

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD AND VALUATION OF FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION (FYC)  
AS PREDICTORS OF STUDENTS' ENGLISH 101 SUCCESS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates first-year composition students' attitudes toward and valuation of first-year composition (English 101) to learn which variable, attitudes or valuation, has a relationship with students' first-year composition success. The study uses a mixed methods approach involving a survey instrument and focus groups to elicit quantitative and qualitative data from student participants. Only first-year compositions students enrolled in English 101 at Methodist University, a four-year liberal arts institution located in Fayetteville, NC, participated in the study. Study findings suggest attitudes, not valuation, shares a relationship with students' FYC success. Further findings suggest self-efficacy and locus of control, writing apprehension (anxiety), instructors' personalities, and instructors' course delivery affect students' FYC success.



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by

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# Students' Attitudes Toward and Valuation of First-Year Composition (FYC) as Predictors of Students' English 101 Success

*"...many students only reluctantly enroll in writing classes. They bring with them a variety of fears that prohibit them from acquiring the skills they know are increasingly valuable. Therefore, I posit that before we can begin to improve the writing of our students, and even before we begin any remediation, we must consider these students' attitudes about their writing and the process of writing." (Simard, 1985, p. 101)*

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Simard's quote suggests writing instructors should first understand students' attitudes toward writing before attempting to improve students' writing. Simard's comment resonates with me and supports an assertion I made several years ago not long after I started teaching college-level writing: students' attitudes affect students' participation in and understanding of writing instruction and, presumably, their success in FYC. My assertion was anecdotal, based partly on my observation of students enrolled in my and my colleagues' FYC classes and partly on my experiences in math classes. I recall my attitude toward my math classes throughout my education—from grammar school through college—and have often reflected on how my largely negative attitude towards math classes seemingly affected not only my success in mathematics but also the course of my life. Undoubtedly, my attitude affected me well beyond my initial desire just to finish and pass my math classes: I am an English instructor—not a chemist, an engineer, or a pharmacist. My dislike of math spilled over into my whole life. My dislike of math had to do with more than just the subject itself; it also had to do with my mathematics anxiety, my

lack of mathematics self-efficacy, the seeming uselessness of math classes, my poor relationships with my instructors, and a host of other factors.

Years later, as I pursued my PhD in Rhetoric, Writing, and Professional Communication at East Carolina University, I thought about my experiences with math and connected those experiences to my observations of FYC students. Could they, perhaps, feel the same way about FYC as I did about math? Could their attitudes toward FYC affect them as profoundly as my attitudes toward math did me? Could their valuation of FYC affect them? I felt that the answer to each question was “yes” but naturally did not know; I could only guess what effect if any their attitudes and valuation might have. With those questions in mind as my starting point, I began an exploration of students’ attitudes toward FYC. I started in 2008 with a small study of FYC students and continued over the next several years with several other small studies. My efforts have since culminated in the present study, my dissertation.

This chapter begins with a description of the study location and an explanation of why I chose that location. It also describes why I chose First-Year Composition (FYC) students as my study participants and FYC as my study subject. I also emphasize my respect for students’ voices (hooks, 1994; Lunsford & Ouzgane, 2004; Miller, 2004), allowing them an opportunity to speak for themselves regarding FYC courses and the role they perceive FYC plays in their college and career success. Lastly, in this chapter I introduce the research question and define key terms such as *attitudes*, *valuation*, and *success* that are abstract and require clear definitions for others to understand my research question.

### *Section I: The Study Site and Study Population*

The study location is Methodist University, a private liberal arts institution located in Fayetteville, North Carolina, a city of approximately 200,000 people. Near Fort Bragg and associated with the United World College (a British-based network of 14 international institutions providing secondary-level education), Methodist University boasts a varied student body representing 41 states, 53 countries, and a wide range of ethnicities and socio-economic statuses. The institution offers over 80 undergraduate majors and concentrations, four graduate programs, 19 varsity sports, and many student organizations and activities. It is located in the sand hills region of North Carolina, approximately an hour south of Raleigh, NC, the state capital. The institution employs approximately 428 full-time employees and has approximately 2,200 students enrolled. Methodist University is also where I work as a full-time English instructor. I chose Methodist University as my study site for two reasons: 1) conducting research at MU provided information on FYC in a private liberal arts university, and 2) Methodist University was readily accessible to me as a study site.

Undoubtedly, composition is a subject unto itself. Attesting to that fact is the proliferation of books, articles, essays, book chapters, and studies on FYC that suggest universities' increasing stake in composition. Given that practically all students enrolled in universities must take at least one composition course and compose essays in English (foreign language classes notwithstanding), it makes sense that FYC would garner increasing attention.

My reasons for choosing FYC students as the participants of this study are both philosophical and pragmatic. First, the ongoing discussion about FYC classes—their

usefulness (or not), their place in the institution as a space for encouraging student growth and honing students' skills (or their place as a simple gate-keeping device)—interests me. Convinced as I am most students need FYC courses to improve their writing to acceptable college levels, I am also aware that there likely would be no need for FYC if college entrance requirements matched faculty members' expectations of students' performance. These reasons for studying FYC are philosophical but lead to pragmatic concerns, my second reason for choosing FYC students as my study population. I have taught FYC students for over ten years now, teaching FYC (English 101 at MU) classes almost exclusively. English 101 is the institution's standard composition course, so only students enrolled in English 101 participated in the study. While I teach other composition courses offered at MU—English 100, Skills Development in English, a developmental writing course and English 102, Composition and Introduction to Literature—those courses are outside this study's parameters.

Outside the practical matters associated with which courses and students to include and exclude, there is the matter of which students interested me and why. Because I have spent much of my career teaching English 101 students, these students interest me most. I spend most of my time with first-year students. English 101 is where I build relationships with students, where I watch them grow as writers, and where I challenge myself to become a better instructor. Further, knowing how hard I work and seeing the difference FYC instruction makes in students' lives, I am convinced my work is meaningful and useful beyond gate-keeping functions—I help students progress in their college careers and lives by teaching them writing skills. I am also convinced that FYC can be improved, not just for

me, but for anyone teaching FYC courses. Key to that improvement, I believe, is understanding students' attitudes toward and valuation of FYC.

*Section II: Representation of Students/Students' Voices*

This study joins a growing body of research that includes students' voices in the ongoing discussion about FYC. For students to be understood, they must be heard. Their voices cannot be absent or minimized. Students cannot become a subject about whom the research has been written yet who are curiously silent regarding their own stories. bell hooks writes about her experiences in the classroom and describes instructors more interested in themselves than their students. She writes:

I learned, along with other students, to consider myself fortunate if I found an interesting professor who talked in a compelling way. Most of my professors were not the slightest bit interested in enlightenment. More than anything they seemed enthralled by the exercise of power and authority within their mini-kingdom, the classroom. (hooks, 1994, p. 17)

hooks' asserts her professors were more interested in themselves than their students, an error I hope to avoid in this study by adopting a researcher/participant model of research and by focusing on students' descriptions of themselves.

