

THESIS

“NO CLASS I TOOK IN SENIOR YEAR MATTERS COMPARED TO WHAT I’M TAKING  
NOW”: THE READING AND WRITING TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO  
COLLEGE

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## ABSTRACT

### “NO CLASS I TOOK IN SENIOR YEAR MATTERS COMPARED TO WHAT I’M TAKING NOW”: THE READING AND WRITING TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE

The transition from high school to college signals a significant change in what students are expected to know and be able to do in an educational context, especially with reading and writing. Many researchers, teachers, and professors have sought to illuminate the complexities of the transition. This thesis sought to bring in students’ voices to this conversation as they are the ones most affected by educational practices and policies. The research questions investigated in this study included: From the perspective of first year college students enrolled in a composition course, how do they describe: 1) their experiences with reading and writing in high school? 2) their perceptions of what they’ll need to know and be able to do in college and their degree of preparation for college-level reading and writing? 3) what teachers could do to help make this transition smoother for students? The research revealed that not only are teachers and professors feeling the tension, but the students are as well. The types of reading and writing done in high school do not necessarily align with the types of reading and writing that students are expected to know and do in college. This disconnect makes it more difficult for students to navigate the transition between the two. The participant in this study offered insightful thoughts about the complexities involved in the shift as well as some ideas for addressing the misalignment between high school and college expectations and requirements for reading and writing.

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## DEDICATION

*For all students and their teachers.*

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## INTRODUCTION

“I feel like they lied to me.”

“We didn’t do any of this in high school.”

“High school was a joke—I was not prepared for this.”

“They say they do all these things to prepare you for college and they don’t.”

As a First Year Composition (FYC) instructor I have heard my students express many frustrations: their new workloads, their need of time management skills, the courses they are required to take, homesickness. The most inciting thing I hear from them, however, is how unprepared they felt for the transition from high school to college. I have spoken with my students about their high school experiences, trying to discover why the shift is so difficult for them. They talked about how their high school teachers always told them how hard college would be, but they found that the work they were being asked to do now was not simply more work than high school (as their teachers suggested it would be), but it was vastly different than what they did in high school and not at all what they were expecting. This experience is something that my participant, Emily, echoed in my interviews with her. My students struggled to make the shift from focusing on grammar and just answering the prompt to thinking about reading and writing rhetorically. They had never been asked to consider purpose, audience, context, and text. It was like I was teaching them a foreign language and it was clear how frustrated they felt by it.

I believe that college should be difficult and students should be required to extend their thinking and learn new ways of thinking. However, I also feel like students should not have to struggle this hard to be successful. They should come into college with some skills that prepare

them to begin thinking, reading, and writing more critically. This transition should not feel like a surprise and students should not feel like they were not at all prepared. I began this research in order to give students a voice in this field. The students are the ones who are affected by educational policies and teachers' practices and we owe it to them to make sure that they are well prepared for the transition from high school to college. Our students should not feel like they were tricked and not set up for success. In asking the students about their experiences and their thoughts about the transition, I believe we can shift our practices to better help prepare them to go from high school to college.

The transition between high school and college signals a significant change in what students are expected to do and know in an educational context. For years researchers have been investigating this period of change and development in students' lives and various observations have resulted from those studies (Collier, 2014; Conley, 2007; Sanoff, 2006; Vanezia & Jager, 2013)The role that First-Year Composition (FYC) has to play in this period of transition for students is a unique one. Oftentimes students find that they are being asked to do very different things in reading and writing in college than they were required to do in high school, and sometimes students seem unprepared for this shift. It is in FYC that professors and instructors most often see a disconnect between what they are expecting first year students to do and what their students expect to do and thus this context is rich for study. In particular, there is an apparent disconnect in the ways that traditional students who are entering college define "good writing" and their perceptions of reading in contrast to the ways that professors and instructors theorize reading and writing. This tension between the two groups has been investigated in many different ways and yet still remains an exigent issue. As a result of my own experiences as a FYC teacher and my forays into this field of study, I have developed some questions that I am



attempting to answer with this research. In answering these questions I hope to discover possible explanations for this gap in the spirit of working to find ways to ease this transition for students. I also want to focus on the students' perspectives, as too often we see policy makers', researchers', and professors' voices represented in the literature, but finding students' contributions is rare. Also, as I want to teach high school after I earn my Master's degree, I would like some kind of practical solution to come out of this research that I can implement in my own teaching. As a future high school teacher, chances are that I will be teaching the Common Core State Standards and working with students who are planning on going to college, so I would like to undertake this research in order to better help my own students.

What seems to be most apparent is a limited amount of student voices in this research. As a result, I have chosen to focus my study on gaining students' perspectives in this issue. The three main questions that are driving my research are: From the perspective of first year college students enrolled in a composition course, how do they describe:

- 1) their experiences with reading and writing in high school?
- 2) their perceptions of what they'll need to know and be able to do in college and their degree of preparation for college-level reading and writing?
- 3) what teachers could do to help make this transition smoother for students?

According to the U.S. Bureau of Statistics, 65.9% of 2013 high school graduates were enrolled in college in October 2013 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2014). As more and more students go from high school to college, it is worth considering how we as educators prepare them for that transition (U.S. Department of Labor, 2014). I believe that as a teacher you have a responsibility to your students to adequately prepare them for what may lie ahead in their education. It is this belief that drives me to investigate how we might ease the current disparity

between what students are able to do when they come in to college and what they are expected to be able to do. There are a lot of changes that come with the transition to college—developmentally, socially, academically, etc.—so it is foolish to hope that the shift will ever be easy, and there is also value in the struggles that students face because those difficulties force students to learn how to overcome them. However, I do believe that there must be something, we as teachers, (on both ends of the change: high school and college) can do in order to better help our students and I believe that it is our responsibility to do so. Those in the field of education, at both the secondary and post-secondary levels, are well positioned to explore and discover these issues as we work directly with students. In order to best look at these issues, however, there is an important piece we need to consider: students. Students' voices are significant to consider as they are the ones being affected by our practices. It seems curious that there is a lack of representation of student voice in the research about reading and writing in high school and college and the transition from high school to college. With this research I am attempting to help fill this particular void.

As the literature review will show, I am not the only researcher who is interested in these questions. However, I feel as though it is still relevant and important because the problem persists. Although researchers and scholars in English Studies have been investigating this issue for decades, the fact remains that we have not really solved the problem. I do not presume to suggest that I will be the one to solve it either; rather I wish to investigate it in a different way and to perhaps shed new light on the matter as well. I do not argue that students should come into college knowing everything that they will learn in their first year composition course; rather, I suggest that there is room for making this transition from high school and college, particularly in the realms of reading and writing, smoother. I hope that my research that focuses on students'

perceptions and beliefs about their abilities, others' expectations of them, and the transition will suggest some possible methods for helping our students make the shift in their thinking, reading, and writing abilities that better prepares them to make the transition from high school to college. In order to establish some context, I have reviewed the research on high school requirements and expectations for reading and writing, university requirements and expectations for reading and writing, and the transition from high school to college—focused on reading and writing.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I review the literature that presents and considers the requirements and expectations for reading and writing for students at the secondary level, which generally appear in the form of standards; the requirements and expectations for reading and writing for college students, which take the form of “college readiness” and outcome statements; and the literature that considers the experiences and challenges of the transition from high school to college and considering this transition with a focus on reading and writing.

The first two sections of this chapter will look at the requirements and expectations for students’ reading and writing abilities. At the high school level, requirements and expectations are generally presented in the form of standards and, in particular, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). In addition to considering the CCSS, this section will also address the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Position Statement on Reading (1999), NCTE’s 21st Century Literacies Framework (2008), and the NCTE’s Beliefs about Teaching Writing (2004) in order to gain a varied and multidimensional perspective on what high school students are being expected and required to know and do in reading and writing. At the college level, this review will focus on the Conference on College Composition and Communication’s (CCCC) Multiple Uses of Writing (2007), the Council of Writing Program Administrators’ Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition (2000), the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (2011) developed by the Writing Program Administrators (WPA), NCTE, and the National Writing Project (NWP).

The third section will focus on the literature and the research on the transition from high school to college for traditional first year students, specifically focusing on the transition that happens from reading and writing in high school to college.

### **High School Requirements and Expectations for Reading and Writing**

The skills and knowledge that graduating high school students are expected to have because of their education are influenced by various beliefs, policies, and research by various authorities. As a result, it is necessary to look at multiple documents that in some way affect what is being taught in high schools and what students are required and expected to know in order to be prepared for college or for a career—the oft-stated purposes of high school education. As our country is moving more towards holding students, teachers, and schools accountable for what’s being done and learned in the class room (especially since the introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001), the policies and standards for students that have evolved as a result are arguably the most influential piece of this issue (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

As of August 2015, 42 states have adopted or adapted the CCSS (generally and specifically with the English Language Arts (ELA) standards) in some way or another (Common Core State Standards Initiative). The road that led to most U.S. states adopting the CCSS began a long time ago when the U.S. public education system started moving towards a standards-based system. In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* pushed the government to develop a standards-based reform movement (LaVenía, Cohen-Vogel, & Lang, 2015). However, these reforms did not change the content of instruction and there were few changes to teaching and student achievement because the standards did not specify what content should be taught (LaVenía, Cohen-Vogel, & Lang, 2015). As a result of this failure, more attempts were made to reform the education system in the 1990s and the more organized approaches began affecting educational policy (LaVenía, Cohen-

Vogel, & Lang, 2015). Part of the impetus behind working towards national standards as the desire for students in the United States to be ranked on par or above students in other countries as students at the time were consistently behind (LaVenía, Cohen-Vogel, & Lang, 2015). In response to this fact, governors across the nation argued for six education goals to be reached by 2000, one of them being that students in the United States should be ranked first in mathematics and science among other countries (LaVenía, Cohen-Vogel, & Lang, 2015). In 1991 a report by the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) argued for standards that stated what students should know and be able to do. Most of the states began writing their own standards and developing quantitative measures to assess students' skills and knowledge. Eventually the result at the federal level was the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001 (LaVenía, Cohen-Vogel, & Lang, 2015). This new legislation led to an increase on standardized testing in order to assess students, teachers, and schools' performances and to help decide where funding would be going.

