

THE RHETORIC OF ACADEMIC DISCOURSE: A QUALITATIVE,  
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF STUDENTS' SELF-INVESTIGATION  
OF THE ACQUISITION OF ACADEMIC DISCOURSE  
IN FIRST-YEAR WRITING COURSES

by

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Abstract

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Whether at a four-year university or a two-year community college, students who choose to pursue higher education will likely be required to demonstrate their eligibility to enroll in college-level writing courses. At a vast majority of colleges and universities in the United States, such eligibility is determined through various means that include college placement tests, like AccuPlacer®, or other standardized assessments and determinants. Once students are deemed prepared or eligible to enroll in college-level writing courses, their academic journeys often include some form of the compulsory first-year English classes. These courses, also known as freshman writing or composition courses, have often been dubbed “gatekeeper” or “weed out” courses. They are perceived by some to function as courses that are just challenging enough to eliminate students who are not able to survive the demands of the fundamentals classes while retaining a smaller pool of students who can meet or exceed the standards and subsequently pass the courses. Whether they realize it or are prepared to do so, students will be required to demonstrate their ability to learn and utilize academic discourse as they matriculate through their college coursework. Numerous studies have

sought to ascertain instructors' perceptions of student readiness for college-level writing courses. This qualitative, phenomenological study seeks to ascertain students' experiences with learning academic discourse, determine the effectiveness of the compulsory composition courses, and discover the degree to which students deem such courses offer adequate preparation for success in other college courses. This study also examines competing conceptions of academic discourse and, secondarily, seeks to establish whether students perceive the ability to write using academic discourse as a skill acquired through the completion of the first-year English course or as a prerequisite needed to pass college-level composition. Finally, this study investigates students' views—after having completed writing courses—regarding the value and benefit, if any, of first-year writing courses and ultimately seeks to answer the question, from students' standpoints, of whether these courses should continue to be compulsory.

*Keywords:* students' self-investigation, perceptions, academic discourse, compulsory, composition courses, theory, writing, assessments, first-year English classes, developmental education, discourse acquisition, learning academic discourse, teaching academic discourse, gatekeeper courses, gatekeeping, discourse community, academy writing, student success, phenomenology, writing instruction, composition studies, academic writing, composition instruction, writing in the academy

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## Chapter 1

### The Rhetoric of Academic Discourse

#### Introduction

Upon first entering the college or university setting, students often carry with them some preconceived ideas regarding not only what the institution of higher education will be like but also what the academic expectations for their continued academic matriculation might entail. Along with these general ideas are the equally presupposed notions students may possess about mandatory classes such as first-year English courses.<sup>1</sup> Some students innately believe that the nature of the first-year composition course is to teach them to write better or more effectively and, ultimately, to assist in their learning how to write for and in a higher education environment. They often discover, however, that the challenges of first-year English courses may supersede their expectations and sometimes their skill sets in relation to academic writing. Researchers in the field refer to the style of writing most commonly required in these courses as “academic discourse” (Bizzell 1982; Bartholomae 1985; Crowley, 1998; Elbow 1991) and maintain that mastery of this discourse is required to communicate effectively in

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, the following terms will be utilized interchangeably: freshman composition, English composition, Freshman English, first-year writing courses, English Composition I, English Composition II, and first-year composition courses. According to Kitzhaber (1963), “Whether it is called ‘Freshman English,’ ‘English Composition,’ ‘Freshman Rhetoric,’ or ‘Communication Skills,’ this course has been a staple of freshman studies for three-quarters of a century and is by far the most populous in the American college curriculum” (p. 1). Each of these terms represents the referent, first-year composition.

academic contexts. Academic discourse, in a sense, represents one pathway—a gateway or corridor—through which students may enter the academic conversation.

Students generally enter institutions of higher education with the enthusiasm and anticipation of being taught what they will need to know for their majors and future careers (Murray, Tanner, & Graves, 1990; Niven, 2009). Their expectations for writing courses are no different. The nature and structure of compulsory composition courses, however, seem to carry an intrinsic requirement that necessitates knowledge or experience in academic discourse antecedently. In essence, the structure of many freshman composition courses presumes that students arrive already capable of and experienced in writing academic discourse. Consequently, when students arrive at their respective institutions and are unable to write at levels deemed suitable for college, these students are often viewed as underprepared for the academic challenges ahead (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010; Bettinger & Long, 2009; Fike & Fike, 2008).

### Background of the Problem

Varying schools of thought seek to explicate reasons students are underprepared for the rigors of college-level work. In the case of English composition courses, college preparation among students can be as diverse as the individual students themselves. In “Our Undemocratic Curriculum,” Gerald Graff (2007) states, “We college professors often blame high schools for sending us poorly prepared students, but it is only recently that we have shown much interest in helping the schools determine what that preparation should be, and [sic] we have along way to go” (p. 130). Graff voices the dissatisfaction experienced by professors regarding inadequately prepared students from high school, yet the author acknowledges that, until recently, there existed poor communication between high schools and colleges regarding necessary preparation for college.

Moreover, Graff suggests that college faculty expect students to have learned academic discourse<sup>2</sup> even before entering college. Essentially, Graff's overview suggests colleges and universities possess expectations for incoming students' competency with academic discourse—however murky or imprecise those expectations might be. Contrarily, high schools remain unaware of the very existence of the concept of academic discourse, much less the expectation that they should be teaching it. Additionally, Graff (2007) maintains the following:

To a large degree, American education is organized for those who are already the best educated, a fact notoriously borne out in the college admissions process, where colleges compete for the top students and are rated by the percentage of these they attract. It is almost as if the goal of college admissions were to recruit a student body that is already so good that it hardly needs a faculty to teach it. (p. 130)

Through these observations, Graff makes clear that college tends to reward those who are already privileged in terms of their exposure to academic discourse.

In "Reflections on Academic Discourse: How it Relates to Freshmen and Colleagues," Peter Elbow (1991) acknowledges that he favors what academic discourse entails, such as "learning, intelligence, [and] sophistication," but that he detests academic discourse itself (p. 135). Elbow defines academic discourse as "the discourse academics use when they publish for other academics" (p. 135). In one sense, Elbow appears to oversimplify and undervalue academic discourse. After all, to state that academic discourse is the language used when publishing for other academics suggests that the only audience that would read or potentially care about academic discourse is other academics—a small population of readers when compared to the general reading population. A student who reads Elbow's assertion might presume that academic

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<sup>2</sup> A Definition of Terms list for this and various other terms utilized within this document appears in Appendix A.

discourse possesses no inherent value, particularly if that student has no plans of becoming an academic. Despite this suggestion, Elbow acknowledges the importance of teaching students academic discourse and employing its principles in academia. As Elbow (1991) explains:

It is obvious why I should heed the common call to teach my students academic discourse. They will need it for the papers and reports and exams they'll have to write in their various courses throughout their college career. Many or even most of their teachers will expect them to write in the language of the academy. If we don't prepare them for these tasks we'll be shortchanging them—and disappointing our colleagues in other departments . . . Discourse carries power. This is especially important for weak or poorly prepared students—particularly students from poorer classes or those who are the first in their families to come to college. Not to help them with academic discourse is simply to leave a power vacuum and thereby reward privileged students who already have learned academic discourse at home or in school—or at least learned the roots or propensity for academic discourse. (p. 135)

In Elbow's estimation, teaching academic discourse is essential, for it represents a very powerful entity which, in its absence, places students at an educational disadvantage. Elbow also acknowledges that the most successful students have *already* acquired academic discourse, either at home or at school. He insists, however, that if the full spectrum of academic discourse is not learned at home or school, then students can learn, at minimum, its origins or develop a capacity for acquiring it in college.

It is worth noting that composition theorists and proponents of higher education unanimously agree that students should be taught academic discourse (Bartholomae, 1995; Bartholomae & Elbow, 1995; Bizzell, 1994; Bruffee, 1984; Crowley, 1998; Crowley, 2010; Delpit, 1988; Eagleton, 1997; Elbow, 1995; Godley & Minnici, 2008; Lu, 1988; Trimbur, 1989). The agreement, however, also becomes the point of departure. The theorists affirm that students benefit from learning academic discourse, yet there is no agreement among theorists regarding what academic discourse is or how it is explicitly defined. This further complicates the notion that students should be taught academic

discourse when academic discourse itself is not a concept that is definitively settled. Academic discourse becomes more of a contested term and less of a clear field-specific designation. Bizzell (1992) admits, "We have not demystified academic discourse" (p. 108) and confirms that much remains to be discovered, researched, and incorporated regarding academic discourse.

Numerous researchers have endeavored to examine the concept of academic discourse and how it relates both to student learning and to expectations for student writing (Bizzell, 2000; Elbow, 1991; Bartholomae, 1985; Hyland, 2009), especially in first-year English courses. Originally viewed as an academic booster and a means for students to further navigate the writing demands of other college-level courses, first-year writing has also been viewed by some students as an entity similar to an abyss that may ultimately prevent them from graduating from college and realizing their career goals. At nearly all colleges and universities in the United States, first-year composition courses are mandatory. For example, the Texas Core Curriculum (TCC) consists of a 42 semester credit hour core mandate for all undergraduate students in Texas; prior to Fall 2014, the 010 Communication core was limited to English Rhetoric and Composition (THECB, 2017). Although beginning in Fall 2014, the 010 Communication core was expanded to incorporate other courses that could also address the core requirement, it is worth noting that many Texas institutions have chosen to retain the first-year English courses, like ENGL 1301 and ENGL 1302, to address the 010 Communication core requirements. If students are unable to pass these required courses, they cannot continue their courses of study.

Nearly three decades ago, the United States ranked first in the world in four-year degree attainment among 25-34 year olds; from 1990 to the present, however, the United States has been outpaced internationally and now ranks 12<sup>th</sup> in this area (Byndloss,

2010; Epperson, 2012; Garofalo, 2010; Lewin, 2010). Various researchers, theorists, and economists have speculated reasons for the drastic decline while others suggest a myriad of means to increase degree attainment and to restore the United States to its original, high-ranked standing. While the United States government is actively encouraging more Americans to both pursue and complete higher education degrees, one element of such attainment may prove to be challenging: matriculation through mandatory coursework. Specifically, the successful completion and matriculation through mandatory freshman composition courses might prove to be an obstacle to students' achieving either two-year or four-year degrees. In the United States, most two-year community colleges and four-year universities require students to take and pass two semesters of composition (Crowley, 1998; Downs & Wardle, 2007; Miller, 1991; Smit, 2007). Few institutions of higher education circumvent—or allow students to circumvent—these compulsory writing courses.

Despite all of the knowledge available about academic discourse, researchers indicate that there is much that is still unknown about when students acquire academic discourse, where they acquire academic discourse—if outside of the college or university setting—and how effective that acquisition is in preparing students for college-level work (Fike & Fike, 2008; Smit, 2007). Even less is known about when or if students who attend community college acquire academic discourse.

Many students are attracted to community colleges because they boast smaller class sizes, more individualized attention, cost effectiveness, and the possibility of greater student success (Bremer, Center, Opsal, Medhanie, Jang, & Geise, 2013; Fike & Fike, 2008; Grimaldi, 2015). Likewise, many community colleges tout an “open admissions” policy that is equally attractive to non-traditional students, to individuals who are seeking to advance within their career fields, and to students who may have had



academic challenges in the past. Students enter community college with the promise of obtaining associates' degrees or certificates. Some students hope to further their studies at four-year universities, but even as community colleges cater to student success, many students find that they are still not adequately prepared to negotiate freshman composition courses. Many students who may have avoided the first-year writing courses during their first year still find it challenging to successfully navigate and pass the mandatory freshman composition courses despite having completed other college courses.

#### Limitations of Previous Research

Previous research has focused on faculty perceptions of students' greatest inadequacies in terms of academic discourse (Fulkerson, 2004; Gaughan, 2001, Giroux, 1981; Gonzales, 1999; Gorrell, 1965; Graff, 1999; Gravett & Petersen, 2007; Gregory, 2005; Gutiérrez, 1995; Flower, 1989; Lu, 1988; Northedge, 2003; Sinclair, 2005; Tannen, 2002; Weisser, 2002). Some of these inadequacies include but are not limited to low reading skills, poor writing skills, low English language proficiency, low motivation, and poor study habits (Dean & Dagastino, 2007; Perin, 2013; Phillips & Giordano, 2016). Few studies, however, review these issues from the students' perspectives, and those rare studies that do often do not incorporate students' lived experiences. Obtaining feedback from students may assist professors and institutions of higher education in designing composition courses that address students' academic needs and better prepare them for subsequent college level courses and writing tasks beyond college. Since researchers point out that there is much still to be discovered about academic discourse (Crowley, 2003; Flower, 1989; Lazere, 2015; Zwiers & Soto, 2017), additional research on academic discourse and how it relates to writing instruction is needed.

Specifically, further research is needed in three key areas: (1) the teaching and learning of academic discourse in community colleges, (2) non-academic factors that may affect acquisition of academic discourse, and (3) pre-college experiences with academic discourse (Gee, 2008; Ishitani, 2006; Ishler, 2005; Osborn, 2015; Singhal, 2004; Smit, 2004). Focusing on the aforementioned areas may assist in providing additional information and strategies to assist students in their preparation for entering the college or university setting.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to solicit data from students who have completed mandatory composition courses at community colleges and universities in the United States within the past five years.

The first objective of this study is to determine whether students perceive a need for prior knowledge of academic discourse before enrolling in first-year English courses. Secondly, this study seeks to investigate students' perceptions of the importance of compulsory composition courses for subsequent college courses. Thirdly, this study seeks to also ascertain whether students perceive required writing courses to be beneficial outside of the academic environment, such as in professional or in social environments. Finally, this study seeks to discover whether students believe that first-year composition courses should be compulsory.

#### Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Framework

Despite theoretical frameworks being sometimes referred to as conceptual frameworks, these terms are neither interchangeable nor synonymous. A theoretical framework is derived from an existing theory—tested and validated by others—and

considered an acceptable theory in the scholarly realm while the conceptual framework provides a logical structure of cohesive concepts which relate to one another from one or more theoretical frameworks (Grant & Osanloo, 2014; Luse, Mennecke, & Townsend, 2012; Merriam, 2001). To this end, the frameworks for this study will be conceptual as they draw from and have implications for both social constructivism and Marxism. Specifically, this study is conceptualized through the lens of the collaborative nature of social constructivism and through foundational elements of Marxism that include notions of symbolic power, cultural capital, and social capital (Althusser, 1969; Marx, 1906; Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu, 1994; Bourdieu, 1986; Hirsch, 1987; Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986).

Social constructivism, developed by psychologist Lev Vygotsky, emphasizes the collaborative nature of learning; Vygotsky, although a cognitivist, rejects the presumption made by other cognitivists like Piaget and Perry that it is possible to separate learning from its social context (Bredo, 1994; Green & Gredler, 2002; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Marshall, 1996; Perkins, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). Piaget rejects the conception that learning is the passive accumulation of information; instead, he proposes that learning occurs when the learner creates knowledge by testing his/her own theories about the world. Similarly, Perry maintains that knowledge is constructed in response to a learner's interactions with his/her environment. Whereas Piaget and Perry view knowledge as being constructed as a result of a learner's interaction with his/her environment, Vygotsky incorporates social interaction—the human phenomenon—into the construction of knowledge (Green & Gredler, 2002; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Marshall, 1996; Perkins, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). In essence, social constructivism embraces the notion that knowledge is constructed and created through interaction with others. From a social constructivism lens, required composition courses might be seen as attempts to help

students develop more effectively as members of the academic discourse community and within society in general by acquiring the ability to understand and demonstrate the socially-connected nature of writing. These courses function on the premise that writing is both an academic act and a social act. Like learning, writing also does not occur in a vacuum. Similarly, academic discourse does not occur in a vacuum as the academic discourse community depends on the interaction of other members within the community to set and maintain the discourse standards among members. Additionally, freshman composition courses hold the implicit understanding that the impact of writing extends beyond personal education and incorporates academic and professional goals.

Many students are not consciously aware that participation in higher education requires the individual to enter an organization or institution that is immersed in ideological practices. Ideology has the power to cover, mask, and obscure; thus it is important to expose how class interests operate through cultural forms—whether political or educational—at higher education institutions (Leitch, Cain, Finke, Johnson, McGowan & Williams, 2001; Marx, 1906). Ideology itself is inescapable (Althusser, 2001). Moreover, it is the nature of ideology to hide or conceal the reality of class struggles from the individual's perception and consciousness (Leitch et al., 2001). On the concept of ideology, Dick Hebdige (1979) maintains the following:

Most modern institutions of education, despite the apparent neutrality of the materials from which they are constructed (red brick, white tile, etc.) carry within themselves implicit ideological assumptions which are literally structured into the architecture itself...[T]he hierarchical relationship between teacher and taught is inscribed in the very lay-out of the lecture theatre where the seating arrangements—benches rising in tiers before a raised lectern—dictate the flow of information and serve to 'naturalize' professorial authority. Thus, a whole range of decisions about what is and what is not possible within education have been made however unconsciously, before the content of individual courses is even decided. (p. 2453)

Many decisions are often made about issues within education, indeed, before individual course content is created and before students begin the first course. When students

enroll in required composition courses, they are also entering a predetermined set of ideologies. The student's ability to maneuver through and successfully navigate the requirements of the institution in general and the writing courses in particular could be related to that individual's ability to learn the requirements and conform to the expectations of the institution. In the case of freshman English, the student's ability to conform to the dictates and requirements of learning the language of the academy—academic discourse—determines the student's level of success within composition courses.

Louis Althusser (1969) complicates the notion of ideology with his conceptualized "ideological state apparatuses," or ISA. These apparatuses are described as "civil institutions that have legal standing...including churches, schools, the family, courts, political parties..." (Leitch et al., 2001). For Althusser (1969), the State is equivalent to a machine of oppression that enables the ruling classes, or bourgeoisie, to maintain domination over the working class, or proletariat, and thereby subjects the working class to capitalistic exploitation. Aligned with Marxist thought, Althusser's (1969) ideological state apparatuses include the following features:

1. The ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) both function and are perpetuated predominately by ideology;
2. The ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) are multiple and distinct and are capable of providing a seemingly rational explanation to contradictions that express the effects of the clashes between the ruling class and the working class; and
3. The unity of the different ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) is secured, usually in contradictory forms, by the ruling ideology—the ideology of the ruling class. (p. 1492)

Ideology is formulated and perpetuated by the ruling class, yet it functions as an abstraction that allows behaviors and actions to appear normal and natural and thereby proceed as unquestioned or unchallenged (Althusser, 1969; Hebdige, 1979). In the case

of required composition, underlying ideologies often pervade how decisions are made and reflect the values of the institution of higher education. From an empirical point of view, it is difficult to quantify, measure, or represent ideology. If, however, an institution can recognize the institutional ideology that is associated with decisions and practices surrounding its own education programs, then that institution will have access to additional information that could assist in promoting students' success in requisite courses such as writing and composition classes. Similarly, cultural capital may also assist in promoting students' success.

Cultural capital is a form of capital, like traditional economic capital, that can be converted into money, such as educational qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Breton, 1962). Cultural capital may exist in three states. In an embodied state, it can exist in forms of language that signify to which social class one belongs. An objectified state includes books or consumables suggesting social class, and an institutionalized state includes educational qualifications or other objective indicators of social class and position (Becker, 1964; Bourdieu, 1986; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Breton, 1962; Grassby, 1970). In the case of first-year composition courses, students are enrolled in the required courses to satisfy the preliminary requisites for the degree plan. Students are endeavoring to earn a degree which, whether they realize it or not, will provide them with varying degrees of cultural capital. Many students, particularly those in the United States, anticipate that their degrees will assist in their abilities to earn a living while pursuing their career interests; hence they are trusting that the cultural capital that they earn in terms of educational degrees and qualifications will be transferred into economic capital.

In a similar sense, social capital refers to the network of social contacts and relationships upon which an individual may draw for assistance or support; the social

networks are marked by trust, cooperation, and reciprocity that may produce goods and services for the individual and the common good (Bourdieu, 1986; Nuñez, 2009; Peabody, 2013). Being a member of a social group may entitle the individual to a share of the capital held by the group. The members of a social network will likely not dole out handouts, but the connections may assist an individual in gaining entrance to a desired university, being selected for a military school, or landing a position at an exclusive company. In a similar sense, learning academic discourse, the language of the academy, can potentially increase one's social capital. It is through the conceptual framework of social constructivism and through elements of Marxism that include symbolic power, cultural capital, and social capital that this study will be examined.

#### Plan of Dissertation Chapters

My dissertation begins with a review of academic discourse as composition theorists define—or attempt to define—and situate the concept within the larger context of writing and composition. A larger purpose of Chapter 1, “The Rhetoric of Academic Discourse,” is to raise the question of academic discourse as a concretely defined term that faculty members and students definitively understand and to introduce the possibility that academic discourse is more nebulous than theorists, researchers, and practitioners realize or acknowledge. Similarly, I endeavor to establish impetus for my research study that seeks to ascertain both students’ and professors’ views of and experiences with academic discourse along with their understanding of the term.

In Chapter 2, “The Case for Academic Discourse,” I review and synthesize competing definitions of academic discourse and discourse communities. In addition, I demonstrate just how complicated and even contested the terms, academic discourse and discourse communities, are in relation to their use within the field. Furthermore,

Chapter 2 serves to provide a clearer and more coherent map of the field's thinking on these terms and concepts.

In Chapter 3, "Methodology," I present the information, steps, and scientific methods I used in the study in order to gain insight and answer the questions raised in my hypotheses. Within this chapter, I also include rationale for my research method, explanation regarding why the chosen research design is suitable for the study, and discussion of why the design I chose will help to accomplish the goals of a study. Chapter 3 also includes reasons why the chosen design is the most appropriate for this research project as well as an explanation of the data collection and data analysis processes.

Chapter 4, "Research Findings and Results," provides the products of my analytic processes and reveals integral information and concepts discovered through the study. I also reveal the "answers" to the initial research questions posed as well as discuss and analyze how the data collected either support or refute my initial hypotheses. In addition, I offer elaboration and connection between data from participants, and I summarize and analyze significant findings regarding the results of the interviews.

In Chapter 5, "General Discussion of Results," I interpret the results presented from the data in the previous chapter and explain why the results are significant. In addition, I suggest the implications of the results for the field. I also integrate my ideas regarding what is most interesting about the results of my study.

In Chapter 6, "Postscript: A Note on Developmental Studies," I include some discussion about developmental studies. Despite my study focusing on academic discourse acquisition among students having completed first-year composition courses, it would be deficient without consideration of developmental and remedial studies. Based on the results of my research study, I argue that teaching academic discourse to



developmental writing students could hold positive implications for their success and their ability to potentially advance to college-level composition courses. I also review field-related suggestions and practices for success among students in development writing and also suggest implications for the field.

## Chapter 2

### The Case for Academic Discourse

#### Introduction

This chapter seeks to clarify the field's understanding of academic discourse with particular emphasis on discourse communities, membership within such communities, and the negotiated locations where members and non-members of discourse communities may interact. Furthermore, this chapter will illuminate just how convoluted and debated many of these concepts are. This research project necessitates a detailed discussion surrounding the nuances of academic discourse in support of making the case for the acquisition of the language of the academy.

#### Academic Discourse in Composition and Beyond

According to composition theorists, academic discourse refers to the ways of thinking and using language that exist inside an established academic community, either in higher education in general or in particular disciplinary communities (Bartholomae 1986; Crowley, 1998; Elbow, 1991; Hyland 2009). The use of language within these communities, of course, is not arbitrary or erratic. It represents consistent and standardized practices determined by the community members (Bamford & Bondi, 2005; Herzberg, 1986; Porter, 1992). Although it may be elusive to some individuals, such as beginning students in the academy, the language of discourse communities is an integral part of the academic community. The methods and manners in which students themselves learn and master the guidelines of academic discourse may differ from one individual to the next. Theorists and scholars, however, emphasize the importance of students' grasping the rules and dictates of academic discourse.

Although academic discourse is often presented as a straightforward concept that is both easily explained and understood, theorists struggle to construct a clear definition of it. According to Bamford and Bondi (2005), "Academic discourse, both written and spoken, is highly patterned, interactive, and socially constrained. It displays to a high degree such features as politeness, hedging, and metadiscourse" (p. X). Furthermore, academic discourse "is seen as a conversation among members of a community, and the ability to participate successfully in this conversation is constitutive of full membership" (p. XII). When it comes to teaching, the conventions and practices of academic discourse represent a set of guidelines and boundaries that assist in preparing students to maneuver within an academic community. Bamford and Bondi are less clear in explaining how one might complete the process for obtaining full membership in a discourse community. It is also not clear whether the authors consider participation in academic discourse to include the adding of insights and information within a class research assignment or if participation indicates formal publication.

Many students have no concept that such an entity as academic discourse even exists, much less that they are expected to enter college with the ability to write using academic discourse. David Bartholomae (1985) indicates that whenever students begin to write for a class or assignment, they undertake the task of "inventing the university," or creating the occasion and language patterns necessary in order complete the writing task (p. 134). Likewise, according to Bartholomae (1985), "The student has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do..." in order to successfully function within the confines of the academy (p. 134). What is most troubling, according to Bartholomae, is that students are often called upon "...to try on a variety of voices and interpretive schemes" and to learn the elements of discourse "long before the skill is 'learned'...[which] causes problems" (p. 135). Bartholomae pinpoints the disjuncture between students' skill levels

with writing in the academy and the academic writing tasks that the students are requested to complete. Although many students enter the university without the background or skill set to utilize academic discourse, the nature of the writing tasks at the college and university level immediately require students to utilize academic discourse. Thus, Bartholomae concludes that many students are placed in positions to fail their college courses.

Similar to Bartholomae, Peter Elbow acknowledges both the importance of students' mastering academic discourse and the assumption that they must have already done so. Elbow expresses admiration for the characteristics of academic discourse: learning, intelligence, sophistication, facts, summaries, reasoning, inference, evidence, and theory. He also recognizes the importance of teaching students academic discourse since they will "...need it for the papers and reports and exams they'll have to write in their various courses throughout their college career. Many or even most of their teachers will expect them to write in the language of the academy" (p. 135). Elbow understands that "Discourse carries power," and consequently, the failure to teach students academic discourse "...places them behind the eight-ball in their college careers" (p. 135).

The problem, according to Elbow, is that teachers fail to teach academic discourse even as they expect students to possess it:

Not to help [students] with academic discourse is simply to leave a power vacuum and thereby reward privileged students who have already learned academic discourse at home or in school—or at least learned the roots or propensity for academic discourse. (p. 135)

Elbow argues that successful students learn academic discourse at home or in pre-college school settings. In other words, the college or university is not the sole location in which students learn the language of the academy and may not even be the main location. Privileged students, who are the offspring of privileged parents and the

graduates of privileged schools, learn the discourse of academic privilege. Obviously, such students are at a tremendous advantage compared to first-generation college students or students from low-income backgrounds.

The gap between the haves and have-nots in terms of academic discourse is increasingly problematic because academic discourse itself is becoming more ubiquitous. Ken Hyland (2009) points out that English has emerged as the international language of scholarship (p. 5). In research and scholarship, English has emerged as the “international lingua franca,” or the adopted, common language among much of the world’s population even to the extent that academics from around the world are now being compelled to publish in English (pp. 4-5). In addition, the spread of English is not limited to the academic research: “With half the world’s population predicted to be speaking the language by 2050, English is becoming less a language than a basic academic skill for many users around the world” (p. 4). From a global perspective, English has become integral to academic success.

### The Discourse Community

If the concept of academic discourse is complicated, the definition of a discourse community in contemporary scholarship is equally confusing and contested. Bamford and Bondi (2005) assert, “There are also problems in the definition and delimitation of the discourse community which range from a rather nebulous ‘academic discourse community’ to the more specific discourse community of, say, geologists or economists. . . Obviously, the term ‘discourse community’ means different things to different people...” (p. XII). The term, academic discourse community, indeed, can have a range of meanings and definitions. Furthermore, the variance among definitions may add to its obscurity. Bizzell (1992) explains, “The concept of ‘discourse community,’ though widely

used in composition studies has not been defined authoritatively—that is in such a way as to win assent from all composition researchers and scholars of rhetoric” (p. 222). Bizzell acknowledges that even among scholars who readily use the term, an agreed-upon definition is elusive. This lack of unanimity may not, however, be unsatisfactory since, according to Bazerman (1994), “Most definitions of discourse community get ragged round the edges rapidly” (p. 128). It has proven challenging to capture the essence of the term “discourse community” in general and “academic discourse community” in particular.

Notwithstanding this lack of consensus, academic discourse communities undoubtedly emerge through conventions, guidelines, and other social constructs (Bourdieu, Passeron, & de Saint Martin, 1994; Herzberg, 1986; Hyland, 2009; Porter, 1992). The practices of academic writing and writing within a discipline establish and perpetuate academic discourse communities. For Hyland, academic discourses are not “... just peculiar regularities of formal style... they evoke a social milieu” (p. 46). The acquisition of academic discourse serves to legitimize a member’s place within the academic discourse community. The concept of academic community reiterates the notion that individuals utilize language to communicate with other members of a social group that, itself, possesses its own norms, conventions, and habitudes (Bartholomae & Petrosky, 1986; Bizzell, 1992; Herzberg, 1986; Porter, 1986; Porter, 1992; Sinclair, 2005). More specifically, a discourse community might also include shared disciplines and interests and inform the methods in which members within the discipline communicate about those interests. Barton (2007) describes such a community as follows:

A discourse community is a group of people who have texts and practices in common ... [such as] a group of academics ... In fact, a discourse community can refer to the people the text is aimed at; it can be the people who read a text; or it

can refer to the people who participate in a set of discourse practices both by reading and writing. (pp. 57-58)

The notion that academic writing practices constitute the definition of an academic discourse community makes formal attempts to initiate new members all the more difficult. Sensing this problem, Harris (1989) points out that “most theorists who use the term [discourse community], however, seem to want to keep something of the tangible and specific reference...to suggest, that is, that there really are ‘academic discourse communities’ out there somewhere, real groupings of writers and readers, that we can help ‘initiate’ our students into” (p. 15). Harris adds, “But since these communities are ... of writers and readers who are dispersed in time and space, and who rarely, if ever, meet one another in person, they invariably take on something of the ghostly and pervasive quality of ‘interpretive communities’ as well” (p. 15). In essence, scholars recognize that in a sense, the academic discourse community is a fleeting and phantasmal notion that must be concretized for effective teaching.