Historically, studies in the social sciences and humanities used a researcher/subject model that minimized the "subjects" of the research in favor of the researcher. Like many present-day researchers, I adopted a researcher/*participant* model to humanize the students who are part of my research and to limit "othering" students. Helmers (1994) writes instructors and researchers often describe FYC students as beginners or children, as beasts, as deficient, as diseased or ill, as foreign or exotic, as generalized, as good, bad, or mystical and as savages. Such labels prohibit students from creating their own identity. Indeed, neglecting students' identities or labeling them risks "othering" them the way Said

(1979) describes “othering” in *Orientalism*. He writes regarding the West’s view of the East: “Orientals lived in their world, ‘we’ lived in ours. The vision and material reality propped each other up, kept each other going. A certain freedom of intercourse was always the Westerner’s privilege; because his was the stronger culture, he could penetrate, he could wrestle with, he could give shape and meaning to the great Asiatic mystery” (Said, 1979, p. 44). Helmers (1994), referencing Said’s “othering” writes, “students ‘are’ specimens, their writings ‘are’ artifacts, their purpose to provide useful knowledge for a community of practitioners” (p. 100). Faculty members are like the Westerners described by Said while “a huge captive enrollment of largely unsophisticated students” (Hairston, 1992, p. 185) are the Orientals who are “a fertile field to cultivate to bring about political and social change” (Hairston, 1992, p. 185). Here one sees the colonization of the mind and the fashioning of a “type” of person—the student as colonized by and created by instructors.

One way to limit “othering” is to increase opportunities for students to speak. Some researchers, such as Carroll in *Rehearsing New Roles* (2002), Sommers and Saltz in their CCC article “The Novice as Expert: Writing the Freshman Year” (2004) and Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, and Shuart-Faris (2005) in *Discourse Analysis and the Study of Classroom Language and Literacy Events: A Microethnographic Perspective*, among many other composition theorists, record and transcribe students’ conversations about themselves and FYC. These researchers use interviews, focus groups, survey instruments and mixed methods approaches to learn about FYC students. Like the aforementioned research, my mixed methods study encourages students to voice themselves, establish their identities, and describe their perceptions of FYC through the survey instrument and focus groups. During data analysis, to minimize my presence, I frequently quote students and use their

self-reported descriptions to describe them (rather than labeling them myself) as I try to understand students' attitudes toward and valuation of FYC.

### *Section III: Research Question and Key Terms*

My experiences working with FYC students, conversations with them, and conversations with fellow English and writing faculty led me to question why students and instructors appear to be so “off” from each other regarding writing instruction. In my experience, instructors and students frequently disagree about FYC classes' usefulness, FYC's role in the college curriculum, students' roles in FYC, and instructors' roles in FYC. It seemed logical to investigate these differences in opinion, starting with the students who participated in my study since I already know what instructors often think. I thought that upon learning what students were thinking, composition instructors might improve their teaching efficacy and increase FYC's usefulness. To that end, I ask the following research question:

What is the relationship between students' attitudes and success in English 101,

Composition, versus students' valuation and success in English 101, Composition?

I initially hypothesized a positive relationship between students' attitudes toward FYC courses and FYC success and between students' valuation of FYC courses and FYC success. I supposed the more positive the students' attitudes, the greater their FYC success and the higher their valuation of FYC courses, and the greater their success in FYC.

Defining terms is essential to understanding my study since I make fine distinctions between words like “attitude” and “valuation” that can initially appear interchangeable. I developed the definitions for all terms except “First-Year Composition” and “efficacy.”

Terms and their definitions follow:

### *Key Terms*

1. Attitudes—the ways students describe FYC courses, using positive, negative, or neutral terms.
2. Sources/factors—external and internal factors, such as FYC’s perceived role, instructors’ roles, and students’ self-perceived ability or talent that influence (are sources of) the attitudes students develop toward FYC.
3. Students—those individuals enrolled part-time or full-time at MU and taking English 101 (FYC).
4. FYC—first-year composition, English 101 at MU (a definition MU developed).
5. Instructors—those individuals who teach FYC classes.
6. Efficacy/self-efficacy/writing self-efficacy—the power to produce certain effects or results; the confidence in one’s own ability to produce certain effects or results; one’s confidence in one’s writing ability (Jones, 2008; Martinez, Kock, and Cass, 2011; Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007).
7. Valuation—how useful or not students see FYC in terms of helping students succeed in their college careers and later their professions; that is, students’ perceptions of FYC as intrinsically valuable and beneficial to them—despite or in accordance with— students’ attitudes toward FYC
8. Success—passing FYC classes with a C or better (as indicated by survey item twenty-seven).

Answering the call to further research posed by Driscoll and Wells (2012), I hope that my research will extend current understanding of students’ attitudes toward, valuation of, and success in FYC as well as reveal whether attitudes or valuation has a

greater impact on students' FYC success. Finally, I hope my research will inform instructors' teaching practices based on understanding how attitudes and valuation affect (or not) students' success.

## Chapter Two: An Overview of Current Research in FYC

Arguably, the greatest challenge of composition instruction is increasing student success in FYC, but FYC classes themselves are controversial, and not just for students. While some faculty members want to eliminate FYC from the college curriculum, others consider it necessary. As the FYC debate continues, composition courses persist and even increase in response to open admissions policies, college faculty members' expectations that students write at the college level, and students' need for FYC to strengthen their writing. Much FYC research has focused on students' writing self-efficacy's effect on students' FYC success students' resistance toward FYC instruction, their valuation of FYC, and their attitudes toward it (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001; Cox, 2009; Dahlman, 2010; Durst, 1999; Goodman & Cirka, 2009; Hairston, 1992; Henderson, 1992; 2008; Linnenbrook & Pintrich, 2003; Pajares, Johnson & Usher, 2007; Schunk, 2003; Simard, 1985). Henderson (1992) writes that many students resist instruction, resent being in FYC, do not value first year composition and ask, as one student did, "Why do I have to be here?" (p. 324). As these sources indicate, some students *do* not value FYC the same way instructors do. In fact, Durst (1999) writes, students often "are dramatically at odds with the views and approaches of the teacher" (p. 2). Whether students are interested in or apathetic toward their FYC classes appears to depend largely upon how they view FYC. If students see the class as artificial, consider it unimportant, consider it inapplicable to their majors and careers, see it as a forum where instructors lord over them, imagine it a platform for instructors' politics and/or see FYC classes as sites of criticism and personal attack, students likely will consider FYC courses unhelpful, even unnecessary (Hairston, 1992; hooks, 1994).

