairly effortless transition to college writing, this difference is notable. Writing an English research paper required not only a change in setup—drawing on scholarly sources for her argument—but also in style. Even in the first semester, my participants were cognizant of the multiplicity of conventions within a single discipline.

Eva defined science writing in contrast to her English papers, which she characterized as argumentative. In her science classes, her instructors were "sort of trying to build up that idea of like how to write scientifically, and realizing like how to reach your peers and how to reach the scientific community." So writing for a particular audience was key; she did not mention this focus on reaching peers for English. She focused on the direct quality and total clarity of science writing with "no fluff," laying out "your findings and your hypothesis and where you think the research can go from there." This description of science writing implies less latitude than English writing. Claire took a biology class requiring both lab reports and essays. She said, "it's like just really strange like how this particular teacher wants us to write, so I'm looking forward to that helping me in future biology classes." Although her professor had "strange" expectations, she anticipated that performing to meet those particular expectations would transfer to other classes.

For psychology, Eva noted, "there's a different language used, so I'm hoping to become more familiar with that, which I think I will just naturally through

taking more courses and becoming more familiar with the actual writing done by psychologists and scientists." One way she started to familiarize herself with the language was by listening to the way the speaker referred to things in the TED talk she wrote about. Grace echoed this concern about learning the language of psychology, telling me that she planned to visit a SAW mentor because she was unfamiliar with science (or social science) writing and struggled to write formally: "I need some help to make it look more of a scientific article instead of a talking one, because when I usually write I use a lot of oral words like 'and' . . . just like it's like I'm talking instead of writing."

Although my participants were able to verbalize some distinguishing conventions for the disciplines they encountered, many of them were unsure whether they could generalize the expectations of one professor to their entire discipline. For instance, although Julia took an English FYS, she recognized that her English professor next semester might have a different set of expectations. Claire acknowledged the ambiguity of whether conventions arose from a professor's preference, from the discipline, or from "college" standards:

> I'm a little bit, I'm still a little bit confused as to what college writing really is because it's so different for each class, especially for like my English and my bio class—they're two completely different kinds of writing, and yes they both need to have you know varying sentence structures and heightened vocabulary and I need to know what I'm talking about in both of them but at the same time it's two completely different things.

She expected that taking more classes would make more "concrete in my head" disciplinary conventions, but at the same time feared that her professors in the

future would expect her to come into their classes already accustomed to their discipline's style. This fear motivated her desire that "a first-year seminar it would be like touching base on a little bit of everything, just so that you're opened up for in case anybody else in college wants you to write that kind of stuff." Her wish for comprehensive, generalized writing instruction aligns with the freshman composition model more prevalent in research universities. While taking scattered classes in the liberal arts can give students a sense of disciplinary conventions, this happened more implicitly than explicitly for my participants.

4.2 Receiving and responding to feedback

A discussion of how students interact with professor expectations would be incomplete without an analysis of how they receive and respond to feedback. I found that the feedback from professors took two primary forms: written feedback and oral feedback, both with advantages and disadvantages. In addition to professor feedback, many of my participants received peer feedback, both from trained SAW mentors and from their friends and classmates. In this section, I will explore the ways students describe their experiences with these guiding figures.

4.2.1 Professors

All six of my participants received written feedback on their writing in their first semester. These comments usually spanned both the style and the content of the papers, covering issues ranging from formatting, grammar, word choice, and

sentence structure, to citation, argumentation, evidence, and reliability of sources. Xia and Liling, both nonnative speakers of English, mentioned getting grammar feedback more frequently than the other participants did.

While most of my participants were glad to receive "really detailed notes" (Eva) and found their professors "really responsible" (Xia) with giving feedback, they encountered some problems. Julia's problem is illustrative of the issues of the timing and legibility of written feedback. The first time I spoke to her, she had not yet received comments on her paper: "I wrote my first college essay, I think a month ago and I haven't gotten it back yet, so I don't know yet how my professor likes my writing." Without any feedback on her writing, she did not feel she could say much about college writing. It seems that receiving substantive written feedback early in the semester would have made her feel more confident about entering the space of college writing. Further, she noted that without comments, she would simply continue to write the same way without necessarily improving. When she got her first paper back with comments, she was unable to read her instructor's handwriting, making out only, "She did say she liked it, that was like the one thing I could find." She handed the paper to me and I was able to decipher more of the comments. Once I read the comments to her, she agreed with them. It wasn't clear whether she would have set up an appointment to see that professor for an explanation of the illegible comments (she was unable to visit during office hours). The usefulness of written feedback depends on the student's ability to read

the comments. Although it might seem trivial, illegible handwriting can create a stumbling block to understanding professor expectations.

In spring semester, Xia and Grace received a paucity of feedback comparable to Julia's, but this was part of the design of their assignments. They both had to do short, frequent pieces of writing—online forum posts for Xia and paragraph responses for Grace—for which they received participation credit but no grade or comments. Xia, seeking to improve, pursued feedback from her professor, asking about her weaknesses. Grace had not yet sought feedback when I spoke to her, but acknowledged that her professor's lack of grade and feedback was having a detrimental effect on her engagement with the material, "because like with the writing he doesn't grade us or anything sometimes I just kind of give up on trying to figure out what is it, I just post whatever is on there." She implied that if she were getting graded, she would think more deeply about her topic. Additionally, without feedback, she did not know his "standard of writing" and felt nervous about meeting his expectations on the upcoming midterm.

For Liling, comprehending written feedback was significant for her progress and her self-confidence as a writer. In her English FYS, Liling got a "terrible" grade on her first paper, a C+. She described the process of "taking pains" writing a paper, then turning it in: "And when you revise a lot of times and then hand it— hand it to your professor confidently, you might get very poor grade because of that, and there will be comments everywhere and grammar mistakes everywhere." Although her overwhelming image of "comments everywhere" betrayed some

frustration, she was optimistic that she could change "very quick" in response to this feedback: "over time, we just learn to avoid such errors, like I don't make such mistake now." Later, her professor commented on her close reading abilities: "she said my advantage is the type of thinking, she said my thoughts are very nuanced—she used very the best word, 'nuanced'—and she said I can detect a little difference in the passage and dig deeper." Liling seemed proud of this assessment.

In contrast, the next semester she encountered problems with both the reliability and the authority of her English professor's feedback after he mistook a summary she turned in for an analytical paper, remarking, "I won't believe anything he say now . . . the professor is not telling the truth!" Their definitions of genres clashed enough that his authority was undermined. However, with the same professor, she conceded to his authority by removing a facet of her analysis that he found unnecessary. She seemed reluctant to omit what she found a compelling component of her argument, but nonetheless submitted to his critique "because he's grading the paper." Her experience reveals the problematic dynamic that results from professors' evaluative power; students externally succumb to feedback to achieve a better grade but internally resist. This feedback-driven conflict undoubtedly complicated her self-confidence as a writer.

Although oral feedback seemed less frequent than written feedback, several participants did meet individually with their professors to talk about their papers, at times as an alternative to written feedback. Some participants looked forward to

conversing face-to-face with their professors. Eva anticipated that meeting with her English FYS professor "should be helpful to talk to her about, like, how I could personally improve my writing." She perceived her future meeting with the professor as not only relevant to her immediate coursework but also to generally improving her writing. Julia and Liling shared this hopeful view of oral feedback, calling it "amazing" and "helpful," respectively. Claire noted that the drawback of receiving oral feedback was that it could easily be forgotten due to the lack of a written record that would allow her to "be like, ok, I remember, she said that and now it's right here so I can actually remember to do that." Oral feedback might escape memory, but written feedback is "right here," signifying a greater immediacy and access.

Furthermore, like any feedback, oral feedback has the potential to confuse rather than clarify. In spring semester, Claire had a frustrating experience when she went to meet with her professor after receiving a poor grade on her exam. While he told her he thought she was confused, he did not give her any concrete tips. Reflecting on their conversation, she said, "I wish that they would give, like, more concrete, like, 'This is what you need to do,' not like, 'Oh, well you'll figure it out.' No, that's not really how it works at all." Liling had a similarly problematic experience: "I talked to my professor and she suggest me to change the focus from—from—yeah, and he—she just give me a very general idea, what's the ideal paper she want to see, and then I have a really hard time." Liling's struggle to articulate what exactly she talked about with her professor

("from—from—yeah") might indicate that she forgot some of the feedback or that it confused her. Both Claire and Liling only got a vague idea of how to improve their writing from these instances of oral feedback, displaying that the downside of conversation's immediacy can be its lack of useful detail.

   Xia seemed to have the most sustained oral feedback from her FYS professor, so I will highlight her experience. For her, talking to the professor was an important way to enter the space of college writing, especially in a nonnative language. When I asked her if she had advice for incoming students, she suggested that Chinese students should "talk to the professor more often." She followed her own advice, speaking to her professor about her essays outside of class before embarking on writing (not after writing, as his written comments were "pretty clear"):

> Yeah I go to talk to him more about how to write a certain assignment instead of how to revise it because he made comments pretty clear so I know how to do that. And I sometimes go to ask him to recommend me some good books that I can or some that I can find primary sources, yeah.

She conceives of her professor as both a source of writing expertise, providing her with information on "how" to approach her writing, and a source of disciplinary knowledge aiding with research. For her final paper, she again sought feedback from her professor as she wrote:

> I went to talk to the professor and he asked me to figure out what I am really interested in, and then I wrote—then I write my final paragraph and I sent it to him so he can check if it's ok to write it like this so then I—he also recommended me some books so I looked them up in the library and those books really inspired me so I wrote a final paragraph and sent him an email and the first time

> he told me there is some—he asked me some questions that isn't clear in my final paragraph so I revised it according to his suggestions and then he said it may work, he's looking forward to seeing my reading my essay.