John Swales (1987), for example, attempts to provide more structure and substance to the definition of a discourse community. He delineates the characteristics of a discourse community as follows:

- a) The discourse community has a communality of interest where at some level, the members share common public goals;
- b) The discourse community has mechanisms for intercommunication between members. The participatory mechanisms may be various such as meetings, telecommunications, correspondence, and bulletins;
- c) In consequence of a) and b) above, the discourse community survives by providing information and feedback, even if that information is itself used for various purposes;
- d) The discourse community has developed and continues to develop “discoursal” expectations. These may involve “appropriacy” of topics, the form, function, and positioning of discoursal elements, and the roles texts play in the operation of the discourse community;

- e) As a result of all of the above, the discourse community possesses an inbuilt dynamic towards an increasingly shared and specialized terminology. Nowhere is this more evident than in the development of community-specific acronyms and abbreviations; and
- f) The discourse community has a critical mass of members with a suitable degree of relevant discursal and content expertise. Discourse communities have changing memberships; people enter as apprentices and leave, by death or in other less involuntary ways. However, survival of the community depends on a reasonable ratio between experts and novices. (pp. 5-7)

Even as he attempts to stipulate a clear definition of discourse communities, Swales recognizes, that his characterization is problematic. For example, the fact that groups share common interests or goals in no way implies that such groups form discourse communities (p. 6). For Swales, commonality alone does not make a discourse community. Likewise, limning the boundaries of discourse communities in Swales's manner implies, first, that individuals may belong to several discourse communities simultaneously and, secondly, individuals will vary in the number of discourse communities to which they belong and hence in the number of genres they command (p. 6). In other words, the discourse community is not immobile but an entity more sinuous in nature. Furthermore, according to critics of Swales's definition, stylistic conventions are not the totality of a discourse community. Bizzell (1992), for examples, writes, "I would question, however, whether Swales's account [of a discourse community] acknowledges the power of discourse communities to shape world views" (p. 226). Bizzell further explains, "By treating the discourse community as essentially a stylistic phenomenon, Swales delimits the object of study for his graduate students in such a way as to leave out larger socioeconomic and cultural elements—that is, those elements that most forcefully create world views in discourse" (p. 227). For Bizzell, Swales (1987) omits some of the integral elements by which discourse communities function.



Although imprecise for some theorists, the concept of the discourse community can be constricting for others. James Porter (1992), for example, indicates, "A discourse community is a local and temporary constraining system, defined by a body of texts (or more generally, practices) that are unified by a common focus" (p. 106). Porter introduces the concept of the discourse community as a constricting or inhibiting system, temporal in nature, and bearing a common aim. Despite its being a "turbulent, chaotic system," the discourse community still manages to operate "with some kind of regularity" (Porter, 1992, p. 107). As a system, the academic discourse community necessarily imposes restrictions, sets boundaries, and even re-sets boundaries regarding what is acceptable use and practice in language. The academic discourse community also maintains circumscribed guidelines by the community. These guidelines can regulate and even impede a writer's latitude when functioning within the discourse community. Porter interprets this concept as "...challeng[ing] the traditional romantic notion of the writer" which, in turn, "...trouble[s] some because [these notions] appear to question the contribution of the individual, leaving little room for individuality" (p. 109). From an individualistic perspective, the academic discourse community particularizes the protocols and governances of the academy, and individual preferences do not supersede those of the discourse community. For Porter, "The discourse community seems to do away with the freedom and autonomy of the writer" (p. 109). Even though it hinders a writer's independence, this hindrance is requisite for maintaining the community (Bennett, 1991; Fairclough, 1995; Gee, 2005; Gregory, 2005; Herzberg, 1986; Moffett, 1968; Northedge, 2003; Osborn, 2015; Park, 2008; Sinclair, 2005; Tannen, 2002; Weisser, 2002; Zwiers & Soto, 2017). In the academic discourse community, however, the writer is not left without a voice or without choices. The discourse community is a dispersion of interrelated practices, and as such, the writer ultimately does not contribute to the

discourse community by simply conforming to it; instead, the writer's discourse must first interrelate with the discourse community through the intersection of discursive practices (Porter, 1992; Sinclair, 2005; Wuthnow, 1989). Once the writer learns to develop a sense of those discursive practices along with his/her own position within their network (Porter, 1992, p. 110), then the writer can begin to change and develop the community in ways and means that change the discourse community.

Still, the discourse community does regulate members' actions. Bartholomae (1985) posits, "It is the discourse with its projects and agendas that determines what writers can and will do" (p. 139). Academic discourse limits what writers—and particularly student writers—can do. According to Harris (1989), "We write not as isolated individuals but as members of communities whose beliefs, concerns, and practices both instigate and constrain, at least in part, the sorts of things we can say. Our aims and intentions in writing are thus not merely personal [or] idiosyncratic, but reflective of the communities to which we belong" (p. 12). As Harris acknowledges, the discourse community regulates what is acceptable within the community. Bizzell (1992) further states, "If we acknowledge that participating in a discourse community entails some assimilation of its world view, then it becomes difficult to maintain the position that discourse conventions can be employed in a detached, instrumental way" (p. 228). Subsequently, participation within a discourse community also includes being subjected to its values, assumptions, goals, and practices.

### *Insiders and Outsiders*

Numerous theorists emphasize the juxtaposition of instructors and students as insiders and outsiders to the academic discourse community (Halliday, 1985; Bizzell, 1992; Biber; Gravett & Petersen, 2007; Gregory, 2005; Gutiérrez, 1995; Hyland, 2009;

Northedge, 2003; Park, 2008; Sleeter, 1993). Generally, instructors are considered insiders, to varying degrees, in the academic discourse community while students are considered fledglings and outsiders. According to Bizzell (1992):

[M]ore and more students have come to college while at a very elementary stage of their initiation into the academic discourse community; that is, more and more students have come who cannot easily produce written Standard English, who cannot sustain an argument in an essay, who cannot adopt the relatively objective persona academics prefer, and so on. (p. 107)

Bizzell's words suggest that the number of students "outside" the academic discourse community has grown, and she adds, "When such students began to be the majority in most college writing classrooms, what could be treated as self-evident quickly became problematic" (p. 107). In essence, instructors can no longer assume that entering students have a foundational knowledge or even a shared understanding of the requirements for participation in the academic discourse community. A threshold or understood benchmark of information that students should already know does not exist anymore.

Possibly due to this new underprepared population of students, the conception of the student as novice and the professor as expert is one that currently is widely accepted. Herzberg (1986) explains this phenomenon as the "Myth of the Gatekeeper":

According to this myth, the community of writing instructors stands at the entrance to the fortress of college education. . . Therefore, we believe, we have a special opportunity and responsibility to influence our students' relation to the academy at large. . . For many students, the knowledge they seek is indeed locked away in a forbidding fortress to whose rooms they have no key. (p. 9)

According to this model, to learn academic discourse effectively, it is imperative for the novice to be guided and instructed by the professional. According to Bamford and Bondi (2005), "Discourse is constitutive of the community and its identity and has to be learned by interaction between the expert and the novice member" (p. XIII). One method of effectively teaching academic discourse to those apprenticed in the field can be through

interaction, modeling, and correction of miscues and errors. For many researchers, there is no better advisor for such training than the professor who already functions as a genuine member of the academic discourse community. According to Northedge (2003) who also situates students as outsiders, the teacher is positioned as both “subject expert” and “insider” whose role is to support students in gaining access to the academic discourse needed to be successful in the academy (169). The student, through practice and acquisition, can achieve entry into the academic discourse community through the instruction of the professor or instructor. Northedge further indicates that the instructor possesses three key roles in enabling the acquisition of academic discourse:

- 1) Lending the capacity to participate in meaning;
- 2) Designing well planned excursions into unfamiliar discursive terrain; and
- 3) Coaching students in speaking and writing academic discourse. (p. 169)

Northedge maintains that each of the key roles necessitates the skill and insight of an established and fluent member of the academic community. Northedge likens the academic discourse community to an “educationalist fraternity” (p.170). His terminology suggests that, like a fraternity, the discourse community is composed of a specialized population of individuals whose memberships have been vetted and whose participation necessarily perpetuates the existence of the community. Students are not part of this academic fraternity and often find themselves “locked out” of the discourse and unable to make sense of the academic language they encounter (Northedge, 2003; Park, 2008; Snow, 1993; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Tannen, 2002; Turner, 2009). For Northedge, “This is why students need teachers. *The teacher, as a speaker of the specialist discourse, is able to ‘lend’ students the capacity to frame meanings they cannot yet produce independently*” (p. 172). The instructor, then, offers students keys of knowledge to unlock the doorways and portals into academic discourse. Moreover, the instructor

actually functions as an insider who acts as a doorway through which students may gain access to the nuances of academic discourse.

For students, however, the process is often not so simple. Students may arrive in college lacking not just necessary skills but also the prior knowledge and socialization necessary to learn those skills. Harris (1989) states, "... [O]ne can argue that the problem is less one of intelligence than socialization, that such students are simply unused to the peculiar demands of academic discourse" (p. 16). While academic preparation, or the lack thereof, may be a potential factor, other considerations may also be prevalent. Without having the benefit of prior knowledge, previous experience, or former exposure, students may find themselves perplexed when considering academic discourse and attempting to use the language of the academy. Furthermore, Harris admonishes, "...[O]ne's role as a teacher is not merely to inform but to persuade, that we ask our students to acquire not only certain skills and data, but to try on new forms of thinking and talking about the world as well" (p. 16). For many students, the trying on of such new forms of thinking and communicating about the world is simply baffling. Harris, then, rightly questions:

[T]o enter the academic community, a student must ... become accustomed and reconciled to our ways of doing things with words; then how exactly is she to do this? (p. 16)

One difficulty lies in the reality that students are required to move between two separate communities with strikingly different ways of communicating and making sense of the world. For example, students often experience difficulty moving from their language comfort zones to academic discourse, and most have no concept of how to successfully make the transition (Au, 1991; Berg, 2007; Bizzell, 1992; Delpit, 1992; Delpit, 1997; Dinwiddie & Allen, 2003; Gregory, 2005; Gutiérrez, 1995; Sleeter, 1993; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Warren, 2013). Furthermore, students find it challenging

and sometimes nearly impossible to understand or explain how or why one moves from one group to the other. Northedge (2003) further asserts, "It is important to ensure that students encounter a suitable range of issues, debates and voices to enable them to develop a sense of the nature of the knowledge community and its discourses—its participants, its values and preoccupations, and its modes of speech and argument" (p. 175). Introducing students to a variety of academic discourse material assists in building their knowledge and fostering a deeper understanding of academic discourse. Similarly, Northedge maintains that students must be able to speak and write within the discourse community with which they intend to become professionally affiliated; this mastery of the discourse is of utmost importance if students are to be taken seriously within the community (p. 178). This integral element is often overlooked, if not completely ignored, by students. To be viewed as a serious, conscientious contributor to a discourse community, it is essential to learn the language of the profession and of that community. Similarly, students' use of concepts and modes of argument must be appropriate, and their grasp of terms within the discourse must be sufficient to allow them to create legitimate meanings of their own using those terms (Northedge, 2003, p. 178). In short, students must become fluent within the discourse community. There is no way to abandon such necessity. Northedge further maintains, "To acquire this fluency, they need opportunities to speak and write the discourse in the 'presence' of a competent speaker who can, by responding, help to shape their usage" (p. 178). The professor of writing, then, possesses a major responsibility in guiding and assisting students in learning the nuances of academic discourse.

While theorists might expect students to experience initial challenges with learning the language of the academy, it seems reasonable to assume that students enrolled in college are at least "college ready." This assumption, however, is false in

some college settings. Disproportionately, community colleges enroll students from historically underrepresented groups, and the students who enroll are more likely than other postsecondary students to be minorities, low-income, and first-generation students (Allan, Garriott, & Keene, 2016; Billson & Terry, 1982; Bui, 2002; Byrd & MacDonald, 2005; Chen & Carroll, 2005; Cushman, 2006; Davis, 2012; Wildhagen, 2015; Xu, 2016). Many of these students are underprepared for college. In fact, approximately two-thirds (66%) of community college students in the United States are considered academically underprepared for college-level course work (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010; Fike & Fike, 2008). As a result, a large number of students who enter community college do so with academic chasms. Osborn (2015) states, "Because community colleges serve the majority of students from diverse backgrounds, what occurs in community college writing classrooms is of tremendous importance if all students are to be provided access to academic discourse and an opportunity for higher education" (p.11). Community college instructors, then, should not necessarily expect their students to have experience with academic discourse. It remains an open question, however, whether college faculty members, regardless of where they teach, appreciate how little their students may know. In their study, Bourdieu, Passeron, and de Saint Martin (1994) found that "...in their instructional practice teachers implicitly expect and impose a requirement of perfect understanding" on their students (p. 37). These researchers found that irrespective of students' actual skills or levels of preparedness, instructors *implicitly* hold high expectations for students, presume that they possess the academic skills necessary for college-level work, and require students to function at the college level with the ability to effectively use the language of the academy. Bourdieu et al. further maintain, "The gap between teacher expectations and actual student ability is only too obvious from the finding that some of the most common words in the language of ideas are among the

most poorly understood” (p. 37). Some of the most commonplace terms used by instructors may be misinterpreted and misunderstood among students. While students’ academic abilities vary, professors’ expectations of student preparedness and comprehension at the college level seem to remain consistent.

### *The Contact Zone*

Many instructors and professors have accepted the challenge to apply to the classroom Mary Louise Pratt's notion of the "contact zone," a social space where people of unequal levels of power and differing language backgrounds meet to negotiate (or coerce) meaning and authority (Bizzell, 1994; Harris, 1995; Hindman, 1999; Lu, 1994; Pratt, 1991). The origins of Pratt's contact zone metaphor have roots in the narrative of an obscure letter written by a highly educated Incan and addressed to the king of Spain; the letter was reportedly written in a mixture of Incan and Spanish (Anzaldua, 1987; Gaughan, 2001; Lu, 1994; Pratt, 1991). Although the Incan was highly educated in his native language, he was virtually illiterate in Spanish (Bizzell, 1994; Miller, 1994; Pratt, 1991; Wolff, 2002). Those individuals who lived and worked in the borderlands—the contact zone—could understand the mixed conglomerate of text written by the Incan. Individuals living outside of the borderlands would view the text as confusing, vague, or even chaotic (Anzaldua, 1987; Bizzell, 1994; Canagarajah, 1997). The metaphor may apply to students who are charged with the task of learning and demonstrating mastery of academic discourse. In such cases, instructors represent those who live inside the borderlands; contrarily, students represent those who work outside the borderlands. Students are expected to communicate within the borderlands; however, their actual abodes, in this case, language abodes, may be elsewhere—outside the contact zone. When students arrive to the borderlands, their communication—written or otherwise—is a



variegated representation, like the Incan text, of their attempts to function and conform within the contact zone. Instructors, like those individuals accustomed to living and working in the borderlands, often possess a unique ability to decipher students' coalesced forms of writing. Some theorists describe this metaphoric amalgamation as one method by which an outside group enters into the language of the academy (Herzberg & Reynolds, 2000; Miller, 1994; Wolff, 2002). Some entering college students attempt to produce a hybridized version of standard academic English. Similarly, students attempt to transform their limited knowledge of the language of the academy into an admixed version of the language of the borderlands.

Contact zones represent locations of uncertainty. According to Harris (1995), Pratt designates contact zones as "spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths as they are lived out in the world today" (p. 34). For Pratt, the contact zone is composed of an assortment of skill levels, experiences, and perspectives. On the surface, the contact zone might seem an unpromising space for education because of the potential for chaos, misunderstanding, and confusion. Proponents of teaching in the contact zone, however, theorize a practice that seeks not to eradicate linguistic and cultural differences but to comprehend and embrace such differences in preparation for teaching students the language of the academy (Canagarajah, 1997; Miller, 1994; Pratt, 1991). Although Pratt is rather vague in expressing how to achieve some of the goals she suggests are facilitated by the contact zone (Bizzell, 1994; Harris, 1995), Pratt's challenge to compositionists is clear: Writing classrooms must reflect and teach ways to negotiate an increasingly multicultural environment (Freire, 1989; Harris, 1995; Miller, 1994; Pratt, 1991).

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

#### Introduction

The approach taken in any research study is integral in the sense that it assists in providing continuity and direction while defining the scope of the study; moreover, the research approach is used to structure the research and to demonstrate the ways in which the project elements work collaboratively to respond to the central research questions in the study. As stated in Chapter 1, the primary objective of this study is to examine college students' self-investigation of their acquisition of academic discourse among students who have completed mandatory first-year composition courses at community colleges and universities in the United States within the past five years. An ancillary element of this study also investigates professors' experiences concerning students' acquisition of academic discourse. For both investigations, thirteen research questions were created and utilized. I believe that a better understanding of this phenomenon would provide both instructors and students with more informed practices surrounding the teaching and learning of academic discourse. This chapter describes the research methodology for this study and includes examination and analyses regarding the following areas: (a) hypotheses and research questions, (b) rationale for the research approach, (c) research design, (d) validity issues and techniques to improve credibility and trustworthiness, and (e) assumptions, limitations, and delimitations.

#### Hypotheses and Research Questions

In this study, I presuppose that students expect to be taught academic discourse upon entering the college or university through their coursework in general and specifically in mandatory composition courses. On the other hand, I also hypothesize

that professors implicitly expect students to enter postsecondary institutions already having some knowledge, experience, and ability to write using academic discourse. I also predict that the majority of students object to the universal requirement of composition courses. The questions to be addressed through research are as follows:

1. How did students first learn academic discourse, and what did the process entail?
2. Are students expecting to be taught academic discourse in first-year composition courses?
3. Are students expected to have knowledge, experience, and/or the ability to write using academic discourse before enrolling in first-year English courses?
4. How can/do students acquire academic discourse outside of the college or university environment?
5. Were first-year composition courses beneficial in assisting students with writing required in subsequent college courses?
6. Are freshman writing courses beneficial outside of the academic environment, such as in professional environments or social environments?
7. Should first-year English courses continue to be mandatory for students?

#### Rationale for the Qualitative Research Design

Based on the research topic and the questions to be answered, I considered various approaches that would most feasibly allow for the accomplishment of the research goals. For example, each of the following five qualitative approaches was considered in relation to employing the most expedient approach: Ethnographic Research, Narrative Research, Grounded Theory Research, Case Study Research, and Phenomenological Research (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Guetterman, 2015; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Ethnographic research focuses on an entire cultural group; the researcher elucidates and deciphers both the shared and learned patterns of behaviors, values, beliefs, and language of the group (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Harris, 1968; Hymes, 1974). In this study, students of various backgrounds would be asked to

participate, so the ethnographic research approach was eliminated from consideration. Narrative comes in many forms and uses a variety of analytical practices, but this form of research generally relies on oral histories or autobiographical reports (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004). In this study, participants would be interviewed; however, neither oral histories nor autobiographical reports would be collected, so the narrative research approach was not selected. Grounded theory research attempts to generate a theory or an abstract analytical schema from phenomena already experienced by a group of participants (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Since this study has roots in social constructivism and Marxism, it was not necessary to create or propose a new theory. As a result, the grounded theory approach was deemed unsuitable for this study. Case study research—the most common type of qualitative research—analyzes episodic events in a defined framework bound by time and setting. This type of research focuses on studying an issue that is explored through one or more cases and involves data collection through multiple sources of information: observations, audiovisual material, reports, interviews, and documents (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Hamel, Dufour & Fortin, 1993; Yin, 2013). The current study could have been considered a case study since it meets the first criterion of analyzing episodic events explored through one or more cases; however, data were not collected from multiple sources of information. As a result, the case study, research approach was eliminated for this study. The phenomenological research approach describes the meaning of a concept or phenomenon of several individuals' lived experiences; one objective of phenomenological research is to describe participants' experiences in a specific context while endeavoring to understand those experiences (Cresswell, 2013; Husserl, 1960; Idhe, 1986; Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Moustakas, 1994). For this study, the phenomenological research

approach was selected since the study focuses on individuals' lived experiences in attempting to acquire academic discourse and their attempts to understand these experiences. Subsequently, the phenomenological research approach is best suited for this research within the framework of qualitative research.

### Research Design

The research participants consisted of two groups of respondents. The first group comprised students who had completed at least one semester of first-year composition. The second group consisted of professors or instructors who teach first-year English courses.

The following list reviews the steps used to carry out this research:

1. Interview questions were piloted with a focus group of 10 participants to test the clarity and caliber of questions and to solicit suggestions for improvement prior to the rollout of the actual study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Litosseliti, 2003). After the interview pilot, five participants, 50% of the pilot participants, contacted me indicating additional information they could have added to their interview responses. Two of the pilot participants specifically stated that it often takes them additional time to process questions and that they sometimes have difficulty with formulating immediate verbal responses. Based on this feedback, I decided to send the questions and informed consent documents in advance to study respondents.
2. Potential research participants were contacted by email and in person. After providing the actual study respondents with the questions in advance, I found that none of the study respondents contacted me afterwards indicating that they wished to add additional information to their responses. Those who

agreed to participate were scheduled for face-to-face interviews on their respective college or university campuses. I elected to conduct face-to-face interviews to take advantage of social cues like voice inflection, intonation, and body language; likewise, I had the opportunity to standardize the interview setting (Openakker, 2006; Wengraf, 2001). I was also able to explain information to respondents and to clarify inquiries as needed.

3. Interview responses were recorded and transcribed as outlined in the informed consent documents. Interview data responses were also manually analyzed and evaluated, and a preliminary coding scheme was created based on themes, categories, and patterns which emerged from the data. Interview data was analyzed using Nvivo software as well. Finally, interview data was analyzed using three experienced raters in support of inter-rater reliability. The process and rationale for analyzing the data is explained in detail in Chapter 4.

#### Validity Issues and Techniques to Improve Credibility and Trustworthiness

For qualitative research purposes, trustworthiness consists of any efforts by the researcher to address validity, the degree to which an instrument measures what it intends to measure, as well as to address reliability, the consistency with which an instrument measures an element over time; trustworthiness also encompasses credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The qualitative, phenomenological research design captured students' lived experiences with the acquisition of academic discourse and highlighted additional information that was not previously considered.

### *Credibility*

The criterion of credibility, also known as validity, proposes that the findings of a research study are accurate and authentic from the points of view of the researcher, participants, and the general process (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2015). To enhance the methodological credibility of this study, I collected data using an interview process and transcribed responses verbatim. Likewise, I utilized manual coding methods, technological coding methods with the employment of Nvivo software, and inter-rater reliability. I also utilized various participatory and collaborative methods within the research study such as the use of a pilot interview group and discussion with professional colleagues.

### *Dependability*

The criterion of dependability adduces that the findings of a given research study can be replicated by other similar studies; generally, qualitative research is usually not expansive enough to provide a reasonable degree of reliability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015; Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2015). For these reasons, I documented all procedures and incorporated three experienced raters to assist in consistently ensuring dependability.

### *Confirmability*

The concept of confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings of the study are the result of the research as opposed to the biases or subjectivity of the researcher. Though qualitative researchers realize the impossibility of attaining objectivity, they must have the capacity to illustrate how the data can be traced back to its origins (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015; Creswell, 2013). For this study, I included ongoing

reflection by way of notation and commentary and maintained records of field notes and transcripts to provide additional opportunities to assess and review the data and findings.

### *Transferability*

The concept of transferability refers to the ways in which a phenomenon in one context can be conveyed or transported to another context reliably (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015; Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2015). Generalized findings are not the goal of this study. To respond to this objective, however, I addressed the issue of transferability through the use of thick, rich descriptions in the analysis of the participants' responses.

### Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

A primary assumption of the qualitative, phenomenological method is that respondents will provide honest, uncensored, and unbiased responses regarding their experiences and views in relation to the questions asked (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015; Creswell, Giltrow, Gooding, Burgoyne, & Sawatsky, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). To support honesty in responses, the participants were volunteers who had the option to withdraw from the study at any time and without consequence or ramification. Likewise, confidentiality and anonymity was preserved; respondents were also assigned pseudonyms.

The limitations of this study include geographical location. The individuals providing face-to-face interviews were located in the state of Texas. It is also likely that individuals' experiences could vary from one institution to the next or from one region to another.



Likewise, participants represented a range of socio-economic backgrounds and statuses; subsequently, results and responses may have varied in relation to this factor. Economic disparities may exist within the same school district which may, in turn, affect potential student success rates at the college level.

## Chapter 4

### Research Findings and Results

#### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine student and faculty perceptions of academic discourse and the processes by which it is acquired. Participants included 41 students (21=male and 20=female) from diverse ethnic backgrounds and 11 faculty members (5=male and 6=female) also from diverse ethnic backgrounds. All respondents answered 13 interview questions. It is worth noting that respondents were not asked specific questions regarding information such as race, birthplace, first-generation college status, or information about their parents. Many respondents voluntarily included additional information such as this during the interview and consented to its inclusion, if deemed appropriate, for the study.

#### *Stability of Results*

Interview response data was first coded manually. Interview responses were also analyzed using NVivo 11 software which is designed to assist in effectively analyzing qualitative data (Bazeley, 2007). Finally, the data were coded by three experienced raters in the area of qualitative research data. The individual manual coding yielded 68 categories<sup>3</sup> from the interview responses, but some data fit into more than one category. The NVivo coding methods produced an overabundance of domains and categories and double-coded some segments of the interview data. The coding methods used by the three raters produced 39 categories<sup>4</sup> and avoided the problem of duplicate coding. The

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<sup>3</sup> The manual coding categories appear on Table 4-1 in Appendix I.

<sup>4</sup> The inter-rater coding categories appear on Table 4-2 in Appendix J.

experienced coders employed the principles of Cohen's Kappa Coefficient, also known as Cohen's Kappa  $\kappa^5$ , as an index to measure interrater agreement for categorical, qualitative items (Shan & Wang, 2014).

## Findings

Direct interview quotes are used to highlight and personalize the data. All names are pseudonymous to protect each participant's identity. Student responses are reviewed in their entirety followed by the responses from faculty. Pie charts of quantitative data appear after the qualitative data analysis of responses to each interview question. Student responses are identified by Q and the corresponding number of the interview question. For example, Q1 denotes the first student question. Faculty responses are identified by PQ and the corresponding number of the interview question. For example, PQ1 denotes the first question for professors.

### *Students' Responses*

Question I: What is your understanding of academic discourse?

Communication: 58%

Writing/Language of the Academy: 24%

Limited or Unfamiliarity: 12%

Rules and Format: 6%

Two integral themes emerged which include the understanding of academic discourse as communication as well as a limited understanding or complete unfamiliarity of academic discourse among students.

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<sup>5</sup> A detailed description of Cohen's Kappa  $\kappa$  appears in Appendix K of this research.

*Academic discourse as communication.* When asked about their understanding of academic discourse, several students equated academic discourse with communication. Anthony is a first-generation college student who states that his parents initially came to the United States as illegal immigrants but later completed the process and obtained legal citizenship. Anthony responds to this question as follows:

To me, academic discourse is an understanding of how to speak professionally, and how to structure one's speech in such a way that it is understandable to everyone. Additionally, I believe it is also being perceived as competent and trustworthy to everyone as, without this, one cannot truly accomplish the first requirement. Others will not truly understand what a person is trying to say without first accepting them as competent and capable of being trusted.

Brian is a second-generation college student but first-generation born in the United States. He says that his parents first gained asylum in the United States due to political unrest in their country at the time, and he was born two years later. Brian's understanding of academic discourse includes speaking and conversation:

My understanding of academic discourse is that it is the proper way of discussing a topic in an academic environment. It usually entails speaking professionally and respectfully to the other person or people in the conversation. It also requires proper use of language and potentially high level language.

In addition, LaToya indicates that she is a first-generation college student and an English language learner whose parents never quite completed the formal immigration process to the United States. LaToya includes her understanding of academic discourse in the following commentary:

Academic discourse is a specific style of communication used in the academic world. It involves how we alter our communication when engaging in academic discussions. For example, we have textbooks, presentations, dissertations, research papers, and lectures. It basically is putting words into sentences together to clearly communicate complex ideas. It overall means communication.

Tran is an international student whose father earned a bachelors degree; he describes his mother as an educated homemaker. Communication between teachers and students is also highlighted by Tran:

From my understanding, Academic discourse is the language used that allows students and teachers to communicate in the class room to gain knowledge. Academic discourse can be learned through class discussions or group discussions.

Rajeev describes himself as an international student who had the opportunity to complete his last few years of high school in the United States. While Rajeev indicates a relationship between academic discourse and communication, he further includes that academic discourse represents a more exacting level of communication:

My understanding of academic discourse is a style of communication used in the academic world. For example, people use more formal language during an academic discussion, and the discussion is usually more complex. It is a way for students to explain their ideas also. The structure of academic discourse is more rigorous compared to daily communication.

These participants, like others, describe academic discourse as a form of “complex” or rigorous” communication. On this subject of students’ understanding of academic discourse, more than half of the respondents, 58%, indicated that they understood academic discourse as communication whether oral, written, or a combination of both while 24% of students understood academic discourse as writing using the language of the academy. Herein lies one challenge and discrepancy with academic discourse. As the faculty data will later show, the results were almost directly opposite of the students’ responses for this question. On this subject of professors’ understanding of academic discourse, only 27% indicated that they understood academic discourse as communication while 46% of professors understood academic discourse as writing using the language of the academy. It is likely that one reason college students are not prepared to write using academic discourse or are not producing writing

characteristic of academic discourse is because the students and the professors have completely different understandings of what academic discourse is. In essence, the professors are expecting writing that adheres to the standards and guidelines of the academy while the students are simply trying to deliver writing that represents clear communication.

*Unfamiliarity with academic discourse.* Some students stated that they were unfamiliar with the term academic discourse to varying degrees. Aminata describes herself as a first-generation student since her mother reached her junior year in college before leaving to start a family. Regarding academic discourse, Aminata states the following:

I'm going to be honest. I've never heard the word academic discourse used, so my understanding of academic discourse would be that I know discourse means language or communicating. So, I would say my understanding of academic discourse is communicating, using your language, or writing in an academic setting or in an academic way such as using academic words or sources.

Cyndeen expresses a general uncertainty about her writing abilities and discusses a lack of confidence any time she has to submit a written assignment. In addition, Cyndeen explains:

I don't know exactly how to describe academic discourse in specific terms, but I think it is how we are supposed to write and understand things in college classes. I don't think I was ever really taught how to write with academic discourse, but I understand some things like MLA format and the different types of papers, like research papers or persuasive papers. I don't feel like I could make up a full list of rules for writing with academic discourse in mind because I don't know much about specific sentence structures or the specific words you shouldn't use in a college level paper.

Figure 4-1 below represents the collective responses of student participants on the subject of their understanding of academic discourse. After formulating and indicating their understanding of academic discourse, students were then asked about the locations students should learn academic discourse.