The literature in this review describes the aforementioned research topics, along with sources of students' attitudes toward and valuation of FYC.

*Section I: Writing Self-Efficacy and Writing Apprehension*

Understanding students' attitudes toward composition instruction potentially can improve the efficacy of FYC courses (Simard, 1985). If composition instructors recall approaches from classical rhetoricians—Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, among others—they will recall that knowing one's audience is essential to gaining the audience's trust and persuading the audience to agree with the rhetor. However, it seems composition instructors often forget their students constitute an audience. Together instructors and students build meaning through a process of information exchange. Whether the "student-audience" accepts what the "instructor-rhetor" has said depends upon many factors, such as whether the groups understand each other, trust each other, and value composition equally. Understanding the differences in students' and instructors' perceptions of FYC potentially may help instructors improve composition instruction.

Writing self-efficacy is one source of students' attitudes toward FYC. Composition theorists (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001; Dahlman, 2010; Goodman & Cirka, 2009; Jones, 2008; Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007; Linnenbrook & Pintrich, 2003; Schunk, 2003) argue low writing self-efficacy increases students' anxiety toward and dislike of FYC while high writing-self efficacy encourages positive student responses toward FYC. Students with high writing self-efficacy can "plan, organize, and revise writing, generate topics and introductions, and manage their own behavior" better than can students with low writing self-efficacy (Jones, 2008, p. 215). Successful students who have high writing self-efficacy respond positively to writing instruction while unsuccessful students who have low writing

self-efficacy often resist writing instruction and inadvertently increase their failure rate thus further decreasing self-efficacy. The lowered self-efficacy perpetuates a cycle of failure, fear, and doubt (Jones, 2008). Goodman and Cirka (2009) sampled first-year students enrolled in an interdisciplinary writing-intensive course at a four-year liberal arts university. Goodman and Cirka's (2009) study focuses on writing apprehension's relationship with writing self-efficacy. Using a survey instrument, pretests and post-tests, and matching of student responses from both tests, Goodman and Cirka (2009) found that writing self-efficacy and writing apprehension (anxiety) are negatively related; writing apprehension increases as self-efficacy decreases and vice versa.

Similar to Goodman and Cirka's (2009) study, Dahlman's (2010) dissertation compared results from a Beginning of Semester Survey (BOS survey) an End of Semester Survey (EOS survey) to learn "whether or not students' sense of self-efficacy was raised and what the cause of that rise in self-efficacy could be attributed to" (pp. 28-29).

Dahlman's (2010) results suggest that raising students' writing self-efficacy shifts their locus of control (LOC) inward and improves students' FYC success.

Further regarding writing self-efficacy, Chemers, Hu, and Garcia's (2001) study and Linnenbrook and Pintrich's (2003) study indicate that writing self-efficacy affects students' success in FYC and thus their responses to FYC. Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2001) assert students with high writing self-efficacy are engaged and learn to write well while students with low writing self-efficacy are unengaged and have difficulty learning to write. Their study of first-year university students from the University of Santa Cruz focuses on the effects of students' self-efficacy and optimism as they relate to students' academic performance. Students completed self-reported surveys to rate themselves regarding

writing self-efficacy. The researchers learned that high writing self-efficacy profoundly and positively impacts academic performance and personal experience in first-year writing students. Linnenbrock and Pintrich's (2003) archival study of other studies on writing self-efficacy and students' attitudes indicates that the studies Linnenbrock and Pintrich reviewed had similar findings: 1) students who have high writing self-efficacy are engaged and learn better than do students with low writing self-efficacy 2) students sometimes underestimate their ability (learned helplessness), and 3) students sometimes overestimate their ability and thus lack engagement. Related to finding three of Linnenbrock and Pintrich's study, Henderson (1992) found some AP students complain FYC is "beneath" them, but AP students often are no better prepared for FYC than "average" students are; some AP students just *think* they are better writers and thus resist writing instruction.

Schunk (2003) tested the variables of writing self-efficacy and students' attitudes toward FYC courses. Schunk (2003) used social cognitive theory and other research studies' findings to support his hypothesis that instructors' understanding of students' writing self-efficacy is essential to improving learning. He argues instructors who understand that low writing self-efficacy negatively impacts students' writing success can focus on weak students, teach them writing strategies that build their confidence, work to improve students' writing self-efficacy, and work to improve their reception of and success in FYC classes. Schunk's (2003) study suggests instructors' responses to students affect students' FYC success.

## *Section II: Fear of FYC, FYC's Relevance, and Transferability of FYC Skills*

Besides writing self-efficacy and writing anxiety as factors affecting FYC students, some studies suggest FYC courses themselves, transferability of skills, and the disjuncture between students' and instructors' writing expectations contribute to students' attitudes toward and valuation of FYC. Related to writing self-efficacy, writing anxiety, and resistance to writing instruction is students' fear of failing FYC courses—in other words, fear of the FYC course *itself*. Simard (1985) writes, “many students only reluctantly enroll in writing classes. They bring with them a variety of fears that prohibit them from acquiring the skills they know are increasingly valuable” (p. 101). Simard (1985) contends students enroll in FYC courses reluctantly because they fear and dislike FYC, feel they do not need it/cannot use the skills they learn in it, or feel the course only fulfills a graduation requirement. He argues that “before we can begin to improve the writing of our students, and even before we begin any remediation, we must consider these students' attitudes about their writing and the process of writing” (Simard, 1985, p. 101).

Miller (1989) argues FYC courses are one source of students' anxiety. Miller (1989) indicates students often dislike FYC courses and experience anxiety because of the dual and contradictory nature of FYC courses and writing assignments. Students are in a public setting yet are required to produce private writing. The assignments are artificial—without a “real audience”—yet their completion is necessary for students' advancement in college. Miller (1989) writes that writing anxiety and dislike of FYC

may have grown or become overt because students have over time been encouraged to perceive their “communication” as dualistically public and private. They must, in most academic settings, write what only a teacher reads, but they have often been assigned a task of imitating traditional public, persuasive forms of writing. Consequently, they may well have developed . . . “audience/reader conflict” because they are asked to shout in the study, to whisper in the Coliseum. (p. 160)

According to Miller (1989), by their nature, FYC classes lead some students to mixed feelings about writing since FYC classes appear contradictory and paradoxical. They require students to complete artificial writing tasks as if they were intended for real audiences and require students ideally to have already mastered forms of writing—if they are to succeed in the course—that they are in the process of learning.