In her narrative, her professor is involved throughout the drafting process, providing first oral and then written feedback, helping her find her focus, her style, and her sources. Her writing process came to involve talking with her professor before the stage of final written comments, highlighting how oral feedback can play an organic role in the development of a piece of writing.

4.2.2 Peers

My participants' views of their SAW mentors' roles reflected the ways they positioned themselves in relation to professors and the ambiguity of the mentors' position between peer and instructor. Claire, Liling, and Xia had writing mentors from the SAW Program assigned to their first-year seminars; Julia, Grace, and Eva discussed the SAW Center. Often, my participants compared their mentors with the professor, as when Claire was struck by the similarity of her mentor and professor's comments on her paper. She remarked, "I felt like the SAW mentor was helpful, as helpful as the professor." Xia also compared her mentor to her professor, but less favorably, commenting, "if I have any problems about my essay structures or content I prefer to talk to the professor directly instead of talking to the mentors because I don't think they know better than the professor." Her comment again positions the mentors and professors comparatively, as if they compete to render services or knowledge to the students. Even when she found

her mentor more helpful later in the semester, she maintained this hierarchy by attributing her mentor's success to her improved understanding of the professor's expectations. By viewing the mentor as lacking authority commensurate with the professor, Xia felt enabled to selectively take her mentor's feedback and "just choose her suggestions that may help." Thus, the professors and mentors were often configured hierarchically, implying that students felt capable of judging and selecting the more useful purveyor of feedback depending on their needs.

Some of my participants viewed the mentors' role in the writing process as necessarily limited. Xia, for example, seemed to refuse brainstorming or outlining help from her mentor, as she preferred to "come up with all the ideas and structures of my essay by myself." Instead she went to the mentor for grammar and word choice. Her use of "by myself" expresses her desire to avoid interference that could impinge on her ownership of her paper. Echoing Xia's opinion on mentoring, Liling thought her mentor gave "useful advice" about how to express her ideas and work on her grammar, "but they can't help you with your idea." Nonetheless, on subsequent papers, she collaborated with her mentor on her thesis and on organization. She enthused, "My mentor is amazing." For Liling more than Xia, her view of the mentor's potential for assistance expanded over the semester, perhaps reflecting a shift towards feeling less possessive of the "idea" of her writing. Like Xia, Julia also saw mentors as fitting into the late stages of her writing process, although not constrained to stylistic issues:

> So I, I go through that process where it's like "This is so good!"
> But then I have to remind myself you know I'm being egocentric,

> you know, someone else who's going to read this is going to think this is the worst thing you've ever written. So I have—I go to the SAW Center, cause I do have that confidence in my writing that whatever I write I can turn in, but I also want to like double check just to make sure that I'm like ok. . . . So having that as like a failsafe before I do turn it in is so helpful and good and I'm glad that there's a SAW Center on this campus.

For Julia, the SAW mentors acted as critical readers with the emotional distance—the lack of "egocentrism" or attachment—from her writing to provide useful feedback. This feedback, although not crucial, functioned as a "failsafe" protecting her from turning in subpar writing.

Just as professors could legitimize SAW mentors by incorporating them in their course, some of them also mandated getting feedback from classmates in peer reviews that they directed. Only Xia mentioned talking with her classmates informally about the first paper for her FYS because they were all confused, but this exchange did not seem sustained. Eva and Claire received and gave peer feedback in small groups using commenting tools in Microsoft Word and Google Documents as part of their coursework. Eva did not find this particularly helpful. Some comments were merely superficial—one classmate "was like, 'this is good, this is good'"—and others simply reiterated "things I already knew." Nevertheless, she liked reviewing peers' papers: "I enjoy sort of like looking at their argument and seeing where it's weak." In giving comments, she was able to deploy her critical thinking skills. When she received feedback from her classmates, she did not go to see a SAW mentor because "I was busy trying to use that feedback and I might have gotten overwhelmed." This suggests that Eva had a feedback quota—

an amount of feedback beyond which she would get pulled in too many directions, confused by divergent suggestions. This concept is consistent with Claire's critique of peer review.

Claire's FYS used a peer review format similar to Eva's several times during the semester. She felt that getting peer comments on her papers was "definitely helping," because she would address the comments. She and her classmates, she said, did well "respecting the fact that like people don't want to get their papers torn down but they do want the help," reflecting the delicate nature of commenting on a peer's paper—its potential to damage versus its capacity to help. Her professor commended her on responding to these comments: "she said that I did a really good job at that and really addressing what the students and her had commented on my paper, and brought it out to, to be a better paper, to be a better argument as a whole." Her professor's affirmation of the peer feedback influenced Claire in seeing it as useful. Further, making comments on her classmates' papers "makes me a closer reader on my own paper," because she often found that she could apply the suggestions she made to others to her own writing. She found the second round of peer feedback different because she anticipated what comments her group members would make and therefore got less feedback. The second iteration of peer feedback was helpful for intrinsic reasons—"more organizing myself"— rather than getting external suggestions.

When I interviewed Claire in spring semester, her view of peer review had again shifted. Looking back on first semester, she commented that it was not the

ideal time to get peer feedback because she was trying to find "who I am in the academic world." Her critique correlates with Eva's feedback quota, although whereas for Eva the volume of feedback could disorient her, for Claire such disorientation could stem from the source of feedback. Although Claire perceived dealing with the comments of other first-years as possibly deforming the pursuit of her identity as a college writer, in the midst of the experience it seemed rather to inform her development as a critical reader and writer.

Although students had multiple formal routes to getting feedback on their papers, most of them under the aegis of their professors, they also had a non-institutionalized option: utilizing their social network to get feedback from friends. Roommates offered an accessible source of feedback for Xia and Grace. Because she considered her psychology essay important and "wanted to make it good," Xia asked her roommate to read it. She recalled, "My roommate said my writing skills are improving, yup, so I was really happy about that." She not only valued her roommate's intellectual ability to critique her paper but also gained confidence from that feedback. Grace had a sustained feedback relationship with her roommate and appreciated her roommate's ability "as a non-reader" of the course material to ask questions about meaning "that would help me to change my article." Interestingly, although the two had the extracurricular relationship of living together, Grace did not want her friendship with her roommate to color her response—"I don't ask her as a friend to, like, you know, make good comments like give compliments." Her ideal was the dispassionate criticism of the sort she

would get at the SAW Center. Once her papers got longer, out of consideration for her roommate's time, she went to see a mentor and "they pretty much did whatever my roommate was doing."

While most of this section has focused on my participants as recipients of feedback, in Julia's case she informally took on the role of writing mentor, providing feedback to various friends. She prided herself on giving them useful advice and took pleasure in their success: "it worked out really well, she actually texted me today and said like, 'Yeah my professor loved my play, so thank you so much!'" One of her friend's papers tended to lack organization and be repetitious and wordy, so she helped her to "shorten the essay so she gets her point across and it's more coherent." She had her friend read the paper aloud and made comments as they went through the paper, emphasizing that the friend, not Julia, owned the paper:

> And I overall I tell her here's my interpretation, here's how you can fix it—you don't have to take my interpretation. Overall this is your paper but this is how I would do it. So she either takes it or leaves it. Sometimes we disagree and she keeps her writing, which is fine, and other times she's like, "That's much better, what you've written," and I'm like, "You can take it, it's fine."

Extrapolating Julia's philosophy of feedback from the approach she took with her friend, she sees the individual writer as controlling and owning the writing, responsible for selecting which suggestions to use and which to reject. In the position of an informal mentor with some special writing expertise, Julia had the opportunity to express and enact her idea of feedback, which presumably would inform her own reception of feedback.

4.3 Conclusion

It is apparent from the stories my participants told that they seek and receive a variety of forms of writing instruction and feedback from their professors, mentors, and peers. Comprehending this feedback is one step of transitioning from high school to college writing, and responding to it is another step. The result of not using feedback is a "dead-end" situation, in the words of Eva, in which the student receives and understands feedback from the professor without applying it. When she got comments on her essays, she would reflect on them: "I look back and I think about why my idea didn't come through as well and how I wrote it and what was wrong with that." This process of receiving, understanding, and responding to comments was a common idea among my participants. Julia described directly applying her instructor's comments on her thesis to the next paper: "this time I made sure my thesis was clear, and then at the end she was sort of like 'You know you're kind of being repetitive at the end, you're kind of arguing against yourself,' so I made sure that, like, I had my argument, it wasn't repetitive, and that I stuck to it." By directly responding to comments, students reacted to feedback. But feedback also has a proactive potential, as when Claire tried to anticipate—almost subconsciously—what her professor would say:

> …yes, it is about me writing about how I see it and stuff, but there is that little voice in the back of my head, like how would your professor want this to look? How would your professor want you to look at this? And at some points it's helpful because if it's harder to get through something or understand something, I look at it like how would your professor want you to look at this.

One of her reasons for trying "to appeal to what they want" was her desire to earn a good grade, which was a common motivator for my students, sometimes to the extent that they sacrificed their agency as writers to please the professor. With peer review and SAW mentor feedback, they felt more empowered to select the comments to respond to, probably because their peers could not evaluate them.

Although my students did identify some flaws in the feedback they received, including paucity, unreliability, mistiming, and illegibility, their experience of negotiating expectations was positive overall. The dynamic of this negotiation did not seem to depend on native language, despite my multilingual speakers' relative inexperience with English composition. All participants manifested an awareness of the active role they played in their education as they developed their own strategies for success like seeking feedback from peers outside the requirements of their courses or from professors during the writing process. Moreover, their comprehension of the way writing conventions vary between the disciplines, although somewhat sketchy, shows their ability to map college writing beyond the particular classes they took. The next chapter will expand on these ideas of development and identity.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS, PART 2
DEVELOPING IDENTITIES AS WRITERS

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5.0 Introduction

In the last chapter, I reviewed the ways in which my participants described their high school experiences, their negotiations with professor and peer feedback, and their comprehension of disciplinary conventions. Now I wish to explore the ways in which students' quotidian writing activities play into the development of their identities as writers, academic and otherwise. To address this theme, I will present various affective responses to writing, the role of practice in their development, and their visions of and aspirations to good writing.