Meanwhile, foundations like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation were also providing funding for schools to improve public high schools (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation). Their vision included a common set of standards, assessments, accountability measures, and performance-based teacher pay. Their efforts caught the attention of Arne Duncan, who President Barack Obama appointed as the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education in January 2009 (Barkan, 2011). By then, the push toward a national set of standards led to the development of the CCSS. The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers (NGA Center and CCSSO) led an initiative that resulted in the creation of the CCSS, written largely by David Coleman (LaVeia, Cohen-Vogel, & Lang, 2015).. In order to gain buy-in with the states, the government created the Race to the Top Fund in 2009. States were encouraged and rewarded for adopting the CCSS with the competitive grant

program. In order to win Race to the Top (RTTT), states had to develop state standards based on the CCSS and adopt them by August 2, 2010 (LaVeia, Cohen-Vogel, & Lang, 2015). Forty states submitted applications for the RTTT and out of those nineteen states received funding for their education programs. This meant that by 2011, most states had adopted the CCSS and had changed their education policies. By the time the participants in this study came into college, they have been influenced by the CCSS for five years and since they were in eighth grade when it was implemented.

Since the CCSS have been so widely adopted/adapted in the United States, it is important to look into what they are asking students to do and know in terms of reading and writing. The stated overall main goal of the CCSS is to “develop College and Career Readiness (CCR) standards in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language as well as in mathematics” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). This research will focus on the standards for reading and writing for 6-12<sup>th</sup> grade students because those are the standards that will reflect what students need to know and be able to do by the time they graduate in order to be college and career ready.

The main aspects of reading that the CCSS standards are developed around are key details (the content of a text), craft and structure (how the author crafted the text and to what effects), integration of knowledge and ideas (how to compare and analyze multiple texts), and range of reading and level of text complexity (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). For each aspect, the document details specific things that students should be able to do in terms of reading by the end of each grade. For example, under the heading of key details, 12<sup>th</sup> grade students should be able to “Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, p.38). The standards

address two types of reading that students should be able to develop key skills with: literature and informational. Though the CCSS does not address rhetorical reading in-depth when it comes to reading literature and informational texts with the effort to be aware of their contexts, the CCSS signifies (at least in theory) a movement to better align reading and writing at the secondary levels with the ways reading and writing are being theorized in postsecondary education.

In contrast to prior beliefs and ways of teaching reading and writing, like the current-traditional (which focused much more on conventions and mechanics), the CCSS (2010) seem to be trying to argue for a more rhetorical approach to reading and writing:

Students adapt their communication in relation to audience, task, purpose, and discipline. They set and adjust purpose for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language use as warranted by the task. They appreciate nuances, such as how the composition of an audience should affect tone when speaking and how the connotations of words affect meaning. They also know that different disciplines call for different types of evidence (e.g., documentary evidence in history, experimental evidence in science) (p.7).

This shift to expecting students to read and write rhetorically helps to better align high school standards with college standards. In general, reading and writing in the postsecondary context requires students to think more critically and focus not just on what is being said, but how it is being said and where the texts are coming from. Students are beginning to need to think about how texts reflect the assumptions, beliefs, values, and affiliations of the authors and their contexts. As the CCSS is an attempt to create “college and career ready” students, this shift could be valuable if it results in what it promises. With reading, the CCSS ask students to be able to analyze and evaluate things like how an author develops ideas over the course of a text, how an author’s purpose shapes the text, and how structure contributes to meaning and effectiveness (NGA & CCSSO). However, these kinds of questions are focused on content, whereas the



writing standards are much more rhetorically based. In writing, the CCSS requires students to focus on understanding purpose, audience, text, and context and how to write for various purposes and audiences in different genres. This signals a mismatch between the two standards and it could manifest in problematic ways. The standards seem to suggest that students need to develop more critical reading and writing skills—to not just read for content, but to read in order to discover how authors’ backgrounds and contexts, intended purposes and audiences influence what and how they write and then to be able to apply that knowledge to their own writing as students. These goals appear to align with other such documents like the *NCTE Position Statement on Reading* (1999), *NCTE’s 21st Century Literacies Framework* (2008), and the *NCTE Beliefs about the Teaching of Writing* (2008), all of which have been around for years and are grounded in research. NCTE is also an organization that straddles the spheres of both secondary and postsecondary teaching, so their positions and their documents tend to try and align high school and college requirements and expectations for students.

Other scholars have begun to investigate to what extent the CCSS may actually focus more on rhetorically-based reading and writing and how the standards it holds students to will prepare them for college. James Warren (2012), an assistant professor at the University of Texas, suggests that the rhetorical focus that the CCSS takes on reading will help students develop disciplinary literacies, but only if their English Language Arts (ELA) teachers “foreground the different discourse conventions among academic disciplines and challenge the notion that a single approach to reading and writing is appropriate across all disciplines” (p. 392). Warren (2012) writes that the CCSS calls for literacy across content areas and students need to be able to discern how reading and writing in different disciplines require certain strategies specific to those disciplines. CCSS is a start for students to recognize that reading and writing are based on

their contexts, but that instruction needs to go a step further in order for students to begin recognizing and using discipline-specific moves and strategies that students will need to know in order to better succeed in college and prepare for “democratic participation” (p. 397). While Warren (2012) finds promise in the CCSS in terms of reading, there are, of course, debates about this issue. In addition, while it is promising that the CCSS require a move toward situating reading and writing rhetorically in all disciplines, it is difficult to ask this of other content teachers, especially without the training needed for learning how to have the conversation around disciplinary differences in reading and writing.

In terms of writing, while some scholars agree that the CCSS attempts to move toward the direction of aligning with college requirements, there are still several shortcomings within it. For example, Mo et al. (2014), a team of scholars at Michigan and Connecticut University, found that there were issues not addressed in the CCSS in terms of writing process, context, purposes, conventions, knowledge/metacognition, and motivation (447). The ones that seem to be particularly important are the writing process, context, purposes, and writing knowledge/metacognition. The CCSS does address the fact that students need to be able to understand the writing process and students do need to be able to plan, draft, revise, edit, or rewrite in a manner specific to their audience and purpose (NGA & CCSSO), which treats writing as a rhetorical, process-based endeavor. However, Mo et al. (2014) contend that the CCSS does not focus on the writing process as recursive and reflexive for each piece of writing. The problem here then becomes that students will think of the process as a series of linear steps rather than a process in which the writing process is seen as recursive. With context, Mo et al. (2014) suggest that while CCSS does address many contextual factors (purpose, audience, genre), it focuses little on how students should connect these to the writing process, getting

feedback on their writing, and how to write in different academic disciplines. This idea of teaching writing in the context of several academic disciplines and requiring students to be able to recognize the features of writing in those differing contexts is related to Warren's argument as well. Mo et al. (2014) also argue that the CCSS, while making a significant effort to require students to write for various purposes (narrative, informative, persuasive, and expository/explanatory texts), it ignores those writing purposes "highly relevant to civic life (e.g., letters and e-mails) and personal growth (e.g., diaries, reflections, poetry)" (p. 449). This lack of attention to other purposes outside of academic contexts privileges only certain kinds of texts and does not require students to expand their critical thinking, a necessary skill in college and in life elsewhere, and something that ties to the idea of writing knowledge/metacognition. Narration, description, exposition, and persuasion are also "classic" forms of writing that were taught before the rhetorical approach came into being, which can make it difficult for students to see the relevance of these types of writing in their everyday lives. Mo et al. (2014) contend that "genre knowledge (knowing the purposes of writing and the macrostructures of a text) and procedural knowledge (knowing the procedures or processes of writing) are not addressed at any grade level" and students are also not required to reflect on their writing processes, behaviors, thoughts, etc. at all (p. 451). The lack of attention and requirement of these important metacognitive skills suggests that the CCSS may not be especially valuable at preparing students for reading and writing at the college level, especially when attention is given to the expectations of incoming first year college students and the outcomes they will need to meet at the end of their first year.

## University Requirements and Expectations for Reading and Writing

Requirements and expectations at the postsecondary level tend to take two different forms: “college readiness” (what students should come in being able to do) and outcomes (what they should be able to do at the end of their first year. Unlike the standards that students must meet upon graduation at the high school level (presumably so that they are college and career ready), there are multiple opinions about what “college readiness” looks like, which suggests that the standards that the CCSS lays out may not be fully representative. Several organizations, like NCTE and the National Association for Development Education, and individual scholars define it differently, and there seems to be a general lack of agreement (Creech and Clouse, 2013). However, one operational definition that does appear in the literature a few times was developed by the Education Improvement Policy Center (EPIC). EPIC was founded in 2002 as a nonprofit to help develop college and career readiness by Dr. David Conley and has partnerships with several organizations, including the National Assessment Governing Board, the Oregon Department of Education, AVID, and the PEW Charitable Trusts (EPIC). EPIC’s definition for college readiness states:

The level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program. *Succeed* is defined as completing entry-level courses with a level of understanding and proficiency that makes it possible for the student to be eligible to take the next course in the sequence or the next level course in the subject area. (Conley, 2007, p.5)

This definition allows for an easier understanding of what college readiness might be and serves as a kind of checklist for what students should be able to do upon entering their first year of college. However, not everyone agrees with this simple of a definition. A lot of scholars argue that there needs to be a more explicit focus on critical thinking, the ability to engage in complex

problem-solving, and research and synthesis skills (McDaniel 2014; Roksa & Arum, 2011). This argument also suggests that students are not coming in with these skills, which is in conflict with what the CCSS promises that students will come in with. High school students might not need synthesis skills, but having those skills is essential for college students' success with reading and writing. Other scholars argue for further current definitions rather than ignoring the old ones. In fact, David Conley, who is professor of educational policy and leadership in the College of Education, University of Oregon and the author of the original definition, even contends that there needs to be an extended definition based on the current climate within higher education. Conley (2008) identifies multiple facets that students should be prepared for in order to be deemed "college ready": Key cognitive strategies (problem formation and solving; research; reasoning, argumentation, and proof; interpretation; precision and accuracy), key content (specific knowledge for each of the disciplines), academic behaviors (self-management, and study skills and behaviors), and contextual skills and awareness (information about college application process, financial aid, and college culture). Incoming college students, then, have to be able to do more than memorize and regurgitate facts—they need to be able to be thinking on a different level. The CWPA, NCTE, and NWP's *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (2011) addresses this issue, but does so by focusing on the writing skills that incoming first year students need to possess.