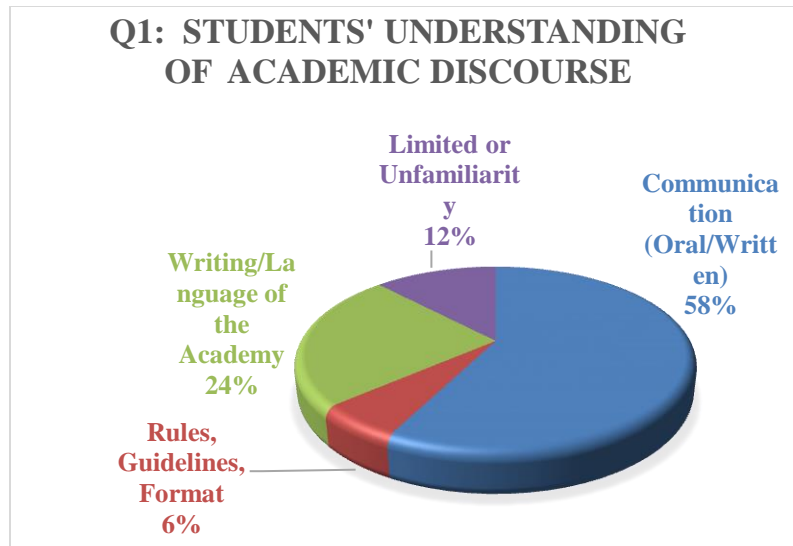


Figure 4-1 Question 1: Students' Understanding of Academic Discourse

Question 2: Describe where and when, you believe, students should learn academic discourse.

Middle and High School (Grades 6-12): 70%

Elementary School: 15%

Home: 9%

College: 6%

Emergent themes of interest from this question include students' indication that academic discourse should be learned in middle school and high school. Similarly, students' indication that academic discourse should be learned at home was also of interest.

*Academic discourse in middle school and high school.* Hakeem describes himself as a hybrid student since he is enrolled in a four-year university but taking various prerequisites at a local community college to save money. When asked where and when students should learn academic discourse, Hakeem remarks:

I think people should learn academic discourse at the beginning of middle school. At that point in time, most people generally know how to communicate with others excluding some grammatical errors and a lack of vocabulary. I believe it should be middle school because they will soon be required to speak on their own behalf on matters that can be very serious and affect their perspective or the perspective of others when doing so.

Chen is completing many of his courses at the community college with the hope of gaining admission to the university of his choice. In similar fashion, Chen indicates the following:

Students should be given the opportunity to learn academic discourse as early as late middle school or early high school. We have English classes that teach grammar and writing styles, but they should teach academic discourse in this setting to introduce students to this concept. Many people think that academic discourse is only for college, but I believe that students begin to engage in academic discourse as early as high school. It wouldn't be a bad idea to introduce and refine their skills in this area before they are immersed in it.

Margaret, whose mother is an English teacher, states that she is taking courses at the community college and living at home to save money for a study abroad program.

Moreover, on this same topic, Margaret comments:

I believe that students should start learning and using academic discourse when they are starting middle school. If you start to ease someone in and then make them continue to use academic discourse, then it will be easier for them in the long run. I did not know about academic discourse until I was a little older, and I always wished I would have learned earlier.

Likewise, Vivian is an international student whose third language is English. She indicates that she is accustomed to learning the details and conventions of languages.

Vivian also discusses time frames governing when students should learn academic discourse. She elaborates as follows:

In Vietnam, we have a saying that is the equivalent of, "You should learn the traditions and rules of the house you enter." I believe this also applicable to academic discourse. The moment a student chooses to enter an academic field in their schools or colleges, they should start learning about academic discourse. However, it also does not inconvenience them to start as soon as possible, for example, as early



as in high school. With the Australian education system, as early as year 9, or ninth grade, we were made to work on a science project and write detailed scientific reports in the style of formal academic scientific reports—complete with scientific literature reviews and discussions. In year 10, or tenth grade, we were made to work on a personal project of a topic of our own choosing, and we had to write a proposal. It included a personal statement regarding our own project, and we wrote up advertisements, budget plans, and business plans. I can say that it does benefit a student to start as soon as they can with academic and professional discourse.

Blanche describes herself as an international transplant student since she was born and reared abroad, but her entire family recently immigrated to the United States. Similarly, Blanche indicates:

I believe the perfect time for a student to learn academic discourse is in high school senior year. The reason for this is that it will be less work for both the professor and the student to go through it from scratch; at least the new student coming into a college will know what the college level demands. Also, the student will have more chances to connect and understand the professor's terminology. Of course, it is quite easy for a student to learn at a younger age, so they don't feel as concerned and less prepared as an adult.

While most of the students identified middle school and high school as the ideal location to learn academic discourse (70%), it is worth noting that some students believe that the best location to learn academic discourse is at home.

*Academic discourse at home.* From some students' standpoints, school environments are not the only locations where academic discourse can be learned.

Helen discusses her educational struggles with the traditional school environment and her desires when she was younger to be homeschooled. In addition, Helen indicates that academic discourse may be learned in the household and explains the following:

When we are younger, our minds are not able to think critically unless someone explains the process. Learning academic discourse should start in middle school. When a student is in elementary school, they may not have the capability to think at an advanced level because they are still learning the basics of education and life. In middle school, a student may start to have questions about what they have been taught in elementary school, and the process of learning academic discourse can take place. Also, academic discourse can be taught to the student by

their parents, depending on the parent and how they want the student to learn.

*The earlier, the better.* Some students indicate that academic discourse should be learned as soon as possible. For example, Diane indicates that she has experienced academic challenges throughout high school and in college. When asked where and when students should learn academic discourse, Diane comments as follows:

I think students should be first introduced to academic discourse when they're in kindergarten around the time they start reading. And, I think that there should be an intro to what the expectation of academic discourse is and how it should be used in each grade just as a kind of refresher to students because it's an important topic. Not every subject requires the same academic discourse, so it would be good to go over it each grade in writing-based courses.

Carla attends community college but hopes to transfer to a local university within the next two years. Similarly, Carla remarks:

I think grade school is the most important, and it all starts with reading. Kids hate reading which I totally understand. It's not as cool as watching tv, but a lot of teachers follow a curriculum that is like kryptonite to kids. If they made curriculum that tried to relate to them instead of learning about Shakespeare and other outdated literature, they might enhance kids' wants to read.

Figure 4-2 below represents the students' responses on the subject of when and where students should learn academic discourse.

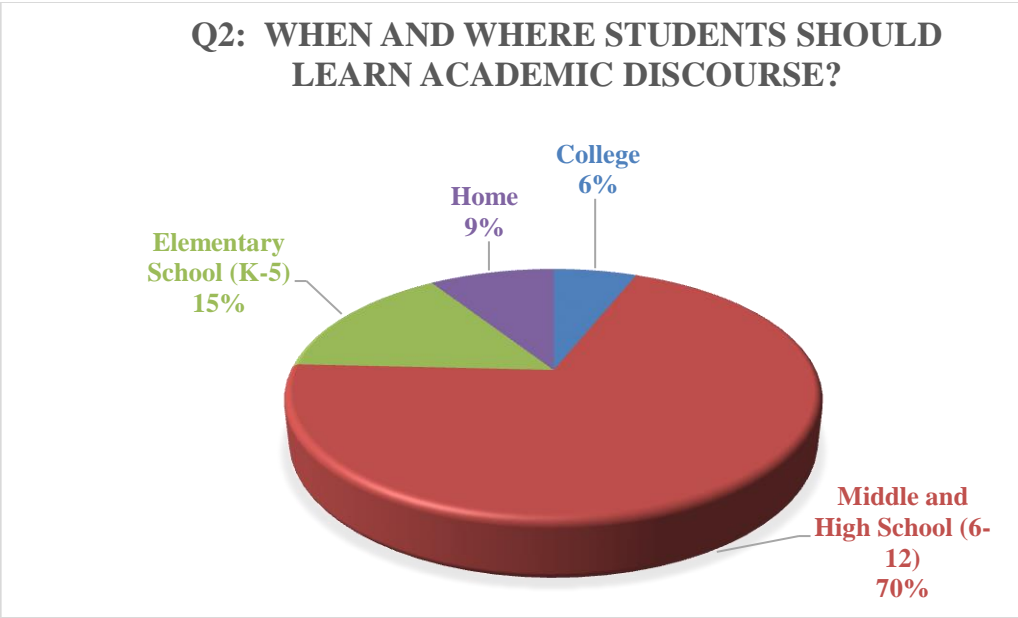


Figure 4-2 Question 2: When and Where Students Should Learn Academic Discourse

A vast majority of students (70%) indicated that academic discourse should be learned in middle school or high school. A small percentage (9%) of students suggested that students should learn academic discourse at home, and an even smaller percentage (6%) claimed that students should not learn academic discourse until college. While the majority of students indicated middle school or high school as the location where students should learn academic discourse, few, if any, middle school teachers and high school teachers know about the existence of academic discourse let alone teach this concept to students. For those who are aware of its existence, many would likely not teach it to students at these levels since many curricula are grade specific and focus on additional benchmarks and milestones such as the passing of state-regulated standardized tests.

After being asked the ideal location for learning academic discourse, students were then asked to relate where they actually learned academic discourse.

Question 3: How did you first learn academic discourse, and what did the process entail?

Middle and High School (Grades 6-12): 52%

College: 24%

Other or No Specific Location: 15%

Elementary School: 9%

*Learning academic discourse in college.* When asked to relate their personal experiences regarding how they first learned academic discourse and what the process entailed, some participants identified college as the beginning of the process. David describes himself as a hard working student who has made good grades throughout high school and college. On this topic, David states:

I first learned about academic discourse in English 1301, and it taught me how to use different forms of argumentation.

Wallace considers himself a third-generation college student since his father and grandfather earned college degrees. He believes that he did not learn academic discourse until college. Similarly, Wallace indicates:

I first learned about academic discourse in a European History course I took in my second semester of college. I did not take any sort of rhetoric class prior to said course, so I struggled with putting essays in the proper format. I gradually learned about it through trial and error and trips to the writing center at the college I was attending.

Chen, a diligent student pursuing four-year university admission, takes a few moments to think about the question a bit more before responding. He then specifies:

The first time I learned about academic discourse was my freshman year of college. The course I took was specifically called Discourse 1301. In that class, we learn about what academic discourse was and why we would need such a skill later in our lives. The problem was, the professor expected us to already know the basics of academic discourse which made it difficult for me to grasp the general concept as she moved quickly through it. I think this is why we could stand to learn about it during the early stages in high school so that students would be prepared going into college.

Some students indicate their actual location for learning academic discourse was not college but middle school and high school.

*Learning academic discourse in middle and high school.* When asked to discuss how they first learned academic discourse and what the process entailed, many participants identified middle school and high school as the beginning of the process. Sonia is a second-generation college student whose parents are both educators. As an illustration of her location where she learned academic discourse, Sonia comments:

I learned academic discourse when I was in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. We would always work on it once a week to further our vocabulary and writing styles. I really enjoyed those days when we could work on academic discourse because I really felt like I was growing and learning a lot more than I usually did in my English classes.

Cyndeen indicates that high school was the likely location she believes she learned academic discourse. In similar fashion, Cyndeen explains the following:

I think I first learned about the term, academic discourse, in this class, but I guess I learned about it a bit in my English classes in high school. I took humanities classes for my freshman and sophomore English classes. I learned about MLA format and the types of essays, but I never retained any information about sentence structure or anything like that. I feel like I can write an okay paper as it is, but I'm not very good at going back and editing my paper to make it better. My experience in those humanities classes was particularly bad because the teacher didn't teach in a style that helped me learn at all, and I pretty much had to guess what I was supposed to do. It was a pretty horrible time.

While some students indicate middle school and high school as the location they actually learned academic discourse, others indicate an earlier time period.

*Learning academic discourse in elementary school.* When asked when and where she began learning academic discourse, a few participants indicated elementary school as their location for learning. Aminata, a diligent student who is enrolled at a community college and a four-year university, states the following:

I recall that my first memory of actually discussing academic discourse would be in fourth grade if I remember correctly. I remember my teacher talking to us about writing the essay for the TAAKS test, so we discussed academic discourse. I believe that was my very first introduction of what it was and how I should be writing.

Terry is an international student who discusses initially experiencing some difficulties with transitioning to English once she moved to the United States. Similarly, Terry indicates the following:

I grew up in Taiwan, an island off the coast of China. There, I attended public school where I remember taking my first midterm in third grade. This is where I learned the appropriate studying habits and school behaviors that one needs to follow in order to be successful within the constraints of an academic environment, including using the appropriate rhetoric.

Other respondents indicate additional locations, outside of academic environments, where they believe they learned academic discourse.

*Additional locations for academic discourse acquisition.* A few respondents state that they began to learn academic discourse at very different times and in different locations. Brian refers to himself as an independent thinker and an independent learner.

On this topic, Brian states the following:

I first learned academic discourse from seeing online conversations. Many of the conversations were disrespectful of others and often times ignored reasoning. Seeing this made me want to be able to discuss things with people in a more respectful manor. I mostly learned this by seeing what I didn't like about these conversations and making sure to avoid them.

Robert describes himself as a computer geek who can spend hours at a time on the internet. On this subject, Robert explains:

Blogs. I started reading widely on queer academic subjects in high school as my interest in the subject grew. This led to me reading widely on such subjects in published works like Judith Butler's hallmark work. This then led to my expanding desire and appreciation for this type of discourse, and this broadened my engagement with the subject to include writings that problematized the initial readings I had engaged with. That led to a nuanced and more truthful understanding of the subject for myself. This exposure to academic discourse also led to my

engagement with more technical and drier writings in my own Computer Science academic career.

Figure 4-3 below represents the students' combined responses on the subject of when and where they actually learned academic discourse.

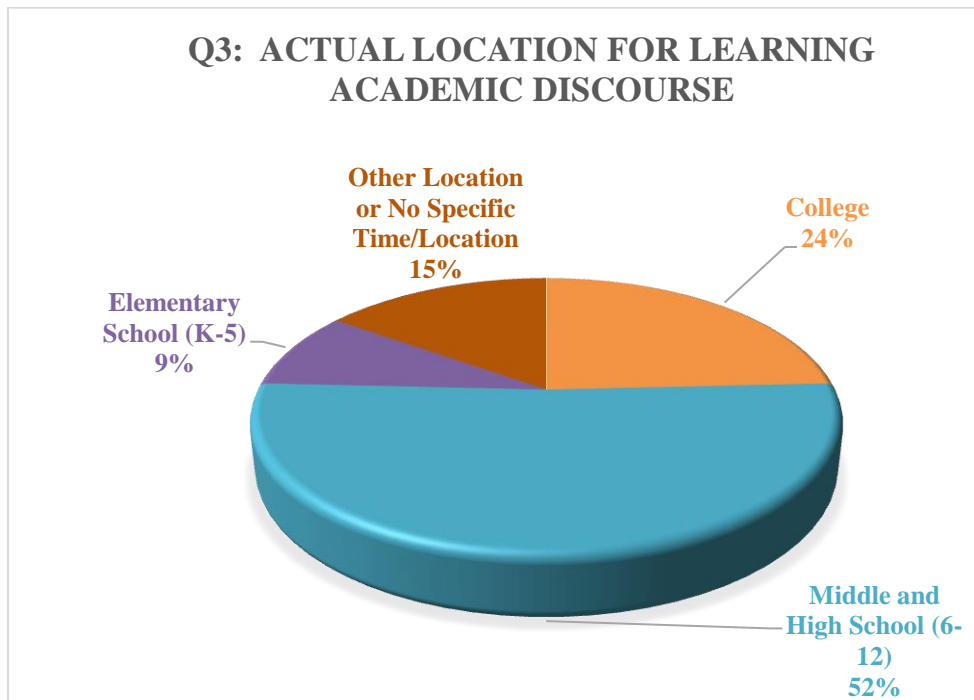


Figure 4-3 Question 3: Actual Location for Learning Academic Discourse

More than half of the interviewees, 52%, indicated learning academic discourse in middle school and high school while 24% of the respondents identified college as the time and location of learning academic discourse. The lowest percentage of respondents at 9% indicated learning academic discourse in elementary school. While only 24% of students indicated actually learning academic discourse in college, the percentage is probably much higher. As previously indicated, it is evident that many students do not have a clear understanding of academic discourse—and neither do theorists and researchers for that matter. Although it is not entirely impossible to learn academic discourse online, it is doubtful that academic discourse can be learned from online conversations. In many

cases, such conversations are infused with opinion and conjecture and lacking research. Similarly, many online conversations do not adhere to basic grammar, usage, mechanics, and structure conventions. As a result, learning academic discourse from online conversations would be improbable.

Question 4: When you enrolled in first-year writing, what were your expectations surrounding learning academic discourse?

Know Some/Learn Advanced Academic Discourse: 31%

Learn the Basics in College: 24%

Difficult and Rigorous: 18%

Low/No Expectations: 15%

Learn to Communicate Effectively: 12%

When participants were asked what their expectations were surrounding the learning of academic discourse once they enrolled in first-year composition, participants offered various sets of expectations. Some themes that emerged with respect to this question include learning the basics, learning effective communication, and experiencing academic discourse as difficult and rigorous to learn. Anthony describes himself as a decent writer and an avid reader. On this subject, Anthony remarks:

I expected to be taught the basics of how to speak, write, and present at a college level, as well as to be provided with opportunities and feedback to refine this ability.

James describes himself as a non-traditional student who returned to school after having quit and spent time in the workforce. James maintains the following:

My expectation was to learn how to effectively think and communicate to my peers in a professional setting. That's what college is for anyway. It is there to prepare you for your professional field. In most of the classes that you will take, you are surrounded by people that will be in the same or similar professional field. So, you basically get training to how they



think and feel as a large group. This will help you transition into the professional field.

Thuy was expecting to continue to memorize and recall information as she had been accustomed to doing. She explains:

When I enrolled in my first year of college, I was used to regurgitating the information that I had learned. Only when I entered some of my classes, such as Composition 1 and Physics, did I realize that I had to improve my educational language. With Physics, I had to research some of the topics to understand how to communicate with others I was learning with. I expected college to be similar to high school where I could just regurgitate information, but I was surprised at the difference in the level of communication.

In addition, Chen discusses experiencing confusion and some frustration when his expectations were not met. He indicates the following:

Since the course was named Discourse 1301, I thought it would be an introduction and an in-depth look at academic discourse. I didn't have a background in discourse, so I found it quite difficult when the professor jumped right into the middle of things. I was hoping that she'd cover the basics, but she only glossed over them expecting most students to have learned discourse previously.

*Low expectations or no expectations.* There were a few participants who indicated having very low expectations regarding learning academic discourse in the first-year composition course. Some indicated having no expectations at all. Shanique laments not being a stellar writer but having enough skill to be successful. As an illustration, Shanique states:

My expectations to learn academic discourse in my first-year college level class were pretty low due to the fact that the class was more content based, and it was a basic level college English class—even though I did come out of that English 1301 class with a few tricks up my hand about writing.

David explains that he attends community college to take time to decide what he wants to study for a career. On this subject, David explains the following:

I didn't really know what academic discourse was at the time, so I didn't have many expectations.

Cory states that he was not successful the first time he attempted first-year composition and had to re-take the courses. In addition, Corey indicates:

We didn't even touch it; we didn't talk about it at all. At that point, I had no idea what academic discourse was at all.

Figure 4-4 below represents the students' grouped responses regarding their lived experiences of their expectations surrounding the learning of academic discourse when they enrolled in first-year writing.

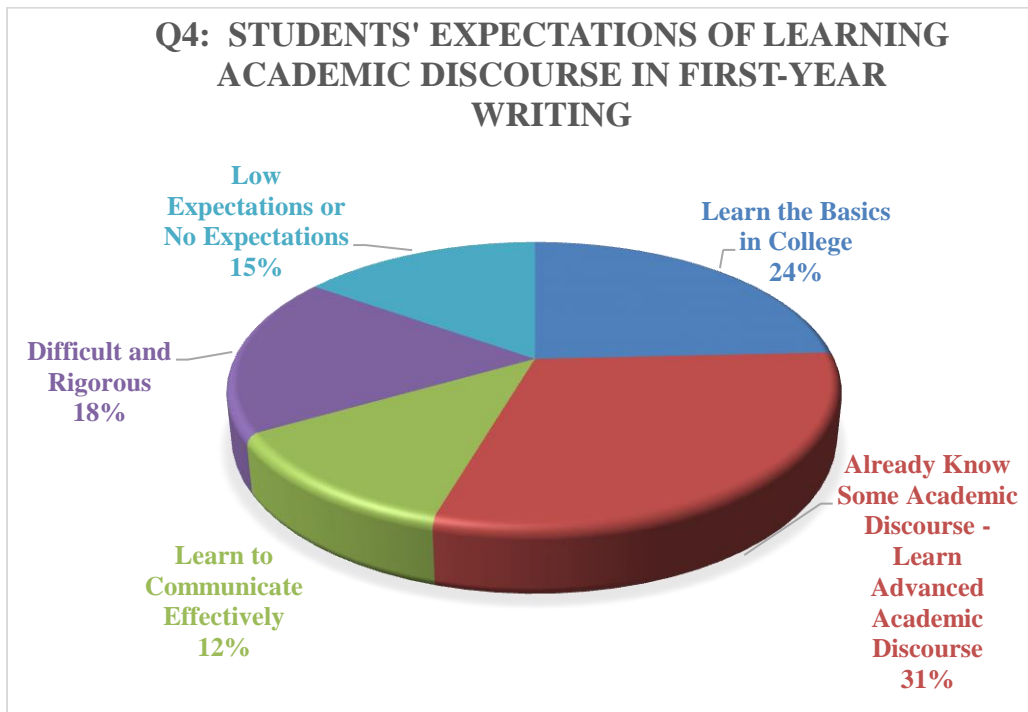


Figure 4-4 Question 4: Expectations of Learning Academic Discourse in First-Year Writing Courses

Slightly less than 1/3 of the respondents, 31%, indicated that they expected to already know some academic discourse and subsequently learn advanced academic discourse during first-year composition. Another 24% expected to learn the basics of academic discourse in college while 15% of participants had low expectations or no expectations.

The 15% of students who indicated having low expectations or no expectation speaks to recurring idea that students not only lack a clear understanding of what academic discourse is, but they also do not know what to expect with regard to what should be taught on the subject. To this end, it is integral for institutions and particularly instructors to explicitly outline what academic discourse is and what students can specifically expect from and in composition courses.

Question 5: How do you perceive your professor's or instructor's expectations surrounding academic discourse during first-year composition?

Medium Level Expectations: 52%

High Level Expectations: 21%

Teach Basics from the Beginning: 18%

Difficult to Determine/Fluctuating Expectations: 9%

*Composition professors' expectations.* Some emergent themes ranged from students perceiving that the professors had very high expectations, medium level expectations, and indeterminate to fluctuating expectations. In response to the question about faculty expectations regarding mastery of academic discourse, some participants indicated that the faculty expectations were very high. Phillip describes himself as originally an international student who later gained U.S. citizenship. As an illustration, of his professor's expectations, Phillip reveals the following:

My composition professor expected us to be more academic, professional, and confident than in any other class. And, she wanted us to do presentations and to read our papers to everyone. She expected us to use academic discourse and to understand it was not just a paper but also a speech.

Ann describes herself as a math wizard who has always had difficulty learning all of the rules and conventions of writing. Ann recalls the following:

My instructor's expectations around learning academic discourse were that it was a necessary and helpful thing to learn. The instructor wanted us to be prepared by having a solid base of knowledge. To establish this, we used many different types of essay styles—from persuasive, to research, and finally argumentative. We learned Bloom's Taxonomy and were encouraged to always ask questions when confused.

Some participants indicated that the professor had some expectations for the students regarding academic discourse. Taj expresses some relief in being able to draw from prior knowledge in the composition class. Taj, for example, explains:

During first year composition, my teacher expected the class to have a basic grasp on the technical aspects of writing. This included spelling, basic everyday grammar use, and structuring a logical argument with an intro, a few detailed paragraphs, and a conclusion. This was fair because my classmates and I started the class with this understanding and were able to build off of what we already knew.

Pedro describes his parents as entrepreneurs who attended college but did not graduate. He indicates that they stressed the importance of education very early in his life and expected him to do well in school. He believes he became a fast learner from their expectations. Pedro indicates that his composition professor had similar expectations.

Likewise, Pedro remarks:

My teacher expected us to have some basic level of academic discourse and that it would vary from student to student. But, that there was some base level of knowing how to spell and basic grammar understanding. Composition I moved very fast but opened up very fair. The teacher expected the class to have basic understanding at first but also expected that a student learn fast.

Other participants indicated that the professor had very low expectations for students.

Robert expresses general disappointment with some college courses but particularly with his composition course. For example, Robert recalls:

Expectations were low. Real engagement with the subject matter is essential to good academic discourse, and real engagement with anything academic is difficult to come by in the early years of undergrad. This isn't true for every class I've been in, but it certainly is the overall trend in my personal experience. A professor taking the subject matter seriously is infectious to some degree, and a professor expecting real

engagement with the subject at hand lends itself to the students taking the subject matter seriously. It's the power of expectations in a nutshell.

Similarly, LaToya detects a lackadaisical atmosphere and attitude in her composition course. She indicates:

My first professor's expectations for academic discourse were not as bad as I thought they would be. She expected us to do what was assigned on the syllabus which was basically to read an article from the textbook and have a discussion as a class. It was laid back, but at the same time, many did not do what was assigned which was strange to me. Looking back, I think she should've had higher expectations of us in order for us to improve our academics.

A few participants stated that the professor's expectations of academic discourse were perplexing or fluctuating. Although Vivian considers herself to be an astute and diligent student, she recalls being confused about her professor's expectations. For example, Vivian explains:

Hindsight, the professor's expectations were quite hard to grasp. It was either too high for some assignments and then too low for others. Or perhaps, it was just me finding some pieces of writing easier to work on than others, and as such, finding the expectations varied from assignment to assignment.

Figure 4-5 below represents the students' synthesized responses on their experience of their professors' expectations surrounding academic discourse.

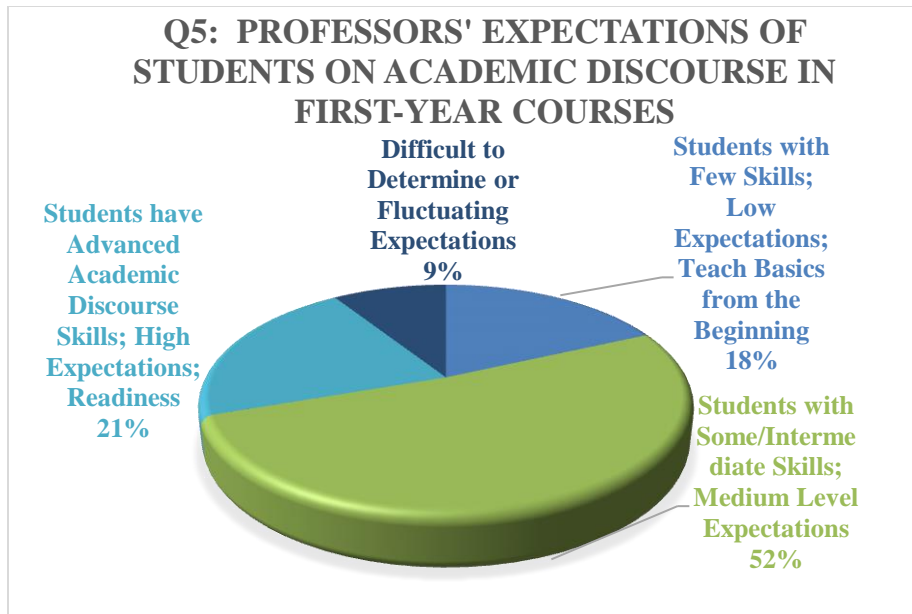


Figure 4-5 Question 5: Professors' Expectations of Students Surrounding Academic Discourse

More than half of the participants, 52%, indicated that their professors had medium level expectations meaning they expected students to have some academic discourse skills. For 9% of the respondents, it was difficult to determine the professor's expectations, or the expectations were not consistent but fluctuated. It is worth noting that not only do the definitions of academic discourse change and fluctuate, but professors' expectations surrounding academic discourse also change and vacillate as well. With little or no continuity among professors and their expectations, it is considerably difficult for students to understand and subsequently learn what is needed in terms of academic discourse.

Question 6: Discuss your experiences regarding whether or not professors expect students to have some skills in academic discourse before beginning their college-level courses.

Medium Expectations/Some Knowledge: 53%

High Expectations/Academic Readiness: 22%

Low Expectations/Teach the Basics: 22%

Unrealistic/Unclear Expectations: 3%

*Professors' expectations for academic discourse a priori.* When asked whether faculty expect students to have some skills in academic discourse before beginning their college-level courses, some participants indicated that professors have high expectations. Sanjay describes herself as an English language learner who spent an exorbitant amount of time traveling back and forth between the United States and her home country, Kuwait, during the first 16 years of her life. Sanjay expounds:

They do expect it. The written for sure is expected. They cannot grade you for your efforts; it's the content that counts. Did you write an X amount of words or not? Did you write a Y amount of pages or not? It's all about the end result. I find it frustrating because we all have different levels of learning. A student should be graded based on their efforts and progress levels.

Sonia believes that many professors expect students to have academic discourse in advance since the professors assume that the foundational information needed for their classes has already been taught before students arrive. In addition, Sonia explains the following:

I feel like a lot of teachers and professors believe that most things that are backing their course have already been taught. In English, every teacher assumes you have learned all of your proper grammar and academic discourse. Sadly, this is not always the case, and as a result, many students begin to fall behind and are unable to fully succeed in the class because they were not given a fair chance.

Other participants indicate that professors have some expectations that students have some academic discourse skills before beginning college courses. James admonishes against the practice of making sweeping assumptions about students' skills. On this subject, James indicates the following:

Yes, I think most professors expect students to have some skills in academic discourse before beginning their college courses. However,

just because you assume most of the students have some experience in academic discourse, you cannot assume that means 100% of them have experienced it. That's why I think most introductory courses start out very slow and very simple and ramp up in intensity more so than other courses later down the college line.

Pedro also acknowledges that professors should not assume that all students are or will be adequately prepared for composition class. Likewise, Pedro maintains the following:

I think it is fair for professors to expect that students have basic high school level skills in academic discourse. However, I don't think a teacher should be surprised if the student is not quite there. I only graduated high school 4 years ago, and I can vividly remember how outstanding it was how little we wrote.

Christina describes herself as a native Texan who has only attended local K-12 schools and local postsecondary schools. On this subject, Christina indicates:

I feel like most all professors expect students to have somewhat of a grasp of academic discourse when they are writing papers for class. My History professor last semester graded pretty hard on all of the essays we did, and many of the students in that class didn't speak English as their first language. So, I could see how they could run into problems with writing perfect papers.

A few respondents explained that their professors had either low expectations or no expectations regarding students' possessing academic discourse skills before enrolling in college. Corey, despite having to repeat his composition cores, expresses disappointment in the lack of expectations regarding academic discourse. Corey's explanation appears as follows:

There were no expectations regarding learning or using academic discourse for me. None of my professors cared to teach it up until Comp II.

In addition, Regina speaks to the lack of expectations among composition professors. She adds the following:

In my opinion, usually professors who teach first-year classes tend not to expect much regarding a student's skill in academic discourse. However, professors for second year and up classes tend to expect the student to at least have some familiarity with academic discourse. This is because during the first year, a student potentially has not gotten a



chance to take classes that teach academic discourse that colleges require them to take.