5.1 Struggle

A theme common among my participants was the struggle of writing. Although "struggle" carries some negative connotations, sometimes sparking frustration and disappointment, it permitted my participants to recognize their areas of weakness and to grow as writers. This section will primarily revolve around the stories of Eva, Claire, and Liling, who told detailed narratives of their struggles and achievements with college communication.

5.1.1 Getting lost

Eva framed her struggle with academic writing—specifically, the part of the writing process preceding composition, the gathering and culling of ideas—in terms of getting lost. She called this phase of writing, "forming the idea then trying to translate it onto paper." To describe this process, she used forms of the word "overwhelm" five times and "struggle" three times, as in, "I just find it a struggle to, like, wade through all of the reading." Here she depicts her process as getting lost in the material and trying to find her argument. The overarching image she constructs is of her writing assignment as fluid and engulfing, threatening to pull her under, whereas "the actual writing part" is like dry land. Later she used other words to describe struggling with writing: "clouded," "jumble," "confusing," in addition to the recurrence of getting overwhelmed by all of her ideas—"there's so much there." Several of my other participants also voiced concerns about getting overwhelmed by or lost in the material. Liling,

reflecting on the number of possibilities for writing her English paper, said, "it's difficult to choose a topic because there are too many things you want to write about, and to narrow it down and choose a specific point."

In the same vein, Eva phrased her progress as feeling "less lost," a result of changing her prewriting approach. Whereas in earlier essays, she first wrote her thesis and then sought evidence, she reversed this method in later essays. She viewed herself as developing through her essays; in an English FYS essay, for example, she felt that she developed her writing style, asserting, "I definitely think I'm getting better because of my writing intensive course." But this is not to say that her claim of self-confidence contradicts her feelings of getting lost, because she still stressed that she struggled and sometimes had to "put off writing and think about it." Indeed, her progress toward comfort appeared to oscillate rather than proceeding linearly:

> I had an essay that was due—the draft—and I think I really struggled with that, probably because I was actually overwhelmed by how much I wanted to say and I didn't know how to sort of put it into one thesis because I just had so many ideas and I was so unsure about my own ideas about the entire—the piece as a whole, so I think that . . . made me less confident in my writing and less able to form an idea out of lots of small thoughts.

This troublesome essay occurred toward the end of the semester, after she had felt she made progress. Again she returned to the concepts of struggle and getting overwhelmed. This time she did not seem to "find" her ideas after getting lost in them or gather these "small thoughts" into a coherent argument. As a result, she felt less confident, not only in her writing for that particular class, but in general.

5.1.2 Gaining confidence

Claire was forthcoming about the challenge of transitioning to college writing, identifying herself as a weaker writer. When she first spoke of her English class, it was in terms of her discomfort with the expected writing style. Writing in the inductive style was a "really hard" change that proved "frustrating." She also found an essay she wrote for biology challenging to the extent that she shared her feelings with her TA in an email. Even though writing it was a struggle and she recognized the possibility of a lower grade, she said, "I feel, like, good about it because I spent the time and I actually gave the effort." Even without necessarily feeling comfortable with the style, her investment of time and effort made her feel confident about her completion of the assignment.

Yet this confidence was not consistent. Considering her hopes for future progress, she indicated her desire to feel more confident in her academic writing so that turning in an assignment wouldn't be so nerve-wracking:

> I want to get to a point where I can turn something in and be like I'm confident that this is going to get at least a B+, I don't want to be like oh my God I don't know what that's going to get, like, hope I did ok on that one, because it's stressful, like, handing in a paper and waiting for however long it takes the professor to get it back to you, like, oh my God, how's my grade in this class, ok breathe…

This account of her self-doubting internal dialog reveals how the uncertainty of her grade caused her a great deal of stress, which she wanted to combat with her own self-confidence. Although her emphasis here is on her score, writing was not merely a way to achieve a good grade—the reader's reception tied into her identity. As she put it, "I don't want to turn in something that like—that isn't a

good reflection on me." Her writing was a reflection of herself. Further, the idea

of comfort resurfaced—she anticipated "getting more comfortable with other

styles other than the one that I've been taught" in high school.

In our second interview, she described her growing comfort with English

writing:

> I felt like it was better than the last couple papers that I've done
> and that's what my professor wants us to do, is feel that we're
> progressing and that we're able to close read much better, and I
> definitely feel like this is a good example of my close reading, and
> I feel really confident in saying that because I got my last paper
> back today and I ended up getting a B/B- on it, which I'm super
> excited about because I got a C+ on my first paper.

Two themes present themselves in her narrative. First, her feeling of progress

related specifically to her professor's expectation that students felt "we're

progressing." Although the causality is uncertain—did she feel good and then

connect that feeling to her professor's expectations, or did the professor's

expectation set her up to feel good?—there is clearly a correlation between her

professor's optimism and her own. Second, she felt "confident" in asserting the

quality of her close reading based on her higher grades, at least partially rooting

her feeling of progress in a putatively objective, somewhat quantitative metric.

The takeaway from her anecdote is that she drew upon her professor's

expectations and grades in explicating her feeling of progress.

Elaborating on this progress, she reflected that she now felt "ashamed of that

first paper" even though at the time she turned it in she "thought that that was the

best" she could do. "It's crazy to think I've gotten better in so little time . . . I did

actually transform into a better writer! Wow!" Claire enthused. Yet, she retained

an identity of mediocrity: "I also do want to keep progressing in my writing and

just feel like I can be a strong writer because I never really felt like I was a strong

writer at all." While deprecating her own writing level might appear to contradict

her rhetoric of transformation, it actually serves to motivate her to "keep

progressing." Her ability to see her own capacity for progress, especially

concretized through her English papers over a short period of several weeks, led

to increasing self-esteem in her writing abilities and their future potential.

5.1.3 Grappling with English

Liling often spoke with affect about the challenges of communicating in

English, and she pointed out that while both Chinese and English writing required

structure and clarity, there were some differences. For instance, "in Chinese you

can write indirectly" while "in English you have to express your opinions directly."

In addition, she found some aspects of writing, like metaphors, culturally situated.

Thinking about how she might apply the "splendid" metaphors used by John

Milton to her own writing, she noted that a metaphor that makes sense in Chinese

might sound "really weird" in English.

Although she enjoyed writing in Chinese, commenting that "writing in my

mother tongue feels very good, natural," English writing was a struggle,

particularly the sometimes "severe problem" of grammar errors. Grace and Xia,

also native Chinese speakers, made some similar statements. Grace saw writing in

Chinese as giving her control: "when it comes to my home language, to my

mother language, it's easier for me to be in control of what I'm writing and what

I'm trying to say." Xia brought up the issue of translating her Chinese thoughts

into English, as "when the idea I want to say is very complicated or I don't know

how to make the sentence structure simpler, I think in Chinese." Writing in

English, it seemed, posed the difficulty of a relative lack of control over

expression.

As Liling considered herself a strong writer in Chinese, in comparison her

English writing seemed particularly "bad." Additionally, speaking with native

English speakers made her self-conscious, especially during the first few weeks of

college:

> Am I speaking the bad—the good thing, or am I speaking the right
> thing? Like, I was very nervous about speaking in English, I really
> need to organize my sentence in my head and try to speak in the
> correct way but when I spoke it—ah, there's so many errors in it,
> very confuse—very frustrated about this first few weeks, very
> nervous about speaking so I didn't speak a lot, speak a little, then
> when people was talking at table I was very embarrassed because
> they speak so fast and they mention lot of things I've never heard
> about . . . I don't know what they're talking about. So I just sit
> there and smile at them and nothing and spoke nothing and it's a
> really, really bad experience.

Her linguistic abilities, characterized by embarrassing "errors," and her

unfamiliarity with American culture had the effect of silencing her—she "spoke

nothing." She felt that her linguistic skills had improved since that trying

transition, although her cultural knowledge made sustaining a conversation

difficult. Paralleling her "really bad experience" with speaking, she admitted she

felt "terrible" when she wasn't good at writing. Some of these feelings derived from her high "obstinate" expectations for herself and her ambition to write better. Indeed, she was "very attached to writings, very emotional"—that is, she felt emotionally invested in her writing, which parallels Claire's view of writing as a reflection on herself.

To contextualize Liling's self-perception as an English communicator, she displayed potentially disempowering views of native versus nonnative speaker SAW mentors and English majors. She was surprised that SAW would employ nonnative speakers, but thought that this showed a promising "future prospect" for other nonnative speakers at Mount Holyoke. If SAW can be taken as a reification of writing prowess, and therefore working for SAW as embodying such prowess, her surprise reveals an assumption that English speakers would naturally outperform nonnative speakers at writing. Similarly, she found it "crazy" and "amazing" that international students could major in English because of the presumed higher writing expectations of this department, speculating that "their writings kind of [are] in the same level with domestic students, their reading speed." Consequent to this conceptualization of the department, she did not think she was good enough at English writing to join the ranks of these expert readers and writers: "I love literature but I'm very bad at writing." When her assumptions about the limitations of nonnative writers were challenged, the ambit of her own future possibilities expanded. Yet, her English communication skills posed a threat to her future success; she worried that "if I'm still staying in this level of

speaking I cannot get internship or job because communication is too important in the interview or in the process of getting a job." Liling possessed a complex and somewhat troubled identity as a speaker and writer of English, influenced by her past identity as a strong writer in Chinese and by her expectations of the role of nonnative speakers in the institutions of the college.