The Framework (2011), along with suggesting the writing skills that student will need to have, argues that there are habits of mind students must have in order to better succeed at college writing. Students must display curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition skills. The Framework also suggests how students can form these habits of mind and gives suggestions for teachers on how to foster those

connections. The Framework appears to operate on the assumption that reading and writing are connected, which is an accepted assumption in the field supported by research (Flower & Hayes, 1981). In order to develop these habits of mind, students need to have rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking skills, knowledge of and ability to use the writing process, and the ability to compose in multiple environments (CWPA, NCTE, NWP, 2011). The combination of the habits of mind and the skills that the Framework lists is what these organizations suggest that students need to be able to know and do in order to succeed in college. The Framework was developed before the CCSS had really taken hold, but the two seem to at least strive towards the same goal.

College students are also held to certain requirements and expectations at the end of their first year of college. In particular, the *Council of Writing Program Administrators' Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition* (2000) influences a lot of universities' composition programs across the country. The outcomes state that by the end of first year composition students should have and be able to use rhetorical knowledge; engage in critical thinking, reading, and composing; have and use multiple composing processes; and have and use a knowledge of conventions as tied to rhetorical concerns (CWPA, 2000). The *WPA Outcomes* are definitely rhetorically based as they require students to know and understand how aspects of the rhetorical situation affect how a text is shaped/written and how a text is understood. Students are also required to be able to apply their rhetorical knowledge to their own writing. These outcomes are likely influenced by major voices in the field, such as NCTE's *Commission on Composition* (1985) and CCCC's *The Multiple Uses of Writing* (2007), which also focus on the importance of awareness of audience, purpose, genre, author, and context when writing and reading.

Professors also have ways in which they theorize about “good” reading and writing for college students. The types of reading that college students are asked to do are generally more

complex than what they experienced in high school. “Good” college-level reading often requires students to use multiple reading strategies in order to engage in the practice of close reading. Dr. Richard Paul, an internationally-renowned scholar on critical thinking, and Dr. Linda Elder, an educational psychologist (2003) argue that in order to become better readers, students have to think about their reading and learn how to think more critically about the texts they are engaging with. Paul and Elder (2003) also contend that good readers need to read with a set purpose in mind that will help them determine how they read a text. Reading with a set purpose is also something that Kylene Beers, an expert on reading and former teacher, also names as a strategy for good reading (2003). Professors also agree, especially in FYC courses, that students need to consider the author’s purpose as they read (Paul & Elder, 2003). In order to critically evaluate the texts they are reading, students need to consider why the author wrote the piece, what goal they are attempting to accomplish, and how that shaped the text. This will allow readers to gain a more developed picture of what they are reading. Another strategy that scholars agree that good readers use is visualizing the text. Anna Quinn (2005), a professor of English, writes that visualizing the story allows readers to gain a better understanding of the text. This complements what Beers (2003) writes about good readers. Quinn (2005) also argues that making predictions and inferences throughout the reading will also help students to engage in close reading and become better readers. She argues that predicting outcomes help readers to attend to what they read and to comprehend it. Quinn (2005) also suggests that reading a text multiple times will aid in comprehension and close reading, which supports what Paul and Elder (2003) and Beers (2003) argue. College students need to use all of these strategies in order to become better readers. Becoming stronger readers will also aid them in becoming stronger writers as the two processes are interdependent and deeply connected (Flower, 1990; Street & Lefstin, 2010).

Patrick Sullivan and Howard Tinburg, both college professors, edited and contributed to a collection of essays entitled *What is "College-Level" Writing?* (2006) in an effort to explore this issue. As an introduction to the collection of essays, Sullivan (2006) writes about the complexities involved in trying to define college-level writing and offers his own definition. Sullivan (2006) first acknowledges the difficulties that come along with trying to decide on a definition. He argues that language and its complexities is one of the main reasons why defining college-level writing is difficult. Sullivan (2006) writes that the works of literary theorists like Derrida and Foucault have led the field to concur that we can no longer think of language as stable. Language is constantly changing and in multiple different ways, and so too, must our understanding of reading. Different readers will interpret the same texts in multiple ways, so that reality is something that affects how we define college-level writing. Sullivan (2006) also writes how the varied and changing nature of language leads to difficulties with assessment and argues that trying to settle on one form of assessment and applying it uniformly is not only impractical, but it is also bad practice. Not having a standard assessment model contributes to the difficulty in defining college-level writing. Sullivan (2006) then moves to describe the fact that the nature of our students also contributes to the complexities of this issue. Currently, there are more nontraditional students and students of multiple levels of ability than ever that are entering our classrooms. The complex environment and make-up of the classroom also makes it difficult to standardize a definition. It leads to differing classroom make-ups dependent on the institution and takes an emotional toll that cannot be ignored and affects how we think about and theorize writing. Sullivan (2006) argues that because English professors work with so many underprepared students, they more than most build personal relationships with these students and are personally affected by those students' successes and failures. Sullivan (2006) contends that



trying to standardize a definition of college-level writing when we have such diversity in our classrooms is very difficult. Sullivan (2006) also argues that the research about teacher expectations and student performance—holding students to high standards typically results in better student achievement (the converse is also true) affects how we will try to define college-level writing. Despite the difficulties and the various factors that must be considered when working to define college-level writing, Sullivan (2006) does offer a definition for consideration. Sullivan's (2006) definition calls for clear examples of strong critical thinking, reading, and writing skills; the ability to show an engagement with ideas in writing; analysis and evaluation of ideas and concepts; effective organization; and the following of the standard rules of grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Not only is it important to look at the requirements for students at both levels, we need to be able to understand what students go through in the transition from high school to college as well.

### **The Transition in Reading and Writing from High School to College**

This research focuses not only on what students are required to do in reading and writing at the secondary and postsecondary levels, but also on the transition from high school to college. There has been a lot of conversation about whether or not students are prepared when they come to college, and that conversation led to the exigence for documents like *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (2011) and other documents that attempt to define college readiness. The CCSS standards, too, were developed in an effort to make sure that students were college and career ready, with the idea being that the standards in place before were not effective enough. In order to better understand the transition, it is useful to review the current

conversations surrounding it. I am certainly not the first one, nor will I be the last, to investigate this interesting time in students' lives.

In an effort to understand to what extent students are prepared for the reading and writing they will be expected to do in college in order to better understand the transition period, there have been a variety of research studies that have investigated different points of view. In 2006 Alvin P. Sanoff surveyed around 800 high school teachers and over 1,000 college faculty about how well students were prepared for college in reading, writing, science, mathematics, and oral communication. Sanoff (2006) found that only a quarter of high school teachers and around one-tenth of college faculty members thought that students were very well prepared to read and understand difficult materials for college. However, the focus in this study was on the difficulty level of reading and not on rhetorical approaches to reading and writing. There have been other studies that highlight the kinds of reading that students come into college doing is not rhetorical enough. Researchers argue that often students only read for content, not to examine the rhetorical situation surrounding a piece. As a result, students do not often see what they read as part of a larger conversation and they often ignore the author and the author's biases all together (Smith, 2004; Warren, 2012). Despite the new attempt to focus on rhetorical reading in the CCSS, it seems that students may not be up to the standards yet. Though there may be other mitigating factors, and a lot of the studies have not taken place too long after the CCSS have been enacted.

Some researchers have attempted to gather students' perceptions of this transitional period and its effects on reading and writing. In 2008, David A. Jolliffe and Allison Harl, as a response to survey reports and studies suggesting that students simply were not reading for class and that in general they were reading for pleasure less as well, set out to determine what first year students taking college composition believed about the transition from high school to

college readers. Jolliffe and Harl (2008) studied the reading habits and practices of 21 first year students taking college composition. Jolliff and Harl (2008) found that students were actually very engaged with their own reading that “was aimed at values clarification, personal enrichment, and career preparation,” but not the reading they were being asked to engage in for class (p. 600). The researchers found that their data from their intake questionnaires suggested that students did not see the transition from high school to college reading as very striking; students felt they were reading more for school and less for pleasure in college than they did in high school their senior year. However, Jolliff and Harl (2008) also found that the reading journals that participants were asked to do contradicted some of their beliefs. Specifically, one student wrote that ““I am aware that this study is to figure out the “jump” from high school to college reading; however the fact is that most of my required reading (which is not much) has nothing to do with this “jump” because what is different is not the amount of reading, but the level and wording of the text. The college text jumps to a level of reading exponentially higher than high school texts”” (Jolliffe & Harl, 2008, p. 610). Overall, the researchers found that a majority of the students in their study found their academic reading dull and pointless, which led Jolliffe and Harl (2008) to suggest how rethinking reading in college courses could make reading more effective and meaningful for students like their personal reading appears to be. While Jolliffe and Harl (2008) focused on reading and the transition from high school to college in the lives first year students, other researchers have chosen to focus on writing.

Nancy Sommers’ and Laura Saltz’s research from 2004, when they did a longitudinal study of students at Harvard studying their progress as writers throughout their freshman year, is one of those studies that focuses on student writing. They found that writers who were able to see themselves as a “novices” and see writing as fulfilling a larger purpose than just being an

assignment were able to make the greatest shifts and developments as writers (Sommers & Saltz, 2004). Sommers and Saltz (2004) argue that there is a “central role that writing plays in helping students make the transition *to* college” and that understanding this role and what occurs in students’ development is part of discovering how college faculty can help students make that transition (p. 127). Sommers and Saltz (2004) also give practical strategies for college faculty to help students see themselves as the novice and to see writing as having larger purposes so that this transition is easier. One way in which students in the study were able to improve their writing is if professors asked them to see themselves as apprentices, to still write in the academic discourse in their specific disciplines, and to take notice of and join the conversation surrounding the topic they were writing in (Sommers & Saltz, 2004). If students were able to see themselves as contributors of original ideas, rather than as writers who were being tested on what they knew from the sources they read, then students were better able to read and write rhetorically (Sommers & Saltz, 2004). Students had to struggle with the difficulty of being asked to make the kinds of moves that academic experts were making, but when held to those high expectations, students were better able to work through the difficulties they were having and improve their writing (Sommers & Saltz, 2004).