Like Simard (1985) and Miller (1989), Cox (2009) found that “anxiety emerged as a theme across the majority of students’ interviews” she conducted regarding FYC (“Student Interviews”, para. 2). She writes, “fragile and fearful, these students expressed deep-seated fears in various ways, locating the object of fear in college itself, in specific courses or subject matter, and in certain professors . . .” where the “level of students’ fear of the composition course was particularly intense” (Cox, 2009, “Fear” paras. 1-2). Cox (2009) described the English composition course at her study site as a high-stakes course with a gate keeping function. Students Cox (2009) interviewed cited inadequate instruction in the past, failure of previous English and composition courses, feelings of unpreparedness, and low writing self-efficacy as factors contributing to their writing anxiety and dislike of FYC (paras. 34-37).

Like Miller (1989) Tinberg and Nadeau (2010) further indicate FYC courses frequently frustrate students because they require students to write simultaneously as expert and novice. Further, students must “engage in conventions of academic discourse without a clear road map” to explain how to engage in those conventions (Tinberg & Nadeau, 2010, p. 18). Students must consider questions for which they have no answers, must write for readers who likely disagree with students, and must learn a general way of

writing that they do not see as transferring to their majors or their jobs (Tinberg & Nadeau, 2010). Similarly, Martinez, Kock, and Cass (2011) indicate:

High expectations for writing across the curriculum are likely to contribute to increased writing anxiety, which can affect students' motivation and willingness to take courses. Writing anxiety is also related to students' poor performances on English writing exams and in jobs requiring writing. (p. 351)

Undoubtedly, students who already fear writing likely fear FYC courses and avoid them when possible.

An additional, complicating factor is FYC's perceived relevance. Some students question whether skills learned in FYC are even helpful. Studies present inconsistent findings. Some suggest FYC skill transference is short-lived and leads to increased student doubt about FYC's relevance. Other studies suggest transference generally is of only rote skills or occurs only when students think skills learned in FYC are relevant to other classes. For example, Fallon, Lahar, and Susman (2009) ask, "Do students transfer the skills that they learn in English 101 to other courses and contexts?" and answer, "Often, it seems that they do not—or, at least, that the transfer is not visible or readily apparent" (p. 41). They further argue regarding one of their findings, "whether or not students had taken English 101 *had no relationship* to their performance" in other classes (Fallon, Lahar, & Susman, 2009, p. 44). Fallon, Lahar, and Susman (2009) note that typically those skills most likely to transfer are "low-road transfers . . . where a skill or task has been practiced so much that it becomes both automatic and flexible" (Fallon, Lahar, & Susman, 2009, p. 46). Low-road transfers often involve "rote behaviors, rather than the complex abstraction and formulation typical of difficult to attain and sustain 'high-road' transfers that most instructors want and that composition requires (Fallon, Lahar, & Susman, 2009, p. 46). Ahrenhoerster (2006) who conducted a mixed-methods, longitudinal study regarding FYC

skills and transference counters some researchers by asserting FYC skills transfer to writing in the majors. However, M. Plata (2008), in a study similar to Ahrenhoerster's (2006), learned that while skills may indeed transfer to other courses, as Plata suggests, those skills last only a few semesters before students forget them, thus rendering FYC skills useless long term. Wardle in her 2007 study "Understanding 'Transfer' From FYC: Preliminary Results of a Longitudinal Study" indicates that student-participants claimed they learned important skills in FYC class but also "maintained they rarely needed those lessons elsewhere" (p. 73). She asserts, "On those occasions when students wanted to use some FYC writing strategies and really engage with their assignments, they found that assignment structures rarely encouraged them to do so" (Wardle, 2007, p. 76). Furthermore, students were less likely to use their ability fully on assignments they considered "easy and un-engaging" (Wardle, 2007, p. 73). Thus, though students learned skills in FYC classes, such as "careful preparation, careful research, revising, and peer review" along with meta-awareness about writing, they typically were disinclined to apply skills learned in FYC classes to other classes (Wardle, 2007, p.73; p.76).

Similarly, Driscoll and Wells (2012) in "Beyond Knowledge and Skills: Writing Transfer and the Role of Student Dispositions" argue students' dispositions (internal qualities, such as motivation, value, and self-efficacy) largely determine how effectively transference occurs. Driscoll and Wells (2012) reviewed previous studies on transfer in composition and found "in many situations where students failed to transfer individual dispositions played a role" ("Beyond", para. 2; "Applying" para. 1). Further, they argue the role of student dispositions on student success in FYC, especially transfer, has not received enough attention. They call for more research on student dispositions in FYC and assert

students' dispositions "need to occupy a more central focus in writing transfer research" (Driscoll & Wells, 2012, "Beyond", para. 1).

### *Section III: Other Factors Affecting Attitudes and Valuation*

Besides issues of self-efficacy, anxiety, relevance, and transfer, many other factors, often related to students' identities, affect students' attitudes toward and valuation of FYC. Students from marginalized groups frequently face more challenges than do their "traditional" counterparts as they often enter college disadvantaged by factors that predispose them to failure. For instance, first-generation students typically have little academic support at home and sometimes lack empathetic parents (Tinberg & Nadeau, 2010). Poor students are burdened by crushing debt and the demands of the part-time or full-time jobs they work to pay tuition costs (Hunt, 2002). Domestic L2 students must quickly learn, adjust to, and function well in a new language while immigrant students—who often are also L2, first-generation, and low income—must overcome language barriers, economic trouble, and even bigotry to succeed (Sternglass, 1997). LGBTQ students must deal with the criticism and stigma associated with their sexual orientations while female students must learn to flourish in the academy's environment dominated by male, heterosexual discourse (Hunt, 2002; Sternglass, 1997). Finally, non-traditional students who return to college after many years out of school must adjust to the rigors and demands of college often while they work to support their families and care for children and aging parents (Tinberg & Nadeau, 2010.) Instructors can know the effects students' lives have on their attitudes toward and valuation of FYC only if instructors learn about students.

Some researchers have found instructors in many disciplines (often without realizing it) reduce their students to “the student” thus ignoring students’ identities and important differences. According to Miller (2004), “the student writer being taught to compose actually *in* writing, who is generally addressed with guarded mixtures of pathetic regret and irritation, has a new and currently generalized identity,” *the student* (p. 162). Likewise, Lunsford and Ouzgane (2004) write, “to speak of *the* student writer and his or her writing processes . . . [has] the unfortunate effect of erasing difference in many ways” (p. 2). The resulting “one-size-fits-all” approach to teaching writing ignores the challenges many composition students face *and* situates writing as a generic event in the “vacuum” of the FYC’s purported “apolitical” environment (Hairston, 1992). Kim, a nontraditional student returning to college after having been out of school for years, felt anxiety because she “doubt[ed] her abilities as a writer,” yet family, friends, and faculty failed to encourage and support her (Tinberg & Nadeau, 2010, p. 71). According to Tinberg and Nadeau (2010) any people in Kim’s life unwittingly predisposed her to failure in her FYC course since, to them, she was just another student; few people noticed her specific needs as a non-traditional student who worked and was a mother.