5.2 Personal expression

Most of my participants engaged in or had engaged in some form of writing as personal expression, either through keeping a journal or blog or doing creative writing. Of course, the pressures of college constricted some of these activities— as Julia queried, "Who has time to write when you're in college?" Because they seemed to connect to these types of writing differently from academic writing, I want to use this section to explore their experiences with writing as a means of self-expression.

Journaling provided a space of emotional expression for Grace and Claire. Grace wrote in a journal when her feelings were out of the ordinary, either happy or "down." Her habit of writing in a journal naturally translated into her FYS, for which she had to keep a journal. Claire intermittently kept a journal, to "get my thoughts out of my head and onto paper so that it's a little less crazy, but I enjoy it." For her, this form of private written expression helped her organize and perhaps purge her mind. She also had done a form of journal keeping unique among my participants; she shared a journal with her mother when they felt they

were not communicating sufficiently. Through the journal, she found it easier to

ask uncomfortable or awkward questions because it provided a "semi-anonymous"

forum different from "face-to-face talking." From her description, the journal

served as both an emotional connection and buffer between her and her mother.

In a similar way, Eva had found in high school that writing stories and poems

allowed her to express emotions that she might otherwise repress. She liked

"getting to say things you think but that are maybe inappropriate to say or mean-

spirited, you know, just things that are harder to get across through just, like,

speaking in your daily life." For her, writing a poem constituted a break from

"daily life," where some expressions might be deemed "inappropriate." She

explained,

> . . . my poetry comes off as very dark because I tend to not be a
> dark person I would say in person but I think that my anger and
> frustration with, like, society as a whole, I can sort of voice
> through poetry very effectively.

By providing a space for her to be "dark" and voice the anger she did not divulge

"in person," poetry enabled her to adopt a more expressive identity. During the

semester, Eva didn't do sustained creative writing, but she told me she had other

outlets, like art.

On the other hand, Julia did not take a creative writing course her first semester

and found she missed that outlet as she was "swimming" in an "environment" of

academic writing as opposed to "creative space":

> I kind of wish I had, like, a class like creative writing where I
> could kind of, like, write whatever and just be happy with what
> I've written, and you know get comments and criticism for it, but I

mean just write what I want to write and not what someone wants me to write for them.

She perceives creative writing as arising from intrinsic motivation—"what I want to write"—whereas academic writing comes from extrinsic instructions—"what someone else wants." The freedom or perceived openness of a creative writing class would allow her to be "happy" without that damper of external expectations. Even though usually she spoke of "creative space" as distinct from academic space, she did want to reconcile the two, proposing that English classes involve a creative project in addition to writing analytical papers. Nevertheless, Julia avoided including her personal voice in her papers: "I would try to like not put myself in my academic writing." She favored impersonal argumentation based on evidence and analysis.

Personal expression and creativity can occur in academic writing as well as in stories, novels, poems, and journals; the apparently dissimilar genres overlap. For example, Eva found similarities between voice in poetry and stance in papers: "I feel like that sort of translates to finding a different voice in poetry to finding a different argument in a paper." Both Claire and Grace thought that connecting to an academic topic on a personal level or writing from personal experience made it more meaningful to them. Recounting an essay she wrote about her hometown for a high school assignment, Grace explained why she liked it so much. She wasn't doing it "only for credit"; instead, she felt personally invested in it:

> I like that piece because also it's, it's just very real, like, you know,
> I was in that article when I was writing it, I like, I can feel like—
> it's my real feeling that was in there, so I think that was really

important. If I write an article like, I don't feel anything when I wrote it, it's not a good one for me.

For her, "realness" signifies putting herself and her feelings into the writing, and the writing evoking her emotions. A lack of emotion would mean that the piece wasn't "good" for her and perhaps artificial. Of course, being good for her is distinct from being good for the instructor; when she felt disconnected from her writing assignments, she would "just get done with it," producing the paper without enjoying the process. Most of the writing she did apparently fell into this category, as she asserted that writing was "not what I like to do . . . it's more of an assignment." For instance, she encountered an uninspiring FYS assignment that required her to write a short paper on each chapter of a book. When that assignment was done, she told me she was "super happy!" She later had to write a synthesis of all those shorter papers, which she found "painful" and time-consuming.

Like Grace, Claire selected a piece of writing based on personal experience, her college application essay, as her proudest piece. This personal statement gave her the opportunity to write directly from experience, and she commented, "I feel better when I'm writing about something that's more relevant to me." Initially, the topics of her academic papers seemed to possess little relevance to her life and therefore were not "meaningful" to her. However, her need for personal connection faded away as the semester went on; speaking about an English paper on a natural disaster, she said it was "kind of cool, writing a paper about something that I've never experienced." She moved from writer-based—taking

herself as audience—to reader- or topic-based writing, defining academic writing as "more connecting with it on an intellectual level instead of, instead of connecting to it on a personal level." When she reflected on her English class during second semester, she actually preferred the objective analyses she had written for it to the personally connected writing encouraged in her sociology course. The English essays were more "creative" because she was able to create her own argument. Her initial valorization of personal connection over intellectual connection had been completely inverted by the time of our last interview.

5.3 Practice and development

Although section 5.1 broached the discussion of development as it relates to struggle, I will use this section to further investigate how my participants viewed their own development. All of them said they had made progress over the semester to a certain extent, and all aspired to improve their writing in the future. Their development happened step-by-step, of course, often in time-consuming writing processes like Julia narrated: "I stare at my computer screen for God knows how long, and I start you know grinding out sentences and reading it out loud to see how it sounds and then you know I delete it and it sounds bad so I delete it again, so I do that a couple times before I finally find a sentence that I can like go off from, and I just go on and on and on." Or, as Claire described writing her first English paper, "it took me a really long time to write my last paper because I sat there for—on Mountain Day, the whole day, and I was like

writing outline after outline and I was like, how can I put this in, like, inductive, I don't know how to do this!" Or, as Liling cautioned, "If you're going to write a paper, even if it's only four pages, 1,000 words, it might takes you days, and five or four hours a day to finish it." I will not delve further into the student's individual writing processes, but it is still worthwhile to bear in mind the work over the hours and days of the semester—doing readings, taking notes, making outlines and mapping ideas, talking to professors and mentors, composing, revising, editing, submitting, and then sometimes revising again—that resulted in my participants' getting practice and experiencing growth.

On a spectrum of views of their own writing progress, Grace was probably the least enthusiastic, applying multiple qualifiers: "I feel like I've improved a little bit maybe." Nonetheless, she felt "very proud" of the quantity of writing she had accomplished over the semester. Getting lots of practice was the key to progress for many of them. For example, Xia found the history papers she had to write for her FYS to be the most difficult ("impressive") writing experience she had had thus far, because it was hard for her to find the proper sources and to condense all the information into the page limit. In our later interviews, however, she told me, "I'm feeling more comfortable about writing narratives because we practiced again for our history class."

Eva viewed practice and editing as the means to improving her writing. She wanted to think more about constructing her sentences and choosing the best words, which would "be reflected" in both her academic papers and her poetry.

This attention to detail—"perfectly phrased" writing—also played out in her task-based email writing to professors of wait-listed classes as she considered how her word choice might influence their reception of her petition for registration. As far as achieving her goals, she said, "I think it's practice and I find editing helps a lot. Like noticing what I'm doing in my writing after I've written it helps build up my ability to recognize it while I'm writing." Further, she wanted greater focus and flow, which she felt "on the road to achieving" as she learned to analyze smaller specific sections of text, and she worked in an English paper to bring greater focus to her analysis. As she narrated,

> I had struggled with my first paper and I got better on my second one and she was like, "You're definitely improving," and she gave me some tips on maybe working backwards from my observations on the text and seeing what that implies about what I think of it, because I think I was having trouble like really finding the strong argument that I had perceived from all of these things I had perceived in the text, so I found my arguments and then I built my thesis off of that, and I think that worked better but I'm not sure.

She said that another part of this process was reducing her paper by choosing parts to remove to ensure the cohesion of her thesis. This process of writing her English papers represented "the most course load" for her because it demanded a more concerted effort than the comparable ease of science writing; likely, the difficulty of English writing forced her to proceed slowly, supporting her goal of careful, focused writing.

Liling had similar writing goals—reducing grammar errors, heightening vocabulary, and making transitions between ideas. She attributed her difficulty with transitions to being a nonnative speaker, as "if you have very good sense of

English you will know how to make good transition naturally," and she lacked

this natural intuition. Nevertheless, she realized that her issues with writing

corresponded with those of native speakers: "we're in the same situation, simple

word, simple sentence, good—good paper." For improving her writing, she

thought, "practice would be most important." She described how getting writing

practice improved her English grammar more than merely reading could, as

writing demanded active decision-making:

> [When] you write you have to decide "the" or "a," what should I
> use? . . . And I get to know that what kind of grammar errors I
> always have in the passage so when I look, review, I kind of
> have—have intention what kind of grammar errors I am looking
> for in this passage so that's better.

Making decisions and finding patterns of errors gave her the tools to consciously

improve her writing, at least on a grammatical level. In her words, "something

where you are conscious of it, you can change." She also believed that she should

"try to improve myself" (her writing) outside of class, and her professor suggested

that she do some writing in response to *New Yorker* articles to experiment with

what Liling called "complex sentence structures which are forbidden in your

paper because that will invite lot of grammar mistakes."