Figure 4-6 below represents the students' composite responses regarding their experiences of whether or not professors expect students to have some skills in academic discourse before beginning college-level courses.

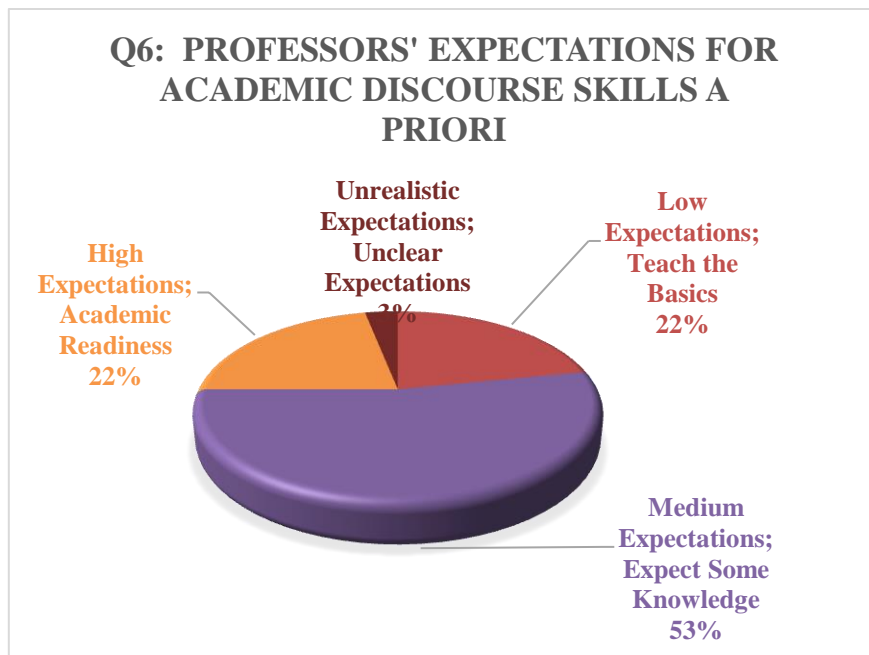


Figure 4-6 Question 6: Professors' Expectations of Academic Discourse before College Courses

More than half of the respondents, 53%, indicated that their professors expected them to have some academic discourse skills before college, and another 22% of interviewees stated that their professors had high expectations and presupposed that the students would exhibit full academic readiness. What is interesting about the responses to this question is that the professors referenced do not seem to follow best practices.

Specifically, such practices suggest that high teacher expectation is directly proportional to high student achievement. In many cases, students indicated here that teachers had

low expectations or medium level expectations. It is possible that some students could achieve higher outcomes with higher expectations among their professors, particularly in first-year composition courses.

Question 7: To what extent have the mandatory first-year composition courses been beneficial to students?

Useful: 79%

Not Useful: 15%

Unknown: 3%

Other: 3%

*Extent to which composition courses are beneficial.* Students were then asked to indicate the extent to which the mandatory first-year composition courses were beneficial to them. Most of the participant indicated that first-year composition courses are beneficial. Thuy believes that the courses are helpful. For example, Thuy explains:

Collin College requires first-year composition courses. My thoughts on the required courses are that they are useful in a student developing the ability to write papers which could be used in any field of study. Even a person studying for a science major will need composition courses. This will help them to be able to write the research papers as well as discuss with other people a topic in an academic way.

Margaret, a university student, is convinced that these courses have been useful to her.

In addition, Margaret indicates:

I currently go to Texas Tech University, and I am an Accounting major. Both English 1301 and English 1302 are required for graduation. Most majors require the two years of English classes, and then most require more major-specific classes. The classes have helped me quite a bit. After this course, I still need to take a professional writing course as well.

Nguyen discusses initially not having to take first-year composition but later, after a change in academic majors, needing to complete the course as part of the new degree plan. In similar fashion, Nguyen communicates the usefulness of first-year composition:

At Arkansas, Composition I and Composition II are required. I was engineering first semester, and we didn't have to take either. But, when I switched over to business, I had to take both. I waited a year and took Comp II in the summer because I wanted no part of Composition II there. I understand why these are required. They teach you specific things you need to know about writing certain essays that will help you in your future career.

Robert indicates that he has attended two prominent universities in two different states.

He laments, however, that the important duty of teaching students academic discourse is dissipating. Moreover, Robert states the following:

At UTD and NYU, the universities I have attended, both have required first-year writing classes. I think this is a vestige from the era of universities taking seriously their responsibility to teach students how to write, vocalize, and therefore think clearly and critically. I say vestige insofar as I think the university system has allowed this hallowed duty of theirs to fall by the wayside.

Tomaza describes herself as a good writer. She indicates that the mandatory courses are not very helpful and that prepared students should have other options:

Our college does require RHET 1302, our common rhetoric class to be taken the second semester of our freshman year. It is a requirement and prerequisite in order to take on any major courses and almost any 3000 junior level courses. My thoughts towards this issue are that this is understandable; however, I believe that students should have an option to demonstrate their knowledge in this field and be able to test out of this. This is similar to the system seen using the TSI (Texas Success Initiative). Being forced to take this class, or at the very least, bearing prerequisites behind it feels unfair.

Like Tomaza, Chen does not believe that the required composition courses are useful. In addition, Chen asserts:

At my school, Discourse I and II are required regardless of what major the student is pursuing. I think it is ridiculous that students must take these classes. A student majoring in math has little reason to take a general discourse class. They seem to be required because it's an easy way to teach broad level academic discourse to every student.

Adu describes himself as an international college student who began his college career abroad before coming to the United States. For Adu, these types of courses may not be as useful to engineers or computer science majors like himself since these careers, in his

estimation, focus less on writing skills and more on technical elements of the field.

According to Adu:

I started college outside of the United States. First-year composition courses in my specific major at my university were voluntary. Technical writing courses, however, were required. I believe this is because the computer science and engineering fields are regarded as requiring much less development in this skill. Whether or not this holds true, I am uncertain.

Figure 4-7 below represents the students' accumulated responses regarding the extent to which first-year writing courses are beneficial to them.

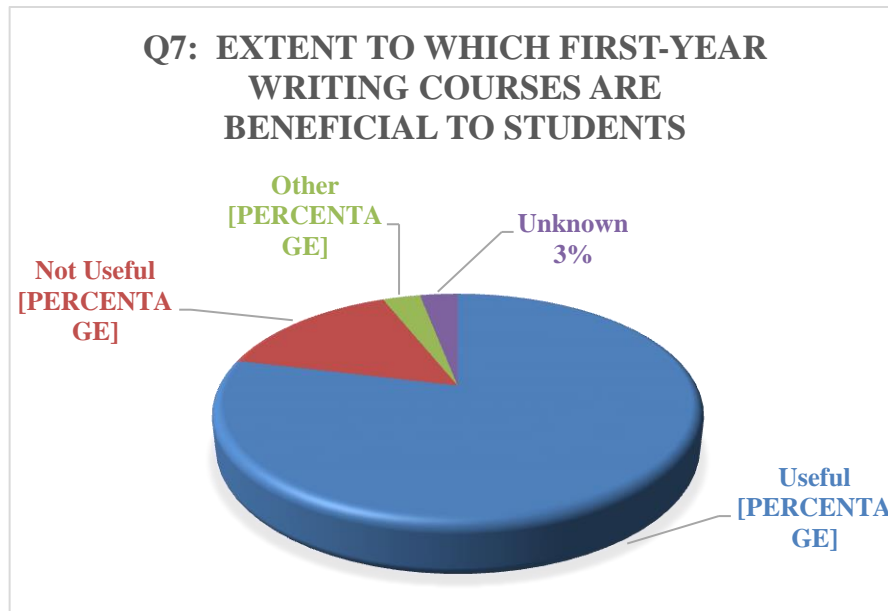


Figure 4-7 Question 7: Extent to which First-Year Writing Courses are Beneficial to Students

With regard to benefit to students, 79% of the student interviewees indicated that their first-year composition courses were useful. Another 15% of the respondents indicated that their first-year composition courses were not useful. With nearly all colleges and universities in the United States have a mandatory writing requirement, students are assessed then assigned to take college-level writing or developmental writing. What is

interesting is that there is no process in place where students can test out of the required writing courses. As a result, there is no mechanism in place to allow students to avoid taking the mandatory courses.

Question 8: Please share a story or personal experience related to your learning academic discourse. What conclusions can you draw from this experience?

Learned Beneficial Skills Relevant Outside of Course: 58%

Negative Encounters with Professors or Students: 15%

Lack of Preparation/Poor Grades: 15%

Unhelpful for Career Track: 9%

Little Focus on Academic Discourse: 3%

*Personal story on learning academic discourse.* Respondents were asked to relate a personal story regarding their learning academic discourse. The personal stories represent a range of experiences. Diane describes herself as a student who worked hard in high school to learn the ways in which college professors expected students to submit their writing only to later learn that the college professors had a different set of expectations. For example, Diane states the following:

In high school, I learned academic discourse through the use of writing an academic analysis paragraph. It is where you have an intro, and then you take a quote and break down the quote and analyze every single part of the quote. Then, you have your clincher. Since I used that method for four years, that's the most prevalent use of academic discourse in my memories, but my college English 1301 teacher basically told me to take the style of how we wrote essays in high school and throw it away. So, while I appreciate learning this method in high school, I really wish that it would line up with how to write essays in college just so I don't have to relearn new academic discourse.

Nguyen, who describes himself as a former university student who later downsized to community college, maintains:

I remember learning about Beowulf my entire senior year of high school at Plano East Senior High School, and it was the biggest waste of time in my entire life. Teachers really think the best way to mold kids into college students is to adjust our thoughts on vocabulary to that of 1500 B.C or whenever it was. Are you kidding me? I tried to participate in class and never showed my teacher disrespect regarding this, but that did not improve my discourse at all. In fact, it probably made it worse.

Terry discusses growing up abroad but later attending high school in the United States.

On this topic, Terry indicates:

Growing up in an east-Asian country, I have seen how students who grow up in an academic setting and who merely focus on their studies are actually at a detriment. Not only does this create high levels of stress within the students themselves, but in many cases, academic discourse is teaching specific material that is useless to students who are not going into that field. One sees a less extreme but similar situation in Western countries. I will present an example from my American high school. Classes on high level math and sciences were encouraged and mandatory for all students, yet I had friends and knew people going into fields that were never going to use these topics again. It was frustrating to see how much time they had to allocate in a field they clearly struggled in and were never going to use again.

Annalise mentions being a second-generation college student but first-generation homeschooled student. Regarding a personal story on academic discourse, Annalise's experience is related as follows:

I've had many experiences where I've written what I think is the best paper of my life, and I got a bad grade on it. I take them to be re-reviewed only to be told I had a good idea with poor execution in the writing. The components of good writing execution—like mechanics, flow of information, et cetera—are part of what I consider to be good academic discourse. It helped me to realize that even the best ideas won't be taken seriously without a bit of rigor in the presentation.

Muriel hopes to pursue nursing in the future; starting classes at the community college, however, seemed like a good idea. When relating a personal story, Muriel states the following:

I took an intro. philosophy class. The class was stimulating, and the professor was engaging. This professor stressed academic discourse. Still, based on class discussions, I could tell I was one of the few students seriously engaging in the subject matter. When I realized this, I started being less vocal in discussions as I didn't want to subject

uninterested students in, what I thought would be, interesting digressions that were related to the subject matter but not directly the subject matter. I didn't want to be *that student* asking the weird questions when everyone else clearly just wanted the class to be over. It made me disappointed with the promise of such a class.

Figure 4-8 below represents the students' joint responses regarding relating a personal story or experience about their learning academic discourse.

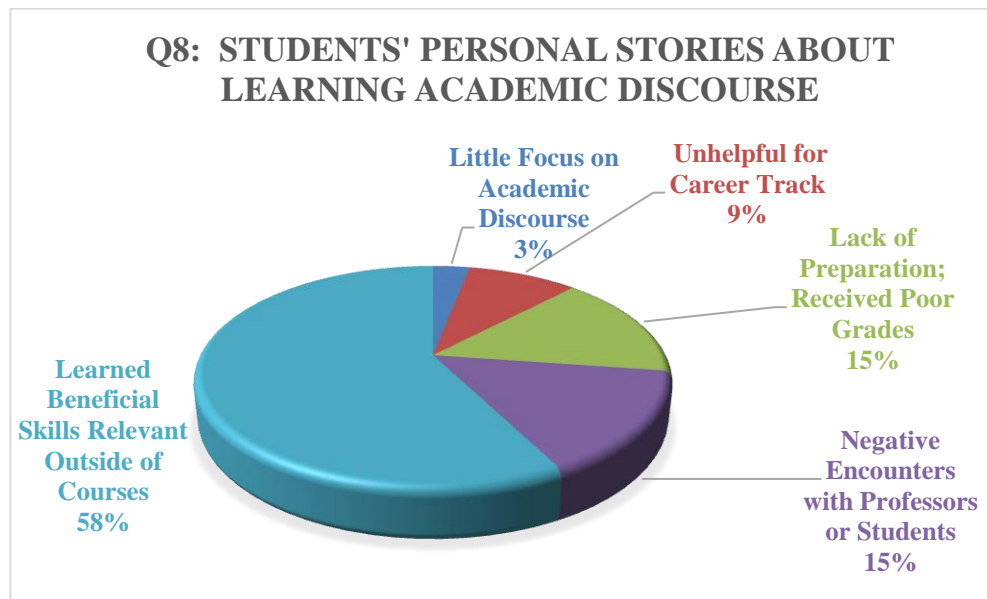


Figure 4-8 Question 8: Students' Personal Stories about their Learning Academic Discourse

Nearly 60% of the personal stories related about learning academic discourse included learning skills that were also relevant and beneficial outside of the first-year composition courses. For 15% of respondents, the personal stories about academic discourse included experiences about being poorly prepared for their writing tasks and receiving low academic scores. The smallest percentage of respondents at 3% related that there was little focus on academic discourse in their school experiences. Although students indicated wide experiences within their personal stories regarding academic discourse acquisition, it is worth noting that few of the actual instances were directly related to the

general, albeit contested, concept or definition of academic discourse. This further reiterates the notion that students have a vague understanding, at best, of this notion of academic discourse.

Question 9: How do you see yourself today in terms of academic discourse acquisition?

Confident and Experienced/Better Understanding: 61%

Moderate Changes/Positive: 36%

Difficult to Assess or Determine: 3%

*Personal assessment of academic discourse acquisition.* Respondents were then asked to rate their level of confidence using and understanding academic discourse. Some participants indicated experiencing confidence as well as having a better understanding of academic discourse as a result of their courses and academic experiences. Taj, a sophomore at the community college, connects academic discourse to professionalism and growth outside the classroom. For example, Taj indicates the following:

I'm really confident, and I've learned that while academic discourse may be useful within a university or a school, I find it is more important to go out into the real world and practice a similar level of professionalism in areas outside of the classroom. I will always take the opportunity to enhance my personal and professional identity outside of the classroom.

Angelina describes herself as a second-generation college student who is skilled in both writing and math. When conducting a personal assessment of academic discourse, Angelina explains:

I feel like I have acquired academic discourse skills through the various classes that I have taken during my time at university. Even a history course that I took taught me about new forms of citations, proper essay writing in the historical setting, and which perspective to use. I have seen the difference in expectations from that class to formal lab reports in my science courses which, I believe, has made my skills better-rounded.



Additional respondents indicated some positive changes or moderate improvement—with additional learning required—in their acquisition of academic discourse. Doris has been attending community college as a bridge to a four-year university. As an illustration of her personal assessment, Doris states:

I think that I have the basics of academic discourse down well, but I struggle sometimes with more specific discourse in my major. There are times when what I write and talk about don't always fit the mold of my field, but in general, I could survive in the academic world. We shouldn't strive to produce numerous mediocre academic discourse students but a smaller number of quality discourse students that know everything pertaining to their areas.

George describes himself not as an exceptional writer but as one who is competent.

Likewise, George indicates:

I have definitely advanced in my years of college. I would not say I'm an exceptionally skilled writer. I'm competent enough but not great. Although I'm not great, I wouldn't say those classes went to waste. In fact, I would say it's great that I did take them so I could at least be competent.

On this issue, Shanique explains her experiences as follows:

That's why I go to college. Every day I go, I gain just a little bit more knowledge on this journey called life. Every now and then, I pick up a book—philosophy and science books are preferred for the simple fact that they make you think while reading them. I know I have more to learn. Going to college helps me do that.

Figure 4-9 below represents the students' associated responses regarding how their experiences shape their current vantage points of academic discourse acquisition. Sixty-one percent of the student respondents indicated that they were confident and experienced in their current levels of academic discourse. Only 3% of the interviewees indicated that it was difficult to assess or determine their current learning levels in relation to academic discourse.

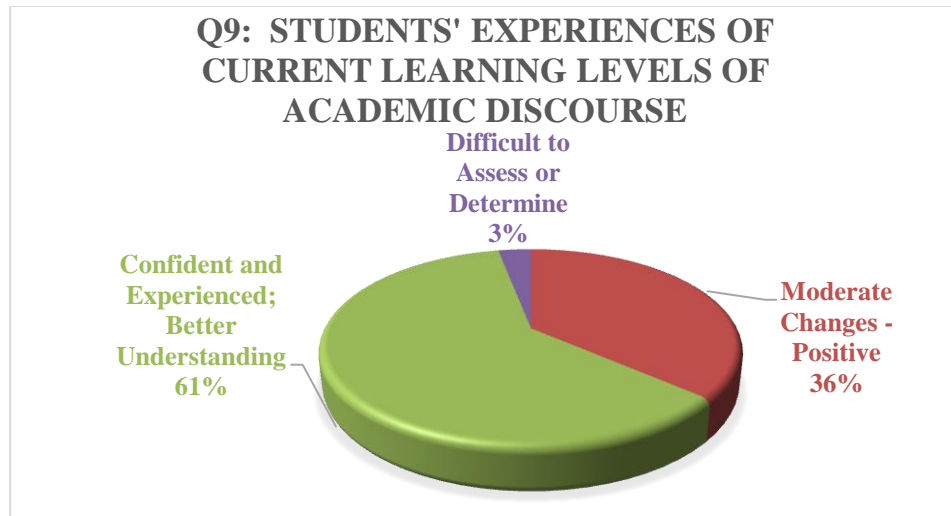


Figure 4.9 Question 9: How Students See Themselves Today Regarding  
Academic Discourse

It is interesting that the vast majority of students believe that they are more confident and experienced in the area of academic discourse and that they have a better understanding of what academic discourse entails. It is likely that the composition courses, along with other college courses and professors' explicit expectations, help to shape and improve students' academic discourse skills over time.

Question 10: To what extent have the first-year composition courses been beneficial in assisting you, as a student, with writing academic discourse for subsequent college courses?

Very/Extremely Helpful: 46%

Helpful: 27%

Not Very Helpful: 12%

Somewhat Helpful: 9%

Neutral or Undecided: 3%

Not Helpful at All: 3%

*Composition courses and writing academic discourse for other courses.* When asked to what extent first-year composition courses have been beneficial in helping students write academic discourse for other courses, participants indicated their experiences and rationale for their responses. Forrest describes himself as a first-generation college student and third-generation entrepreneur since his grandfather started his family's first construction company. Forrest indicates, "It has toned my writing, speaking, and evaluating skills."

Chance describes himself as a temporary international student whose goal is to someday obtain U.S. citizenship. He considers his composition courses to be useful for additional courses. Likewise, Chance explains the following:

Those courses are very helpful for every other course we take at the college. To write reports or to write an email to your professor, you have to have good writing skills. I have used the skills I learned in my composition courses for every other course I have taken.

Similarly, Angelina views the composition courses she has taken as useful in various other college courses she has taken. She describes her experience as follows:

My first-year composition course has been beneficial in teaching me the important aspects of academic discourse. I have used these skills in my electives, mandatory core classes, and lab courses. As a student, knowledge of the resources that accompany academic discourse has also added to my ability to gain knowledge through reputable sources and databases.

Linda discusses her move from conducting research on general online websites to conducting scholarly research as. In addition, Linda expounds as follows:

Writing classes have really helped me. Back in high school, I would do all my research on Google to find what I needed, but in college, I did not know that there were better sources such as scholarly articles. I had not learned this until coming here to Collin. Without being taught this new way of improving my papers, I would not have gotten the grades that I had hoped for. This is not only just in my composition classes; it is also in any other class such as Psychology. In my composition classes, I first

learned how to find those journals, and it helped me in my other classes as a whole when I had to write academic papers.

Some participants indicated that composition classes have not been very helpful in their other courses. Regina is convinced that the information she learned in her composition courses has not been very useful outside of those courses. For example, Regina states the following:

I don't think it the classes were really beneficial as in they did not teach me anything that I've used to write for other subsequent courses. However, they did teach me how to tackle assignments I do not feel any motivation to work on: Just put your fingers to the keyboards or grab a pen, and just scribble until it has some semblance to what you are supposed to write. It would help you get into gear to work on the assignments.

Despite taking several composition courses, Hakeem believes that the course information has not been beneficial to him. Moreover, Hakeem explains:

After I had finished 1301 and 1302, I do not think I took much out of those courses because I took the English 3 and English 4 advance placement courses in high school which are equivalent to 1301 and 1302 in college. Therefore, both of those courses, I think, were a nice refresher, but I don't think I learned a lot of new material or concepts.

Figure 4-10 represents the students' cumulative responses surrounding the extent to which first-year composition courses have been beneficial in assisting them with writing academic discourse for subsequent college courses.

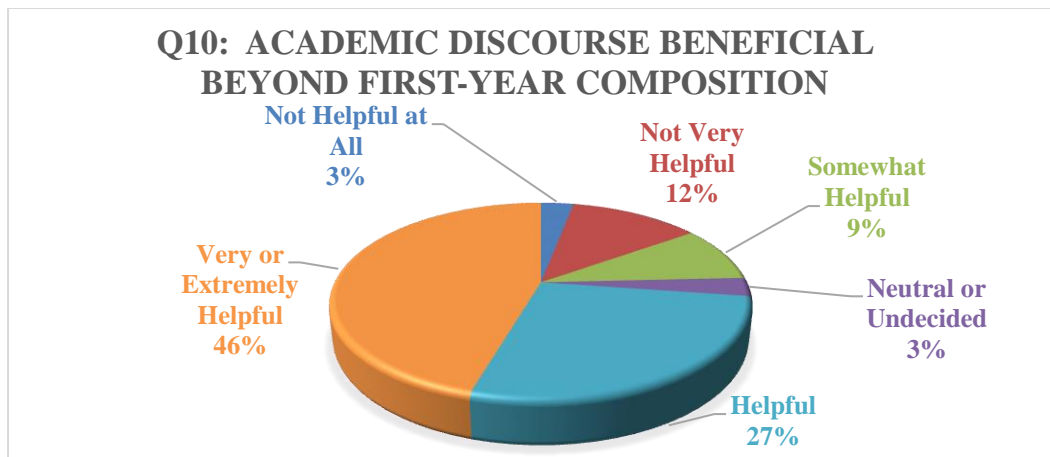


Figure 4-10 Question 10: Academic Discourse Beneficial in Courses  
Beyond First-Year Writing

Combined, 73% of respondents indicated that academic discourse was either helpful or very helpful beyond first-year composition. Combined, only 15% of student participants revealed that academic discourse was not helpful at all or not very helpful beyond first-year composition. Although the majority of respondents indicated some level of benefit, the 15% of students who stated that academic discourse was not helpful beyond their composition courses cannot be ignored. This suggests that there is population of students who generally experience little to no benefit of from the required writing courses. Even though colleges and universities maintain this universal requirement, it is likely that a substantial percentage of students are expending tuition, time, and effort but are not reaping any benefits from the courses.

Question 11: To what extent are the freshman English courses beneficial outside of the academic environment and in such situations as students' employment or careers, in other professional environments, or in social environments?

Beneficial: 55%

Very/Extremely Beneficial: 33%

Somewhat Beneficial: 9%

Not Beneficial at All: 3%

*Academic discourse beneficial outside of school.* When participants were asked to what extent freshman composition courses are beneficial outside an academic environment, some respondents indicated that the courses are very beneficial. Despite his technical focus, Chance relates that composition courses are beneficial outside of the school environment. For example, Chance states the following:

For me as an electrical engineering student, I think that these courses are the foundation to be a successful engineer in the future. These courses help me to learn how to communicate with my co-workers in a professional way.

Yuwak, who relates that English is his fourth language, agrees that composition courses are beneficial outside of the academic environment. Likewise, on this subject, Yuwak indicates:

The freshman English courses teach students better English and teach them how to read, write, talk, and think. It helps students to stand confidently in professional environments or in social environments.

In addition, Wallace suggests that the composition courses have been beneficial in quite expansive ways. He explains as follows:

I find that my freshman English courses have been enormously helpful in every aspect of my life. It has aided me in everything from academic papers, to cover letters, to texts I sent to friends. My freshman English courses have completely changed the way I write, and they have shaped my development as a person far more than I ever thought they would.

Unlike Wallace, however, Carla has an opposing perspective. When asked to what extent the freshman English courses are beneficial outside of the academic environment, Carla indicates:

Slim to none. Our biggest paper that took half the year was over cell phone addiction and how it's harmful to your health. The teacher was so thrilled about this topic because she just wanted to open our eyes, I

guess, on how our generation was terrible about using our phones. It'd be different if we had an essay about how college kids struggle finding jobs or something that might help us actually grow and help our careers.

Figure 4-11 below represents the students' cumulative responses surrounding the extent to which first-year composition courses been beneficial outside of the academic environment and in such situations as students' employment or careers, in other professional environments, or in social environments.

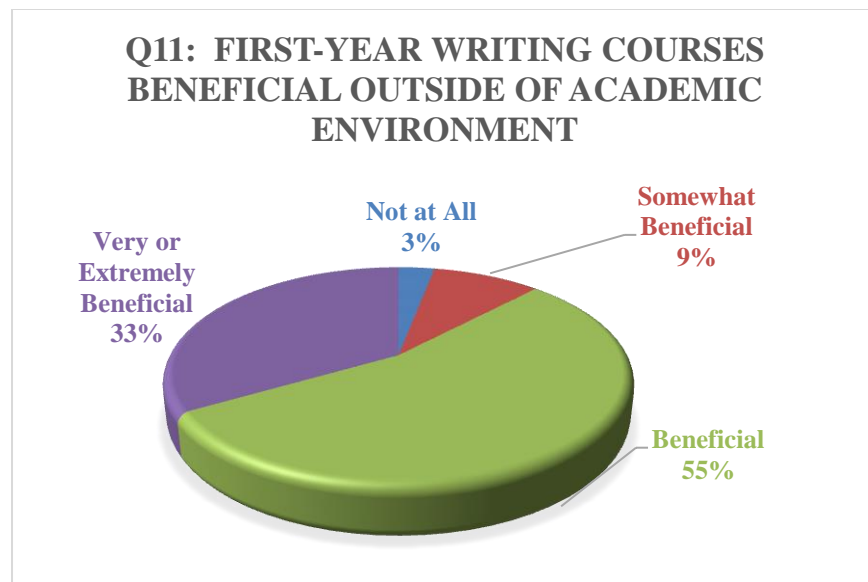


Figure 4-11 Question 11: First-Year Writing Courses Beneficial Outside of the Academic Environment

Combined, 88% of respondents expressed that first-year writing courses are beneficial or very beneficial outside of the academic environment. Only 3% of the participants stated that first-year writing courses are not beneficial at all beyond the academic environment. It is worth noting that most of the respondents agreed that the composition courses were valuable outside of academia. It is interesting that some of the respondents initially did not view the composition as being necessary but did acknowledge that what they learned within the classes has benefitted them outside of academia. It may be worth considering

how departments and instructors can tailor the content to be more helpful for students within the academic environment as well.

Question 12: Should first-year writing courses be mandatory? Why or why not?

Mandatory for All: 67%

Voluntary/Not Mandatory: 21%

Mandatory for Low Scorers or Ill-Prepared: 9%

Discipline Specific Writing Courses Only: 3%

*Mandatory or voluntary.* When asked whether first-year writing courses should be mandatory, several participants responded affirmatively. Helen describes herself as good at creative writing and interested in a healthcare profession. She also asserts that composition courses should remain a requirement at the college level. For example,

Helen explains the following:

First-year writing courses should be mandatory because they allow individuals to develop their writing skills. Through these courses, an individual can gain knowledge on how to properly write different types of essays and papers. Also, it allows an instructor, who has experience in the writing field, to assist students in improving their skills. Writing courses can assist a student in writing resumes, developing an argument, and communicating with others.

Lauren, who considers herself a good writer because of her mother, acknowledges the following:

Yes, I think this should be mandatory with a capital M. You don't just write papers in English. It is almost limiting students' full potential by not giving them the service of making it mandatory the first year. I probably would have made higher grades in other courses had I taken English first. It's the same concept like math classes. You don't jump to trigonometry if you have never taken algebra.

Ann has a very different but innovative viewpoint on this subject. She clarifies her perspective as follows:



If the student cannot demonstrate proper academic discourse, I believe that it is 100% necessary for written courses to be mandatory. This is because without this knowledge, they do not have the necessary information to succeed in academics. I am all for students testing out of this though.

Some participants indicated that composition courses should not be mandatory. Malik is a self-proclaimed decent writer whose academic pursuits will not require a writing-intensive curriculum. On this topic, Malik states, “No, I believe that they can be substituted for writing practice in other classes.” Juan agrees with Malik that the courses should not be mandatory. He further describes his educational pursuits as vocational in nature. Similarly, Juan indicates the following:

Absolutely not. I'm sure I'm just being biased. We spend money on classes, and they just flat out are not worth it. Composition I can be a great class to really figure yourself out in, but instead of doing that, you have to spend \$ 90 on three books you won't read and try to relate to these topics you have zero interest in.

Figure 4-12 below represents the students' summative responses surrounding whether or not first-year composition courses should be mandatory along with rationale based on their lived experiences.