Undoubtedly, instructors’ treatment of race and ethnicity also affects students’ attitudes toward and valuation of FYC as several theorists suggest. Burford (2005), conducted a mixed methods study at a Texas university (where most students were Latino/a,) and used a survey instrument to find that cultural differences, race bias, and immigration status were major factors contributing to students’ fear of composition classes. Latino/a students’ culture often clashed with their Anglo-American instructors’ culture resulting in cultural misunderstandings. Some instructors demonstrated blatant

dislike of immigrant students. Like Burford (2005), hooks in *Teaching to Transgress* (1994) indicates race bias greatly hindered learning for African American students newly integrated in desegregated schools because white teachers' cultural expectations did not match African American students' behaviors and expectations.

L1 language, sexual orientation, and gender can also affect students' attitudes toward and valuation of FYC courses. Burford (2005) asserts some instructors at her study site disapproved of students whose first language was Spanish. Similarly, Sternglass (1997) describes immigrant students whose first language is Spanish as having the added stress and anxiety of taking second-language placement tests as well as the anxiety of having to function in the second language without translators or teachers knowledgeable in the students' L1 language. Sternglass (1997) also indicates LGBTQ students feel limited writing about their life experiences—often cast as taboo subjects—and fear revealing their sexual orientations to instructors who might reject LGBTQ students. Sternglass (1997) further argues female students, whose discourse typically values cooperation and shared power, frequently face challenges in the academy dominated by masculine discourse that values competition and dominance.

Marginalized students often must overcome their own unique obstacles to succeed in college. To help these students succeed, instructors must see them as more than just a generic group of individuals whose life experiences do not affect them. All of the aforementioned groups, traditional students included, deal with challenges related to background and identity; however, given that these challenges are not obvious manifestations of students' backgrounds and identities, they often receive little attention from instructors. Instead, in the aforementioned cases, students' identities—the result of

their diverse backgrounds and experiences— frequently are erased and replaced by the generic “student” label described by Hairston(1992), Lundsford and Ouzgame (2004), and Miller (1998). As a result, FYC instructors may not account for students’ unique life experiences and learning needs. The instructors’ failure may then affect students’ view of instructors and FYC courses and result in misunderstandings between students and instructors.

#### *Section IV: Instructors’ Influence on Students*

Arguably, instructors are one of the most influential factors affecting students’ attitudes toward and valuation of FYC. Simard (1985) describes the situation well. He writes, “an open honest dialogue helps my students see me not as an antagonist but as a guide” (p. 101). Beth, an instructor interviewed by Cox (2009) also reduces antagonism. She avoids publicly “singling out” students who need help writing and encourages weak students to schedule regular conferences with her. She actively avoids fomenting conflict between students and herself when she can since antagonistic relationships discourage students’ FYC success. As Beth suggests in Cox’s (2009) study, instructors can profoundly affect students’ success in FYC courses. Students’ relationships with their writing teachers can make students more (or less) accepting of FYC courses and receptive of (or resistant to) instruction. One of the problems with writing instruction is that students often see themselves in an adversarial relationship with their writing instructors, as Simard (1985) suggests when he indicates he wants his students to see him “as a guide,” not “an antagonist” (p. 101). Students must get passing grades to proceed with their college careers yet often do not know how to please their writing instructors; thus, professors become covert antagonists. In *Collision Course*, Durst (1999) writes:

Schooling is so riddled with evaluations, both formal and informal, that teachers' tacit expectations often take on heightened importance: hence, the constant search by students for "what the teacher is really looking for." As teachers who want students to be more intrinsically motivated and genuinely interested in their education, we often find such concerns petty and irritating, but I would suggest that students' anxiety can indeed be well-founded. (p. 68)

Durst (1999) explains that often instructors are not overtly antagonistic toward their students; however, instructors' talent for mystifying students with seemingly unknowable expectations frustrates students and presents instructors as purposefully hiding their expectations to confound students. Durst (1999) writes that instructors only need state their expectations up-front to lay ground rules that clarify instructors' expectations and avoid needless frustration on students' and instructors' parts.

In other cases, the antagonism between students and instructors is more obvious. Helmers (1994) writes that instructors routinely "other" students, placing them in opposition with the instructor who is described as wise, beneficent and kind yet plagued with students who are incompetent, intractable, and ungrateful. To support her assertions, Helmers (1994) examines many faculty testimonials and indicates these testimonials frequently present students as adversaries. She writes, "Just as women are produced through kinship and labor relations, students are produced through their relationship with teachers," an instance of "othering" where the "native . . . [is] clearly different from the observing self" most notably in the natives' lack and inherent inability relative to the observer (Helmers, 1994, p. 35).

Burford (2005) in her study on FYC students enrolled in a Texas university quotes students who described their instructors in overwhelmingly negative (and adversarial) terms. Some comments include the following: the teacher "gets mad with the students when they do not understand the lecture. A poor teacher degrades the students by making

them feel incompetent. [The teacher] doesn't care about the students' opinions. A poor teacher doesn't really know how to give the information to the student in a way that they understand it" (Burford, 2005, p. 53). Burford (2005) argues these comments generally represent students' perceptions of composition instructors at her study site. Undoubtedly, students know—from instructors' looks, postures, comments, and tones—that the instructors become frustrated teaching students who have difficulty learning; thus, instructors themselves are yet another potential source of students' attitudes toward FYC.

#### *Section V: Conclusion of the Literature Review*

The researchers cited in this chapter describe several commonly known sources of students' attitudes toward and valuation of FYC: self-efficacy, anxiety, transferability and relevance; identity and diversity (encompassing culture, language, gender, and sexual orientation); fear, FYC myths, and relationships with instructors. Attitudes, valuation, and thinking dispositions are important factors affecting students' FYC success. According to Swartz (1986) attitudes and values—along with interests, prior expectations, general beliefs, theories, and ideologies—can impact individuals' understandings of events, even producing bias and prejudice (p. 111). Swartz's (1986) observations certainly held true for me. I had bad experiences in math classes and thus developed a prejudice against math. Similarly, it stands to reason students who have had bad experiences with writing, see FYC as useless, or have low writing self-efficacy will be disposed (via bad experiences, negative attitudes, and low valuation) to resist FYC instruction and fail—unless they can somehow work past their aversion to FYC.