Liling did see herself improving through practice; from the perspective of

second semester, she said she found writing "much better" as she had achieved

greater focus and efficiency. In our last interview of first semester she pulled out

her graded papers for me to look at, saying, "I think I have gotten a lot of

improvement because my four papers are different, very different." At the same

time, every paper got more difficult because her arguments became increasingly complicated: "every time I write paper I just feel it's not getting any easier, it's not getting easier, it's really, really difficult." Nevertheless, she thought that doing these difficult papers was "helpful." Her association of difficulty and helpfulness points to the positive element of struggling and getting lost in complexity—without it, a writer cannot grow.

With Julia, one might expect that publishing a novel as a teenager would endow her with great self-assurance in her development thus far. However, although the novel proved her writing skills to herself, she did not perceive it as a culmination of her development. She was eager to continue improving her writing: "I still think I'm not a good writer, I still think I need, I have a lot of improvement." Her phrase "I'm not a good writer" merits consideration; she does not seem to be saying that she is a bad writer, but rather that she is not the consummate writer, and therefore has "a lot of" room to grow. Confidence in her writing coupled with humility to produce her positive outlook on future progress.

For Claire, progressing was very important to her self-image as a writer. When I asked her what she would want a reader to think of her writing—in other words, what her personal metric for good writing would be—she said,

> I just like, I want them to think that, like, it's not just something thrown down onto paper, like I actually put thought and effort into it. I guess also, like, just appreciate that I, like, took the time to do it…to devote to this class because, like, I want a good grade, I want to learn something, and I also want them to consider like where I started and where I'm going to and kind of, like, if there's a change and if I'm getting better because I hope I am, but I just I hope they're not sitting there like reading my paper saying like,

> "This is so stagnant, like nothing's changing, she's the same writer."

Time and effort recur as qualities of good writing, as they indicate a devotion to academic success. Further, she wanted her reader to recognize her progress as a writer. I found this a refreshing way to imagine good writing, because the factors she mentions are fairly extra-textual; that is, the reader would need to know the process and the story behind the writing to understand the dimensions of time, effort, and development. The individual paper, then, is not merely a paper but a symbol of choices.

It is important to note that my participants did not view all writing activities as contributing equally to their development, a theme that emerged in my second semester interviews with Xia and Claire. Xia compared the variety of writing assignments she was currently working on in her psychology course to her history papers from first semester, and concluded that the psychology writing helped her improve her skills "in a more general way," whereas the previous semester she had only developed historiography skills. Thus, she saw the writing assigned in some classes as more transferable to other contexts and potentially more developmentally practical. In the same way that Xia judged first semester based on second, Claire regarded her first semester writing as enabling greater progress than did second semester writing, which reverted to the high school style of five-paragraph essays aimed at demonstrating content knowledge. Pushed back into the comfort zone she had already exited, she critiqued these assignments as counterproductive and mindless—as she put it, "it's not anything, like, of my own

production." My participants were able to recognize what kinds of practice facilitated their development, whether they personally needed "general" skills or a challenging style, especially with the hindsight of a second semester in college.

5.4 Good writing

I asked my participants in multiple ways about their visions of good writing—"What should an academic paper look like? What are your goals for writing?" Their reflections on the idea of "good writing" are instructive, and fall into three main categories: structure, style, and connecting with the reader. I devote subsections to the latter two because of their complexity. As for structure, the majority of my participants agreed that a certain formulaic structure for academic writing could support a strong paper. When Julia distinguished between good creative writing and good academic writing, she said that good academic writing followed a simpler formula of "three paragraphs to back up your evidence with examples and then you have your conclusion." Within that formula, there was a "risk of either being like repetitious or just having not a strong enough claim"—in other words, the strength of the evidence placed within the formulaic framework could determine the success of the argument. Similarly, Liling remarked that clear writing was one of her goals, enumerating the components—topic sentences, examples, and explanation. This, for her, was "a very safe way to do the argumentation," and linked to outlining during prewriting. Academic papers followed a pattern not to enforce a formula, but because people's understanding

followed a pattern. Once a writer became "very good at writing of course you can do a lot of changes in [the pattern], as long as it help readers understand it," she added. Eva agreed with the idea of a formula being helpful, but added, "I believe that really great writing has to sort of fall away from that formula."

5.4.1 Style

Many of my participants mentioned vocabulary, syntax, formality, readability, and, to borrow Xia's word, the overall "attractive" quality of the text as components of good writing. The valuation of style is perhaps best expressed by Eva, who did not even consider casual writing like text messages to friends to be a form of writing. Writing had to involve deliberation and care as when "I analyze how my sentence is being structured." This is not to say that they all prioritized style over content—creative ideas, "real thoughts" (Grace), critical thinking, and good points were also common markers of good writing.

Claire talked about the importance of style, including "elevated vocabulary and a more, like, varied sentence structure," to college writing. Content, she believed, should already be understood, so "we shouldn't be, like, trying to understand it while we're writing." Writing, rather than a means of tackling ideas, was about learning to write "in the style"—in her case, in the inductive style of literary analysis. While her description privileges style over content, she was not dismissing content as unimportant, but rather advocating a sequence of thinking in which the student comprehends and formulates material and ideas before, not

during, writing, so the act of writing involves fashioning those ideas into the proper style. Achieving this style would result in the reader "seeing the maturity of a person through the paper." "Maturity" is a striking word choice, and I take it to mean the status of a writer as fully initiated into a given genre of writing. So, a good college paper, by meeting stylistic standards, would corroborate the student's familiarity and facility with academic writing and perhaps academia in general. She used the concept of maturity later, pointing to flow and cohesion as traits of mature writing. Grace brought up an idea similar to maturity when she discussed wanting her writing to become "more academic and . . . more professional" by distinguishing it from her style of speech through selecting vocabulary and avoiding overuse of conjunctions.

Good writing in both English and Chinese needed to manifest stylistic elegance in Liling's opinion. She recounted, "I realized the very splendid beautiful sentence in Chinese when I translated it to English it just becomes something obscure, unclear, it's a cultural thing." To deal with this problem, she decided to try to make her English style clearer and more direct, and, in pursuit of "meaningful words and more elegant expression," even channeled Charles Dickens in a translation of her Chinese story. Similar to Claire, she emphasized the importance of style over content in distinguishing good writing, since "all of us are capable of thinking deeply and critically but the writing, it's in the writing make difference." She clarified that by the "writing," she meant higher order elements like sentence structure. Conversely, in a later interview, I asked her

about her goals for good writing, and she named original ideas, grammar, and logic in that order. Her reasoning for the primacy of the idea did echo her prior reasoning for the primacy of the writing style—namely, uniqueness, standing apart from other writers, both peers and in general. Other participants voiced a similar desire for uniqueness. Eva recalled her high school senior thesis, stating, "I don't like being common" in her writing; for her, originality or uniqueness were elements of good writing. For instance, she was proud of the creative writing she did in a high school class because it broke out of her usual ideas: "I found in creative writing my ideas really strayed to totally different, like, mindsets when I was writing."

5.4.2 Connecting with readers

This last category is the most germane to this discussion, as some scholars like Muriel Harris have argued that understanding the role of the audience is a marker of mature or college-level writing. My participants seemed very conscious of writing for a reader or a specific audience. An audience could even serve as a motivation to write, as Xia pointed out—even when that audience was the professor. As Grace observed, "through writing I could communicate with the professor and let her or him know what I'm thinking about the subject."

As far as a specific audience, Grace emphasized that the definition of good writing depended largely on the discipline: "good writing would be something that would fit the reader's like—that would make sense to readers and that would

fit the requirements of the field." In addition to following disciplinary conventions, good writing needed to "make sense to readers." On the other hand, in bad writing, the readers "don't know what you're talking because they like—the ideas are not fully expressed." Furthermore, several participants posited a fairly intimate relationship between writer and reader, including Grace. She wanted her readers "to feel like I'm talking to them." While she wrote, she talked to herself "to see what my paper would be like if somebody's reading it, and then I usually, like, when I'm writing a paper I would like people to understand what I understand, yeah that's kind of the purpose I write a paper." The writing's power to fully communicate her meaning to the reader indicated its quality.

Along the same lines, Julia considered good writing simple and pointed to keep "the reader's attention." Making the reader comprehend was crucial to her definition of good writing: "you want to move the reader along, you want to, like, take the reader by the hand and show them what's going on in each paragraph." She imagines the relationship with the reader as the intimate gesture of leading by the hand, bringing the writer and reader close together, in opposition to confusing writing that might serve to separate writer from reader. The same applied to her creative writing; speaking about evolving toward purposeful writing, she aspired "to have people read and enjoy our stories." Sharing stories with an audience was key, and she had firsthand experience with learning about her readers when her editor told her that young adults "have a short attention span." To suit that audience, she condensed her novel. When she discussed her goals for her writing,

the reader again played a pivotal role: "it's just making writing I would say easier—I guess I just said easier—but making it more understandable, for me and for the readers."

For Eva, the interplay of the reader and the writing extended beyond the writer fully communicating what she intended:

> . . . it doesn't necessarily have to deliver the same idea that the writer wanted it to, but there has to be something that the reader gets from it—yeah, so they have to be able to sort of find their own meaning for it and if it doesn't have that it's sort of pointless.

The writer might want to "deliver" a certain idea in the writing, but what matters is the way a reader makes meaning out of the text. Although initially she uses the common conduit metaphor for writing with the phrases "deliver" and "gets from it," configuring writing as a container for the meaning that the reader extracts, she then diverges from this analogy. The reader must "find" his or her own meaning; at least at the reader's end, good writing allows or requires an active search for significance.