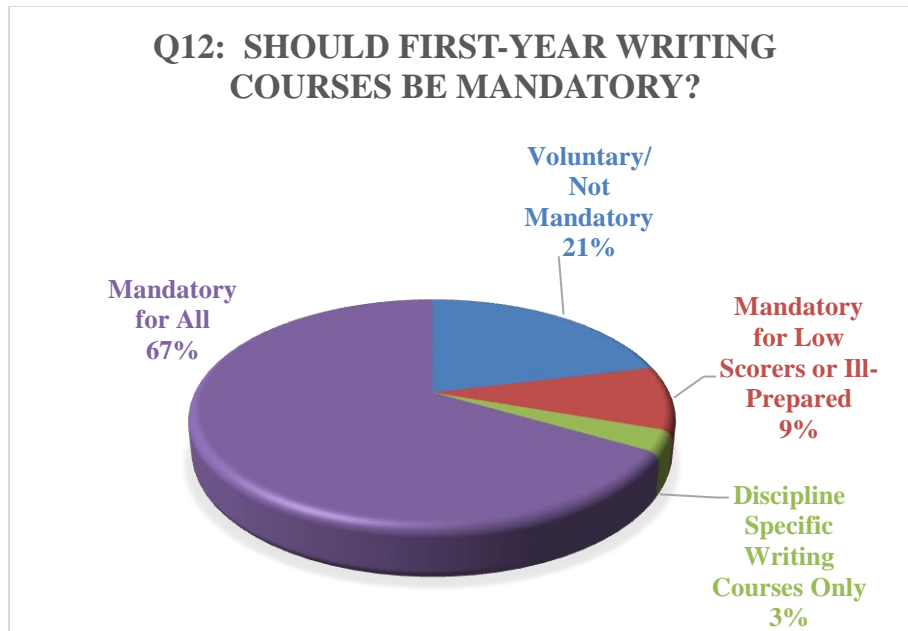


Figure 4-12 Question 12: Should First-Year Composition Courses be Required?

Nearly 70% of the student interviewees stated that first-year writing courses should be mandatory for all students while 21% expressed that the courses should be voluntary. Another 3% of respondents indicated that the writing courses should be discipline specific as opposed to general writing courses for all students. In my original hypothesis, I predicted that the majority of students would disagree with the universal requirement of composition courses. The responses from this question prove this element of my hypothesis to be overwhelmingly false. As a 20-year educator, it is most surprising to me that I was incorrect about this assumption. It is possible that misinterpreted students' ill-preparation for college-level writing and unfamiliarity with academic discourse as frustration, reluctance to perform, and resentment for being required to take first-year composition courses. It is entirely possible that other composition professors and instructors are also misinterpreting and misjudging students similarly as well.

Question 13: Before we conclude the interview, please discuss or add any additional information that we might have overlooked or not covered regarding this topic.

Academic Considerations: 52%

No Additions: 33%

Employment and Career Considerations: 6%

Language Barriers/Learning Barriers: 6%

Discipline-specific Writing Courses: 3%

*Additional information.* When asked to discuss any additional information that was not covered during the interview, some themes emerged ranging from academic considerations to language concerns. Muriel, a self-named technology guru, predicts that the future of postsecondary education lies in the STEM disciplines. Specifically, Muriel included the following:

My experience with college to some degree has been a slow realization that the humanities aspect of it is dead or nearly dead.

Sanjay, an English language learner, raises integral concerns regarding language skills and language barriers. On this subject, Sanjay maintains:

People with different language skills should be given extra consideration. They are trying to express their thoughts and, at the same time, give good technical proof. It's very hard to tackle both from my experience. I have worked very hard on myself by reading books and googling words or ideas. Others may not have the chance. Of course, I find that I could be a better communicator. Being bilingual makes me need assessments or critiquing to what I'm doing wrong or on ways to become better.

Tomaza raises the concern about mandatory composition courses in relation to students with learning disabilities. On this subject, Tomaza explains:

I feel like Rhetoric classes may have not taken learning disabilities into account. As someone who has a learning disability, it is tough to catch up where my base knowledge may lack compared to my peers. I think that people such as myself may have benefitted from doing an additional writing course, like remedial, though I have no other way to justify it.

In addition, Jerald believes that the current execution of required composition courses lacks profound teaching of academic discourse. On this topic, Jerald indicates:

My belief is that first-year writing courses are important but are poorly implemented and lack the critical level needed to properly instruct students. As they stand right now, they merely serve as a platform to practice presentations with little constructive feedback. They leave students with a basic sense of academic discourse but nothing beyond that, and they do not actively work to resolve the problem of the lack of professionalism in young adults.

Figure 4-13 below represents the students' synthesized responses surrounding adding additional experience or information before concluding the interview.

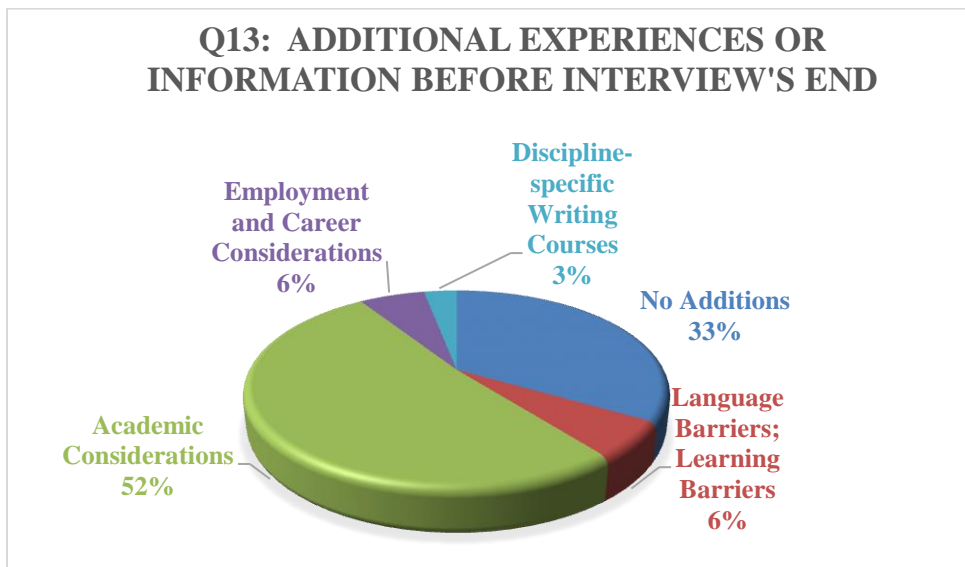


Figure 4-13 Question 13: Additional Experiences or Information before the Interview's End

Upon closing the interview, more than half of the respondents added academic considerations as additional information to include. Likewise, 6% discussed employment and career considerations while another 6% of the participants highlighted language barriers and learning barriers in their concluding remarks. A point of interest regarding this inquiry lies in learning disabilities. As an educator, I spent seven years as a high

school English instructor. During that time, numerous students had individualized education plan (IEPs) who had learning disabilities. Once I transitioned to teaching college, I never received any formal documentation or requests regarding students with learning disabilities until last year. This documentation represents one in the 13 years I have taught at the college level. I have always wondered what happens to students with learning disabilities once they transition from high school to college. It is worth noting that one student I taught in high school with an IEP did take one of my college classes a few years later. The student, however, presented no documentation for accommodations while in the college course and functioned as if none were needed.

### *Professors' Responses*

Question I: What is your understanding of academic discourse?

Communication: 27%

Writing/Language of the Academy: 46%

Rules and Format: 27%

*Understanding of academic discourse.* Instructor Ng describes himself as having a fulfilled 23-year career in education. He adds, however, that he has only been teaching at the college level for 10 of those years. When asked what his understanding of academic discourse is, Instructor Ng explains, "Academic discourse is the language of our professional world." Similarly, Professor Kenn indicates that he is a tenured professor who has been teaching college for 31 years. He describes academic discourse as follows:

Academic discourse is the professional process utilized to communicate in academia and in the career field. Academic discourse is the common language, especially in one's profession, by which we share ideas and transmit knowledge. There is commonality among colleagues, and our medium is academic discourse.

Figure 4-14 below represents the composite responses of student participants on the subject of their understanding of academic discourse.

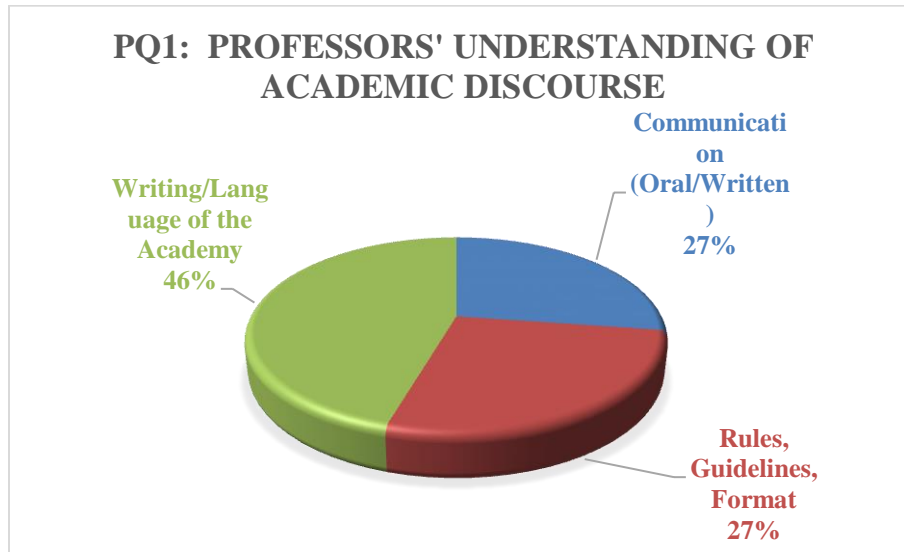


Figure 4-14 Question 1: Professors' Understanding of Academic Discourse

In comparison to the faculty, 58% of student respondents associated academic discourse with communication while only 27% of professors associated academic discourse with communication. Similarly, 27% of students indicated that academic discourse refers to the writing and language of the academy while 46% of professors indicated that academic discourse refers to the writing and language of the academy. Student respondents were twice as many connected academic discourse with communication than did professors, but more professor respondents connected academic discourse with the writing and language of the academy. This fundamental difference between students' understanding and faculty members' understanding of academic discourse is very significant. The discrepancy demonstrates nearly polar opposite understandings between the two groups of what academic discourse is. Understanding the magnitude of this difference might also assist professors in addressing and potentially designing better ways to assist students in the acquisition of academic discourse skills.

Question 2: Describe where and when, you believe, students should learn academic discourse.

Elementary School: 46%

Middle and High School (Grades 6-12): 36%

Home: 18%

Emergent themes of interest from this question include professors' indication that academic discourse should be learned in middle school and high school as well as in elementary school.

*Student location for academic discourse.* Dr. Davis has taught numerous English and Composition courses as well as some literature and developmental writing courses for almost two generations. When asked when and where students should learn academic discourse, Dr. Davis remarks:

I have been in my profession for 36 years. Each year, I have witnessed a steady decline in students' writing skills and in their comprehension skills also. A person would assume that increased technology translates into increased academic skills, but it seems as if the opposite is the case these days. With the decline in skills, student really need to start learning academic discourse as early as possible; I would go as far as suggesting learning it when they begin school. Kindergarten or first grade is not too early; they need to start as soon as possible.

Figure 4-15 below represents the professors' collective responses on the subject of when and where students should learn academic discourse.

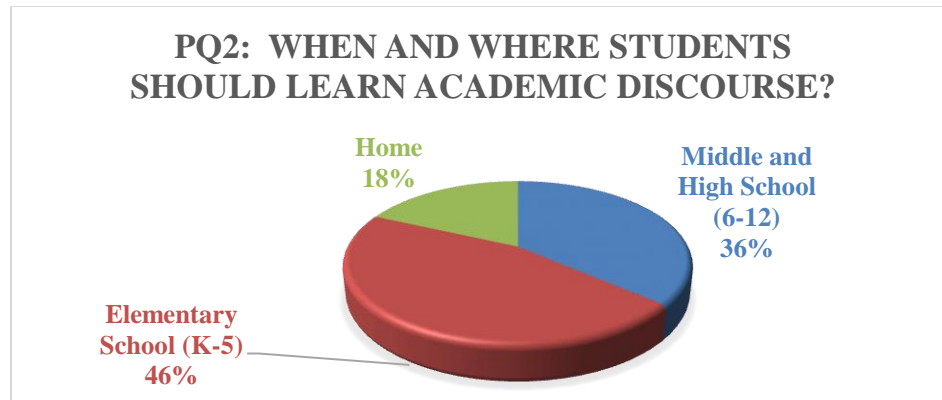


Figure 4-15 Question 2: When and Where Students Should Learn Academic Discourse

Almost half of the respondents, 46%, indicated that students should learn academic discourse in elementary school while 36% stated that middle school and high school are the preferred locations. Another 18% of instructor respondents indicated home as the location for learning academic discourse. Comparatively speaking, a majority of student interviewees (70%) identified middle school and high school as the time frame and place students should learn academic discourse whereas 46% of faculty indicated middle school and high school. Although 15% of the students identified elementary school as the place to learn academic discourse, an overwhelming 46% of the instructors indicated elementary school. Some instructors commented on the rapid rates in which today's students can learn information due to the availability of technology. It seems as if some faculty members are assuming that rapid information transfer among digital natives somehow translates into rapid learning rates among this population. Other professors commented that today's students are smarter than they were at the same age; subsequently, the professors might assume that a smarter generation of students can also learn information earlier and at much faster rates than previous generations.



Question 3: How did you first learn academic discourse, and what did the process entail?

Middle and High School (Grades 6-12): 46%

College: 27%

Elementary School: 18%

Home: 9%

*Actual location for learning academic discourse.* Dr. Jackson is a retired military

Veteran who started a second career in teaching and education 14 years ago. Dr.

Jackson describes first learning academic discourse as follows:

For me, learning academic discourse probably started as soon as I started to read and write. My dear mother was a homemaker who later went back to school and became a teacher. Looking back, she was always a teacher at heart because she would sit my brothers and sisters and I down at the table after supper, and we would practice our penmanship, spelling, and writing. We memorized poems and passages from the classics, and she taught us how to write well. We wrote book reports every week during the summers. A couple of years ago, I found one of the reports I wrote. I was a young girl at the time—still in grammar school—when I wrote it, but it would rival any current college student's writing.

Figure 4-16 below represents the professors' associated responses on the subject of when and where they actually learned academic discourse.

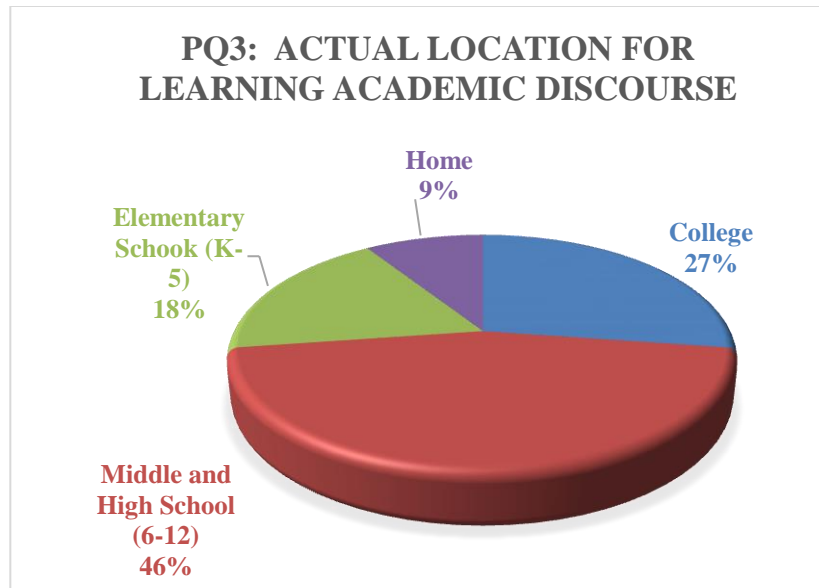


Figure 4-16 Question 3: Actual Location for Learning Academic Discourse

When asked when and where they actually learned academic discourse, 52% of students indicated middle and high school compared to 46% of professors indicating the same response. Moreover, 24% of students and 27% of instructors indicated learning academic discourse in college. Countless students assume that the move from senior year of high school to freshman year of college is one proverbial step and that the first year of college is a mere extension of 12th grade. For most students, such is not the case. It is also worth noting that while both students and instructors indicated middle and high school as the preferred location to learn academic discourse, the writing tasks of the schoolroom may be inadequate for the tasks required in the college or university course. The responses from both students and faculty indicate a murky understanding of academic discourse in both groups. If possible, it would be preferable for students to begin learning the language of the academy in high school, but research and professors' commentary indicate that students generally do not arrive to college with the academic

discourse skills needed. Moreover, what students consider academic discourse might be better categorized as general communication skills.

Question 4: When students enroll in first year writing, what, in your opinion, are their expectations around learning academic discourse?

Know Some/Learn Advanced Academic Discourse: 46%

Learn the Basics in College: 27%

Low/No Expectations: 18%

Learn to Communicate Effectively: 9%

*Students' expectations of learning academic discourse in first year composition.*

Respondents were then asked about students' expectations when they enroll in first-year composition courses. Dr. Collins has been teaching composition courses for seven years. He states that he returned to the classroom after an extensive career in journalism. Dr. Collins explains:

Let me see. It's hard to tell. Some of the students really understand what's expected of them, but most are pretty clueless. It's been my experience that students are coming to college with fewer refined writing skills. They can't write as well as they should, so they come expecting to be spoon-fed basic skills that they should've already learned. They google everything else; you would think they'd google how to write a decent sentence. It gets pretty depressing some days. I had an assignment recently—pretty simple for English 1302—and over half the class just copied and pasted information from other sources with no citations. Of course, *Turn It In* caught it, but over 50% of the class flat out plagiarized. The most shocking part about it is that they were flabbergasted when they got failing grades. How do you pass 1301 pulling those kind of stunts? Seriously? How did they even get to 1302? They're really clueless. Most of them don't seem to want to really learn anything. They just want you to give them A's for breathing. Most of them have just stopped coming to class altogether. I guess I'm a bad instructor for acknowledging the elephant in the room. The days of students wanting to learn to write better are long gone. So, to answer the question, I don't think they have any real expectations about learning academic discourse. They just want to do the bare minimum and get an A they didn't work for. Sorry, that's been my experience.

Figure 4-17 below represents the students' grouped responses regarding their lived experiences of their expectations surrounding the learning of academic discourse when they enrolled in first-year writing.

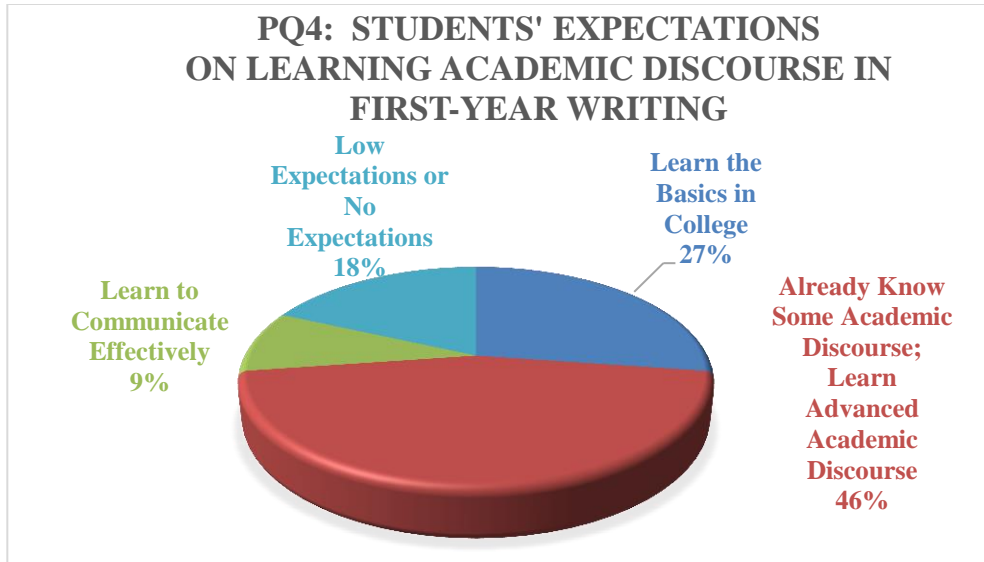


Figure 4-17 Question 4: Students' Expectations on Learning Academic Discourse

In comparison to faculty, 31% of student respondents revealed that they expected to already have some knowledge and to learn more advanced elements of academic discourse while 46% professors revealed that students expected to have some skills and learn advanced academic discourse. In addition, 24% of students and 27% of professors indicated that students expected to learn the basics of academic discourse in college. Similarly, 15% of students and 18% of instructors revealed that students had either low expectations or no expectations surrounding learning academic discourse in first-year composition courses. At the same time, 52% of students revealed that the professors expect the students to have some academic discourse skills, and 82% of professors indicated that they expect students to already have some academic discourse skills in

first-year writing courses. In similar fashion, 75% of students experienced their professors' expectations of students having intermediate or advanced skills in academic discourse before beginning college-level classes while 100% of instructor respondents expected students to have intermediate or advanced skills in academic discourse before beginning college-level classes. In my original hypothesis, I presumed that students expect to be taught academic discourse upon entering the college or university, through their coursework, in general, and specifically in the required composition courses. The responses from both faculty and student prove this element of my hypothesis to be false. After my first few semesters of teaching composition, I noticed that fewer and fewer students arrived to class prepared to write using the language of the academy. I misinterpreted their ill-preparation or lack of preparation for the course as an expectation to be taught academic discourse. Subsequently, I began explicitly teaching students academic discourse and intentionally weaving academic discourse lessons into the course curriculum. This decision proved to be beneficial for students and improved their class performance and eventually improved their grades in the course. The impetus for the decision, however, was based on my miscalculated assumptions about the students. I would venture to say that I am surely not the only professor who has made similar decisions—albeit student-centered—based on incorrect presumptions.

Question 5: Please describe your expectations of students regarding academic discourse and first year composition.

Students have Advanced Academic Discourse Skills/High Expectations: 18%

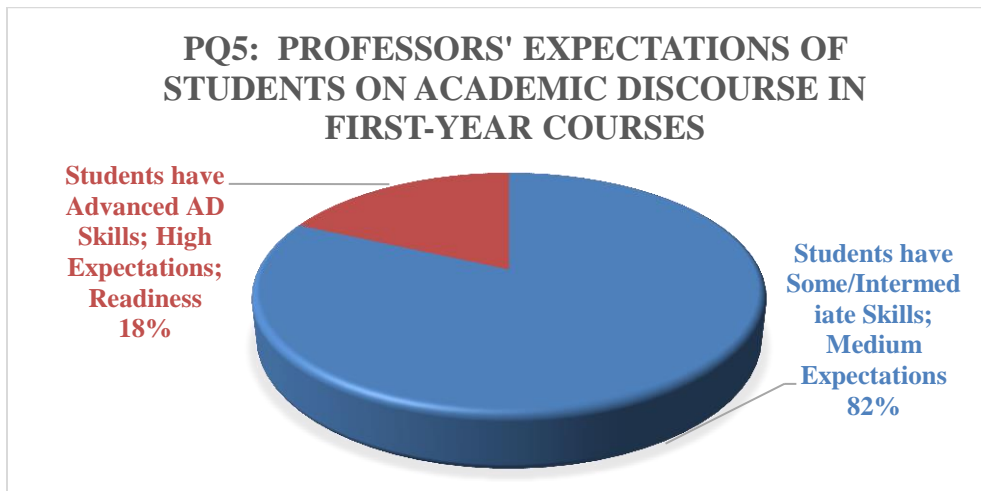
Students have Some Academic Discourse Skills/Medium Expectations: 82%

*Expectations of students regarding academic discourse.* Instructors were then asked to relate their expectations of students regarding academic discourse and first-year

composition. Professor Nwosu describes herself as a Ph.D. with no tenure. She states has been teaching at the community college for nine years. Professor Nwosu indicates the following:

Can I be honest and say my expectations are always higher than what the students can deliver? I have high expectations for my students. The truth, though, is a large percentage of them really do not have the writing or critical thinking skills we generally expect from a college student. In all honesty, it is really challenging. Let me give you an example. A few years ago, I had just started teaching English as an adjunct. The students coming into my classes were barely prepared to do the work, but they passed the placement test. It was either the Compass or Accuplacer—one of those tests. There was something called a cut score that determined if the student would have to take remedial writing or 1301. Somehow, the cut scores were lowered, and there was a flood of students entering 1301 who honestly should have been in developmental writing because they just did not have the skills to survive. The English classes have never recovered from that change which, by the way, was pitched as a great idea. The students just cannot handle the material. What happens now? We just keep watering the curriculum down to try to fit the student instead of forcing the student to reach up and meet the standards of the classes.

Figure 4.18 below represents the professors' combined responses regarding their experience of their professor's expectations surrounding academic discourse during first-year composition.



#### Figure 4-18 Question 5: Professors' Expectations of Students

##### Surrounding Academic Discourse

The majority of the professors, 82%, indicated that they expect students to have some or intermediate academic discourse skills. The remaining 18% of the professors expect students to have advanced academic discourse skills. In short, 100% of faculty expected some level of experience with academic discourse. Compared to faculty, 52% of students revealed that the professors expect the students to have some academic discourse skills while 100% of professors indicated that they expect students to already have some academic discourse skills in first-year writing courses. In this scenario, the professors had higher expectation rates than did the students, but the students' expectations were unexpectedly high as well. Notwithstanding the contested definition of academic discourse, this evidences that both students and professors alike understand it is necessary and expected that students have some experience with academic discourse, particularly in relation to first-year composition.

Question 6: When students enroll in first-year writing, what, in your opinion, are their expectations around learning academic discourse?

Medium Expectations/Expect Some Knowledge: 73%

Learn the Basics in College: 27%

*Expectations of knowing academic discourse a priori.* Faculty participants were then asked whether they expect students to have some academic discourse skills before starting college. Instructor Jamila states that she has been teaching writing courses for more than two decades. On prior academic discourse expectations, she explains the following:

Of course, I expect students to have strong skills in academic discourse before they start any class. Does it happen? Rarely. I have been doing

this for over 20 years now; actually, it will be 22 years in January. This is the worst I have ever seen it. Our students cannot write. Period. End of story. They need to learn it, but they will not make the time or have the discipline to do it. What is really sad is that some of them are so vain and misguided that they think they know it all, and no one can teach them anything.

Figure 4.19 below represents the professors' synthesized responses regarding their experiences regarding whether or not they expect students to have some skills in academic discourse before beginning college-level courses.

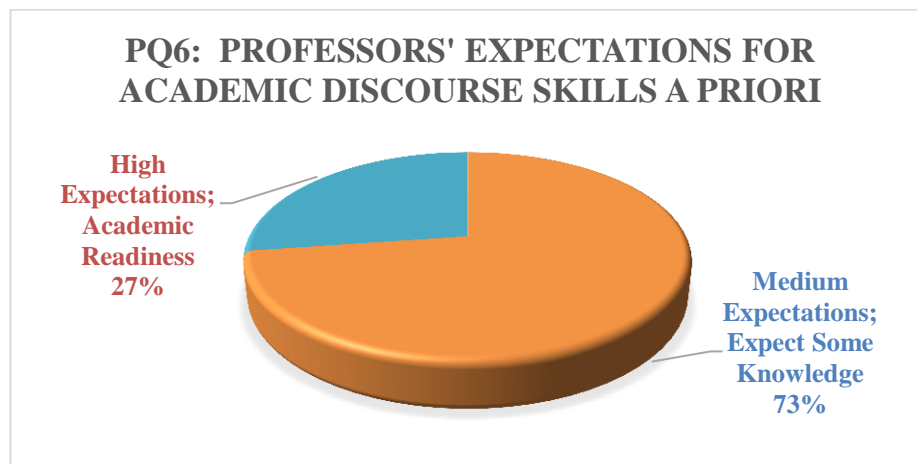


Figure 4-19 Question 6: Professors' Expectations of Academic Discourse before College Courses

The majority of the instructor respondents (73%) indicated that they expect students to have some academic discourse skills before entering college, and another 27% of faculty stated that they expect students to have advanced academic discourse skills and exhibit full academic readiness. In short, 100% of faculty indicated they expect students to have some level of academic discourse skills before entering college. Comparatively, 75% of students experienced their professors' expectations of students having intermediate or advanced skills in academic discourse before beginning college-level classes. In my original hypothesis, I predicted that professors implicitly expect that students enter postsecondary institutions already having some knowledge, experience, and ability to



write using academic discourse. Based on the responses, this is the only part of my hypothesis that has been correct. The implications are worth considering particularly since the professors in this study unanimously expected students to have prior academic discourse skills, but the students did not unanimously have the same expectations for themselves.

Question 7: To what extent are the mandatory first-year composition courses beneficial to students?

Useful: 100%

*Extent to which composition courses are beneficial.* Faculty participants were asked to discuss, from their experiences, the extent to which first-year English courses are helpful to students. Dr. Martinez states that she has worked in education for 19 years, beginning her career in K-12 and moving to teaching college after the first eight years. She discusses some of the challenges she experienced with students complaining about taking required writing classes but later thanking her once they were able to use their skills in other classes and other areas. Dr. Martinez considers the first-year English courses as very beneficial to students and expounds as follows:

Before moving from Jersey, I taught at the university, and the composition courses were mandatory. Here, at the community college, the courses are mandatory, and I believe that they should be. Students need these classes because they need the knowledge and skills. Many students here struggle with writing.

Figure 4-20 below represents the professors' accumulated responses representing the extent to which first-year writing courses are beneficial for students.

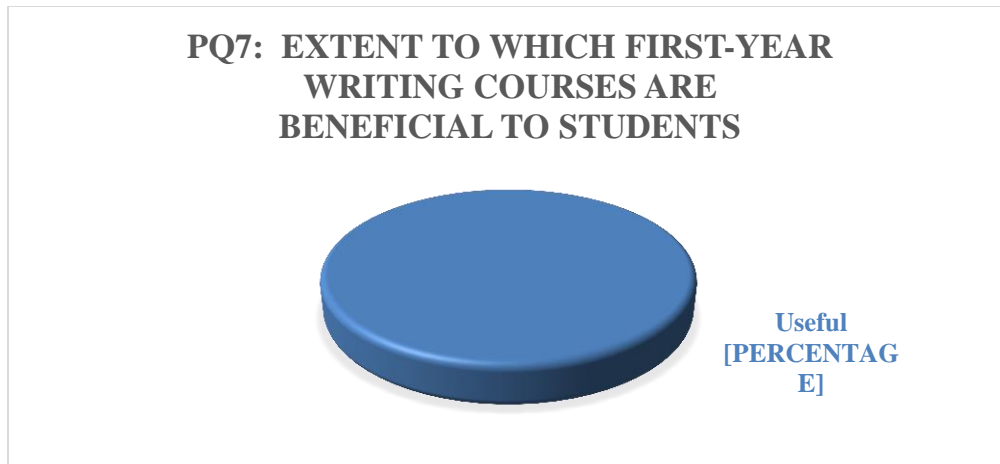


Figure 4-20 Question 7: Extent to which First-Year Writing Courses  
are Beneficial to Students

With regard to institutional policies, 100% of the professor respondents indicated that their institutions require students to complete first-year composition courses, and all of those respondents also indicated that the required courses were useful. Comparatively, 79% of students indicated that the courses are useful to them. While 79% appears to be substantial, it is worth noting that the students were not in unanimous agreement on this question like to professors. Furthermore, it is interesting that none of the professors, from their responses, considered the possibility that the courses might not be beneficial for all students. Similarly, none of the professors mentioned or offered examples of students they might have encountered who did not necessarily need to take a year of composition due to their knowledge base or developed skill set. In my own career, I would estimate that there have been 1 or 2 students in each class I have taught who could have easily tested out of taking first-year composition—if such mechanisms were in place—or skipped the classes altogether. I would venture to say that collectively, about 10% of the students I have taught fit into this category. Postsecondary institutions might

provide better service to students such as these if there were opportunities for them to demonstrate mastery, test out of certain classes, and potentially save time and tuition.