So far, the most generative attempt at creating a nation-wide study of students’ perceptions about the transition from high school to college was the recent NCTE Listening Tour. In fall of 2013 NCTE asked college faculty across the nation to survey their incoming students within the first few weeks of their first semester about their college writing expectations, college writing experiences, their writing lives more generally, and about the transition from high school to college (Collier, 2014). 2,200 students were surveyed and patterns emerged from the data that was collected. In general, a lot of incoming students were worried

about “the performance of writing, writing they see as testable—either correct or incorrect—and designed to showcase knowledge for assessment purposes” and felt that most college-level writing would fall into the category of assessment (Collier, 2014, p.10). The researchers also discovered that, “Despite students’ anxiety about writing, about 80 percent reported that they were feeling well prepared for college-level writing,” but what students felt prepared for does not necessarily match realities of college-level writing (Collier, 2014, p. 11). Linda Adler-Kassner, a professor of writing studies and the director of the writing program at the University of California, Santa Barbara, noted that most students expected it would be like high school in that there would be an emphasis on an “adherence to form, to correctness, to reporting of existing information. They expect to *do* writing rather than *engage* in writing, both as a way of thinking and as a way of demonstrating knowledge” (Collier, 2014, p. 11). Other professors involved in the study reported that their students believed that college-level writing would be like filling in a particular form and that there would be an emphasis on mechanics and grammar (Collier, 2014). Professors also found that when students were asked questions about “habits of mind and traits are needed to be successful writers, students ranked persistence and time management highly, but ‘openness to new ideas’ fell near the bottom” (Collier, 2014, p.11), which does not match the beliefs that the field of composition holds. These differences that occur between students’ perceptions and beliefs about reading and writing and college faculty’s expectations lead to disconnects in the college classroom and often lead to students struggling to make the shift in their thinking to align their beliefs with those of their professors. This disconnect has led some researchers to search for ways to ease this tension and disparity for students.

## **Conclusion**

Students are always affected by the expectations of what they should know and be able to do in school. Those expectations are shaped by standards, teachers, professors, researchers, and policy makers. However, it seems as though there is a disconnect between the expectations of high school and of college that creates a problem for the students making the transition between the two. Teachers and researchers have their theories about why students are not prepared for the transition, but it seems as though the students would have the best insight into this tension as they are directly affected by it. This research seeks to give students a voice and to gain insights into their experiences and their thoughts about the reading and writing transition from high school to college.

## METHODOLOGY

### **Purpose of Study**

The transition between high school and college signals a significant change in what students are expected to know and do in an educational context. The role that First-Year Composition (FYC) has to play in this period of transition for students is a unique one. Oftentimes students find that they are being asked to do very different things in reading and writing in college than they were required to do in high school, and sometimes students seem unprepared for this shift. It is in FYC that professors and instructors most often see a disconnect between what they are expecting first year students to do and what their students expect to do and thus this context is rich for study. In particular, there is an apparent disconnect in the ways that traditional students who are entering college define “good writing” and their perceptions of reading in contrast to the ways that professors and instructors theorize reading and writing. Researchers in the field have often investigated the tension between these two groups and yet it still remains an exigent issue. As a result of my own experiences as a FYC teacher and my forays into this field of study, I have developed some questions that I am attempting to answer with this research. In answering these questions I hope to discover possible explanations for this gap in the spirit of working to find ways to ease this transition for students. I also want to focus on the students’ perspectives, as too often we see policy makers’, researchers’, and professors’ voices represented in the literature, but finding students’ contributions is rare. Also, as I want to teach high school after I earn my Master’s degree, I would like some practical solutions to come out of this research that I can implement in my own teaching. The three main questions that are driving

my research are: From the perspective of first year college students enrolled in a composition course, how do they describe:

- 4) their experiences with reading and writing in high school?
- 5) their perceptions of what they'll need to know and be able to do in college and their degree of preparation for college-level reading and writing?
- 6) what teachers could do to help make this transition smoother for students?

In order to gain a rich understanding of the transition from high school to college, specifically focused on reading and writing through the perspective of students, I will be using what Merriam (2009) calls a *basic qualitative study*. Basic qualitative research is “interested in (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). My intent is to use this research to understand first year college student’s perceptions of expectations and requirements from them with reading and writing in high school and college and to better understand what happens during the transition itself (from the perspective of first year students enrolled in a composition course) and the changes that students’ perceptions, ideas, and abilities with reading and writing go through.

## **Participants**

The participant is a student who attended a Western university in fall 2015 and who was enrolled in a FYC that fall. Initially, I recruited an entire class of students from one FYC section (typically capped at 24 students) in the second week of the fall semester of 2015. This allowed for a variety of high schools (with differing student demographics, teachers, classes, etc.) to be represented, but that are still influenced by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), as my survey and interview questions assume familiarity with the CCSS. Other selection criteria



included: students must be traditional first year students (graduating from high school in spring 2015 and attending college that fall; aged typically 18-19 years old) and a preferred criteria is that they have access to papers they wrote in high school (with or without teachers' comments). Students need to be considered "traditional" because I am interested in their perceptions when they transition directly from high school to college. In an effort to limit confounding variables, such as time, maturity/development, other experiences (classes they might have taken), etc., I narrowed my sample. I recruited an instructor of an FYC section in the first week of the semester by email to request permission to recruit from within his/her class. I then visited that class during the second week of the semester. I gave a short presentation about the purpose of my research and why I was interested in their experiences and then handed out the consent forms. I contacted students who signed the consent forms and provided their emails by email to take the online survey. At the end of the recruiting process I was left with one participant, Emily. Emily was a first year English Education college student, enrolled in a FYC course.

## **Procedure**

I sent out a recruitment email to the FYC instructor detailing general information about my study, the selection criteria, time commitment, and what students were asked to do (interviews and provide writing samples), possible benefits and harms (I did not expect that there would be any) as well as the informed consent forms (for participants who are 18 or older and for parents for those participants who are still legally minor) (See Appendix A). I then visited the class and gave a short presentation about my study. I asked students if they were willing to participate in a longitudinal study that would span from the first part of their semester after they have graduated high school through week ten of their first semester as a college student. I asked

them to participate in a survey and two interviews. As the primary researcher, I conducted all of the interviews.

### **Data Sources**

In order to develop my research, I collected two forms of qualitative data, including: surveys and interviews. I then used that data to analyze and describe the student's perceptions and identify some themes that occurred in order to better illustrate the issue of the transition from high school to college in terms of reading and writing.

**Surveys:** I distributed a survey to one CO150 class in the second week of the fall semester (See Appendix B). I chose the class based on a Western university instructor's adherence to a common syllabus for an FYC course because their class should closely align with the Composition Department's theory of reading and writing. The common syllabus is decided upon by the composition administration and all instructors are given the option to use it. The syllabus lays out the projects for the course, a general timeline for concepts to be taught, daily lesson plans for the first ten weeks, and some suggested lesson plans for weeks 11-16.

**Interviews:** In the third week of the semester, I contacted potential participants for interviews (See Appendix C). I received one response (Emily) and I scheduled the first interview for the third week of the semester. I did this so that I could gain her insight into her experiences with reading and writing in high school while it was still relatively fresh in her mind. I then scheduled the second interview to take place during the tenth week of the semester. This second interview focused on her experiences with reading and writing in college as well as her experiences in the transition between high school and college. I interviewed the participant twice in thirty minute periods for a total of one hour of her time. The interview was one-on-one and semi-structured. I recorded the interview on my phone and took some notes as well. I then

transcribed the interviews into Word documents. The interview questions can be found in the appendix.

## **Data Analysis**

There were two stages to my analysis: the first stage took place in the fourth week of the semester and focused on the data I gathered from the participant as a recently graduated high school student and then second stage focused on the data I gathered from the participant as a college student during week ten of the semester. In each stage I transcribed the interviews after each one for the sake of analysis. Then, I did an in-depth reading of the interviews I transcribed and attempted to organize the data thematically by coding the data and sorting it into broad categories relating to my research questions (Merriam, 2009). These categories also led me to central concepts (themes) within each of those categories. I did this for both of the interviews I analyzed. As I analyzed the interviews, I also analyzed and coded the data in the survey I collected and sorted them into my categories. I began with what Merriam (2009) calls category construction when I read through the transcript of the first interview. I engaged in the process of open coding and marked anything that seemed relevant and useful in answering my research questions (Merriam, 2009). As I coded, major themes emerged from the data and I sorted evidence from the transcribed interview into separate documents with my categories that evolved from the data. The categories were influenced by my research questions and the coded data within them answer those questions.

The second stage of data analysis again contained interview data (indirect assessment) and survey data to analyze. I read these in-depth throughout the process and “coded” for broad categories (relating to my research questions) and read for themes that developed within each of those categories (Merriam, 2009).

I also looked at the CCSS documents in the first stage and analyze to what extent students' writing achieves the outcomes set out in the standards. As the standards were created in an effort to make sure that students are both college and career ready, it is important to see whether or not the participants feel "college ready" as defined by the standards. Student perceptions and voices, with the exception of the NCTE study, have been noticeably absent in this debate. In general, it is teachers, policy makers, and professors who deem that students are unprepared for college. Adding the students' voices to this conversation is important and fed into my third question, which asks how students feel they could be better prepared for the transition (in high school) and better aided through it (in college).

### **Qualitative Study Report**

After I created and finalized the documents detailing the categories and themes found in the data, as well as a document containing the comparison between the two stages, I wrote a report that gives what qualitative researchers call thick, rich description (Merriam, 2009). The report and description consisted of all the themes and categories with examples from my research to support each of those ideas and that serve to help answer the research questions. The report also detailed the context of the study in order for the audience to gain a more complete understanding of my analysis. This section also included some suggestions for implications of this research and how it might be used to better students' experiences with the transition from high school to college.