Related to attitudes and valuation are thinking dispositions. According to Perkins, Tishman, Ritchhart, Donis, and Andrade (2000) thinking dispositions are learnable, like

attitudes, and concern how people tend to invest their abilities. Thus, thinking dispositions suggest *action*, not just *feelings* the way attitudes suggest or *need value* the way valuation suggests. While some of the literature does do so, historically speaking, FYC research does not often address students' thinking dispositions, nor does it, as indicated by Wardle (2007) and Driscoll and Wells (2012), address thinking dispositions' effects on students' success in FYC. Indeed, Driscoll and Wells (2012) raise several research questions intended for future research and tied to thinking dispositions as a central factor in FYC research, namely, "How and where are dispositions formed?" "What is the relationship among individual dispositions?" "How do dispositions impact all areas of learning to write?" "How can teachers accurately understand—and adapt to—student dispositions in the classroom?" and "What is the role of curricular interventions in shifting dispositions?" ("Future Inquiry" paras. 1-2).

While I do not claim to answer all of these aforementioned questions completely, I think that my research addresses them at least in part and presents a step in the direction Wardle (2007), Driscoll and Wells (2012) and other composition theorists and researchers argue composition research needs to move—toward understanding students' thinking dispositions in FYC research. Possibly, *attitudes and valuation are factors that affect the development of thinking dispositions*; if so, the resulting thinking dispositions may in turn affect students' FYC success. My research attempts to fill the gap described by Driscoll and Wells (2012) and Wardle (2007), among other FYC theorists and researchers in several ways by:

- 1) understanding students' descriptions of their attitudes toward FYC classes to learn if/how students' attitudes affect thinking dispositions,

- 2) understanding students' descriptions of their valuation of FYC to learn if/how students' valuation of FYC affects thinking dispositions
- 3) addressing the impact attitudes and valuation may have on students' reception of FYC
- 4) addressing the impact attitudes and valuation have on student success in FYC
- 5) determining whether attitudes or valuation is more likely to affect student success in FYC
- 6) addressing factors that affect students' attitudes toward and valuation of FYC.

My research addresses, at least to some degree, the areas of future research raised by Driscoll and Wells (2012), Wardle (2007), and others besides testing whether attitudes or valuation better determines students' FYC success and investigating how students develop the attitudes toward and valuation of FYC that they have.

### **Chapter Three: Methods and Methodology**

After reviewing research on composition instruction, I found that increasingly research is directed at understanding students' attitudes toward FYC and valuation of FYC (Cox, 2009; Dahlman, 2010; Henderson, 1999; Simard, 1985; Swartz, 1987). I also found some studies in education that liken thinking dispositions to attitudes and investigate thinking dispositions' affects on students' success (Driscoll & Wells, 2012; Lipman, 1986; Swartz, 1987). Answering the call to further research posed by Driscoll and Wells (2012), my research will extend current understanding of students' attitudes toward and valuation of FYC as well as reveal whether attitudes or valuation has a greater impact on students' FYC success. Finally, my research will inform instructors' teaching practices based on understanding how attitudes and valuation affect (or not) students' success.

#### *Section I: Methodological Approach, Study Design, and Data Collection*

My research relies on a Mixed Methods research approach involving quantitative and qualitative data. Hughes and Hayhoe (2007) describe mixed methods approach as using more than one research method in one research project. Like many other composition researchers, I use typical quantitative and qualitative techniques to gather my data. For instance, my study, similar to Martinez, Kock, and Cass's study (2011) and Pajares, Johnson, and Usher's study (2007) uses a survey instrument to gather quantitative data, and like Carroll's (2002) and Cox's studies (2009), my study uses students' recorded and transcribed conversations to gather qualitative data. These methods were good to use for my study for several reasons: 1) the survey allowed me to learn how a large group of FYC students thought about and felt about FYC; thus, the survey allowed me to gather "breadth" of data. From the survey I was able to understand FYC students generally; 2) the

focus groups allowed me to learn detailed information regarding how students thought about and felt about FYC; thus, the focus groups generated “depth” of data. In other words, the focus groups allowed me to learn a lot about what a smaller group of students thought and felt specifically about FYC and why. Using only quantitative data collection methods would not have provided the “depth” that I wanted, and using only qualitative data collection methods would not have provided the “breadth” that I wanted.

I addressed my research question in two ways—through a survey instrument and through focus groups; both approaches generated quantitative and qualitative data. The survey portion required more quantitative analysis than qualitative analysis since it generated more quantitative data. I used Qualtrics to collect survey data, and I used Qualtrics and NVivo to analyze data. The focus groups data required more qualitative analysis than quantitative analysis since it generated more qualitative data; I used NVivo to analyze focus group data.

In the spring of 2013, I surveyed a broad portion of Methodist University’s FYC students to learn their attitudes toward and valuation of English 101, composition. To gather data, I used a convenience sample of Methodist University English 101 students. I asked permission from fellow FYC faculty members to include students enrolled in their sections of English 101. Most of my colleagues teaching English 101 agreed to allow their students to participate. Once I determined via instructor consent the sections of FYC eligible for my study, I contacted the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness for the classes’ rosters. I e-mailed the students listed on each roster and invited them to participate. The e-mail invitation provided students with a description of the study, provided informed consent, and explained that clicking on the survey link indicated

students' willingness to participate. I e-mailed approximately two hundred students, and eighty-two students participated in the survey; they accessed the survey online through Qualtrics and could choose to participate in an interview.

From the survey, eight students self-selected for the interview, but only one showed up for the interview. While I collected his data, I omitted it since one interview alone was insufficient for my purposes. Instead, I held focus groups during the fall 2013 term to generate qualitative data. To recruit student participants for the focus groups, I approached my colleagues and asked their permission to speak briefly to their classes. Several colleagues agreed. Upon visiting classes, I described my research, indicated students could choose not to participate, and indicated that students who did participate would get pizza. This incentive proved helpful since students who were disinterested before my mentioning the incentive changed their minds after hearing it and agreed to participate. I circulated a sign-up sheet through each class, so students could supply their names and contact information. I later e-mailed students asking them what days they could meet for the focus groups. I scheduled meetings, and students met in groups to discuss FYC. Twenty-one students participated in the focus groups. None had taken the survey; instead, these students comprised a new participant group.