Question 8: Please share a story or personal experience related to your learning academic discourse. What conclusions can you draw from this experience?

Learned Beneficial Skills Relevant Outside of Academia: 58%

Lack of Preparation/Poor Grades: 34%

Little Focus on Academic Discourse: 8%

*Personal story on learning academic discourse.* When asked to share a personal experience or story related to learning academic discourse, Professor Kenn describes having a major epiphany. He indicates the following:

As a sophomore in college, I had an English class with Dr. Wesley. He was a traditional professor and a stickler when it came to writing. He gave us two grades on our papers: one score for form and one score for content. At the time, I was into Beatnik culture, and I was a well-known poet on campus and around town. Dr. Wesley returned our first assignment, and I scored an F in form and another F in content. That was a wake-up call for me. I hired a tutor and got my act together. If it were not for him, I might not have realized the importance of academic discourse.

Figure 4.21 below represents the instructors' responses upon relating a personal story or experience about their learning academic discourse.



Figure 4-21 Question 8: Professors' Personal Stories about  
Learning Academic Discourse

Of the professors' personal stories about learning academic discourse, 58% included learning skills that were also relevant and beneficial outside of academia. For 34% of faculty respondents, the personal stories about academic discourse included experiences about being poorly prepared for their writing tasks and receiving low academic scores. The smallest percentage of respondents at 8% related that there was little focus on academic discourse in their school experiences. Comparatively speaking, both the student interviewees and the faculty related similar experiences in their personal stories about learning academic discourse. For example, 58% of the students and 58% of the professors discussed experiences where they concluded that learning academic discourse has been beneficial outside of school or academia. In addition, 15% of student respondents and 34% of professor respondents—more than double that of students—related experiences where they lacked the necessary preparation in academic discourse and subsequently earned poor grades. Moreover, 3% of students and 8% of professors indicated that there was little focus on academic discourse in their school experience. It is worth noting that despite having very similar experiences around learning academic discourse, it is difficult to process why professors view themselves as being so far removed from the students they teach. Likewise, based on their responses, the professors seem to have very high expectations for students that they themselves might not have been able to meet while they were students.

Question 9: How do you see yourself today in terms of academic discourse acquisition?

Confident and Experienced/Good Understanding: 75%

Moderate Changes/Positive: 17%

Difficult to Assess or Determine: 8%

*Personal assessment of academic discourse acquisition.* Faculty respondents were also asked how they see themselves today in terms of academic discourse acquisition. Professor Huang describes himself as corporate cross-over who began his career in corporate America and later transitioned to academia. Despite having 15 years of experience in his field, he discusses uncertainty about his academic discourse skills in relation to attempting to have an article published in a peer-reviewed journal. Professor Huang remarks:

Even with my years of experience, I recognize that practice really does make perfect, and if people do not constantly use and upgrade skills, they can become defunct. I am proficient in using academic discourse, but journal referees always have a way of giving colleagues a dose of reality. About two months ago, I submitted an article to a journal, and it was returned with over 50 comments. Some were quite vicious. Provided that I make the revisions, it may be accepted. I do not know if I want to resubmit the revisions. The journal is not that prestigious anyway.

Figure 4-22 below represents the professors' summative responses regarding how their experiences shape their current vantage points of academic discourse acquisition.

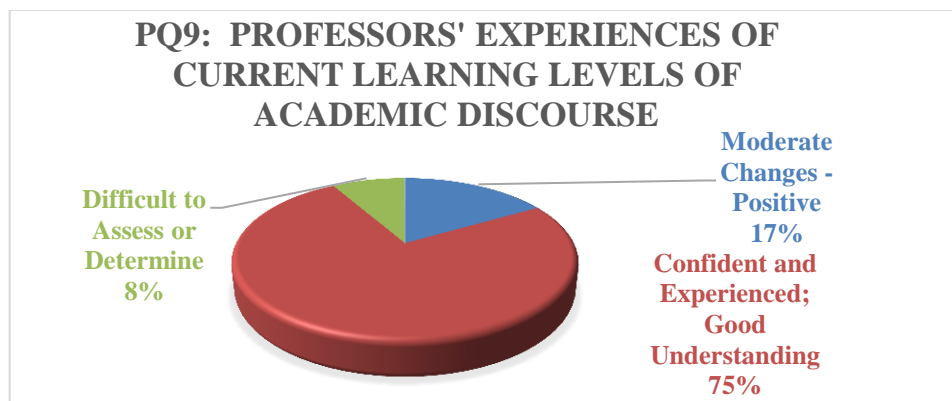


Figure 4-22 Question 9: How Professors See Themselves Today Regarding Academic Discourse

The majority of the faculty respondents (75%) indicated that they are confident and experienced in their current levels of academic discourse. Only 8% of the interviewees indicated that it is difficult to assess or determine their current learning levels in relation to academic discourse. In comparison, when asked to what extent the first-year composition courses have been beneficial in assisting students with writing academic discourse for subsequent college courses, 46% of students indicated extremely helpful while 64% of instructors indicated extremely helpful. Similarly, 27% of students and 36% of professors indicated that writing courses have been helpful. Combined, 73% of the student respondents and 100% of the instructor respondents indicated very helpful or helpful. Again, while 73% of students indicated that the required writing courses are helpful, it is worth considering what process can be established to address the 27% of students who held a different opinion from the majority of respondents. In organizations in general and postsecondary institutions in particular, the embedded concept of majority rules is often ubiquitous. However, institutions that can potentially make the most strides are those that somehow address and ameliorate concerns among the minority voices or among those who may have a dissenting opinion that is not represented among the majority voices.

Question 10: To what extent have the first-year composition courses been beneficial in assisting students with writing academic discourse for subsequent college courses?

Very/Extremely Helpful: 64%

Helpful: 36%

*Composition courses and writing academic discourse for other courses.* Faculty respondents were asked to what extent first-year English courses assist students with preparation for subsequent, college courses. Dr. Abena indicates that she is an editor

and consultant who has been teaching composition courses at a local community college for the past eight years. Dr. Abena states:

If students apply themselves, the courses can be very beneficial. Writing is one of the most important skills that anyone can have. The ability to write well and effectively is essential in all courses. If students receive a solid foundation in their composition courses, that alone will carry them far in college.

Figure 4-23 below represents the professors' responses surrounding the extent to which first-year composition courses have been beneficial in assisting students with writing academic discourse for subsequent college courses.

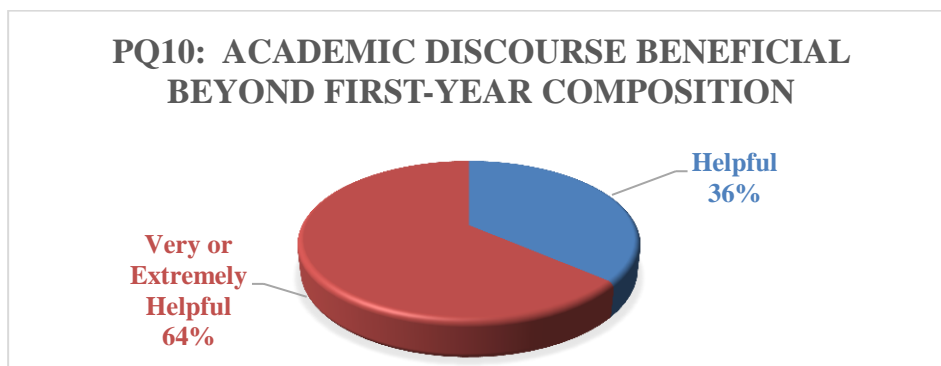


Figure 4-23 Question 10: Academic Discourse Beneficial in Courses Beyond First-Year Writing

Of the instructor respondents, 64% indicated that academic discourse is very or extremely helpful in assisting students with writing academic discourse for subsequent college courses. Similarly, 36% of professor participants revealed that academic discourse is helpful beneficial in assisting students with writing academic discourse for subsequent college courses. In comparison, for 73% of the student respondents, the first-year writing courses have been beneficial or very beneficial in assisting students with writing academic discourse for subsequent college courses. Again, considering methods to address the 27% of students who did not experience first-year writing courses being beneficial for other college courses might be useful in creating courses that deliver

information that is practical for and applicable to other college classes. This is particularly important since first-year composition courses are often touted as foundational courses designed to scaffold students' writing skills and prepare them for writing tasks in other courses.

Question 11: To what extent are the freshman English courses beneficial outside of the academic environment and in such situations as students' employment or careers, in other professional environments, or in social environments?

Very/Extremely Beneficial: 67%

Beneficial: 33%

*Academic discourse beneficial outside of school.* Instructor Pradeep describes herself as a career adjunct professor who has been teaching college writing for 12 years. When asked to what extent first-year composition courses are beneficial outside of the academic environment, Instructor Pradeep indicates:

Writing and communication are cornerstones to success. Writing expertise and discourse mastery are paramount in any situation, be it academic, employment, or social. Several students have come back years after they have graduated to tell me how what they learned in my writing class has helped them and sustained them in the professional world. Students who master academic discourse in their English courses can write their own tickets.

Figure 4-24 represents the professors' cumulative responses surrounding the extent to which first-year composition courses are beneficial outside of the academic environment.



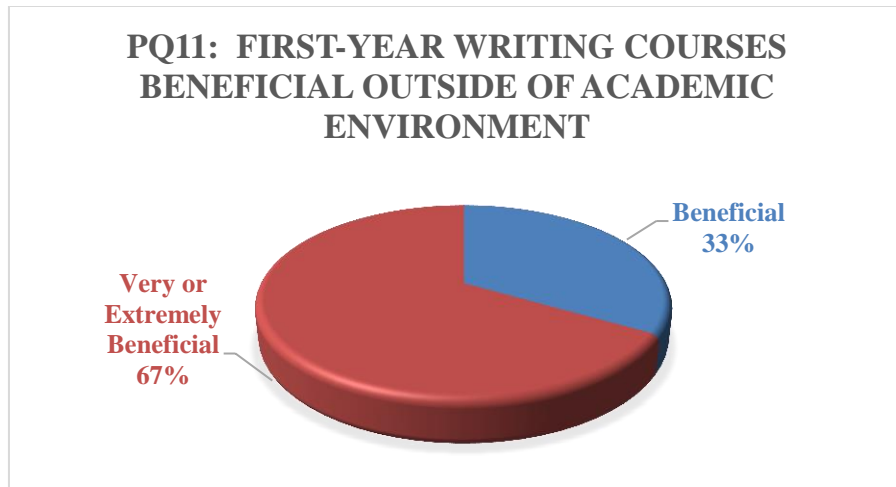


Figure 4-24 Question 11: First-Year Writing Courses Beneficial Outside of Academia

Sixty-seven percent of the instructor respondents expressed that first-year writing courses are very or extremely beneficial outside of the academic environment. Another 33% of the participants stated that first-year writing courses are beneficial outside of the academic environment. In comparison, when queried on the extent to which the first-year composition courses have been beneficial outside of the school or academic environment, 55% of student respondents indicated they are beneficial while 33% of professor respondents indicated they are beneficial. Similarly, 33% of students and 67% of professors indicated very or extremely beneficial. Combined, 88% of the student interviewees and 100% of the professor interviewees indicated that the first-year writing courses have been beneficial or extremely beneficial to students outside of the academic environment. It is worth considering ways to make first-year composition classes more beneficial outside of academia for the 12% of students who did not deem the courses as such.

Question 12: Should first-year writing courses be mandatory? Why or why not?

Mandatory for All: 75%

Mandatory for Low Scorers or Ill-Prepared: 17%

Discipline Specific Writing Courses Only: 8%

*Mandatory or voluntary.* Faculty respondents were asked whether first-year writing courses should be mandatory. Dr. Martinez discusses her experiences with students at both two-year and four-year institutions. She expresses skepticism about having the option to choose composition courses. According to Dr. Martinez:

Without a doubt, writing courses should be mandatory. I have worked at community colleges and at 4-year universities, and students struggle with writing at both types of institutions. Technology has crippled many of our students, and they just do not know the basics anymore. The writing courses can help quite a bit. I hear conversations about optional writing courses, but students do not do optional. If the courses are not required, they will not take them. They need the writing courses, so these classes should always be mandatory.

Figure 4-25 represents professors' responses on whether or not first-year composition courses should be mandatory with rationale based on their experiences.

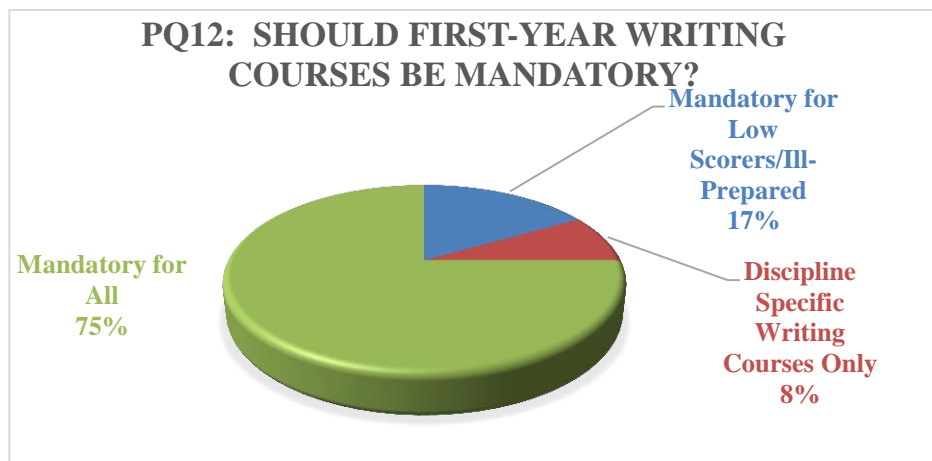


Figure 4-25 Question 12: Should First-Year Composition Courses be Required?

Among the faculty interviewees, 75% of respondents stated that first-year writing courses should be mandatory for all students. Another 17% expressed that the courses should be mandatory only for students who are ill-prepared for college or who have low scores

on placement tests. Finally, 8% of respondents indicated that the writing courses should be discipline specific as opposed to general writing courses for all students. In comparison, when asked whether first-year writing courses should be required, 67% of student respondents (vs. 75% of instructors) indicated the courses should be mandatory for all students. Likewise, 9% of students (vs. 17% of faculty) indicated that the courses should only be mandatory for students who achieve low scores on the placement tests or for those who are ill-prepared for college. Only 3% of students indicated that writing courses should be discipline-specific. For this question, 100% of faculty members indicated that composition courses should be mandatory in some form. Although not a part of my original hypothesis, I would have predicted that some professors would have indicated a voluntary option, or other options in general, for students. The lack of non-mandatory options, however, might speak to institutional tradition or culture that upholds the universal requirement. It is also worth noting that although organizations like College Board offer options for students to test out of courses through their College Level Examination Program (CLEP), several institutions in the United States do not recognize CLEP testing and will not accept CLEP credits.

Question 13: Before we conclude the interview, please discuss or add any additional information that we might have overlooked or not covered regarding this topic.

Employment and Career Considerations: 50%

Academic Considerations: 25%

Language Barriers/Learning Barriers: 17%

No Additions: 8%

*Additional information.* When asked to include additional experiences or information, Dr. Collins explains the following:

We generally receive feedback from industry leaders whenever our students are hired into their firms and organizations, and the feedback we receive most is related to their writing skills and presentations skills. They urge us to help students sharpen their oral and written communication skills because these skills are lacking, especially among new graduates turned new professionals. As professors, we cannot succumb to the pressures of passing students through the system; we need to return to the times when students were required to demonstrate mastery of academic discourse skills. A common trend now is to pass international students and ESL students even though the students are obviously not demonstrating a basic command of the language. Most of the students are very respectable and polite, but being amicable and congenial cannot substitute for demonstrating proficiency. This is a detrimental trend that has to stop. It does not benefit the students for us to just pass them. They need to demonstrate, like every other student, that they have an authentic command of the language.

Figure 4-26 below represents the professors' collective responses surrounding adding additional experience or information before concluding the interview.

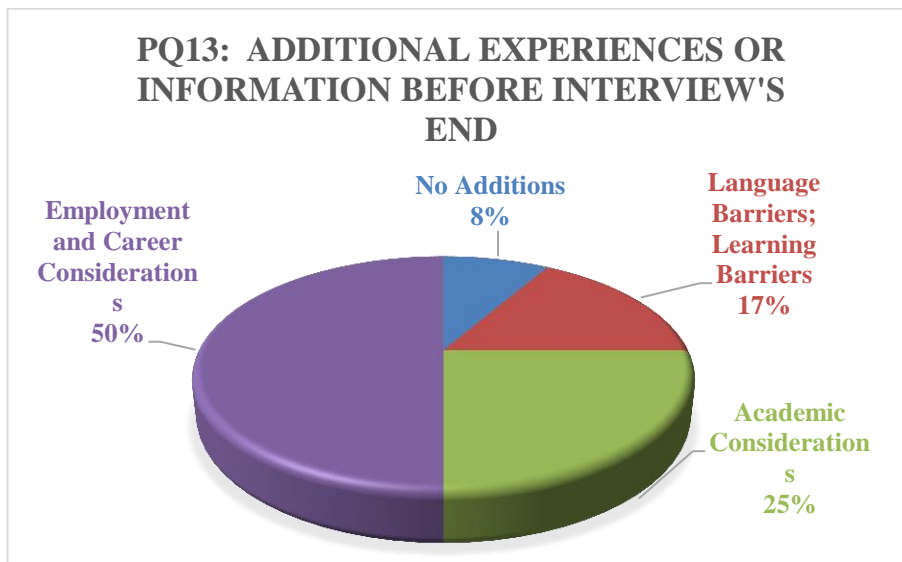


Figure 4-6 Question 13: Additional Experiences or Information before the Interview's End

Nearing the conclusion of the interview, 50% of the instructor respondents added employment and career considerations as additional information to include. Likewise,

25% discussed academic considerations while another 17% of the participants highlighted language barriers and learning barriers in their ending remarks. In comparison, 52% of student respondents related academic considerations in their concluding remarks while 25% of instructor respondents related academic considerations in their remarks. It is worth noting that 50% of faculty members concluded with employment concerns while only 6% of students discussed employment and careers. It is likely that employment and career concerns may not be the primary focus for some students whereas completing and passing courses within their major may be more immediate concerns. In a recent study of British students' academic writing, however, Sultan (2013) inquires, "Can academia help improve the writing skills of tomorrow's professionals?" and ultimately asserts that the skills and processes required in academic writing can be strategically transferred into valuable skills in the workforce (p. 145). Sultan's assertions align with the experiences of professor respondents in this study.

The data collected from this study further illuminate the contested notion of the term, academic discourse. Neither the faculty nor the students had a clear delineation or full understanding of academic discourse, but both faculty and students agreed on the necessity for students to have some skills and knowledge in academic discourse. With respect to the optimal location to acquire academic discourse skills, both students and faculty indicated middle and high school and even elementary school. In terms of writing, however, "[T]he schoolroom essay—in its style—serves its situation...But the schoolroom and the university classroom are different situations. Accordingly, the kind of writing that suits the schoolroom tends not to suit the university classroom" (Giltrow, Gooding, Burgoyne, & Sawatsky, 2014, p. 9). From a logistical perspective, neither elementary school, nor middle school, nor high school are actual places that most students will likely learn academic discourse. The curriculum is specialized to the grade levels, and most

high schools teachers are both unaware of the caliber of the demands placed on students entering postsecondary institutions in relation to academic discourse and are unable to fully prepare students to meet those demands. The same holds true for middle school and elementary school teachers.

## Chapter 5

### General Discussion of Results

#### Introduction

Some language theorists believe that academic discourse acquisition is based on the three dimensions of input, output, and interaction where input denotes reading or listening to allow brain processing, output encompasses writing and speaking, and interaction denotes cooperative exchanges of input and output (Krashen, 1985; Long, 1996; Swain, 2000; Zwiers & Soto, 2017). The interviewees demonstrated through their experiences that these three dimensions of input, output, and interaction, are indeed integral in the acquisition of academic discourse. Without all three dimensions, obtaining skills in academic discourse can prove challenging, particularly for students in first-year writing courses.

#### *Academic Discourse Remains Contested*

While many rely on the contributions of researchers and experts in a field to help define terminology and shared conceptual terms, academic discourse has neither been fully defined nor does composition theory have a shared conceptual understanding of academic discourse. Despite this study's focus on academic discourse acquisition and gleaning participants' understanding of the term, academic discourse remains a contested term. The results of the study further illuminated the extent to which neither students nor faculty respondents fully understand or agree upon a definition of academic discourse—and certainly not upon its implementation. One might conclude that herein lies one fundamental divergence between the student and the professor. Communication might be considered a more broad or generic form of discourse while writing and language of the academy might suggest a more specific form. The 46% of professors

indicating academic discourse as the language of the academy is also aligned with composition theorists' general definitions. Most composition theorists describe academic discourse as the ways of thinking and using language that exists in the academy (Bartholomae, 1980; Bartholomae, 1985; Bartholomae, 2001; Hyland, 2009; Scarcella, 2003; Smit, 2004). This phraseology represents the extent of their definitions. The term, academic discourse, however, is frequently used among theorists—and composition professors for that matter—as a term definitively settled and clearly understood by all. This term that actually has no real definition—apart from a murky and nebulous understanding of what it should be and should do—is treated as a magnum sermo, a major word or concept, that everyone should and does understand. As such, it is very likely that professors—myself included—are holding students accountable to standards of academic discourse that have no continuity from one course to the next and that are individually contrived. Furthermore, it is possible that the difference in the understandings of academic discourse may also assist in explaining some of the dissimilarities in experiences and expectations among students and faculty.

#### *Locations and Expectations for Acquisition*

It is worth noting that none of the instructor respondents indicated college to be the preferred time frame and place students should learn academic discourse. Likewise, when asked when and where they actually learned academic discourse, 52% of students indicated middle and high school compared to 46% of faculty. All of the faculty interviewees expected students to enter college with some degree of academic discourse skills; most of the students recognized their professors' expectations of their possessing academic discourse skills in advance of beginning their college classes. Research, however, suggests that increasingly, students are arriving to higher education institutions



less prepared for the writing tasks and challenges of college (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010; Bettinger & Long, 2009; Fike & Fike, 2008). Conclusively, one might inquire regarding how to manage expectations while ensuring that students are adequately prepared to meet the writing challenges of college. Countless students assume that the move from senior year of high school to freshman year of college is one proverbial step and that the first year of college is a mere extension of 12<sup>th</sup> grade. For most students, such is not the case. Instead of one step between 12<sup>th</sup> grade and freshman year of college, many students find that there are numerous steps or levels between senior year and what would generally or logically seem to be grade 13. It is equally significant that while both students and instructors indicated middle and high school as the preferred location to learn academic discourse, the writing tasks of the schoolroom are inadequate for the tasks required in the college or university course. Although present jargon among high school curricula refer to students being college-ready, this conception is vastly different from teaching students academic discourse. Colleges and universities set the standards and threshold for student admission, and high schools—and possibly middle schools—prepare students to meet or exceed the admissions standards for acceptance. Beyond that, the high school's job is done. In short, it is not the high school's job to teach college skills or college material. That is the college's job and the professor's job. If the students are able to gain admission to the college or university, whatever happens once those students cross the institution's doorstep is a matter between the students and the institution. Academic culture has grown accustomed to reassigning students' ill-preparedness to previous academic levels. For example, if students are not prepared for high school, the middle school is criticized. When students are not prepared for middle school, the elementary school is to blame. If students are ill-prepared for college, any and all of the aforementioned can be responsible. Ubiquitously, professors lament about

students' ill-preparedness for college. Instead of taking this approach, however, it may be more effective to teach students exactly what they need to know and avoid relegating those responsibilities to secondary institutions whose foci and curricula are designed to achieve other intended goals.

I hypothesized that students expect to be taught academic discourse in college while faculty expect students to enter college having some knowledge, experience, and ability to write using academic discourse. Based on the student interview data, the first half of my hypothesis is not supported. Only 25% of students indicated that they expected to learn academic discourse in first-year composition as opposed to 31% who indicated that they believed they already possessed sufficient academic discourse skills upon entering college. The second half of my hypothesis is supported by the data in this study as all faculty participants expected beginning college students to already have some knowledge, experience, and ability in terms of academic discourse.. The results of these hypotheses warrant additional review and considerations. Whereas 52% of student respondents indicated that they already learned academic discourse in middle school and high school, all faculty respondents claimed that students do not have the basic academic discourse skills necessary when they begin first-year writing courses. This disjuncture is captured neatly in the response of Professor Huang:

When students start my English 1301 course, most of them—like 95% of them—cannot write a coherent paragraph. In a class of 25, maybe 2 students can write at a very basic level. The rest of them require major help. If you ask them, though, they are writing experts, and they do not need to take these courses.

This is a major concern among composition faculty. On the surface, the issue would appear to be with the students' lack of skills and abilities. At closer inspection, greater concern might lie in the assessment practices and policies surrounding how students are tested and how college-ready scores are determined. To add to the growing concerns,

the state of Texas recently passed House Bill 2223 which now requires students who are placed in developmental writing and math course to also simultaneously register for the college-level or college-ready equivalent of that course (THECB, 2018). In essence, students who would have previously been required to pass developmental writing before registering for Composition I are now required to take the developmental writing course and register for Composition I as its co-requisite. If faculty members believe that most students arrive in first-year composition woefully unprepared (irrespective of their belief that students “should” be prepared), we might wonder why they do not begin first-year composition courses teaching or reviewing basic skills. For some, the decision is out of their hands. For example, Dr. Davis states:

I teach at two community colleges—separate districts—in the DFW area. The dean at the first college specifically told me not to teach grammar in 1301 or 1302 which are the courses I teach. It is explicitly forbidden at that college. At the second community college, we cannot teach grammar either, but we can include grammar exercises and quizzes as part of the student’s lab credit. Grammar, structure, and format are the basics, the foundation. Without the basics, the students just do not grasp the higher level concepts. It is a double-edged sword, really.

#### *Universal Requirement*

Several student respondents indicated concerns ranging from the course information being irrelevant to their career track or academic major to instructors’ teaching methods being too high or too low for students. Like these participants, there are also scholars and compositionists who debate the necessity and efficacy of required composition courses. Known as Composition Abolitionists and Reformists, these scholars advocate for better quality courses for students who have the universal writing requirement, vertical curriculum development to ensure writing courses fit students’ needs and career interests, and better quality and expertise among instructors who teach the courses (Brooks, 2002; Connors, 1995; Crowley, 1998). The Composition

Abolitionists' and Reformists' objectives echo the concerns of the 15% of student interviewees in this study who indicated that the composition courses are required but not useful. The data from this study suggests that the need for mandatory first-year composition courses may not be as great as originally perceived. An additional consideration would be for postsecondary institutions and lawmakers to create and establish processes for students to not only test into freshman composition but also test out of the courses or to bypass the universal requirement if they can demonstrate proficiency. Implementing such a process could potentially save students both time and money while decreasing the time needed for degree completion.

#### *Suggestions and Recommendations*

Smit (2007) considers teaching academic discourse as justified in order to prepare students to write the types of papers that are required in college but argues that academic discourse is a genre "unique to school" and useful primarily for academic purposes (p. 146). As Chapter 2 and the study participants further demonstrate, there is absolutely not consensus or field unanimity where academic discourse is concerned. Based on research and the findings of this study, I suggest the following:

1. *Decide on a shared definition for academic discourse.* It is integral for the composition community to define and adopt a clear and agree-up definition for academic discourse. In the absence of this occurring in a comprehensive manner, postsecondary institutions in general and writing departments in particular can create a shared and detailed definition of academic discourse as a benchmark for how students will be instructed and assessed. Clear expectations surrounding academic discourse can also be created once consensus is achieved.

2. *Incorporate some review material into the coursework.* Perin (2013) suggests embedding developmental instruction in college-level coursework particularly for underprepared students. For first-year composition courses, including short review lessons in areas where students demonstrate weakness or where students could benefit from review might prove helpful. Likewise, providing students with online resources, videos, or vignettes that reinforce the concepts and build onto course material might increase student outcomes within first-year composition courses.

3. *Offer incentives for writing center visits.* Students are often encouraged to seek assistance from tutors or from the writing center. Studies show, however, that many of the students who are intrinsically motivated to seek writing help are also students who generally already have high grade point averages, positive class attendance, and are academically strong students (Bielinska-Kwapisz, 2015; Bielinska-Kwapisz & Brown, 2012; Moore et al., 2008). Offering incentive points or other incentives might encourage students to seek assistance from the writing center. Incentive points earned as a result of writing center visits could assist in supplementing students' scores on writing assignments. Moreover, students could gain the added benefit of reviewing concepts and material with a tutor. Both elements combined could be beneficial in improving students' writing skills while also assisting to improve their assignment scores.

4. *Explicitly teach academic discourse.* It is important for professors to not only teach academic discourse but to also specifically inform students of this practice; it is equally important for instructors to use the term, academic discourse, particularly once a shared definition is established within a department. Some student respondents in this study indicated that they had never heard the term, academic discourse. Others were not certain if they had ever been taught academic discourse or were uncertain when or where the process occurred. Being intentional and deliberate about teaching students

academic discourse while informing them of such in the process may assist in increasing and improving students' academic discourse acquisition. Thonney (2011) conducted a study through analyzing scholarly research articles from six disciplines; the author provides suggestions and recommendations about academic writing that composition instructors can use to further prepare students for academic discourse tasks. Specifically Thonney identifies the six standard practices or moves in academic writing as follows:

- a. Writers respond to what others have said about their topic;
- b. Writers state the value of their work and announce the plan for their papers;
- c. Writers acknowledge that others might disagree with the position they have taken;
- d. Writers adopt a voice of authority;
- e. Writers use academic and discipline-specific vocabulary; and
- f. Writers emphasize evidence, often in tables, graphs, and images. (p. 348)

Thonney attempts to define the term more clearly and offers a model of how instructors might proceed with their students. Professors and instructors might add Thonney's six standard practices in academic writing to their course curricula and incorporate these practices to aid students in learning academic discourse. Thonney also suggests the following techniques which may facilitate students' understanding of the conventions of academic discourse:

- I. Have students read authentic academic texts from various disciplines. Since most of the reading undergraduates do is from textbooks, newspapers, and magazines, offering authentic academic texts will assist in illustrating the conventions of academic writing.
- II. Help students notice how academic writing varies. One way to raise students' awareness of writing variety is to show them resources for writing in different disciplines. For example, [www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/](http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/) includes documentation guidelines and sample student papers for humanities, history, social sciences, and sciences. Similarly,

www.citationmachine.net can assist students with creating citations in MLA, APA, Turabian, or Chicago styles.