## DATA ANALYSIS

In this section I analyze data collected from a survey and my two interviews with Emily, a first-year college student. Emily also responded to the online survey, so I was able to gather data from that source. I was also able to interview her for thirty minutes in the third week of the semester and again during the tenth week of the semester. This analysis is divided into four sections based on major themes that emerged as I was coding my data: engagement with required reading, a focus on grades, perceptions of college, and the transition from high school to college. This data I gathered from Emily offers insight into the transition from high school to college from a student's perspective. In working with Emily I was able to find some thought-provoking themes that could help teachers at both the high school and college level shape their instruction to better aid students with the transition.

### **Engagement with Required Reading: "I'm not gonna read a textbook."**

Two months into her college career, Emily has already begun crafting a hierarchy of literacies in her own mind, in that she prioritizes different literacy practices. In this sense, hierarchy is used to show how Emily ranks different kinds of literacies in order of importance to her and her life. Her tendency to prioritize certain literacies over others appears as discussed her experiences in both high school and college. She has a clear hierarchy for both reading and writing and it manifests in the ways that she speaks about those two practices in her experiences. In regards to reading and what she considers to be "good reading," Emily said: "Reading to me, when I think of it, I think of, personally I think mainly of creative books" and that value is apparent throughout the interviews. Emily prefers to read books like the *Harry Potter* series and Stephen King novels over more "factual" reading, like textbooks. This is not to say that she does

not value more academic reading, as she also brought it up when thinking about reading: “But then, my academic brain thinks of textbooks, and you know, the ‘required’ reading, or whatever you want to call it.” However, it seems clear that Emily views that kind of reading as important for the sake of her grades, rather than important for any other kind of purpose. Her view of reading seems to support what researchers have found in regards to students only reading for content, instead of viewing the reading as part of a larger conversation and influenced by the authors and their biases (Smith, 2004; Warren, 2012). As a FYC instructor myself, I know that this kind of reading will not serve as well as FYC courses are focused on more rhetorical reading.

In her experience in college thus far, Emily views academic writing (e.g. textbooks and scholarly articles) as “supplemental versus so necessary to the class” (See Figure 1). The figure shows how Emily values reading fiction above all else, though not every type of fiction. Emily views historical fiction, romance novels, and any kind of graphic novels as less valuable than other types of fiction. The figure also shows how Emily views academic reading as the least important and as more supplemental than vital. This view of reading for class as “supplemental” contradicts how many professors and researchers think of the reading in their classes and thus this speaks to an interesting tension between students’ and professors’ views of reading (Bunn, 2013). When asked about the reading for her American Literature survey, however, which is largely made up of works of fiction, Emily saw that the “the reading is the class, like we discuss the reading...that makes a difference.” Jolliffe and Harl (2008) argue that student engagement in reading is key to make academic reading more meaningful for students. Perhaps Emily is not engaged in her academic reading because she does not find it meaningful unless it is the type of reading she is more likely to do on her own (e.g., fiction). It is clear that she views fiction above

more academic texts. However, within the fiction category, Emily has created even more hierarchies.

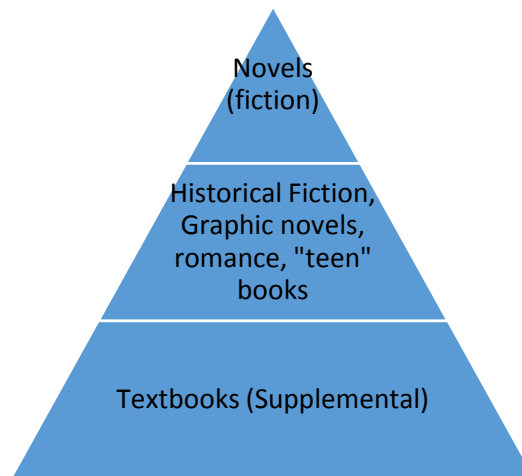


Figure 1: Reading

Emily appears to value certain kinds of fiction novels above others. Emily does read a lot outside of her reading for school, around two to three hours a day when she was in high school and three to four hours a day now that she is in college. She also reads a wide variety of fiction novels: from Stephen King novels to the *Harry Potter* series. Within the genre of fiction, she does read romance novels, but she views that as “kind of embarrassing.” This leads me to infer that she does not believe that romance novels are very important or represent “good” literature. This belief reflects a debate that has been going on for decades (Dodson & Wigutoff, 1983). Emily also appears to value “normal novels, just words” over less traditional texts. When speaking about her high school experiences with reading, Emily talked about her senior English class in which she read *The Watchmen*, a graphic novel by Allen Moore, Dave Gibbons, and John Higgins (1986). Her opinion of this work in her personal hierarchy of texts is clear as she stated: “We read *Watchmen*, which is legit a graphic novel and I was just kind of like, why are we reading this when we could be reading a, you know, a something that’s not quite a comic book.” Her view of reading reflects a traditionalist sense of the types of texts that should be

valued in the classroom (Connors, 2015). Emily does not seem to value the use of non-canonical texts in the classroom despite their promising effects on student engagement and learning (Connors, 2015).

**Writing as a Creative Outlet: “Creative outlets of writing are just so much more important...than academic writing.”**

Emily also clearly values certain kinds of writing above others. In general, Emily was quick to talk about creative writing and was more inclined to engage in creative writing processes than in academic writing. She speaks about academic writing as if it is foundational: “Like academic writing provides a purpose that is definitely beneficial for our society and our community,” but it is clear that she values creative writing about all else (See Figure 2): “creative writing, like there’s so many outlets...writing is a thing that should just be nurtured and is just, it’s inspiration, it’s not factual.” Emily also spends more of her time writing creatively than academically, even working on some of her out-of-school writing while in her college courses. Emily has a very clear sense of how she believes that academic writing and creative writing differ. “School writing is just factual, whereas creative writing is pouring your heart and soul into characters and plots and you know, everything that’s going into it.” Emily believes in the craft and care that goes into writing creatively and feels as though academic writing is not as powerful. This creates a point of tension because it is clear that Emily does not see academic writing as creative, which is in conflict with how many professors view writing (CCCC, 2007; Sommers & Saltz, 2004). It also likely means that Emily will not be as engaged in her academic writing assignments, which may impact how well she achieves the outcomes for FYC (CWPA, 2000).



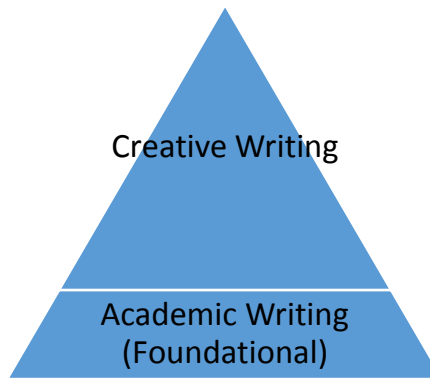


Figure 2: Writing

However, when asked to define “good writing,” Emily focused on academic writing in her definition, both in her high school experience and in her college experience. When initially asked about how she defined “good writing,” Emily replied: “Good writing is focused, it is centered, you are using evidence and you are analyzing, excuse my language, but you are analyzing the shit out of that evidence. You don’t just throw evidence on the paper and just kind of continue.” This kind of definition applies to more academic writing, especially in argument writing and literary analysis. The CCSS certainly supports the idea of using evidence in order to persuade your audience (p.7). It is interesting to see that though Emily speaks about valuing creative writing more highly, her definition appears to be focused on academic writing. It is possible that the context of the interview influenced her answers, but it also might mean that perhaps she recognizes that academic and creative writing are more closely related than she believes. Her definition became even more refined after she had been in her college composition course for ten weeks:

I would say that good writing is probably, very factual, very organized, um, synthesizes sources. It’s something that you, you have a point, but you also, like, acknowledge counter arguments and stuff like you know where you want to go and the reader doesn’t necessarily know, but you’re guiding them all the way through your argument completely through the paper. It’s just very funneled almost, to me. Very structured.

It is clear that she is being influenced by her composition course and she acknowledges that. Her definition shows awareness of the kind of language that is usually used in FYC courses (e.g., “synthesizing sources”) and the “structured” nature certainly seems to fit in defining more academic writing (CWPA, 2000). Again, Emily is attempting to make a clear distinction between academic and creative writing, which complicates how a lot of professors and researchers theorize about writing (CCCC, 2007; Sommers & Saltz, 2004). Emily’s definition for “good *creative* writing” reveals her passion for it: “Creative writing is...creativity for one...just imagining and really putting yourself out there. That makes great creative writing if you can pour your heart and soul, as a writer, into whatever you are writing.” What I find interesting, though, is that when she was asked about “good writing,” Emily did define it in terms of academic writing first, though she makes it clear in other areas that she values creative more highly. This suggests an interesting tension in her established hierarchy of literacies. It might also speak to the fact that she values her academic performance “above all else.”

**An Increasing Focus on Grades: “My top priority, above all else...to do well academically.”**

One thing that became clear as I spoke to Emily is that she had an increasing focus on grades and her academic performance. Emily bases her knowledge on why she is a good reader and writer on her grades. This was clear in her survey answers about both reading and writing. When she was asked to define herself as a reader and what evidence she had to support it, Emily wrote: “I’m a good one... Previous English class grades and my own comprehension levels.” Emily does acknowledge that there are other factors (comprehension levels), but she places most of the importance on her grades. Her answer was similar when answering a similar question about what kind of writer she is: “Again good. Previous English class grades and my own desires to write in my free time.” Emily even believes that her high school teachers’ opinions of her as a

reader and writer are also based on her grades: “[They would say I’m] Strong. My papers were well written and received good grades.” Emily’s high school tried to make their standards more transparent in the form of “learning goals” and Emily felt like “it was just like this excess, total bullshit thing that they added.” Emily felt that writing the goals on the board was useless because her high school already had a set curriculum before they were required to write the goals on the board. As a result, Emily felt like a lot of teachers were just writing them on the board to fulfill their obligation, but that they did not really work to incorporate them into their lessons. There is research that suggests that making goals and standards clear to students leads in an increase in student learning (Bunn, 2013; Mo et al., 2014). However, it appears that must be paired with an authentic and genuine effort to include those goals into the lesson plans.