5.5 Conclusion

My participants experienced various processes of struggle and success as they engaged in college writing, including getting lost in their material, gaining confidence in their capacity, and grappling with English as a second language. Eva and Claire struggled with the writing expected for their English first-year seminars, as Eva found herself getting lost in the plentiful ideas of the texts she analyzed and Claire initially deemed herself underprepared and uncomfortable

with a new writing style. Liling, also in an English first-year seminar, encountered the extra level of difficulty of speaking and writing in her nonnative language. She positioned herself in an imagined community of multilingual students at Mount Holyoke by linking her struggles to the obstacles she expected them to face in such bastions of communication as the SAW Program and the English Department. While all three students expressed frustration as they underwent struggles, their overall trend seemed to be toward increasing comfort with the academic writing required of them, taking on tentative identities as able college writers.

For many of my participants, creative and journal writing intersected with their identities in emotive ways. Significantly, academic writing could also assume this personally "meaningful" role. I argue that the ability to see connecting to a topic via logos as equally meaningful as connecting via pathos comprises an important step in maturing as college writers. Other developments unfolded through practicing writing, undergirded by a persistent awareness of room for growth, improvement, or progress. Indeed, my participants showed impressive self-awareness of their writing, the importance of which is illustrated by this quote from Julia: "So when we have that perspective when we look back and we realize you know this is something that I improved upon, and I mean that's sort of how we develop as writers." Such developmental perspective also stemmed from their conceptualizations of ideal, good writing, as performed through structure, style, and, most importantly, connection with the reader. Their development was not

merely self-focused, for they aspired to communicate cogently, appropriately, and even intimately with an audience. Viewed collectively, my participants displayed emergent identities as producers of knowledge and as contributors to a greater intellectual conversation.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Chapter outline
6.0 Introduction
6.1 Connections to existing literature
6.2 Suggestions
6.3 Personal reflection
6.4 Conclusion

6.0 Introduction

In this concluding chapter, I discuss how the findings presented in the results

chapters link to the existing scholarship summarized in the literature review,

highlighting the most salient complements and contradictions. As my study raised

more questions than it could answer given its limitations of time and scope, I

propose some directions for further research. Following this synthesis, I offer

some thoughts and suggestions for professors and students. I conclude with a brief

reflection on my experience with researching and writing this thesis.

6.1 Connections to existing literature

Backgrounds of secondary school, extracurricular communications, language,

and culture influence the way first-year students view their identity and enter

college. My participants' understanding of academic writing initially arose mostly

from their high school writing experiences, which they described either as rigid,

boring, and test-oriented, or as personal, emotive, and flexible. The issues of

transitioning to a new culture and language arose particularly for my three

Chinese student participants, with Liling as the most vocal representative of this

identity issue. Moving from schools where they took English as a second

language to the academic English of Mount Holyoke, it is no surprise that they

found communicating in English more challenging than in their mother tongue.

Yet, there was recognition, at least by Liling, that having the nonnative speaker

identity could also be beneficial, endowing her with multiple ways to phrase her

thoughts. These two views of the multilingual/nonnative identity as disadvantage

and advantage expressed by my participants align with the research conducted by

scholars like Cristina Ortmeier-Hooper, Yuet-Sim Chiang and Mary Schmida.

Their research indicates that multilingual students variously perceive their

linguistic and cultural backgrounds as enabling, damaging, or irrelevant to their

success. Furthermore, my multilingual participants' qualitative assessment of their

own struggles with English communication—a subjective perspective in contrast

to the quantitative issues compiled by Tony Silva—accords with Keiko K.

Samimy's analysis of how students situate themselves into imagined communities

based on their English literacy. Their responses followed the typical native versus

nonnative dichotomy that she claims dominates, confirming her assertion.

 Besides adapting to a nonnative language, my participants also had to learn to

communicate in the registers of university discourse, which, according to Douglas

Biber, Susan Conrad, Randi Reppen, Pat Byrd and Marie Helt, are multitudinous.

The research of Melanie Kill suggests that gaining facility in these registers—in particular academic writing—necessitates the student adapting, even relinquishing, her identity. Based on a quandary she faced when students brought their personal experiences into academic writing, Kill reflects on how students are expected to perform their identity for their professors. In a similar way, my participants deliberately tailored their identities as they negotiated academic writing, considering how to perform for their professors. Besides academic writing, undergraduates commonly perform self-sponsored writing activities, as evidenced by the Stanford Writing Study. Fishman and Lunsford, reporting on the study, categorize the self-sponsored activities as either self-reflexive or transactional. Many of my participants participated in self-sponsored writing activities—in transaction, like writing emails to professors, and self-reflexively, by doing creative writing and keeping journals. While these categories often are atomized for the purposes of research, for some of my students, they intermingled, as when Eva connected voice in poetry to argumentation in academic writing or applied her need to choose words carefully to both emails and papers. For others, the boundaries between self-sponsored and academic writing activities remained fixed, as when Julia yearned for creative space that she wasn't encountering in her academic classes.

Although my participants did not explicitly use the term "academic discourse" to describe their academic writing or speaking, they certainly grappled with the idea, recognizing special conventions for writing by discipline and

conceptualizing the requirements for good writing. Nearly all of them agreed that good academic writing could have a standard structure or formula, which seems to confirm the philosophy of basic writing spearheaded by Mina Shaughnessy: academic writing has discrete teachable components. In addition, many of them named style and connecting to an audience as aspects of good writing. Both of these factors find supporters in the volume *What Is "College-Level" Writing?* as markers of college writing.

As for conventions that vary by discipline, Michael Carter, Douglas Downs, and Elizabeth Wardle have argued that writing is not a general skill that can be taught separately from disciplinary content, but rather ensconced in each discipline. It is perhaps surprising that students as early in their college career as my participants could voice disciplinary conventions with any assurance, but they did. For the most part, their comprehension stayed at a surface level; that is, they understood that each field has certain requirements and uses certain language, so writing scientifically would be wrong for an English paper and vice versa. Several of my participants acknowledged that they would need more experience in college to better appreciate the conventions of the different disciplines, and at least one, Claire, felt anxious about not being sufficiently prepared to tackle the genres expected by a variety of disciplines after her first semester. By recognizing their need to take more classes, my participants reflected the recommendation of Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz that new college writers must accept their novice status as a prerequisite to growth.

The second part of Sommers and Saltz's recommendation is that student writers need to see purpose in their writing assignments beyond making the professor happy and getting an "A." Yet, satisfying the professor did occupy much of my participants' thought as they sought to figure out what their professors wanted from their writing and then to meet those expectations, occasionally even compromising their own ideas for the sake of a better evaluation. The primary way they learned about professor expectations was through receiving and applying feedback, in accordance with Jérémie Séror's argument that experiencing feedback is critical to how students experience writing overall. My participants in general were quite satisfied with the feedback their professors offered—it approximated the detailed, timely, readable, formative, and dialogic model that Séror advocates. There were, however, the exceptions of illegible written comments, delayed returns of assignments, and confusing oral feedback in office hours, which align with some of the pitfalls that he found.

An interesting dialectic between student development and professor feedback becomes apparent. While an exclusive focus on scoring well could hinder their maturation, reacting to professor feedback significantly influenced my participants' developing identities as writers. In other words, a certain amount of dependence on professor expectations could foster students' future independence. One sign of professorial influence was the awareness of audience—the professor—that my participants manifested. Some of them even grew to internalize the responsive voice of the professor. Using the terminology of Ellen

Lavelle and Nancy Zuercher, it seems that surface writing—focused on pleasing the teacher—intermixes with and informs the deep writing characterized by autonomy and agency. So, while I cannot say whether the intellectual enterprise of academic writing eventually outweighed the immediate concern of grades and meeting professor expectations for my participants, it seems probable that this would occur once they feel confident in their identities as capable college writers.

In addition to professors, mentor and peers were important sources of feedback. The students' ambivalent view of their SAW mentors coheres with Muriel Harris's idea that mentors occupy a role between professor and peer. While they viewed their mentors as possessing helpful writing expertise, some of my participants felt that their role needed to be limited to the later stages of the writing process like editing and proofreading rather than the foundational stages like brainstorming and organizing, a perspective that both acknowledged and constrained the role of the mentors. Indeed, although most recent writing center theory, most famously Stephen North's "Idea of a Writing Center," has rejected the "fix-it" model of tutors who merely clean up student writing, many of my participants viewed stylistic advice as the proper domain for mentors. The constraints on mentors likely stemmed from their "peerness," because my participants did not voice comparable concerns about the interventions of their professors.

Nonetheless, some of my participants perceived SAW as an institution of great writing authority, which positions the mentor closer to the expertise and power of

the professor than to a peer. While Harris argues that mentors' special position somewhere between peer and professor empowers them to work with students in a way that professors can't, the ambiguity prompted my students to judge the mentors and professors hierarchically, so that the quality of the mentors' work was measured against the professors'—at times favorably, at times unfavorably. This is not to say that my participants primarily dismissed the mentors as mere line editors or as inferior alternatives of feedback; conversely, many of them expressed praise and gratitude for the help their mentors provided. Yet, the contradiction between my participants' view of the scope and position of the mentors and the kind of model the SAW Program seeks to promote complicates Harris's acclamation of the elasticity of the writing tutor.

My participants who experienced peer feedback had similarly ambivalent reactions. On the one hand, they recognized the benefit of having other students comment on a draft during their writing process and of their own self-reflexive critical thinking as respondents. On the other hand, they found some of the received feedback surface-level, unconstructive, and even a hindrance to their self-actualization as college writers. These issues parallel one of Tony Silva's findings about why students resist peer feedback—a fear of peer incompetence. The other issues he found, the conflation of collaboration or editing with plagiarism and a reluctance to expose linguistic weaknesses, seemed marginal to their reservations. In fact, two of my multilingual participants sought peer feedback outside the structure of the classroom by asking their roommates to read

their papers, indicating that their desire to produce good writing prevailed over insecurities about linguistic competence. The former problem, conflating collaboration with plagiarism, did arise in my participants' work with their SAW mentors. Several of my participants thought they needed to come up with their ideas and structures independently without mentor input to make their work their own. While avoiding appropriation is a perennial topic in writing center studies, such an emphasis on the individual ownership of ideas contravenes the arguments for collaboration and against the hegemony of single authorship put forth by scholars like Kenneth Bruffee and Andrea Lunsford.