To analyze survey data, I used chi-square analysis, frequencies, and identification of narrative themes (per commonly repeated words or phrases). For the focus groups' data, I identified narrative themes to learn students' attitudes toward and valuation of FYC and to learn what the sources of students' attitudes toward and valuation of FYC might be. I coded qualitative survey data and focus groups' conversations using a scheme that I developed. Using NVivo, I looked for words that suggested positive, neutral, or negative attitudes

toward or valuation of FYC as well as commonly mentioned topics. For instance, student comments that regarded teachers' teaching techniques I coded in the node "teachers." Within the node "teachers" one comment might read, "the teacher is friendly and helpful; she makes FYC fun," a positive comment, while another comment might read, "the teacher is unorganized and critical," a negative comment. I subjected students' comments made in the open-ended survey questions and focus group conversations to the coding process just described to learn whether students' attitudes toward or valuation of FYC courses is related to (and possibly a predictor of) students' FYC success.

During my study, I followed IRB protocol by applying with ECU's Institutional Review Board (IRB,) along with MU's IRB, for study approval. I provided students with informed consent, allowed them to opt-out of the study at any time, protected them from potential harm, and protected their identities by assigning students pseudonyms as identifiers. As an aside, I did not include my own students as study participants to avoid a potential conflict of interest: bias on my part and discomfort on students' parts at critiquing their instructor personally.

## *Section II: Participant Selection and Descriptions of Study Populations*

The selection of student participants depended upon several factors, namely students' enrollment at the study institution, their enrollment in English 101—first year composition—and their status as day students. Not of consideration were the following statuses: students' sex, race, full-time or part-time enrollment status, traditional or nontraditional status, or major. Data gathered from the demographics section of the survey shows that the population participating in the survey is representative of the student body at Methodist—mostly traditional students who are white males.

The commonality nearly all first-year students share is the first-year composition (FYC) requirement they must complete to graduate. My experience, along with anecdotal evidence from colleagues, studies I have conducted, and studies I have read (Beaufort, 2007; Cox, 2009; Goodman & Cirka, 2009; Henderson, 1992; Jones, 2007; Tinberg & Nadeau, 2010), suggests students' attitudes toward and valuation of FYC classes likely impact their success in English 101. I wish to learn which variable, attitudes or valuation, has a relationship with students' FYC success.

*Group 1: The Spring 2013 Study Pilot Group*

The first group of students to participate in my study was one section of English 100 and two sections of English 101 that I taught. These students piloted the study survey during the week of March 1, 2013. I used Qualtrics to distribute the survey by e-mailing students the survey link. I explained to students that I was working on my dissertation study and planned to use a survey instrument that I created in Qualtrics. I further explained that while my students' responses could not be included in the survey data for my study since data gathered during the survey revision process might be skewed I still needed my students' help learning how well the survey worked in a real-life situation. Thirteen students assisted and provided me with feedback I later used to correct errors in wording, presentation, and navigation that I had not noticed.

*Group 2: The Spring 2013 Survey Participant Group*

The second group of students participated in the study late during the spring 2013 term and comprised a convenience sample that took the survey. These students were enrolled in five of my colleagues' English 101 classes for a total of ten sections of English 101 and a total of 82 students. Thirteen sections of English 101 were held that term, and

only three sections did not participate. Two of those were sections I taught, and one was a section belonging to a colleague who intended to have her students take the survey, but could not due to disciplinary problems she had with her class.

Five colleagues asked their students to complete the survey during classes' assigned writing labs, so I could collect as much data as possible. I contacted the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness for copies of class rosters with students' names and e-mail addresses to minimize my intrusion in my colleagues' busy schedules. After submitting my request to OIRE and receiving the rosters, I used Qualtrics to e-mail students the survey link the day before classes' assigned lab times.

Students who took the survey during the spring 2013 term answered demographic items. These items describe the students as follows: Of the 80 students who responded to item 17 on gender 56 or 70% were male and 24 or 30% were female. Regarding item 18 on age, 81 students responded. Sixty-five respondents, or 80% of respondents, were between 17 and 19 years old; 10 or 12% were between 21 and 24 years old, and 6 or 7% indicated being over 25. Item 19 was on ethnicity. Four students or 5% identified as Hispanic/Latino while 76 or 95% indentified as non-Hispanic/Latino. Seventy-nine students answered item 20 on race. Five students or 6% identified as American Indian/Alaskan native; 2 students or 3% identified as Asian; 35 students or 44% identified as black/African American; 1 student or 1% identified as native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; 41 students or 52% identified as white; and 8 students or 10% identified as other.

Items 21 and 22, while not strictly demographic in nature, I asked to understand my study population better as MU students. Item 21 regarded major; 79 students answered and represented all five academic schools at Methodist University with the largest groups

representing the Reeves School of Business—25 students or 32%—and the School of Science and Human Development—23 students or 29%. Seven students or 9% identified as members of the School of Arts and Humanities; 12 students or 15% identified as members of the School of Health Sciences; and 12 students or 15% identified as members of the School of Public Affairs. Item 22 regarded number of semester hours students were enrolled in when they took the survey. Eighty-one students answered. Of those, 54 students or 67% indicated they were taking between 12 and 15 semester hours; 26 or 32% indicated they were taking between 16 and 18 semester hours; and one or 1% indicated taking 19 or more credit hours.

Items 23 through 27, again while not technically demographic, concern English 100, English 101, and the grades students received (or expected to receive) in those classes. I asked these questions to understand the history students had with the English 100 sequence at MU. Of the 81 students who responded to item 23 on English 100, Skills Development in English, 60 or 73% indicated they had taken English 100 at MU, and 21 or 26% indicated they had not taken English 100 before meaning nearly three quarters of the students surveyed had taken a remedial English course. This fact suggests that most of the students surveyed were possibly weak writers already. Item 24 concerned grades received in English 100. Of the 59 students who answered, 11 or 19% got A's in the class, 26 or 44% got B's, 17 or 29% got C's, one or 2% got a D or an F, and 4 or 7% could not recall their grades. Item 25 asked students if they had taken English 101 *before* at MU. Eighty students answered; 12 or 15% indicated they had taken English 101 before at MU while the remaining 68 or 85% indicated they had not taken English 101 before. Items 26 and 27 asked, respectively, what grade students *expected* to get in English 101 and what grade

they *actually received*. Regarding item 26, 80 students responded. Seventeen students or 21% *expected* to get A's; 45 students or 56% *expected* to get B's; 14 students or 17% *expected* to get C's; and 4 students or 5% *expected* to get a D or an F. Item 27 on grades *actually received* shows that of the 80 students who responded 9 students or 11% received A's, 17 or 21% received B's, 25 or 31% received C's, 23 or 29% received a D or an F, and 6 or 8% received incompletes. Regarding these items, I will explain my findings in further detail in chapter four.