- III. Help students infer and practice academic writing principles—both the universal and the discipline specific. Studying diverse examples promotes understanding. Exercises like these help students notice commonality and variation in academic discourse.
- IV. Help students see that academic writing is dynamic. When students realize that language conventions are more than fixed rules or formats, they also learn that genres and discourse styles evolve to meet the needs of writers. (pp. 357-358)

Providing first-year composition students with additional information and practices in the area of academic discourse can expand their knowledge bases now while preparing them to build on those foundations later when writing using the academic discourse of their career fields.

#### *After-Interview Conversations*

A majority of faculty participants (81%) wanted to continue the conversation after the interview's end. There were three questions that each participant wanted me, as the researcher, to answer:

- 1) What is *your* definition of academic discourse?
- 2) How do *you* teach academic discourse in your classes?
- 3) If I am teaching composition [or rhetoric], am I automatically teaching academic discourse?
- 4) How do *you* handle students who are ill-prepared for *your* classes?

Although I attempted to circumvent the questions during the first or even second faculty interview, I realized very quickly that these professors wanted real answers, and they were genuinely interested in what I had to say. I employed some previous techniques that have learned and used with students such as:

- A) Do not define a word using the same word;
- B) Avoid catch phrases or buzz words; and
- C) Saying what a word is *not* does not convey what it *is*.

Using these parameters and adding some of Saussure's principles (1959), I attempted to devise a definition for academic discourse that I could use when answering faculty members' questions. I found, however, that it was more difficult than I initially anticipated, and I began to partially understand why composition theorists had left the defining of academic discourse as incomplete. My working definition of academic discourse, however, did violate some of the original parameters that I set forth, but I formulated the following:

Academic discourse is an umbrella-term that encompasses advanced elements of writing and thinking that adhere to the standards and conventions expected at the scholarly (university) level. Academic discourse presupposes excellence in the areas of mechanics, usage, grammar, and structure. Academic discourse also presumes mastery of higher-level critical thinking skills. Furthermore, academic discourse implies proficiency in argumentation analysis.

If my definition of academic discourse were correct, then I, along with other composition professors who expect students to have some skill in academic discourse a priori, have been approaching this concept incorrectly where students are concerned. For example, if academic discourse, indeed, presupposes excellence in mechanics, usage, grammar, and structure, then composition instructors cannot assume that first-year writing students are skilled in this area. Of course, instructors cannot and would not teach "the basics" in first-year composition courses, but they could include short review lessons to polish students' grammar skills. If academic discourse truly presumes mastery of higher-order thinking skills, then writing faculty cannot assume that students have prior knowledge in this area either. In general, many Composition I and Composition II classes incorporate higher-level critical thinking skills as part of the curriculum; subsequently, assuming



students have prior knowledge in an area that is to be taught in the course is ineffective. Similarly, if academy discourse implies proficiency in argumentation analysis, then composition faculty also cannot assume that students are skilled in this area in advance of their writing courses. At many institutions, first-year composition incorporates argumentation and teaches students effective argumentation styles. Some first-year English courses also include a research component which utilizes many of the aforementioned skills. If my definition were correct, then composition instructors, and possibly all postsecondary instructors, might rethink and revamp our practices with regard to what we expect students to know and be able to do before entering our classrooms. For writing faculty, however, when composition theorists state that students must be taught academic discourse, this might be viewed as less of a suggestion and more of an edict or mandate.

## Chapter 6

### Postscript: A Note on Developmental Studies

#### Introduction

One area that this dissertation does not explicitly examine is that of developmental studies or remedial studies. Although the current study focuses on academic discourse acquisition among students who have completed first-year composition courses, such a study would be remiss without some discussion of developmental studies. Composition theorists maintain that teaching students the language of the academy—academic discourse—is one key to assisting in their success at the college level (Bartholomae, 1985; Bartholomae, 2005; Crowley, 1998; Scott & Denney, 1908; Shaughnessy, 1977). Perhaps, teaching academic discourse to developmental writing students could also improve their success. Students who are assigned to developmental studies courses are considered to be lacking in basic reading, writing, and/or math abilities as measured by placement tests. Such students are generally required to complete non-credit-bearing basic skills courses before enrolling in freshman-level English, mathematics, and science courses (Adelman, 2002; Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006, VanOra, 2012). Postsecondary institutions are increasingly being called upon to meet the needs of these students. Much of this responsibility falls to community colleges. As Bailey and Cho (2010) state, “Addressing the needs of developmental students is perhaps the most difficult and most important problem facing community colleges” (p. 46). Bailey and Cho further assert, “Developmental students face tremendous barriers. Less than one quarter of community college students who enroll in developmental education complete a degree or certificate within eight years of enrollment in college” (p. 46). With more than 75% of developmental education students failing to complete either a degree or a certificate in an 8-year period,

community colleges must be willing to reassess some of the practices and programs within developmental education. Bailey and Cho concede, “It will be very difficult to meet the Obama administration’s goal of increasing the number of community college graduates by 5 million by 2020 without making significant progress on improving outcomes for students who arrive at community colleges with weak academic skills” (p. 46). The authors highlight significant concerns regarding improving success rates among these students. With the Trump administration underway, various levels of speculation exist regarding its potential impact on colleges and universities. Magda Rolfes (2016) states, “Whether the Trump administration follows through on the [Obama administration’s] reforms or not, community colleges should continue to improve how they proactively recruit prospective students and systemically remove enrollment barriers to secure their pipeline of prospective students” (New Trump Administration, para. 6). One area that Rolfes does not explicitly address, however, is the plan of action once the students are admitted. It is one matter to strive to increase enrollments through recruitment and removing barriers; it is a different matter to ensure that students receive support and systematic assistance with filling educational gaps to potentially affect their outcomes in positive ways.

In June 2017, the 85<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature Regular Session passed House Bill (HB) 2223. One goal of the bill is to accelerate underprepared students’ persistence and promote successful completion. HB 2223 requires underprepared students who are required to enroll in developmental education to also enroll in a co-requisite model that allows the student to also enroll in the entry-level college course. In essence, students enrolled in developmental studies will now be required to enroll in a college-level course to support the student’s successful completion of the college-level class. This new initiative is scheduled to be implemented in Fall 2018, and any public institution in the

state of Texas with underprepared students is subject to the requirements of HB 2223 (THECB, 2018). Adopting a progress-oriented plan for improving students' outcomes might prove beneficial for these students.

Unfortunately, for many students, taking remedial courses is still synonymous with failure. Having to complete developmental courses can potentially delay students' academic progression anywhere from one semester to two years or more. Some students become so inundated by the overwhelming amount of additional course work needed—before they can even begin their actual college studies—that they become despondent and leave before they are able to start their actual college coursework. It is estimated that the cost for remedial education in the United States ranges from 1.0 to 3.0 billion dollars per year, “yet despite the prevalence and high costs of remedial assessment and placement, the ultimate benefits of this process are unclear” (p. 329). It is not clear whether the benefits of remedial education outweigh the current costs.

While costs are important concerns, program effectiveness is, of course, the primary concern within developmental education. Bettinger et al. (2013) reveal that effectiveness of remediation programs vary immensely by student. For example, women seem to experience more positive effects from remedial education courses than men, and older students seem to experience more positive effects than younger students (Bettinger et al., p. 97). Socioeconomic status also affects student outcomes. For instance, “Low-income students (that is, students receiving Pell Grants) had more negative outcomes in remediation than higher-income peers in terms of persistence, associate's degree completion, transfer rates, and credits earned” (Bettinger et al., 2013, pp. 98-99). Students who were from lower socioeconomic backgrounds also had lower persistence rates and completed fewer degrees than those who were from higher-income backgrounds. With regard to program effectiveness among institutions, Bailey and Cho

(2010) assert, "Given the size and importance of the developmental function, there are surprisingly few rigorous evaluations, and outcomes from those are not encouraging" (p. 46). Evaluating or re-evaluating program effectiveness for developmental education might prove to be advantageous for enhancing student success.

Gallard, Albritton, and Morgan (2010) conducted a cost/benefit review of two remedial education programs and subsequently attempted to quantify the benefits of the programs. Like previous research, this study found that remedial programs alone were minimally effective. However, remedial programs that also included tutoring programs, peer mentors, enhanced support services, and enhanced faculty support increased retention and success rates among developmental education students (p. 11). Building on these findings, Manuela McCusker (1997) recommends 16 strategies for making developmental programs effective:

1. Collect student biographical data before and after remedial course completion;
2. Mandate counseling and support services to assist students with success in classes;
3. Provide counselors with student profiles and course reading and writing requirements;
4. Continue or start learning assistance center activities and integrate these with classroom instruction;
5. Incorporate volunteer instructors and peer tutors in language labs;
6. Use computers in the classroom and learning lab;
7. Use multi-learning systems and structure sequential courses;
8. Initiate flexible testing and completion strategies;
9. Award college credit to some non-credit remedial courses;
10. Minimize remedial class size;
11. Hire instructors who specialize in remediation;

12. Ask remedial instructors to share remediation techniques and otherwise collaborate with content-area faculty;
13. Require content-area faculty to give reading and writing assignments to students;
14. Implement developmental education through the curriculum, as in adjunct models;
15. Monitor student behaviors and continuous evaluation of program effectiveness; and
16. Communicate with other community colleges to share internal evaluations, suggestions, and successful activities. (p. 103)

In addition to McCusker's suggestions, the current study suggests that teaching academic discourse to developmental studies students might also improve success. In particular, the current research demonstrates the importance of explicitly teaching first-year composition students academic discourse. Explicitly teaching such students the language of the academy will increase their exposure to the form and style of academic discourse and place them in better position to pass developmental courses and master the academic discourse essential for success in college-level courses. As Elbow (1991) indicated, failure to teach students the language of the academy disempowers them. It is unreasonable to expect students taking remedial courses to advance in their fields of study if they lack fluency in the language of the academy. The very fact of their being required to complete remedial coursework indicates that they are already underprepared for college-level work. Students who lack of familiarity with academic discourse seem destined to remain underprepared.

At the same time, it is critical that students advance through developmental coursework as expeditiously and as efficiently as possible. Bettinger, Boatman, and Long discuss methods for accomplishing this goal that include online modules and advanced technology, asserting, "The aim is to shorten the time students spend in developmental courses, enabling them to move more quickly into their college level courses, while also

ideally creating efficiencies in the delivery in developmental education” (p. 100).

Providing students with opportunities to reduce the amount of time spent completing developmental coursework can have both personal and financial benefits while promoting progression through developmental and into college-level courses.

In addition, students must have formal and informal opportunities to celebrate milestones at various points in the process. Miquela Rivera (2009) discusses this importance particularly for Hispanic students. Her words, however, are applicable for all students, irrespective of race. Rivera asserts that administrators and staff can support students delaying gratification and continuing their studies by setting specific milestones that will be both recognized and rewarded along the way (p. 17). Setting goals and celebrating milestones in a situation where students might otherwise be seen as treading water can potentially build confidence, build hope, and offer students the patience and perseverance needed to continue striving for the attainment of their goals.

Students must also have access to active support and resources beyond developmental coursework. Such resources include early-warning grade notification, ongoing student advising, study skills enhancement, and time management training. Mentoring is another option to provide support and assistance to students. Craig Vivian maintains, “Mentoring is a generally recognized contributor to a positive college experience for students. Mentoring also is acknowledged to be of particular benefit to college students at-risk for failure or withdrawal” (p. 336). Once students are able to transition out of developmental courses, it is important to continue to make services and resources available to them to enhance their opportunities for success. Students must also have clear plans in place with clear goals and progress maps regarding graduation or transfer to a follow-on institution. Such plans include opportunities to dialogue about

progression and regular checkpoints to ensure graduation from the 2-year institution and/or transfer to 4-year institutions.

Ellen Urquhart Engstrom (2005) suggests a collaborative approach to developmental education courses for college students. Specifically, the author discusses the efficacy of an integrated reading and writing curriculum for students with low reading scores. Engstrom begins with the premise, “In the United States, educators are increasingly concerned about the numbers of students in secondary schools who do not read well” (p. 30). This growing concern is felt in many community colleges. Engstrom provides an example of an integrated reading and writing curriculum with Landmark College (31). The underlying rationale for Landmark College is that “many students are able and motivated to get a college education, but they often lack the fundamental reading and writing skills necessary for success” (p. 31). The following outlines some of the particular attributes of Landmark’s program:

- A) Students receive a pre-credit, developmental skills program where they learn academic skills in small classes that teach specific strategies for active reading, writing, and note-taking;
- B) The developmental skills curriculum is designed to develop a broad range of skills in students with varying learning profiles; and
- C) The developmental skills program also offers specified training for students who have weaknesses in comprehension or challenges with decoding. (pp. 31-32)

The integrated reading and writing curriculum was designed to give students access to a wider range of diverse texts in order to build background knowledge and to improve overall comprehension, and it uses text-to-speech software to improve poor decoding and fluency difficulties (p. 32). By honing their skills through reading and writing collaboration as well as integrating technology in the form of the text-to-speech software, students have the opportunity to practice and sharpen their skills using various forms of media and numerous learning strategies.



Landmark's integrated reading and writing curriculum is collaborative and incorporates elements of reading instruction and elements of writing instruction. The program itself is intensive and prolonged as well. There are several short, daily training sessions that incorporate learning technology to further reiterate and build upon learning concepts. The program is spread over a period of several weeks, specifically over the course of a semester that averages 16 weeks. According to Engstrom, "The reading and writing courses were organized so that students would learn text patterns simultaneously" (p. 33). In essence, while the students were learning to write narrative essays, they also learned how to read narrative essays for content and structure (p. 33), thereby reinforcing and building upon the learning skills already being taught. Furthermore, the active reading strategy was taught at the very beginning of the semester and consistently reinforced with every reading assignment (p. 33). The concept behind the reinforcement supports the notion that repetition and consistent incorporation of learning concepts assists students in acquiring the skills needed to improve their learning acquisition processes.

When discussing implications for future success, Engstrom further maintains, "Students' reading skills and capabilities significantly affect what they can accomplish when faced with the complex demands of academic reading" (p. 39). Essentially, a student's capabilities in reading may be described as directly proportional to the student's success rate in college. A student who has stronger reading skills has the potential to better navigate college courses than a student who has poor reading skills. Engstrom also asserts, "Successful comprehension of various texts requires mastery of a complex set of interpretive mental activities as well as a solid foundation for rapid and accurate single-word recognition (p. 39). Engstrom finally suggests that educators provide students with opportunities to participate in an array of reading and writing experiences

and to become active observers of their own reading styles (p. 39); by doing so, the author is convinced that students can “develop the skills, strategies, and confidence to be successful students” (p. 39). The author further acknowledges that collaborative, academic resources such as tutoring and skills support services (p. 32) assist students in increasing their skills and the probability for academic success.

Collaborative learning and cooperation are also addressed by Kate Garretson when discussing the teaching and implementation of developmental reading and writing courses. During Fall 2006, faculty members at Kingsborough Community College who taught reading/writing courses, philosophy courses, and speech courses merged their efforts and shared a focus on philosophy that included Eastern and Western tradition; it was also designed to focus on the exploration of contemplative practices (p. 51). Instructors within the three disciplines used the same subject matter to teach and reiterate the same material among the different courses. The foci for the developmental reading and writing courses were designed around utilizing mindfulness meditation activities and included strategies such as contemplation, free writing, and reflective writing geared toward improving overall reading and writing skills (pp. 51-52). While this collaboration began with English as a Second Language (ESL) students, there are possible implications for other developmental reading and writing students. Garretson recommends that mindfulness meditation might be “used in...classrooms to amplify aspects of reading and writing practice that are not addressed in more traditional formalistic or skills-based instructional methods” (p. 63). While the author supports collaboration among colleagues and departments, it is also evident that she supports the idea of utilizing non-traditional strategies to reach students and to foster increased student success—particularly in a developmental education setting.

Denise Johnson (1997) also discusses a collaborative approach to a developmental reading program in which she was involved. The author indicates that she and another colleague met with two world history professors in order to design a unit around a chapter from the world history course textbook (p. 391). Reiterating learning material and demonstrating its relevance from one subject or course to the next may be helpful in assisting students in learning, retaining, and ultimately using the information learned at increased rates. One rationale for designing such a unit included the recognition that, "An increasingly large number of college students are entering [college] without the necessary skills to cope with the demands of content area learning" (p. 390). As a result, the thrust to increase student learning and student success within the developmental course itself became the impetus for the collaborative work. Regarding the findings and results of the collaboratively designed unit, the author reports, "Although a few students reacted with a typically negative view of the content and process, most were positive" (p. 392). The author indicates that the majority of the informal feedback from students was positive. There was no formal assessment tool to collect student responses to the designed unit, but some students who were previously "dreading" taking world history indicated that they were actually looking forward to the class (p. 392). By participating in the designed unit, students also had the opportunity preview the course load, course content, and course expectations before enrolling in the world history course. Johnson remarks, "The fact that the world history chapter came out of the text used on campus and that the lecture was delivered by a professor who taught world history seemed to increase the students' interest in the unit and their positive response to it" (p. 392). The caliber of the student responses may serve as an indicator that such collaboration is necessary in the context of developmental education. The responses also left Johnson with a continued commitment toward creativity and collaboration, as

she states, “I refuse to rely on traditional [strategies] or commercial materials, but instead creatively design a course my students find interesting and valuable and that meets their specific needs” (p. 392). Since remedial education students often have a wide range of needs, it is important for educators to have a wide range of strategies—including collaboration—to meet students’ needs.

Community college presidents have reiterated the importance of meeting students’ needs when discussing the challenges of remedial education. When asked how her institution had been affected by the large number of students who require remedial coursework, Carole M. Berotte Joseph states, “MassBay sees developmental education as a crucial element in its work with students to ensure that they are ultimately able to succeed at the college level” (“Challenges,” p. B33). Joseph further indicated that her institution has nearly discontinued all self-paced and lab-based courses and has replaced that model with more holistic or integrated instruction which combines reading and writing activities (p. B33). Joseph laments that since so many incoming students require remedial course work, “it is apparent that community colleges should work with the public schools to assure that curricula and learning outcomes are aligned and relay the same information about...college level work” (p. B33). Kathi Hiyane-Brown, president of Normandale Community College, confirms the disparity between high school graduation requirements and college entrance expectations. She also understands the need for collaboration between community colleges and local school districts and suggests “transitional programs for students needing to bridge these gaps” (p. B34). Increasingly, community colleges recognize the need for students to make a smoother academic transition from high school to college. Collaborative programs that build students’ aptitude and assist in making those transitions might promote greater student achievement. While Eduardo J. Martí, president of Queensborough Community College,

believes developmental education is one method of maintaining the standards among the local work force, he is equally concerned about the cost of remedial education (p. B34). Martí maintains that more collaboration between secondary schools and community colleges might result in a reduced need for remedial courses (p. B34). The recurrent theme of community colleges and high schools working together suggests a potential avenue for increased student success.

Appendix A  
Definition of Terms

## Definition of Terms

**Academic Discipline** – A particular branch of academic study; A discipline can be construed in a broad fashion, as in history or biology, or narrowly such as cognitive psychology or medical entomology (Boiarsky, 2003; Giltrow, Gooding, Burgoyne, & Sawatsky, 2014).

**Academic Discourse** - Academic discourse denotes to communication styles, ways of thinking, and method of language use which exists within the college or university setting (Applebee, 1974; Bamford & Bondi, 2005; Bourdieu, 1994; Cutting, 2000; Elbow, 1991; Graff, 2007; Graff, 2003; Lazere, 2015; Wuthnow, 1989).

**Academic Writing** – Peer-to-peer communication about knowledge and inquiry within research communities; scholarly writing; writing in the disciplines (Adams, 1993; Andrews, Torgerson, Low, & McGuinn, 2009; Armstrong, 2002; Beaufort, 2007; Boiarsky, 2003; Giltrow, Gooding, Burgoyne, & Sawatsky, 2014; Graff, 2003; Kitzhaber, 1963; Zwiers & Soto, 2017).

**Ambiguity** – The capacity for a word or phrase to be interpreted in two or more ways (Giltrow, Gooding, Burgoyne, & Sawatsky, 2014).

**Attrition** – The act or process of gradually reducing the strength or effectiveness through sustained attack or pressure; in academia, the loss of students due to drop out, stop out, or failure to graduate (Anderson, 2005; Billson & Terry, 1982; Huffman, 2001; Ishitani, 2006).

**Basic Writers** – Students who possess rudimentary, writing skills; such students may be assigned to developmental or remedial courses. Some basic writers manage to begin composition courses at the college level but experience numerous challenges due to gaps in education or skill levels (Andrews, Torgerson, Low, & McGuinn, 2009; Armstrong, 2002; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; Attewell & Lavin,

2007; Au, 1980; Au, 1986; Au, 1991; Bamberg, 1997; Bamberg, 2004; Barthes, 1968; Bizzell, 1992; Shaughnessy, 1977; Warren, 2013).

**Belletristic Writing** – Writing with taste and aesthetic principles as the main features; greatly influenced by British and Scottish textbooks like Hugh Blair's (1783) *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (Miller, 1997; Murphy, 1971; Murphy, 2012).

**College-level Courses** – classes or courses designed to accumulate a range of college credits across subjects and interests (Fike & Fike, 2008; Flanders, 2017; Gallard, Albritton, & Morgan, 2010).

**Communications Course** – A course combining writing, speaking, reading, and listening activities; popular during the 1940s and 1950s (Berlin, 1987; Masters, 2004; Murphy, 2012).

**Composition Based on Classical Rhetoric** – Composition in this sequence occurs in four chronological interior steps: Invention (discovery) of ideas, their Arrangement, the wording (Style), and their retention in Memory (Applebee, 1974; Bakhtin, 1981; Bakhtin, 1986; Berlin, 1987; Murphy, 2012).

**Composition Courses** – Separate courses in composition appear only in late nineteenth century America and beyond though they are now the one element common to nearly every level of education in America (Applebee, 1974; Anderson & Farris, 2007; Armstrong, 2002; Berlin, 1987; Kitzhaber, 1963, Murphy, 2012).

**Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC)** – Association of writing teachers formed in 1949 (Berlin, 1987; Murphy, 2012).

**Continuing-Generation College Students** – College students who have at least one parent who has earned a bachelor's degree (Allan, Garriott, & Keene, 2016; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005).



Correct Language as Social Status – The favorable effect, from Roman antiquity to present-day America, of the capacity to compose oral and written language to accepted usage; the corollary has often been a heightened emphasis on grammatical rules and determined efforts to eliminate dialects (Althusser, 2001; Anderson, 2005; Murphy, 2012).

Cultural Capital – A form of capital that can be converted into economic capital such as educational qualifications (Althusser & Balibar, 1997; Apple, 1995; Bourdieu, 1986; Hirsch, 1987).

Current-Traditional Rhetoric – Formalist rhetoric dominating writing instruction in North America for much of the twentieth century; inspired by Alexander Bain's texts, it features topic sentences, modes of discourse, and an emphasis on correctness (Bain, 1866; Murphy, 2012).

Developmental Courses - remedial or basic courses, generally beyond the high school level, designed to prepare for students for college-level courses. Such courses do not count toward degree requirements (Anderson & Farris, 2007; Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006; Bailey & Cho, 2010; Beaufort, 2007; Engstrom, 2005; Gallard, Albritton, & Morgan, 2010; James, 2006).

Discourse Community – A group of people identifiable, or recognizable, not only by their shared values, beliefs, and specialized knowledge about the world but also by the way they talk or write. Their use of language embodies their shared values and special knowledge (Bamford & Bondi, 2005; Beaufort, 2007; Cutting, 2000; Giltrow, Gooding, Burgoyne, & Sawatsky, 2014; Wuthnow, 1989).

Economic Capital - This is the form of capital is the one with which most individuals are likely the most familiar. Bourdieu describes this type of capital as one which can be immediately converted into money. It does not necessarily mean ready cash

but it may also refer to property ownership (Althusser, 1969; Althusser & Balibar, 1997; Bourdieu, 1986; Hirsch, 1987).

Epistemic Rhetoric – Also known as social-epistemic rhetoric; concept that language and writing help produce truth and knowledge through a process of interaction among the writer, the interlocutors, and the surrounding socio-cultural, political, and other external factors (Berlin, 1987; Murphy, 2012).

First-Generation College Students – college students whose parents have not completed a bachelor's degree (Adachi, 1979; Allan, Garriott, & Keene, 2016; Attewell & Lavin, 2007; Bailey, Crosta, & Jenkins, 2007; Billson and Terry, 1982; Cushman, 2006; Davis, 2012; Earl, 1987; Terenzini, 1995; Wildhagen, 2015).

Form – Elements readers and writers recognize as patterns in the wordings or overall shape of writing. Form is the particular way in which content—the writings ideas or meaning—is expressed, rather than an independent entity. Form can also be used to refer to phrases that frequently occur in certain kinds of writing (Andrews, Torgerson, Low, & McGuinn, 2009; Giltrow, Gooding, Burgoyne, & Sawatsky, 2014; Zwiers & Soto, 2017).

Freshman Composition Courses – any category of required, first-year English courses, writing courses, or their equivalent, designed to ensure students' writing abilities and prepare students for future coursework within the institution of higher education (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010; Berlin, 1987; Kitzhaber, 1963).

Hypothesis – A statement that is deemed plausible but that is, so far, untested and will be shown to be tested in the course of the research study (Creswell, Giltrow, Gooding, Burgoyne, & Sawatsky, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Informed Consent – Permission received from research subjects to participate in a study. Researchers need to inform potential participants about the purpose and risks of

the research; participants need to decide to take part in the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Giltrow, Gooding, Burgoyne, & Sawatsky, 2014).

**Knowledge Deficit** – The gap in established knowledge—what has not been said, what needs to be said, some error in what is held to be true. The knowledge deficit is what justifies the present research project (Allan, Garriott, & Keene, 2016; Giltrow, Gooding, Burgoyne, & Sawatsky, 2014).

**Language Acquisition** – The natural process by which a child learns oral language on his own by listening to and imitating elders; by contrast, writing requires external instruction and cannot be learned on one's own (Barton, 2007; Murphy, 2012; Zwiers & Soto, 2017).

**Levels of Generality** – The structure of information in a given passage, moving from the highest, most abstract concepts through general concepts down to specific details. Levels of generality can be represented in diagram form, with abstractions appearing at the top, generalized, or contextualized at midpoints, and specific details at the lowest levels. The levels diagram reveals relationships among ideas and specific details (Giltrow, Gooding, Burgoyne, & Sawatsky, 2014).

**Liberal Culture** – Writing based on literary works, with emphasis on appreciation of literature as the best thoughts of the best minds; prominent at Yale in the latter part of the nineteenth century (Berlin, 1987; Murphy, 2012).

**Metadiscourse** – Discourse about discourse; another way of looking at discourse as interaction between writer and reader (Bamford & Bondi, 2005; Graff, 20017; Hayot, 2014; Hyland, 1998; Crismore and Farnsworth, 1990; Swales, 1990; Mauranen, 1993; Sinclair, 2005; Vande Kopple, 1997).

Modals of Moral Obligation – Wording like “should” or “must” that expresses the moral need for an action or change based on research findings (Giltrow, Gooding, Burgoyne, & Sawatsky, 2014).

Modes of Discourse – Types of composition stressed by Alexander Bain at Aberdeen: narration, description, exposition, argument, and poetry; Bain also urged frequent and sequenced writing assignments. Some others attribute the modes to the influence of a faculty psychology, through the Scottish rhetorician George Campbell (Bain, 1866; Campbell, 1990; Cutting, 222; Murphy, 2012; Wuthnow, 1989).

Moral Compass of the Disciplines – The values and beliefs that characterize different, academic disciplines (Giltrow, Gooding, Burgoyne, & Sawatsky, 2014).

Mutual Knowledge – An estimate of what can be safely assumed as shared, background knowledge (Giltrow, Gooding, Burgoyne, & Sawatsky, 2014).

National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) – Association of teachers founded in 1911 in protest over uniform reading lists; the NCTE argued that teachers, rather than colleges, should set reading and writing requirements for their students (Berlin, 1987; Gold, 2008; Murphy, 2012).

Objectivity – The attempt to avoid personal bias or the limits of personal perspective and experience in the production of knowledge (Giltrow, Gooding, Burgoyne, & Sawatsky, 2014).

Plain Language – The use of language designed to be understood by a general readership. When standards of plain language are invoked to criticize the complexities of other kinds of discourse, for example, academic or legal writing, a unitary view of language is in evidence (Boiarsky, 2003; Giltrow, Gooding, Burgoyne, & Sawatsky, 2014; Zwiers & Soto, 2017).

Retention – continued student persistence in academia which may ultimately lead to graduation or completion of a degree or certification (Fike & Fike, 2008; Flanders, 2017; Koenig, 2009; Seidman, 2012).

Rhetoric – Originally, its precepts concerned the art of speaking though many of its doctrines have been and continue to be applied to writing as well. The subject was central in Western education from the first century BCE until the late nineteenth century in America (Andrews, Torgerson, Low, & McGuinn, 2009; Beaufort, 2007; Berlin, 1987; Campbell, 1990; Connors, 1997; Kitzhaber, 1963; Murphy, 2012).

Social Capital – This form of capital refers to connections and the obligations they bring; this form of capital can also be converted into economic capital (Althusser, 1969; Anyon, 1990; Bourdieu, 1986; Hirsch, 1987).

Sociality of Knowledge – The ways in which knowledge is the product of social activities (Beck, 1996; Giltrow, Gooding, Burgoyne, & Sawatsky, 2014; Hanlon, 2010).

Subjectivity – The personal, social, and cognitive point of view or experience of the world (Giltrow, Gooding, Burgoyne, & Sawatsky, 2014).

Taxonomy – Schemes for classifying and ordering phenomena; schemes that depend on naming or using nouns for items (Giltrow, Gooding, Burgoyne, & Sawatsky, 2014).

Unitary Views of Language – The idea that a single set of standards can be applied to all forms of writing or speech. Unitary views of language often manifest themselves in set rules (Giltrow, Gooding, Burgoyne, & Sawatsky, 2014).

WAC/WID - Writing program efforts that extend beyond traditional concerns with first-year composition; Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and Writing in the Discipline (WID) were found in most institutions by the new millennium. The second term is

a later development that relies on particular analyses of a discipline's writing and publishing, purposes, and discourse communities, while the first was more of a general term (Beaufort, 2007; Berlin, 1987; Herzberg, 1986; Murphy, 2012).

Appendix B

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Protocol



UNIVERSITY OF  
**TEXAS**  
ARLINGTON

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION  
REGULATORY SERVICES

**Institutional  
Review  
Board  
Notification of Exemption**

July 25, 2017

Barbara Morgan  
Dr. James Warren  
English  
The University of Texas at Arlington  
Box 19035

Protocol Number: 2017-0637

Protocol Title: *The Rhetoric of Academic Discourse: A Qualitative, Phenomenological Study on Students' Self-Investigation of the Acquisition of Academic Discourse in First-Year Writing Courses*

**EXEMPTION DETERMINATION**

The UT Arlington Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, or designee, has reviewed the above referenced study and found that it qualified for exemption under the federal guidelines for the protection of human subjects as referenced at Title 45CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:(i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, either directly or through identifiers linked to the subject; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You are therefore authorized to begin the research as of **July 25, 2017**.