A discussion of my results would be incomplete without engaging the slippery abstraction that is identity. Although some of my participants' identities as writers seemed to stay stable over the course of our interviews, others—most notably Claire—saw themselves discernibly transforming. Claire in particular fit the category of the self-expressive elaborative writer as described by Ellen Lavelle and Nancy Zuercher, and she recognized her status as a novice from the beginning, albeit in somewhat depreciatory terms as "underprepared" and a weak writer. Her self-criticism might have enabled the shift she experienced, as she was sensitive to the need to catch up to her peers. In my opinion, her most significant evolution was from writing with pathos to writing with logos; eventually she valorized the intellectual over the emotional-personal connection. Marcia Curtis and Anne Herrington, along with Sommers and Saltz, have lauded this kind of move away

from subject-focused writing toward writing to join a greater community of knowledge creation as the crux of college writing development.

Personally connecting to academic writing does not necessarily signify immaturity; on the contrary, "affective byproducts," as termed by Hadara Perpignan, Bella Rubin, and Helen Katznelson, are an important contributor to development. The most salient affective byproducts I witnessed in my participants were struggle and confidence. Many of my participants spoke about their struggles, about getting overwhelmed by the material and lost in their writing. I posit that this struggle determined their development as writers.

Of course, too much struggle can strip a student of her self-confidence and undermine her identity, which is why the first-year seminar program exists to ease students into the rigors of college academics. As affirmed by scholars like Stephen R. Porter and Randy L. Swing, first-year seminars are sites where students learn important academic skills. When my participants spoke to me about their writing, the majority of what they discussed were the steps from brainstorming to polishing that they did for assignments from their first-year seminars. The quantity of attention that they devoted to their FYS writing demonstrates the writing intensive nature of this program and its efficacy in teaching writing as a recursive process.

To return to the idea of struggle, although my participants frequently expressed frustration, the upside of this emotion is that it implies they care about their performance and are aware of their capacity to do better. When my participants

did well on essays and amended past flaws like a lack of focus or even grammatical errors, they noted that they felt more comfortable and confident. The combination of struggle and confidence seemed to form a formula for writing development.

Overall, the experiences of my first-year participants confirmed and occasionally complicated the findings of past research. It is notable that even within a compressed period, many of them perceived progress in their writing and engaged with sophisticated notions ranging from the specificity of audience to the construction of knowledge. My findings sparked several new questions that could be addressed with further research utilizing different approaches. The qualitative case study approach was limited by size—involving six participants rather than a larger sample—and time—most of the data comes from the first few months of my participants' first year. Furthermore, one of the inherent distinctions between qualitative and quantitative approaches is the former's dearth of "objective," statistical data. Nevertheless, my case study setup allowed me to construct rich portraits of the writing identities of my participants. It also had the positive byproduct of prompting my interviewees to cast themselves as the main actors in their own development, with professors, mentors, and peers playing supporting roles. Scholars like David Nickles suggest that first-years taking responsibility as active learners rather than passive students is a desirable step in the transition to college writing. While inherently limited, the personal nature of my approach

arguably had an empowering effect on my participants, in line with my mission of making space for their voices in academia.

I have a number of directions for future research. First, I did not question my native English speaker participants about their identities as native speakers operating in an English language college, whereas I encouraged my Chinese speakers to describe their experiences with English to me. An area for further research, then, would be to investigate how domestic native speakers at Mount Holyoke place themselves in imagined literacy communities. How do they position themselves with or against the multilingual and international students here? Second, the ways creative and academic writing interact merits more systematic study, especially since the demands of academic writing seemed to compete with my participants' desire to write on their own. How might doing personal or creative writing within the structure of a class differ from doing it independently or as an extracurricular activity? Third, I would be interested in doing a longitudinal study covering the entirety of my participants' undergraduate career in the model of Marcia Curtis and Anne Herrington to better understand how students move from writing to please the professor and express themselves toward writing to engage with ideas and from intrinsic motivation. Can a focus on satisfying the professor coexist with seeing writing as having a greater purpose, or are the two at odds? Fourth, I did not make much distinction in writing my results between how students viewed their course mentors—SAW mentors assigned to their first-year seminar—and mentors in the SAW Center unrelated to their course.

Do students view mentors differently depending on their roles, and if so, why?

My final two directions are not so much questions as threads I want to follow

further. I hope to do more around the theme of struggle and confidence to pursue

the linkages between affect and writing for students. I also wish to interrogate

academic writing as a question of social justice. These questions could be

addressed using a method similar to the current study—interviewing students—

but involving more voices by interviewing other constituents in the teaching of

writing, like professors, administrators, and mentors, and sampling more widely

using surveys.

6.2 Suggestions

Based on my research and its connections with existing literature, I would like

to take this section to consider and make suggestions on several topics: first-year

seminars and preparation for college-level writing, connecting academic to self-

sponsored or creative writing, and viewing struggle—including linguistic

struggle—as beneficial.

Even though my study did not focus on the pedagogy of first-year seminars, as

all of my participants took a first-year seminar their first semester at Mount

Holyoke, I am going to offer some suggestions for further consideration based on

what they shared with me. With one exception, my participants demonstrated

sustained engagement with their writing projects for their first-year seminars.

Four of these students took various first-year seminars in the English department.

Even the students with no plans to pursue literature were able to find subjects for their writing that interested them. In their close readings, they learned to focus on details rather than trying to cover major chunks of text, which meets the goal of the first-year seminar program as stated on the webpage to teach "college-level thinking, writing and discussion." Yet, I am not sure that the students learned to make "connections between the disciplines" to the same extent. They did engage with overlapping disciplines—politics, history, and religion interwove with English, for example. But, apart from one professor who presented English writing conventions to her students in class, my students did not receive or disclose receiving explicit instruction about the differences between the disciplines. I think it is important for students to understand how academia separates the disciplines, which includes disciplinary writing conventions, before they can appreciate the interdisciplinary nature of their first-year seminars. Furthermore, few students were able to articulate definitive differences between the expectations of high school writing and college-level writing, although they sensed "that something more is being offered to them and, at the same time, asked of them" (Sommers and Saltz 125). I think that first-year seminars, in the WAC/WID models, might serve students well by offering at some point a discussion of some of the potential differences between college and high school level writing as well as of disciplinary conventions.

Many of my participants named drawing from personal experience or emotion as important ways to tap into themselves as writers. While some of them kept

journals for class or had to submit short self-reflections, the majority of their assignments were in the expected genres—literary analysis for English, narrative for history, and so on. As half of them enjoyed creative writing and the majority did some sort of self-sponsored personal writing such as keeping a journal or blog, it might benefit students to experience some creative or personal space in the academic assignments they do, especially in their first year. At least one participant wished that her first-year seminar could involve at least one creative component as a break from more typical academic writing. I believe that incorporating some form of writing in a "nonacademic" genre like personal narrative or blogging into first-year seminars, which tend to offer greater pedagogical latitude, could help ease the transition to college-level writing by validating the personal voices of the students as writers as they shift into new academic identities. For example, a professor could assign students a weekly journal in which they respond as they wish to the readings, evaluated based on completion, as a supplement to graded analytical papers. By affirming the value of personal expression and requiring frequent writing, such an assignment could enable the students to reconcile the apparently contradictory pulls to personally yet intellectually connect with their subjects, healing the logos-pathos rupture.

Connecting academic to self-sponsored writing should also go the other direction with instructors explaining how academic writing can influence self-sponsored or even technical writing. Although I concur with WID scholars that writing is not a universally transferable skill, it would serve students well to

reflect in class on the aspects of writing (I don't want to reduce it to "skills") that they can transfer to and build on in their next semester. While this might risk commoditizing writing as a mere useful skill for employment, bowing to the current capitalistic pressures on higher education, I think students—especially "basic writers"—should be made aware of how their proven ability to master a given genre and the underlying habits of thinking and doing, to echo Carter, can empower them to continue mastering new genres.

Finally, I offer an admittedly idealistic recommendation for students entering Mount Holyoke: reflect on what struggle means. I propose that struggle should be seen as exerting effort to approach or attain an objective in difficult circumstances. I sensed that some of my participants felt downtrodden by their struggles with language and writing. I am thinking in particular of Liling's accounts of how self-conscious speaking in English with Americans made her, and the way my participants would elaborate upon the grueling processes of writing. They seemed to operate from an underlying paradigm in which struggling implies weakness; a strong student would not need to struggle with writing assignments.

In my own experience, I have encountered this misconception throughout my schooling—because I seem to perform well on academic writing, some peers have assumed that I simply produce assignments without much effort, or more aptly, struggle. Yet this is far from true; I cannot think of any writing I do that does not cause me to struggle and question my words, my ideas, my approach, and my audience. In the moment, the struggle is indeed painful, but I can see that only

through years of struggle have I improved. I think that many of my participants might concur, especially since they expressed a desire to receive constructive criticism and improve rather than getting an "A+" paper with no comments and staying static. Struggle is only dangerous when students lose confidence because of it; again, I am thinking of how Liling doubted that multilingual students could equal native speakers as English majors and SAW mentors because, of course, they must struggle with their nonnative tongue.

Getting lost, realizing that old ways of orienteering aren't working, is a crucial way that students develop as writers and thinkers. As long as students know that there are structures of support in place to help them grow—often in the form of attentive professors and mentors—struggle and its uncertainties should not cause fear. So, I recommend that incoming students realize that transitioning to college writing will be a struggle for many, if not all, of them, and that they will keep struggling throughout college. Since what I am recommending is a personal attitude change, I cannot offer concrete ways to implement it, beyond asking the guiding figures in students' lives—parents, instructors—to remind them that while producing good work matters, education stems also from the processes of growth behind the products.