Emily’s focus on her academic performance has only increased since she has started college. There was a marked difference in how much Emily talked about grades in the second interview compared to the first one. In particular, she spoke about her recent grade on an assignment for her FYC course: “And I thought it was great, but. I mean 89 is not bad, but still.” She went on to say: “I feel like I don’t struggle that much, it’s just that I’m not necessarily satisfied with an 89 for a paper versus a 92...I just, sometimes, kick myself when I see something that’s a B versus an A because, one I have a scholarship that’s persuading me to do all As and I have always strived for that anyways, that’s like, my top priority, above all else.” In the first interview, she mentioned grades and that doing well was important to her, but her concern with her academic performance was not as prevalent. Her focus on grades influences her behavior and even affects her writing practices. She views writing assignments as specific, isolated pieces that only apply to her professor because she wants to do well on them. She spoke about preferring it when her professors told her what they are looking for when grading so that

she can make sure she does well on the assignment. She said: “I can cater my writing to what they want to read, you know?” This suggests that Emily may not view those writing assignments as having any other purpose or audience beyond her FYC course and her instructor, despite what her FYC course states about writing in its objectives (CWPA, 2000). The assignment sheets used in Emily’s FYC course outline specific purposes, audiences, texts, and contexts. In general, the audience for those assignments are almost never the professor but instead reflect wider, more authentic audiences. Emily’s FYC course objectives support what the *WPA Outcomes* (2000) require students to be able to know and understand in regards to rhetorical concepts. Emily is most likely not alone in feeling like grades are the most important part of school and so it is important to understand her and students like her. Emily cited multiple influences for her fixation on academic performance. Her parents seem to be a major influence on her as she said: “They want me to focus on my academics and my grades and classes because those lead up to my future job instead of a part-time, minimum-wage job that could screw up the things leading to an actual career down the road, you know, in the future.” In this case, Emily was talking about how her parents always told her to focus on grades instead of a job. She said that they was part of the reason that she wanted to always do well in her classes. This illuminates another common idea among college students that high grades will lead to a career (Delbanco, 2012). This is a limiting view of college to have. A lot of professors would most likely agree that college is about more than earning good grades and working towards a career (Delbanco, 2012). Unfortunately, most students do not come into college with those kinds of expectations.

**Perceptions about College: “You better comprehend everything because he’s moving on.”**

Emily came into college with a lot of expectations about how college would be different from high school. Emily’s perceptions were often informed by her family, specifically her father,

and by her teachers in high school. Emily was very anxious when she first came to college and when she speaks about what the people in her life told her about college, it is easy to see why: “Everyone always told me that college was going to be terrifying and hard and just like, rip your hair out from all the studying.” Emily was constantly told by her high school teachers that she would have to read, write, and study way more in college. This kind of preparation seems to come from good intentions, but it did not make a good impression on Emily. The CCSS definitely endorse teachers to prepare students for college: “With students, parents, and teachers all on the same page and working together toward shared goals, we can ensure that students make progress each year and graduate from high school prepared to succeed in college, career, and life” (Common Core State Standards Initiative). However, it seems like this kind of fear tactic is not very effective. The stories about what to expect from her teachers and her father seemed to have made a lasting impact that affected her transition to college. Before classes even started, Emily got an email from one of her professors about reading that she should do before the first day of class and she panicked because it was like what everyone said was coming true: “I had a minor breakdown because I was like ‘Oh my god!’ I’m in the middle of this huge transition and just like, I was panicking because I was just so stressed out.” Emily went into college expecting a load of work unlike anything she dealt with in high school, so this kind of email did not help her stress levels. Emily also came into college expecting a certain kind of class experience.

Emily’s teachers and father influenced Emily to believe that college would be a certain way. In particular, Emily talked about how she felt like she needed to be prepared for the lecture experience: “People, because it was mainly like people said, you know, you’re going to sit in a lecture hall, he’s going to lecture, and then you’re going to read, and you better comprehend

everything because he's moving on." This kind of class set up is very different than what most high school classes are like and thus Emily felt like this would be a difficult transition (Farris, 2010). This kind of expectation added to Emily's stress and most likely complicated her transition from high school to college. Emily also felt like the work load with writing would be even more difficult: "They're like oh it's a lot of papers and a lot of reading. And when you hear the word a lot of papers and you think of like a four month time period, it makes you feel like you're writing a paper every day." It is easy to see how that kind of expectation would make it difficult for students like Emily to wrap their heads around the idea of college. The *Framework* (2011) does not address this problem, nor do the CCSS. If these documents are meant to ensure that students are prepared for college and are given the tools to succeed, they might have been more useful if there was some kind of attention to the misalignment between student expectation and reality.

**Transition: "They say they do all these things to help prepare you and they don't. They don't."**

The interviews with Emily revealed a lot about her transition from high school to college. The amount of work that Emily is doing is college versus what she was doing in high school has clearly changed. Emily reported that she only read for her classes for an hour per day in high school. Emily reports that she reads two and a half to three hours per day for her college classes. The types of reading have mostly stayed the same, however. Emily talked about the fact that she mostly read for her English classes in both high school and college. In college there are more textbooks, but Emily sees them as "supplemental" to her lectures and said that "it's kind of like a last resort for a lot of my classes." This goes against how a lot of professors view reading (Bunn,

2013). The differences between high school and college become most apparent when Emily talks about her writing experiences.

Most of the papers that Emily had to write in high school were literary analysis papers. Emily spoke at length about how her high school really only prepared her to write that one type of essay. This contradicts what the CCSS state that students should be writing. The CCSS has tried to suggest a curriculum that has students practice and master many types of writing skills, not just literary analysis. Emily did say that her high school required students to do research papers. However, Emily did not find the experience very useful: “They kinda just say, look at this question, Google it, and then pick random sources. And you’re kind of just like, well, that’s not really helpful to structure research, you know?” Indeed, this type of writing did not prepare her well for writing research papers in college:

High school I feel like was so loose about like citing and things like, I mean I almost got in trouble on my proposal because she said it wasn’t clear enough in my text, like where I was referencing in, you know, my works cited and that would have been plagiarism. In high school, they would have breezed over that, they don’t care as much as in college.

Emily has been struggling with the fact that so far her professors have expected her to already know about citation and to have mastered it while her high school did not focus on that particular skill. Emily seemed to be unprepared for the different types of writing that she has been asked to do in college and has laid the blame on her high school experiences.

In particular, Emily was very critical of her high school and the ways it handled preparing students for college: “Cause [the high schools] say they do all these things to help prepare you and they don’t. They don’t.” Not only did Emily feel like her high school was not preparing students for college, but she also felt like “high school English classes are a joke” and “they didn’t care about reading.” Emily’s critique of her high school stems from the fact that she

felt like her teachers were too hands-on in helping students with their reading in the sense that they were very guided and scripted. There was a certain way students were to read the books and certain ideas and concepts that students were supposed to glean from their reading. Whereas Emily feels like college-level reading requires the students to be self-reliant and read and comprehend the material on their own. Emily feels like college-level reading requires more critical thinking skills, something that aligns with what The CWPA, NCTE, and NWP's *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (2011) also says that students need in order to do well in college. However, while Emily spoke a lot about her high school not preparing students for the transition, she has not found the transition very difficult. Emily took an Advanced Placement (AP) Literature course in high school and credits that class with most of her success in college-level reading and writing: I think because I took advanced English classes, I was, I was more prepared. But had I not, I would be drowning right now." The homework load in her AP classes helped prepare her for the homework for college. Somewhere talk about how this is not what I was expecting

Over and over, Emily talked about AP Literature being the only reason that she was at all success and ready for college-level reading and writing. Yet, when she was specifically talking about AP Literature versus her college English courses, the two seemed very different and at odds with one another. In AP Literature Emily was required to read the books and have them done by a certain date. The reading was very much done in isolation and not brought up in class much: "There was no class discussions of the book, it was all about you knowing how to identify symbols and metaphors and motifs and themes and being able to take general knowledge and like, critical knowledge and very specific things and then, like, spit them onto a piece of paper in forty minutes and make it pretty." This type of format is very assessment-based whereas



Emily's college courses are much more discussion-based. Emily's professor gives the class some questions to guide their reading and then their class periods consist of them engaging in discussion about the work they are reading. Emily has to write an essay at the end of the course, but there have not been exams on the books like she had in high school. It seems like AP Literature should not have really prepared Emily for this type of class format, but Emily reports that she is doing very well in her college English courses regardless. It is possible that Emily would have been prepared for college regardless because she feels like she is a strong reader and writer and seems very comfortable with those literacy practices.

It seems like AP Literature should not have prepared her well for her college courses. The fact that she believed that it was the only class that prepared her for the transition was not something I was expecting when I began this research. Researchers have generally found that AP courses do not prepare students for the kinds of reading and writing that will be expected of them in college and focus more on helping students pass the AP exams (Farris, 2010; Whitley & Paulsen, 2010). Yet, Emily felt that the autonomy that her AP Literature afforded her is what made her ready to be successful in college-level English courses. Emily describes the focus on assessments in her AP Literature classes, "spit [ideas] onto a piece of paper in forty minutes and make it pretty," but she did not speak about feeling hindered by that experience in college. Emily does not seem to feel that her college English course is that different than her AP Literature course, despite the obvious differences in focus of the classes. It is possible that it was the level of reading in AP Literature is what helped Emily to feel prepared for her American Literature course in college. However, Emily did admit that AP Literature, and her other high school English classes, did not prepare her for the multiple types of writing assignments she is having to do in her FYC course. Emily wished she had practiced "different kinds of writing. Just how to

write a well-structured anything. Other than just a paper on a book, you know?” It seems clear that though her AP Literature class helped her to feel prepared for the level of reading in college and to hone her writing skills, that there were still gaps in her preparation for the transition from high school to college.