Pursuant to Title 45 CFR 46.103(b)(4)(iii), investigators are required to, “promptly report to the IRB **any** proposed changes in the research activity, and to ensure that such changes in approved research, during the period for which IRB approval has already been given, are **not initiated without prior IRB review and approval** except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject.” All proposed changes to the research must be submitted via the electronic submission system prior to implementation. Please also be advised that as the principal investigator, you are required to report local adverse (unanticipated) events to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services within 24 hours of the occurrence or upon acknowledgement of the occurrence. All investigators and key personnel identified in the protocol must have documented Human Subject





UNIVERSITY OF  
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OFFICE OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION  
REGULATORY SERVICES

Protection (HSP) Training on file with this office. Completion certificates are valid for 2 years from completion date.

The UT Arlington Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services appreciates your continuing commitment to the protection of human research subjects. Should you have questions or require further assistance, please contact Regulatory Services at [regulatoryservices@uta.edu](mailto:regulatoryservices@uta.edu) or 817-272-2105.

Appendix C  
Informed Consent Form – Student

**The Rhetoric of Academic Discourse:  
A Qualitative, Phenomenological Study of Students' Self-Investigation of the  
Acquisition of Academic Discourse in First-Year Writing Courses**

**Informed Consent Form – Student**

**Definitions:**

Academic Discourse – Language and writing used in the academy or at the college/university level. According to composition theorists, academic discourse refers to the ways of thinking and using language that exist inside an established, academic community, such as in higher education or at the university level (Bartholomae 1986; Hyland 2009). In fact, there is such a thing as a powerful, discourse community with rules and conventions to be mastered, and scholars agree that instructors should teach students academic discourse (Bizzell 1982; Elbow 1991).

Acquisition – For this study, “acquisition” refers to learning information or obtaining a skill.

**Principal Investigator:** Barbara Morgan, [Barbara.Morgan@mavs.uta.edu](mailto:Barbara.Morgan@mavs.uta.edu)

**Faculty Advisor:** Professor James Warren

**Introduction:** You are being asked to take part in a research study of how college students learn academic discourse. Please read this form carefully, and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

**What the study is about:** The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine the acquisition of academic discourse of college students who have enrolled in and completed at least one mandatory, first-year composition courses, or the equivalent, at community colleges and universities in the United States within the past five years.

**What we will ask you to do:** If you agree to participate in this study, we will conduct an interview with you. The interview will include questions about your writing courses, experiences in those courses, and your self-investigation regarding your learning academic discourse. The interview will take about 30 minutes to complete. With your permission, we would also like to record the interview. Interviews will be conducted at your college campus.

**Risks and benefits:**

The researcher does not anticipate any risks to your participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.

The benefits to you include your ability and opportunity to discuss and add your experiences surrounding first-year, composition courses. Your experiences may also assist writing professors, institutions of higher education, administrators, and possibly senior high school faculty members improve their processes in preparing students to acquire academic discourse skills.

**The Rhetoric of Academic Discourse:  
A Qualitative, Phenomenological Study of Students' Self-Investigation of the  
Acquisition of Academic Discourse in First-Year Writing Courses**

**Compensation:** There is no direct compensation for participation in this study. The researcher's students will receive 30 points in extra credit for participation.

**Your answers will be confidential:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researchers will have access to the records. After we record the interview, we will destroy the recording after it has been transcribed. We anticipate that this destruction will occur within two months of its taping.

**Participation is voluntary:** Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. If you decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions, it will not affect your current or future relationship with the University of Texas at Arlington or your current or future relationship with Collin College. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. Alternatively, students who elect not to participate may receive the 30 extra credit points by completing two (2) additional lab assignments. Each completed, lab assignment is worth 15 extra credit points. Lab assignments are defined (from the Course Syllabus) as follows:

Labs: The lab component is an integral part of the course and is designed to support writing improvement. Labs cannot be completed during regular class; instead, they must be completed outside of class. The requirements for written, lab entries are as follows: 1.5 pages minimum in length, typed, double-spaced, MLA format, Times New Roman, 1" margins, size 12. The following are acceptable, lab activities:

Written Response: Collin-sponsored Event	Writing Center Tutoring Sessions
Writing Center Workshops	Library Workshops
Online Grammar and Writing Exercises	ACCESS Tutoring
Online Student Tutorials/Library Tutorials	Study Skills Seminars
Article Annotation or Exposition	Journal Writing
Formal Conferences with Professor	Grammar Quizzes

**If you have questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Barbara Morgan, under the supervision of Prof. James Warren. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have inquiries later, you may contact Barbara Morgan at [Barbara.Morgan@mavs.uta.edu](mailto:Barbara.Morgan@mavs.uta.edu) with any questions or concerns. You may also contact Prof. Warren at [jewarren@uta.edu](mailto:jewarren@uta.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 817-272-9329 or access the website at <http://www.uta.edu/research/administration/departments/rs/human-subjects-irb/>.

You may also report your concerns or complaints to the Office of Regulatory Services at 817-272-3723 or by email at [regulatoryservices@uta.edu](mailto:regulatoryservices@uta.edu).

**The Rhetoric of Academic Discourse:  
A Qualitative, Phenomenological Study of Students' Self-Investigation of the  
Acquisition of Academic Discourse in First-Year Writing Courses**

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent:** I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview recorded.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name of Person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study.*

Appendix D  
Informed Consent Form – Professor

**The Rhetoric of Academic Discourse:  
A Qualitative, Phenomenological Study of Students' Self-Investigation of the  
Acquisition of Academic Discourse in First-Year Writing Courses**

**Informed Consent Form – Professor**

**Definitions:**

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Acquisition – For this study, “acquisition” refers to learning information or obtaining a skill.

**Principal Investigator:** Barbara Morgan, [Barbara.Morgan@mavs.uta.edu](mailto:Barbara.Morgan@mavs.uta.edu)

**Faculty Advisor:** Professor James Warren

**Introduction:** You are being asked to take part in a research study of how college students learn academic discourse. We are asking you to take part to gain a professor's or instructor's perspective on this subject. Please read this form carefully, and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

**What the study is about:** The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine the acquisition of academic discourse of college students who have completed mandatory, first-year composition courses, or the equivalent, at community colleges and universities in the United States within the past five years.

**What we will ask you to do:** If you agree to participate in this study, we will conduct an interview with you. The interview will include questions about your writing courses, experiences with students in those courses, and how your students acquire academic discourse skills. The interview will take about 30 minutes to complete. With your permission, we would also like to record the interview. Interviews will be conducted at your educational institution.

**Risks and benefits:**

The researcher does not anticipate any risks to your participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.

The benefits to you include your ability and opportunity to discuss and add your experiences surrounding first-year, composition courses. Your experiences may also assist other writing professors, institutions of higher education, administrators, and possibly senior high school faculty members to improve their processes in preparing students to acquire academic discourse skills.

**The Rhetoric of Academic Discourse:  
A Qualitative, Phenomenological Study of Students' Self-Investigation of the  
Acquisition of Academic Discourse in First-Year Writing Courses**

**Compensation:** There is no direct compensation associated with this study, and there is no compensation for professors and instructors who participate.

**Your answers will be confidential:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researchers will have access to the records. After we record the interview, we will destroy the recording once it has been transcribed. We anticipate that this destruction will occur within two months of its taping.

**Participation is voluntary:** Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. If you decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions, it will not affect your current or future relationship with the University of Texas at Arlington or your current or future relationship with Collin College. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time.

**If you have questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Barbara Morgan, under the supervision of Prof. James Warren. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have inquiries later, you may contact Barbara Morgan at [Barbara.Morgan@mavs.uta.edu](mailto:Barbara.Morgan@mavs.uta.edu) with any questions or concerns. You may also contact Prof. Warren at [jewarren@uta.edu](mailto:jewarren@uta.edu). If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 817-272-9329 or access the website at: <http://www.uta.edu/research/administration/departments/rs/human-subjects-irb/>.

You may also report your concerns or complaints to the Office of Regulatory Services at 817-272-3723 or by email at [regulatoryservices@uta.edu](mailto:regulatoryservices@uta.edu).

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent:** I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Your Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview recorded.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Your Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study.*



Appendix E  
Recruitment Materials - (Email Message)

**The Rhetoric of Academic Discourse:  
A Qualitative, Phenomenological Study of Students' Self-Investigation of the  
Acquisition of Academic Discourse in First-Year Writing Courses**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

My name is Barbara Morgan; I am a doctoral student in the English Department at the University of Texas at Arlington.

I am conducting interviews for a qualitative study to help determine how college students learn academic discourse.

The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

You were selected to participate in this study because you have completed at least one course in the First-Year Writing course series, or its equivalent.

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. If you decide not to participate or to skip some of the questions, it will not affect your current or future relationship with the University of Texas at Arlington or your current or future relationship with the Collin College. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time.

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researchers will have access to the records. After we record the interview, we will destroy the recording after it has been transcribed. We anticipate that this destruction will occur within two months of its taping.

The researcher conducting this study is Barbara Morgan, under the supervision of Prof. James Warren. If you have inquiries later, you may contact Barbara Morgan at [Barbara.Morgan@mavs.uta.edu](mailto:Barbara.Morgan@mavs.uta.edu) with any questions or concerns. You may also contact Prof. Warren at [jewarren@uta.edu](mailto:jewarren@uta.edu).

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Texas at Arlington's Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 817-272-9329 or access the website at <http://www.uta.edu/research/administration/departments/rs/human-subjects-irb/>. You may also report your concerns or complaints to the Office of Regulatory Services at 817-272-3723 or by email at [regulatoryservices@uta.edu](mailto:regulatoryservices@uta.edu).

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in this research.

Sincerely,

Barbara Morgan  
University of Texas at Arlington  
Doctoral Candidate  
[Barbara.Morgan@mavs.uta.edu](mailto:Barbara.Morgan@mavs.uta.edu)

**The Rhetoric of Academic Discourse:  
A Qualitative, Phenomenological Study of Students' Self-Investigation of the  
Acquisition of Academic Discourse in First-Year Writing Courses**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

My name is Barbara Morgan; I am a doctoral student in the English Department at the University of Texas at Arlington.

I am conducting interviews for a qualitative study to help determine how college students learn academic discourse.

The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

You were selected to participate in this study because you have taught at least one course in the first-year, writing course series, or its equivalent.

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. If you decide not to participate or to skip some of the questions, it will not affect your current or future relationship with the University of Texas at Arlington or your current or future relationship with the Collin College. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time.

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researchers will have access to the records. After we record the interview, we will destroy the recording after it has been transcribed. We anticipate that this destruction will occur within two months of its taping.

The researcher conducting this study is Barbara Morgan, under the supervision of Prof. James Warren. If you have inquiries later, you may contact Barbara Morgan at [Barbara.Morgan@mavs.uta.edu](mailto:Barbara.Morgan@mavs.uta.edu) with any questions or concerns. You may also contact Prof. Warren at [jewarren@uta.edu](mailto:jewarren@uta.edu).

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Texas at Arlington's Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 817-272-9329 or access the website at <http://www.uta.edu/research/administration/departments/rs/human-subjects-irb/>. You may also report your concerns or complaints to the Office of Regulatory Services at 817-272-3723 or by email at [regulatoryservices@uta.edu](mailto:regulatoryservices@uta.edu).

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in this research.

Sincerely,

Barbara Morgan  
University of Texas at Arlington  
Doctoral Candidate  
[Barbara.Morgan@mavs.uta.edu](mailto:Barbara.Morgan@mavs.uta.edu)

Appendix F  
Research Interview Script

**The Rhetoric of Academic Discourse:  
A Qualitative, Phenomenological Study of Students' Self-Investigation of the  
Acquisition of Academic Discourse in First-Year Writing Courses**

Research Interview Script

Objects or experiences of life and in the world stand out against a backdrop of context through using a personal biography or narrative that provides meaning to that object or experience (Husserl, 1970).

*Researcher says:*

- Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.
  
- As you know, my name is Barbara Morgan, and I a Ph.D. candidate and the primary investigator for this project. My supervising professor is Dr. James Warren. Both my contact information and his contact information are located on your Informed Consent Document.
  
- This interview should take about 30 minutes to complete.
  
- Please allow me to tell you a bit more about this research study. A primary goal of this research is to obtain and document students' experiences around learning academic discourse. Feel free to share as much information as you see fit. As a reminder, this interview will be recorded to help with maintaining the answers and data received. Remember, all responses are confidential, and participation is voluntary.
  
- What questions do you have before we begin the interview?
  
- If there are no additional questions, and you still agree to participation and recording, please sign and date this Informed Consent Document. This extra copy of the document is yours to keep.

(Research Interview Questions – Student: Questions will be specific to the participant.)

*Question*

1. According to composition theorists, academic discourse refers to the ways of thinking and using language that exist inside an established, academic community, such as in higher education or at the university level (Bartholomae, 1986; Hyland, 2009). In fact, there is such a thing as a powerful, discourse community with rules and conventions to be mastered, and scholars agree that instructors should teach students academic discourse (Bizzell, 1982; Elbow, 1991). What is your understanding of academic discourse?

*Question*

2. Describe where and when, you believe, students should learn academic discourse. Why?

**The Rhetoric of Academic Discourse:  
A Qualitative, Phenomenological Study of Students' Self-Investigation of the  
Acquisition of Academic Discourse in First-Year Writing Courses**

*Question*

3. How did you first learn academic discourse, and what did the process entail?

*Question*

4. Now we will discuss your experiences at the college level. When you enrolled in first year writing, what were your expectations surrounding learning academic discourse?

*Question*

5. How do you perceive your professor's or instructor's expectations surrounding academic discourse during first year composition?

*Question*

6. Discuss your experiences regarding whether or not professors expect students to have some skills in academic discourse before beginning their college-level courses. Why?

*Question*

7. To what extent are the mandatory first-year composition courses beneficial to students?

*Question*

8. Please share a story or personal experience related to your learning academic discourse. What conclusions can you draw from this experience?

*Question*

9. How do you see yourself today in terms of academic discourse acquisition?

*Question*

10. To what extent have the first-year, composition courses been beneficial in assisting you, as a student, with (mastering) writing academic discourse for subsequent, college courses?

*Question*

11. To what extent are the freshman English courses beneficial outside of the academic environment and in such situations as students' employment or careers, in other professional environments, or in social environments?

*Question*

12. Should first year, writing courses be mandatory? Why or why not?

**The Rhetoric of Academic Discourse:  
A Qualitative, Phenomenological Study of Students' Self-Investigation of the  
Acquisition of Academic Discourse in First-Year Writing Courses**

*Question*

13. Before we conclude the interview, please discuss or add any additional information that we might have overlooked or not covered regarding this topic.

*Researcher says:*

- Thank you, again, for participating in this study.
- Please feel free to e-mail me if you think of additional areas that we should include, or if you have any additional questions.
- This concludes the interview. I appreciate your time.

Appendix G

Research Interview Questions - Student



**The Rhetoric of Academic Discourse:  
A Qualitative, Phenomenological Study of Students' Self-Investigation of the  
Acquisition of Academic Discourse in First-Year Writing Courses**

Research Interview Questions

Objects or experiences of life and in the world stand out against a backdrop of context through using a personal biography or narrative that provides meaning to that object or experience (Husserl, 1970).

Research Interview Questions - Student

1. According to composition theorists, academic discourse refers to the ways of thinking and using language that exist inside an established, academic community, such as in higher education or at the university level (Bartholomae, 1986; Hyland, 2009). In fact, there is such a thing as a powerful, discourse community with rules and conventions to be mastered, and scholars agree that instructors should teach students academic discourse (Bizzell, 1982; Elbow, 1991). What is your understanding of academic discourse?
2. Describe where and when, you believe, students should learn academic discourse. Why?
3. How did you first learn academic discourse, and what did the process entail?
4. Now we will discuss your experiences at the college level. When you enrolled in first year writing, what were your expectations surrounding learning academic discourse?
5. How do you perceive your professor's or instructor's expectations surrounding academic discourse during first year composition?
6. Discuss your experiences regarding whether or not professors expect students to have some skills in academic discourse before beginning their college-level courses. Why?
7. To what extent are the mandatory first-year composition courses beneficial to students?
8. Please share a story or personal experience related to your learning academic discourse. What conclusions can you draw from this experience?

**The Rhetoric of Academic Discourse:  
A Qualitative, Phenomenological Study of Students' Self-Investigation of the  
Acquisition of Academic Discourse in First-Year Writing Courses**

9. How do you see yourself today in terms of academic discourse acquisition?
  
10. To what extent have the first-year, composition courses been beneficial in assisting you, as a student, with (mastering) writing academic discourse for subsequent, college courses?
  
11. To what extent are the freshman English courses beneficial outside of the academic environment and in such situations as students' employment or careers, in other professional environments, or in social environments?
  
12. Should first-year writing courses be mandatory? Why or why not?
  
13. Before we conclude the interview, please discuss or add any additional information that we might have overlooked or not covered regarding this topic.

Appendix H

Research Interview Questions - Professor

**The Rhetoric of Academic Discourse:  
A Qualitative, Phenomenological Study of Students' Self-Investigation of the  
Acquisition of Academic Discourse in First-Year Writing Courses**

Research Interview Questions

Objects or experiences of life and in the world stand out against a backdrop of context through using a personal biography or narrative that provides meaning to that object or experience (Husserl, 1970).

Research Interview Questions - Professor

1. According to composition theorists, academic discourse refers to the ways of thinking and using language that exist inside an established, academic community, such as in higher education or at the university level (Bartholomae 1986; Hyland 2009). In fact, there is such a thing as a powerful, discourse community with rules and conventions to be mastered, and scholars agree that instructors should teach students academic discourse (Bizzell 1982; Elbow 1991). What is your understanding of academic discourse?
2. Describe where and when, you believe, students should learn academic discourse. Why?
3. How did you first learn academic discourse, and what did the process entail?
4. When students enroll in first-year writing, what, in your opinion, are their expectations around learning academic discourse?
5. Please describe your expectations of students regarding academic discourse and first-year composition.
6. Discuss your experiences regarding whether or not you, as a professor, expect students to have some skills in academic discourse before beginning their college-level courses. Why?
7. To what extent are the mandatory first-year composition courses beneficial to students?
8. Please share a story or personal experience related to your learning academic discourse. What conclusions can you draw from this experience?

**The Rhetoric of Academic Discourse:  
A Qualitative, Phenomenological Study of Students' Self-Investigation of the  
Acquisition of Academic Discourse in First-Year Writing Courses**

9. How do you see yourself today in terms of academic discourse acquisition?
  
10. To what extent have the first-year composition courses been beneficial in assisting students with (mastering) writing academic discourse for subsequent college courses?
  
11. To what extent are the freshman English courses beneficial outside of the academic environment and in such situations as students' employment or careers, in other professional environments, or in social environments?
  
12. Should first-year writing courses be mandatory? Why or why not?
  
13. Before we conclude the interview, please discuss or add any additional insights or information you have regarding students' acquisition of academic discourse.

Appendix I  
Manual Coding Categories

Table 4-1 Manual Coding Categories

Question	Content	Domain 1	Domain 2	Domain 3	Other
Q1/PQ1	What is academic discourse?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Reading</li> <li>•Writing</li> <li>•Speaking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Usage &amp; Grammar</li> <li>•Rules</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•College Vocab.</li> <li>•Univ.Exp</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•School-related</li> <li>•? Unkwn</li> </ul>
Q2/PQ2	Location: academic discourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Very Early</li> <li>•K/1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup></li> <li>•4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> grd</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Jr/Sr HS</li> <li>•Jr High</li> <li>•Middle Sc</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Parents</li> <li>•Home-school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Internet</li> <li>•Online</li> <li>•Chat/Blg</li> </ul>
Q3/PQ3	Actual Location + Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Young Age</li> <li>•K/1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup></li> <li>•4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> grd</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Jr/Sr HS</li> <li>•Jr High</li> <li>•Middle Sc</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Parents</li> <li>•Home-school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Internet</li> <li>•Online</li> <li>•Chat/Blg</li> </ul>
Q4/PQ4	Expectat. Academic Discourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Prev Know</li> <li>•Learn/Class</li> <li>•HS Prep.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Xfer Skills</li> <li>•MS Prep.</li> <li>•Prepared</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Review</li> <li>•Build on Prev Info</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Know Some AD</li> <li>•Unsure</li> </ul>
Q5/PQ5	Prof's Expectat. AD – 1 <sup>st</sup> yr	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Prev Know</li> <li>•Learn/Class</li> <li>•HS Prep.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Review</li> <li>•Build on Prev Info</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Know Some AD</li> <li>•Prepared</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Low Expectat</li> <li>•Unsure</li> </ul>
Q6/PQ6	Expectat. AD Skills a priori	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Use HS info</li> <li>•Learn/Class</li> <li>•HS Prep.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•ADReview</li> <li>•Build on Prev Info</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Know Some AD</li> <li>•Prepared</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•No/Low Expectat</li> <li>•? Unkwn</li> </ul>
Q7/PQ7	Extent 1 <sup>st</sup> Yr. Comp. Beneficial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Somewhat</li> <li>•Very Benef</li> <li>•Beneficial</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Some help</li> <li>•Helpful</li> <li>•Ok/Some</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Not at all</li> <li>•Time/\$ wasted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Unable to gauge or tell</li> </ul>
Q8/PQ8	Personal Story on AD Acquis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Wake up cll</li> <li>•Poor prfmc</li> <li>•Understand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Too High</li> <li>•HS exper</li> <li>•Instr expec</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Negative academic experien.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Positive academic experien.</li> </ul>
Q9/PQ9	Self-Assessmt Acad Disc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Confident</li> <li>•Proficient</li> <li>•Better Unstd</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Some chg</li> <li>•Positive</li> <li>•Neutral</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Not helpfl</li> <li>•+Writing</li> <li>•+Speakg</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Unable to gauge or tell</li> </ul>
Q10/PQ10	1 <sup>st</sup> yr Cmp AD Other Collg Crs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very Benfcl</li> <li>•Somewhat</li> <li>•Beneficial</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Foundatn</li> <li>•+Performnc</li> <li>•Helpful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Research</li> <li>•Humaniti</li> <li>•NonTech</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Extrmly</li> <li>•Neutral</li> <li>•Unsure</li> </ul>
Q11/PQ11	AD Benef Outside of Academia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes Helptul</li> <li>•Somewhat</li> <li>•Beneficial</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Career</li> <li>•Correspnd</li> <li>•Work/Job</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Social</li> <li>•Organizat</li> <li>•Online</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Conferc</li> <li>•Email</li> <li>•Var Plac</li> </ul>
Q12/PQ12	1 <sup>st</sup> yr Cmp Mandatory Optional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Required</li> <li>•Some Req</li> <li>•Certain Stds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Optional</li> <li>•Testing Scr</li> <li>•Devlopmntl</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Test Out</li> <li>•Beneficl</li> <li>•Writing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Neutral</li> <li>•Unsure</li> <li>•Undecd</li> </ul>
Q13/PQ13	Additions Before Concluding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•School/Collg</li> <li>•Learning Issu</li> <li>•Beneficial</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•ESL/ELL</li> <li>•Job/Work</li> <li>•Beneficial</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Placemnt</li> <li>•Testing</li> <li>•Proficient</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Optional</li> <li>• Discipln</li> <li>•None</li> </ul>

Appendix J

Inter-rater Coding, Categories, and Themes



Table 4-2 Inter-rater Coding, Categories, and Themes

Question	Content	Codes, Categories, and Themes
Q1/PQ1	What is academic discourse?	•Writing •Usage and Grammar •Lang of the Academy •Speaking •Limited/Unfamiliar •Unknown •Communication •Unknown •Rules, Guidelines, Format
Q2/PQ2	Location: academic discourse	•Elementary School •Jr/Sr HS •Formative •College •K/1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> /3 <sup>rd</sup> •Middle and High School •Online •Parents •4 <sup>th</sup> /5 <sup>th</sup> /6 <sup>th</sup> •Middle School •Blogging •Home
Q3/PQ3	Actual Location + Process	•Elementary School •Chat/Blg •Other/No Specific Loc. •K/1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> /3 <sup>rd</sup> •Parents •Internet •Jr/Sr HS •Middle and High School •Home-school •College
Q4/PQ4	Expectat. Academic Discourse	• Build Skills •Rigorous/Difficult •MS Prep; Prev. Skills •Learn Basics in College •HS Prep. •Low/No Expectatns •Effect. Communication •Some AD/Learn Advanced.
Q5/PQ5	Prof's Expectat AD – 1 <sup>st</sup> yr	•Undeterm/Fluct Expect •Unsure •Few Skills/Low Expect •Intermed Skills/Med Expect •Prepared •Some AD •HS Prep •Advanc Skills/High Expecta •Build on Info
Q6/PQ6	Expectat. AD Skills a priori	•Prev Prep •AD Review •Low Expecta/Teach Basics •Med Expecta/Some Knwlg •Prepared •Unclear/Unrealis •Know Some AD •High Expect/Acad Readiness
Q7/PQ7	Extent 1 <sup>st</sup> Yr. Comp. Beneficial	•Useful •Some Students/Helpful •Voluntary •Very Beneficial •Not Useful •Time/\$ wasted •Unknown •Beneficial •Ok/Some •Unable to gauge or tell
Q8/PQ8	Personal Story on AD Acquis	•Little Focus AD •High exp •Negative academic experien •Lack Prepar/Poor perfrmnc •Positive academic experien •Unhelpful for Career Trk •Beneficial Skills Outside Crs
Q9/PQ9	Self-Assessmt Acad Disc	•Confident/Better Understanding •Some Change •Proficient •Moderate Changes/Positive •Unsure •Difficult to Assess/Determine •Better Unstd •Positive
Q10/PQ10	1 <sup>st</sup> yr Cmp AD Other Collg Crs	• Very/Extremely Helpful •Non-Tech Related •Helpful •Somewhat Helpful •Humanities •Neutral or Undecided •Not Very Helpful •Unsure •Not Helpful at All
Q11/PQ11	AD Benef Outside of Academia	• Yes Helptul •Online •Beneficial •Career •Somewhat Beneficial •Work/Job •Social •Not at All •Conferc •Email •Very/Extremely Beneficial
Q12/PQ12	1 <sup>st</sup> yr Cmp Mandatory Optional	•Mandatory for All •Some Req •Discipline-Specific •Testing Scr •Developmental •Test Out •Voluntary •Mandatory for Low Scorers •Writing •Neutral •Unsure
Q13/PQ13	Additions Before Concluding	•Employment/Career •Academic Considerations •ESL/ELL •Discipline-Specific •Placement Testing •No Additions •Optional •Language/Learning Barriers

Appendix K

Cohen's Kappa Coefficient  $\mathcal{K}$

Table 4-3 Cohen's Kappa Coefficient  $\kappa$

Cohen's Kappa Coefficient $\kappa$ <sup>6</sup>																	
<p>The definition of <math>\kappa</math> is:</p> $\kappa = \frac{\text{Pr}(a) - \text{Pr}(e)}{1 - \text{Pr}(e)}$ <p>or</p> $\text{Kappa} = \frac{(\text{Observed Agreement} - \text{Expected Agreement})}{1 - \text{Expected Agreement}}$																	
<p>Review of Variables and Equation Elements</p>	<p>Pr(a) represents the actual observed agreement. Pr(e) represents chance or expected agreement. N represents the total number of items under consideration.</p>																
<p>Observed agreement is determined by calculating the frequency with which two measurements, or raters, agreed:</p> $\text{Observed Agreement} = \frac{(a + d)}{N}$																	
<p>Expected agreement is determined by calculating the expected agreement values divided by the total number (N) of items:</p> $\text{Expected Agreement} = \frac{(\text{Expected (a)} + \text{Expected (d)})}{N}$																	
<p>The agreement by chance, for both positive and negative, must also be taken into consideration:</p> <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Positive</th> <th>Negative</th> <th>Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <th>Positive</th> <td><math>(a+b)(a+c)/N</math></td> <td><math>(a+b)(b+d)/N</math></td> <td>a+b</td> </tr> <tr> <th>Negative</th> <td><math>(c+d)(a+c)/N</math></td> <td><math>(c+d)(b+d)/N</math></td> <td>c+d</td> </tr> <tr> <th></th> <td>a+c</td> <td>b+d</td> <td>N</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			Positive	Negative	Total	Positive	$(a+b)(a+c)/N$	$(a+b)(b+d)/N$	a+b	Negative	$(c+d)(a+c)/N$	$(c+d)(b+d)/N$	c+d		a+c	b+d	N
	Positive	Negative	Total														
Positive	$(a+b)(a+c)/N$	$(a+b)(b+d)/N$	a+b														
Negative	$(c+d)(a+c)/N$	$(c+d)(b+d)/N$	c+d														
	a+c	b+d	N														
<p>It is worth noting that kappa = 0 when two measures agree by chance only, and kappa = 1 when two measures agree perfectly.</p>																	

<sup>6</sup> Cohen's Kappa Coefficient ( $\kappa$ ) is a statistical measure of inter-rater agreement and reliability between two rates that features qualitative or categorical data. This computational method is generally thought to be a more robust measure than simple percent agreement calculation since  $\kappa$  also takes into account any agreement occurring by chance. Sources: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3900052/> and [http://epiville.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/popup/how\\_to\\_calculate\\_kappa.html](http://epiville.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/popup/how_to_calculate_kappa.html)

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### Biographical Information

Barbara E. Morgan brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the School of Arts, Technology, and Emerging Communication (ATEC) at UT Dallas as Faculty Accreditation Coordinator and Senior Lecturer. She has dedicated nearly 20 years to education and to student success. Additionally, she is a Veteran of the United States Army where she served 10 years as an Arabic Linguist and a Signal Officer.

Morgan has earned a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition at the University of Texas at Arlington. Her research includes strategies and methodologies to increase undergraduate student completion rates in such requisite courses as English Composition I, English Composition II, Rhetoric, and Professional and Technical Communication. Her research further extends into assessment and increased graduation rates among students. She also holds a Master of Science degree in Student Affairs in Higher Education, a Master of Education degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, a Bachelor of Arts degree in English with emphasis in Spanish, and an Associate in Arts degree in Arabic Language and Cultural Studies.

In addition, Barbara Morgan has worked diligently in the K- 12 educational environment, and she is a board-certified English, Language Arts, and Reading Teacher (8- 12) and Principal (EC- 12) in the state of Texas.

Likewise, Morgan has extensive experience with successfully educating students at both the community college level and at the university level. Similarly, her background and proficiency with assessment and SACSCOC accreditation make her an exceptional asset to both ATEC and UT Dallas. She currently teaches ECS 3390, Professional and Technical Communication, at UT Dallas.