6.3 Personal reflection

One year ago, I found myself in the midst of an academic crisis. I had been considering doing a creative thesis since my first year at Mount Holyoke, but

earlier that semester I had found out about the field of Composition and Rhetoric, a subset of English distinct from literature. I realized that I had already encountered the field as a SAW mentor in my preparation course with Dr. Laura Greenfield two years before and had at least a vague familiarity with its major luminaries like Peter Elbow and Andrea Lunsford. Initially, I toyed with the idea of researching the SAW Program or the English department, but with the guidance of Professor Shea I arrived at the idea of speaking with the students whom professors, mentors, and the whole institution work to understand and serve. Scholarship sometimes omits or overpowers the voices of students, because as novices, they usually do not have the academic clout to publish or present.

I was excited by the idea of using my thesis as a forum for the voices of first-year students, and nine months after embarking on my study, I am still excited about this mission. For me, the thesis has served several purposes besides the main mission of broadcasting student experiences in their own words. First, it has been an invaluable way to conduct qualitative research, something I had never done before—although my work as a SAW mentor had thoroughly prepared me to talk about writing with my peers. Again, I owe Professor Shea a great deal of credit in guiding me through a crash course in research methods. I found that I enjoyed the case study approach, and if this were a graduate thesis or dissertation, I would like to continue working on the same cases, following my participants through their first year and perhaps beyond. By conducting and transcribing my interviews, I created my own text to analyze, much different from and more

intimate than analyzing the writing of a long-dead author or poet. Second, it has connected to my English studies in unexpected ways. At first, I did not see much overlap between poetry and qualitative analysis, but the process of transcribing, coding, analyzing, and interpreting requires many of the same skills as the poetic analysis that has become second nature. Third, it has inducted me into the field of Composition and Rhetoric, particularly through compiling the literature review. When I attended the 2013 convention of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, I recognized the names of many scholars whose work I had encountered strewn throughout the program, and I felt enthused by the current research in the field. Given that experience, I can confirm that conducting this thesis has primed me to enter a graduate program in this field. In these ways, completing this project has been the capstone to my undergraduate work.

Like my participants struggling to become the ill-defined yet promising "college writer," I have struggled along the way. Finding time to devote to reading, recruiting, interviewing, transcribing, coding, analyzing, and writing amidst the demands of classes and extracurricular commitments has been a constant struggle. Once I found that time, I often became daunted by the amount of data I had to analyze, swimming in a sea of possible directions. But I have learned to read and write in a new genre and gained insight into how a diverse sample of first-year students experience writing at Mount Holyoke College, and come away with a number of questions that I hope to pursue in the future. Indeed, to seize on Robert Davis and Mark Shadle's concept of research writing, I am

happy to keep wandering the open territory of mystery rather than the enclosure of expertise. I am confident that I can take what I have learned here to my next institution and continue the process of struggle, questioning, and insight.

6.4 Conclusion

In recent years, the traditional foundations of the liberal arts have been called into question, and our capitalistic economy seeks to absorb higher education as another profit-driven industry. Those who defend academia and its elite institutions like Mount Holyoke College have a responsibility to critically examine the student experience. It is in this context, and driven by my longstanding interest in writing, that I conducted this study. What I found was that even in the first semester, the development of students' identities as college writers is apparent, as they move from the expectations of secondary school to those of college. Depending on the strength of their high school education and their facility with English, some find the transition easy, while others feel underprepared. Although they struggle to write in new ways, they gain confidence from professor feedback and their increasing familiarity with the conventions of their discipline or genre. When feedback falters, they tend to take the initiative to speak with their professors and mentors, and thus actively negotiate their academic experience. Overall, while I offer some recommendations for improving the student experience, I was left inspired by the simultaneous sophisticated understandings and openness to growth expressed by my participants.

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APPENDIX A: RECORD OF IRB EXEMPT STATUS

Mount Holyoke IRB

To: Layli Amerson
From: Katherine Binder, IRB Chair
Subject: Proposal #11
Date: 10/02/12

The proposal **11. Experiences of First-Years in Mount Holyoke Writing Intensive Classes** has been verified by the Mount Holyoke Institutional Review Board as **Exempt** according to 45CFR46.101(b)(2): Anonymous Surveys - No Risk on 10/02/2012.

Please note that changes to your proposal may affect its exempt status. Please contact me directly to discuss any changes you may contemplate.

Thanks,

Katherine Binder,
IRB Chair
kbinder@mtholyoke.edu

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE
INFORMED CONSENT FORM (WRITTEN)

Title of Study: Experiences of First-Years in Mount Holyoke Writing Intensive Classes

Investigator: Layli Amerson '13

Brief description of project and procedures to be followed:
This project aims to gather qualitative information about how several first-year students at Mount Holyoke experience writing-intensive curriculum. For participating students, the investigator will conduct three one-hour interviews throughout the Fall 2012 semester, which she will audio record with the interviewees' permission. She will also provide the students with the link to a secure online Google form for them to record their writing activities weekly, the online version of which she will delete at the end of the semester. She will use the data gathered from the interviews and the forms for her senior thesis, written for honors in the English Department. In the write-up, all names and other distinguishing characteristics of participants as well as names of any professors and particular classes will be changed.

This project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of Mount Holyoke College. The following informed consent is required by Mount Holyoke College for all participants in human subjects research:

A. Your participation is voluntary.
B. You will not be penalized in any way if you decide not to participate. You may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time. In addition, you can decline to answer any particular questions or to participate in any given part of the project without penalty.
C. The procedures to be followed in the project will be explained to you, and any questions you may have about the aims or methods of the project will be answered.
D. All of the information from this study will be treated as strictly confidential. No names will be associated with the data in any way. If you provide your address in order to receive a report of this research upon its completion, that information will not be used to identify you in the data. The data will be stored in the investigator's locked filing cabinet in her residence hall and the data will be accessible only to the investigator. In the write-up, all names and other distinguishing characteristics of participants as well as names of any professors and particular classes will be changed.

E. The results of this study will be made part of a final research report and may be used in papers submitted for publication or presented at professional conferences, but under no circumstances will your name or other identifying characteristics be included.

If you understand the above, and consent to participate in the project, please sign here:

_____ (Participant sign here)

_____ (Participant print name here)

_____ (Date)

If you have any questions about this research, please contact:

Layli Amerson at amers22l@mtholyoke.edu or

Professor Mark Shea at markshea@mtholyoke.edu or

MHC's Institutional Review Board at institutional-review-board@mtholyoke.edu

Would you like a report on the group results of this research project upon its completion?

       YES   NO

Address to which the report should be sent: _____

APPENDIX C: SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDES

First interview (October 2012)

- ✯ **Overall question: Who are you as a writer?**
  - o Various kinds of communication you participate in
    - ▪ Email?
    - ▪ Facebook?
    - ▪ Talking with friends/family?
    - ▪ Academic writing
    - ▪ Creative writing
  - o Tell me about a piece of writing you did that…
    - ▪ was really frustrating
    - ▪ changed the way you view writing
    - ▪ affected how you see yourself or the world
    - ▪ you felt really proud of
  - o How would you describe the relationship between *what* you write about and *how* you write?
  - o What is "good writing"? What is "college writing," and how does that differ from "high school writing"?
  - o Do you foresee your writing changing at all from now to senior year at MHC?
- ✯ **Academic writing**
  - o What would an "academic paper" look like?
  - o Experience thus far in your class(es)
    - ▪ Teacher expectations
      - • Has the teacher discussed expectations for content (topics) or style (format, how to write) in class?
        - o If so, did you find it helpful?
        - o If not, would you want him or her to do so?
    - ▪ Feedback
      - • What kinds of feedback have you received on your written work?
      - • Did you have a chance to revise based on this feedback?
  - o Tell me about your writing activities over the past few week(s).
    - ▪ What assignments have you been working on?

- Did you struggle at all with the activity?
- Have you received feedback on your writing from your professor or a writing mentor?
- ✯ Thus far, have your initial expectations/ideas about college writing changed?

Follow up interviews (November and December 2012)

- ✯ Are you feeling different about your writing at this point? Do you feel that you're approaching your writing differently?
- ✯ How did you find your Psych paper? How did you deal with the space limit? Do you feel it helped you understand the language of psychology?
- ✯ Can you talk about how you felt overwhelmed by [your reading]? Using technique of gathering ideas then coming up with thesis?
- ✯ Last time you talked about how writing in neuroscience can make you more confused about your ideas. Is that still the case?
- ✯ New feedback on previous assignments? Peers? SAW?
- ✯ Last time you talked about wanting to make your writing have better transitions, more focus, and be more precise—do you feel that you've progressed toward this?
- ✯ Let's say you were asked to recommend changes to the way writing is taught or assigned in your classes. What would you say?
- ✯ What kinds of communication do you count as "writing"?
- ✯ If I were to tell you that there's a certain form for "good writing" would you agree?
- ✯ When someone reads your writing, what do you want them to think?
- ✯ Reflecting on the semester (so far), how has it gone?

Second semester interview (February/March 2013)

- ✯ Classes this semester?
  - o Which?
  - o What kinds of writing?
  - o Different from fall semester?
- ✯ Are you doing any writing outside of your classes?
- ✯ Have you received feedback this semester?
- ✯ Are you feeling different about your writing at this point? Do you feel that you're approaching your writing differently?
- ✯ How would you define "college-level writing"?
- ✯ Reflecting on spring semester (so far), how is it going? Any hopes for the last two months, either in terms of writing or generally?