### Conclusion

Emily’s experiences with the transition have brought multiple tensions to light. Emily is a strong reader and writer and has always done well academically in her English course. Yet, her abilities and confidence in herself did not prepare her for the differences she would experience in her transition from high school to college. Emily spoke about her views of the required reading for her college courses as “supplemental” and how she much preferred to read texts that she found valuable (namely, fiction). There is a dissimilarity between how she views academic reading and how her professors view the reading that affects her engagement with her courses. Emily also feels similarly about writing. She views creative writing as highly important to the human experience while academic writing has a purpose, but is not as vital. This attitude might impact her ability to fully achieve the outcomes for her FYC course. However, Emily does highlight how important her academic performance is to her. As grades are a top priority in her life, Emily is driven to succeed despite the challenges she is facing in the transition. Her preoccupations with grades affect her literacy practices to the extent where she only writes what she believes her professors want to read. This tendency has followed her from high school into college and it affected how she perceived what college might be like. Emily’s expectations of college were that it would be incredibly difficult and she has found it challenging, but not in the ways that she expected. Emily spoke at length about how her high school did not prepare her for college. She felt like none of the papers she wrote for high school, typically literary analysis

essays, prepared her for the varied types of complex writing that she was being expected to do in college. She felt like she was still successful in college so far, but felt like it was harder than it should have been. Emily believes that there are many ways in which teachers and professors could make the transition from high school to college smoother for students. I will address Emily's recommendations for teachers and professors in the next chapter.

## CONCLUSION

I began this study wanting to add students' voices to the conversation surrounding the transition from high school to college. I tried to recruit many students from one section of FYC in order to gain students' perceptions about this period of change. Though I was only able to recruit one student in my study, I still gained valuable insights into a student's perspective into the reading and writing transition from high school to college. Speaking with Emily allowed me to discover that there are disconnects between high school and college and unfortunately, it is our students that bear the consequences. Emily had many valuable ideas about what led to this disconnect and how to possibly repair it.

### **Reading and Writing Experiences in High School**

The first question I explored was: From the perspective of a first year student enrolled in a composition course, how does she describe: her experiences with reading and writing in high school? Emily is a voracious reader and writer and was very engaged with those practices in high school. She often spoke about English classes during the interviews, especially AP Literature, being her favorite courses. She read and wrote for her own purposes just as often as she did for her classes in high school. Emily seemed to have very positive experiences with reading and writing in high school, though she felt like her high school did not prepare her for college. In particular, the types of writing she did in high school, which were mainly essays based on the novels they read, did not prepare her for the variety of writing purposes that she has encountered in her FYC course. Emily wished that she had practiced "different kinds of writing" and felt that her high school classes lacked this kind of practice. Her perception of high school writing seems to fit with what scholars like Mo et al. (2014) argue: the CCSS does require that students learn

and are able to write narrative, informative, persuasive, and expository/explanatory texts, but it ignores other kinds of non-traditional academic purposes for writing (e.g., proposals, letters, poetry, etc.). Her experience did not serve her well for her FYC course because she has had to write for a variety of different purposes. In high school, she said that the only two types of papers that she had to write: “We never did anything other than book-based things, except the two research projects that I did in sophomore and junior year.” Her experience does seem to go against what the CCSS states that high school students should do to some extent. The CCSS argues that with writing, students should be able to understand and effectively use rhetorical concepts like purpose, audience, author, text, and context. Emily’s description of the essays that she was required to write in high school does not fit that goal: “The majority of it was, like, essays, based off of books. Like, interpret such and such...And so it was basically either, totally unstructured research or it was like, just hope you’re like you’re good at picking out symbols and themes and illusions.” However, with reading, the CCSS ask students to be able to analyze and evaluate things like how an author develops ideas over the course of a text, how an author’s purpose shapes the text, and how structure contributes to meaning and effectiveness (NGA and CCSSO 38, 40). This standard seems to be aligned with her essays in high school.

The difference in goals between reading and writing expectations for high school students seems to create a dissonance that might be manifesting in the types of assignments that students are asked to do in school. High school administrators and teachers should reevaluate the types of writing that they require of their students. Most FYC courses do not have students do any type of literary analysis, so students are not being prepared for college if they only learn that type of writing in high school. It is important for students to be exposed to and practice writing for all kinds of purposes. Though the CCSS attempts to address that need, based on my research it does

not fully reach the point at which students are actually required to practice all types of writing, even non-academic ones that are important for civic life and personal growth (Mo et al., 2014). Not only did Emily's assignments seem at odds with the standards and expectations of her in high school, but so did her own personal values and beliefs about reading and writing.

As I spoke with Emily, it became clear that in high school and beyond she felt that certain kinds of reading and writing were more important and valuable than others. Emily valued different kinds of reading and writing than her teachers and professors, which illuminated some disconnects between what she thought and was able to do and what she was expected to know and be able to do. In particular, Emily values fiction over any other kind of reading and feels that academic reading is supplemental to her classes and only important for the sake of her grades.

Emily is clear on what she thinks of reading:

I think mainly of creative books, when I, when I think of reading. But then, my academic brain thinks of textbooks, and you know, the "required" reading, or whatever you want to call it. For the majority when I think of reading, it's just, it's books like I really want to read, that I really like reading... The required reading is one thing, that's, that's for my grade, but when I want to, when I'm done with school and I'm sitting and I'm old and gray, I'm not gonna read a textbook.

Emily's view of reading does conflict with the CCSS. The CCSS do focus on reading literary texts, but especially by twelfth grade, there is more of a focus on informational texts. The fact that Emily does not value her academic reading for her own purposes suggests that value of the reading she was asked to do in high school was not made clear to her. She felt as though it were pointless and only good for the purpose of doing well academically. The same is true for how she views writing. Emily highly values creative writing and often engages in that practice for her own purposes and enjoyment. She is highly critical of the types of academic writing that she was asked to do in high school, though she admits that it can be important for the advancement of society:

Like academic writing provides a purpose that is definitely beneficial for our society and our community, but creative writing, like there's so many outlets, you have poetry, you have like just short stories, novels... There's so many beautiful ways that writing can come across and I think that just creative outlets of writing are just so much more important, to me than academic writing.

The focus on academic writing in Emily's high school with a lack of emphasis on creative writing supports what Mo et al. (2014) contend about the limitations of the CCSS. Mo et al. (2014) argue that creative writing is important for personal growth and that helping students to engage in that practice will serve them better as writers than solely focusing on academic writing. It would also be valuable if students were encouraged to think about the overlap of creative and academic writing. It would help them to see how writing can be made to suit many purposes and would better prepare them for the types of writing that they will be expected to do in college.

### **College-Level Reading and Writing**

The next question I investigated was: From the perspective of a first year college student enrolled in a composition course, how does she describe her perceptions of what she will need to know and be able to do in college and her degree of preparation for college-level reading and writing? Emily did not have much of an idea of what to expect in college except an idea that there would be a massive amount of work. Her parents and her teachers told her to expect to do "a lot of papers" and to have a lot of reading every night. Emily did not consider how the reading and writing might be different, something that Jolliffe and Harl (2008) found in their study. Emily found that the types of readings that she was being asked to do in college were different and more complex than those she encountered in high school, which supports Jolliffe and Harl's (2008) findings as well. However, Emily also felt like the readings for college were mostly supplemental to the courses she was taking (except for her English courses). Her view of the

reading as supplemental contradicted what she was told by her high school teachers and her parents: “You know, reading for lecture classes it’s supplemental versus so necessary to the class, like I was told it to be.” Professors generally value the reading they give to their students more than Emily seems to, which highlights the need for professors to make the purpose of their reading assignments more clear to students (Bunn, 2013). In order to better motivate students like Emily to see the readings as important, it would be beneficial for professors to take the time to explain the value of the readings rather than assuming their students will automatically understand.

In terms of writing, Emily came in with the impression that she would need to be able to write research papers. She felt ill-prepared for this particular kind of writing as the research she did in high school was not taken very seriously by her teachers: “I mean, they had us do research papers, but again, it is not nearly as intense with citing and sources and finding those sources. High school I feel like was so loose about, like, citing.” This experience contradicts what the CCSS sets as standards for research. The CCSS focuses on finding and evaluating credible sources and learning correct citation, but Emily did not experience that preparation and it did not prepare her for college where “college is so, you know, based on academic honesty and stuff like that that, they’re just a lot more strict and there’s so many other things that we’re expected to know how to write.” Emily also felt like the types of writing she did in high school did not prepare her for the types of writing she would encounter in college. For example, her FYC course instructor had her class write a proposal for a solution to a social problem. This type of writing challenges students’ critical thinking and writing skills, which is something that scholars believe “good” college-level writing should reflect (Sullivan, 2006). However, Emily was not prepared for this type of writing and she experienced the tension between what she could do and



what her instructor expected her to know how to do: “Because I think my comp professor kind of went into it assuming that we all knew how to write a proposal, and I’m like I have never written a proposal in my life.” This kind of misalignment between reality and expectation created difficulty for Emily and the struggle she felt was clear in how she talked about the outcome of that assignment. She felt as though she were being judged for not knowing something that her instructor assumed she should have known. Emily was critical of her high school’s writing assignments as a result. She said many times that her school did not prepare her for college, especially not for college writing. Emily pointed out that part of the reason that she struggled with the sudden change in the types of writing in college was because “they didn’t encourage creativity in high school.” Her assignments were very “formulaic” and focused only on certain kinds of thinking, whereas her college assignments were much more open and focused on getting her to think critically.

The CCSS attempts to address the need for students to think critically, but does not allow for much creativity either. Part of the issue might also stem from the fact that Emily firmly believes that she is a strong writer and has always thought so because she has done well academically. Sommers and Saltz (2004) argue that students must first be willing to see themselves as novices in order to shift their thinking and start thinking and writing more deeply about their learning. Emily does not seem willing to view herself that way and it appears that she lays the blame for her difficulty on the lack of preparation in high school and her instructor’s assumptions about what she should be able to do. This is not to say that those are important factors, but it is important to not forget the roles that students’ behaviors and processes play in the transition from high school to college. *The Framework* (2011) identifies certain habits of mind as being key to the success of students in college, openness, creativity, responsibility, and

metacognition as being a few of them. If students like Emily were more open to new experiences and types of reading and writing, it is possible that the transition might be easier for them.

Helping students to develop these habits of mind is something that both teachers and professors could help students to do as they make the transition.

### **The Transition**

Finally, I wanted to know: From the perspective of a first year college student enrolled in a composition course, how does she describe what teachers could do to help make this transition smoother for their students? Despite doing well in her college classes, Emily was still critical of her high school experience and had some ideas about how the transition could be less difficult. Emily felt like there were ways for high school teachers and administrators to help make the transition smoother. In particular, she felt like the curriculum needs to be more rigorous senior year of high school:

It should have you almost up to the level that's expected of you in colleges...Just base it off a state level...most kids are going to state schools. I mean, like, 60% of my graduating class went to [a state school], so if they can just base it off of generally what is expected at [state schools], I feel like it would be such an improvement to high school curriculum.

This is an interesting idea and one that seems to fit the CCSS's goals of making sure that students are "college ready." Emily also felt like the format of high school could be changed in order to make students more prepared for college. She spoke about how courses in college are accelerated and shorted to fit everything into one semester. Emily said that "Even if they made senior year compacted into one semester and just let you out a semester early, at least you would get the feel of what's expected of you in college." She felt like making senior year of high school feel more like college would help prepare students for college better than what high schools have in place now. These ideas certainly seem better than simply telling students what to expect. A

more hands-on example might be just what students need to better navigate the transition from high school to college. Emily also felt like there were things that college professors could do to make the transition easier: “college professors might want to go a little easy for the first month.” This goes against what authors like Sommers and Saltz (2004) would say about transitioning students into college. They argue that professors need to keep high expectations and that students need to feel like novices and accept that role in order to learn and grow as writers. Emily’s feeling is understandable as the transition away from home and the familiar supports of that place is extremely emotionally difficult. Professors might want to take this kind of thing to account and address it in their own classrooms.

### **Implications for Future Study**

Obviously a major limitation of my study is that I was only able to interview one student. Future studies endeavoring to continue this work should focus on recruiting more students. This work would benefit from having many students’ perspectives so that researchers could see if there were common themes that appeared across all students. Studying multiple students would help boost the validity of this type of study. It would show that those themes were not specific to only one student, but could be seen in relation to many different types of students. It would be interesting to see if those commonalities occurred in just students enrolled in the same FYC course or if those trends also appeared in FYC students enrolled in other classes, in other FYC courses at other schools in the same state, and at other universities in different states. The more students interviewed, the better it would be for seeing similarities and differences. It would also be important to interview students in other majors. As Emily is an English Education major, it is quite possible that her experiences with reading, writing, and the transition might be entirely different than students in other majors. It might also be valuable to interview the students a third

time, at the end of the semester or even at the end of their first year of college. Adding a third interview might offer even more of a longitudinal perspective and it would be interesting to see if any of the students' perceptions or ideas changed in that time. It would help researchers to see how students are developing in their thinking as a result of their college experiences.

Another direction that this line of study could go in is looking at Advanced Placement courses, International Baccalaureate schools, and Concurrent Enrollment courses. Since all of those programs claim to be specifically aimed at preparing students for college, it would be illuminating to see if students felt more prepared as a result of taking these courses.

### **Final thoughts**

I began this study with the desire to help students better make the reading and writing transition from high school to college. Finding that there was an abundance of research on this transition from the perspective of researchers and teachers, I wanted to discover what students had to say about it as they were the ones most affected by this period of great change in their lives. My students in FYC often expressed frustration resulting from a tension between what their high schools prepared them to know and be able to do and what I and other instructors were asking of them in college. It felt wrong that they were having to bear the burden of a disconnect between high school and college that was not of their doing. Talking with Emily helped me to see the different ways in which reading and writing were treated in high school versus college. She helped me to gain insight about the fact that students often value different literacies than their professors and sometimes that difference causes tension and difficulty for the students. Emily also helped me to see the ways in which the types of reading and writing that are being done in high school do not necessarily align with the types of reading and writing expected of students in college, despite what the CCSS might be attempting. There is no blame that can be

placed on any one person or education system that would easily alleviate this problem. Instead, it is vital that professors, teachers, instructors, administrators, and policy makers at all levels work to better align their practices. College should be a shift in thinking and it should require students to work hard, but it should not seem impossible to achieve success in college because of a lack of preparation. We owe it to our students to ensure that they have the skills and tools to be successful in college and beyond.

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APPENDIX A  
RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear Professor:

My name is Kelsey Hatley and I am a researcher from Colorado State University in the English department. I am conducting a research study on the reading and writing transition from high school to college. The purpose of this study is to answer the following questions: From the perspective of six first year college students enrolled in a first year composition course, how do they describe: 1) their experiences with reading and writing in high school? 2) their perceptions of what they'll need to know and be able to do in college and their degree of preparation for college-level reading and writing? and 3) what could teachers do to help make this transition smoother for students? The title of my project is "The Reading and Writing Transition from High School to College." The Principal Investigator is Dr. Pam Coke from the English department and I am the Co-Principal Investigator and I will be the one actually conducting the study.

I would like to recruit your CO150 students to participate in my study. Participation involves the following steps: 1) as the Co-Principal Investigator I would visit your class for approximately ten minutes and explain my study to the students and have them sign a consent form if they would like to participate; 2) the student participants would then take an online survey, outside of class, that will take approximately ten minutes; and 3) finally, they will participate in two sixty minute interviews with me, outside of class, one during week three and one during week ten. Your participation and your students' participation in this research is voluntary; students may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

I will be collecting the names and emails of interested students. When I report and share the data with others, I will combine the data from all participants. I will keep their data confidential; their name and data will be kept separately in an encrypted file on my password protected computer accessible only to me. While there are no direct benefits to your students, I hope to gain more knowledge on how to improve future instruction in a First Year Composition Course, like CO150.

The survey and/or the interviews might raise discomfoting memories for some participants. If so, they can withdraw from the study at any time. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but I have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential (but unknown) risks.

To indicate your willingness to allow your students to participate in this research, please email me with your consent.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact Kelsey Hatley at [Kelsey.Hatley@colostate.edu](mailto:Kelsey.Hatley@colostate.edu) or Dr. Pam Coke at [Pamela.Coke@colostate.edu](mailto:Pamela.Coke@colostate.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU IRB at: [RICRO\\_IRB@mail.colostate.edu](mailto:RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu); 970-491-1553.

Dr. Pam Coke  
Associate Professor of English Education  
Principal Investigator

Kelsey Hatley  
English Education Graduate Student  
Co-Principal Investigator

## APPENDIX B

### SURVEY

#### Survey Questions

1. How old are you?
2. When did you graduate high school (month/year)?
3. Which high school did you attend (school/city)?
4. What is your [intended] major?
5. How would you describe yourself as a reader? What evidence do you have to support your description?
6. How would you describe yourself as writer? What evidence do you have to support your description?
7. How would your high school English teachers describe you as a reader? What evidence do you have to support their descriptions?
8. How would your high school English teachers describe you as a writer? What evidence do you have to support their descriptions?
9. Do you have access to you papers from high school (with or without teachers' comments) and could you bring them to our first interview? [It is okay if you don't have access to your papers, that does not automatically eliminate you from this study.]

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### Interview Questions Week 3

1. About how many hours a day did you spend reading material for school in high school?
2. What kinds of texts did you read for classes in high school?
3. About how many hours a day did you spend reading outside of school texts in high school?
4. What kinds of outside of school texts did you read in high school?
5. About how many hours a day did you write for class (both in class and for homework) in high school?
6. What kinds of writing did you do for classes in high school?
7. About how many hours a day did you write for non-school related activities in high school?
8. What kinds of out-of-school writing did you do in high school?
9. How do you define “good reading”? What shaped your ideas about this definition?
10. Do you consider yourself a “good reader”? What evidence do you have to support your ideas?
11. How do you define “good writing”? What shaped your ideas about this definition?
12. Do you consider yourself a “good writer”? What evidence do you have to support your ideas?
13. What are your expectations for college writing? What influenced/shaped these expectations?
14. What are your expectations for college reading? What influenced/shaped these expectations?
15. Do you feel prepared for college-level reading? What evidence do you have to support your ideas?
16. Do you feel prepared for college-level writing? What evidence do you have to support your ideas?
17. In your opinion, what [formative experience] has best prepared you for success in college-level reading?
18. In your opinion, what [formative experience] has best prepared you for success in college-level writing?

#### Interview Questions Week 10

Follow-up from last time: Were the standards/learning targets in high school made clear to you?  
E.g. were they on the board somewhere or were they explained to you?

1. About how many hours a day are you reading for your courses in college?
2. What kinds of texts are you reading for your courses?
3. About how many hours a day are you writing for your courses in college?
4. What kinds of texts are you producing for your courses?
5. About how many hours a day are you doing outside of school reading in college?
6. What kinds of outside texts are you reading?

7. About how many hours a day are you doing outside of school writing in college?
8. What kinds of outside texts are you writing?
9. How do you now define “good reading”? What informs your definitions and ideas?
10. How do you define “good writing”? What informs your definitions and ideas?
11. Do you now consider yourself a “good reader”? What evidence do you have to support your ideas?
12. Do you now consider yourself a “good writer”? What evidence do you have to support your ideas?
13. How well do you think the reading/writing courses you took in high school prepared you for college reading?
14. How well do you think the reading/writing courses you took in high school prepared you for college writing?
15. What do you wish you knew more about/had practiced more?
16. If you were talking with a friend from high school back home, and you were describing what it has been like to go from your high school to CSU, what would you say that transition has been like for you?
17. What have been some of your successes? Your biggest challenges?
18. What do you think your CO150 instructor has done to make this transition smoother?
19. What can teachers (both high school and college) do to better prepare students for the transition from high school to college?
20. Is there anything I haven’t asked you that you would like to tell me?

\*I will offer my participants the option of having the interview questions in advance.