### *Group 3: The Fall 2013 Focus Groups Participants*

The third group of students to participate in the study comprised the focus groups held during the fall 2013 term. These students were enrolled in six of my colleagues' English 101 classes and self-selected to participate. Twenty-one students participated, divided into five groups, four groups of four and one group of five. These students did not take the survey and were an entirely different group of participants. The qualitative data generated by the focus groups gives me a detailed understanding of students' attitudes toward and valuation of FYC, along with a better understanding of other FYC issues (for instance, instructors' roles in FYC, students' roles in FYC, the perceived purpose of FYC, etc). The focus groups allowed students to explain their ideas regarding attitudes, valuation, success and FYC without the constraints of Likert scales and forced-answer choices as was true of the survey. Allowing students to speak for themselves mattered because I wanted to get as full an understanding as possible of students' attitudes toward and valuation of FYC; I felt the survey alone fell short of providing the full understanding I desired.

Students audio-recorded themselves during the focus group sessions, and I later transcribed students' conversations to include in my dataset. Thirteen women and eight men participated in the study. Included were six African American students, one Caribbean islander of African descent, one Latino student, and thirteen white students. Students represented various majors. Two students were business majors; four were biology majors; three were social work majors, and two were education majors. One was a management major, one a sport management major, one an applied exercise science major, and one an athletic training major. The remaining seven students represented the following majors: accounting, nursing, justice studies, environmental and occupational management and political science (a double major), and music. Nineteen students were first-year students, and two were first-semester sophomores.

### *Section III: Survey Instrument's Administration and Design*

Regarding the survey instrument, while the studies conducted by Dahlman (2010), Jones (2008), Lamon Burney (2010), and Trice (1985) influenced me in terms of their basic methodologies (survey instruments with forced answer, multiple-choice, Likert-type and open-ended questions), the specific survey questions that I developed (with only some few exceptions), are original and unique to this study. The survey instrument consists of 26 questions divided into five sections. Section 1 addresses students' attitudes toward English 101. Section 2 addresses students' valuation of English 101. Section 3 asks students questions regarding instruction. Section 4 invites students to participate in the interview portion of the study, and section 5 asks demographic questions of students, along with questions regarding their majors, semester hours taken, and their history with the English 100 sequence at MU.

I administered the survey instrument online through Qualtrics. Students who responded to the e-mail inviting them to take the survey accessed it online and needed only 15 minutes to complete it. I built the survey in the fall of 2012 and deployed it in the spring of 2013. A complete copy of the survey (as developed in MS Word) appears in Appendix F.

*Part I of the Survey: Attitudinal Items—Items 1-6*

Part one on students' attitudes toward English 101 presented 6 items. Some items were open ended; others were forced-answer and provided Likert scales. Others were multiple-choice. Item 1 asked, "What answer choice best describes your attitude toward English 101, composition?" and provided the answer choices "I like it a lot; I like it some; I dislike it some; I dislike it a lot." I asked item 1 because learning whether students like or dislike English would suggest their attitudes toward the class and might suggest how likely they were to persist in the class or to resist instruction.

Item 2 asked, "How much do you think each of the following factors contribute to your attitude toward English 101?" Students had several detailed answer choices from which they could choose and an "other" category that allowed them in item 3 to describe what "other" meant to the student. Item 2 provided several commonly mentioned reasons cited by researchers (hooks, 1994; Procter, 1992; Simard, 1985; Tinberg & Nadeau, 2010) that students typically give for liking or disliking FYC classes. Students' answers to item 2 could suggest whether students locate their LOC externally or internally (Jones, 2008; Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007). Item 3 allowed students the opportunity to elaborate on their answers for item 2. It read, "If you would like to describe any other factor that you think MOST contributes to the attitude you have toward English 101, please do so in the textbox below." Students could type their responses or skip the item.

Item 4 asked, “Does your attitude toward composition affect your performance in English 101?” and provided “yes,” “no” and “I am unsure” as answer choices. Items 5 and 6 allowed students to elaborate on their response to item 4. Students who answered “yes” in item 4 were directed to item 5 that read, “If you think your attitude does affect your success/performance in the class, please explain HOW you think it affects your success/performance and WHY” and provided students with a textbox to type their answers. Students who answered “No” to item 4 were directed to item 6 that read, “If you think your attitude does NOT affect your success/performance in the class, please explain WHY you think it does NOT affect your success/performance.” Item 6 also provided a textbox for students to write their answers. I asked items 4 through 6 to learn if there were any trends among students’ answers—for instance, whether the majority agreed that attitudes do affect performance or disagreed that it does. I intended these items to help me learn whether students’ thought their attitudes affected their performance in FYC classes and if so, how. The answers students provided for these items could have also revealed where students locate the locus of control (LOC)—internally or externally. Where students locate their LOC may affect how instructors approach teaching FYC. For example, if most students locate their LOC externally and say that their attitudes toward FYC result from their sense that the instructor dominates the class while disregarding students’ agency, instructors may change their teaching strategies to give students more control in the class and therefore, perhaps, improve students’ success (Cox, 2009; Jones, 2008). Indeed, as I will explain later, some students indicated the scenario I just described.

*Part II of the Survey: Valuation Items—Items 7-13*

The second part of the survey concerned students' valuation of English 101 and asked seven questions. Items 7 and 8 of the survey used a 7-point Likert scale where 1 was least helpful and 7 was most helpful to indicate how helpful students thought English 101 was in preparing them for other general education courses, major courses, and future careers. Item 7 read, "Using the following scale, where 1 is least helpful and 7 is most helpful, indicate how helpful you think English 101 is in preparing you for your other GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES." Item 8 read, "Using the following scale, where 1 is least helpful and 7 is most helpful, indicate how helpful you think English 101 is in preparing you for your MAJOR COURSES." Item 9 read, "Using the following scale, where 1 is least helpful and 7 is most helpful, indicate how helpful you think English 101 is in preparing you for your FUTURE CAREER." Item 10 asked, "How likely do you think it is that your career will require you to use writing skills?" and item 11 asked students, "How *valuable* do you consider English 101 to your success in college and in the future?" Both items 10 and 11 provided forced-answer choices to indicate how likely students thought they were to use skills learned in English 101 and to indicate how valuable they considered English 101 as it applied (or not) to their success in college and their futures. The answer choices were "Not valuable at all," "Somewhat valuable," "No opinion," "Valuable," and "Very Valuable." Item 12 asked, "Why do you consider English 101 valuable? You may choose more than one answer choice. Select all that apply" and then allowed students to choose as many as they wished of the following options: Improving Writing Skills; Improving Critical Thinking Skills; Applicability to Other Classes; Applicability to Your Future Career; and Other. These choices reflected some of the commonly cited reasons given for students taking FYC

courses (Ahrenhoester, 2006; Driscoll & Wells, 2012; Plata, 2008; Wardle, 2007). Students who answered “other” for item 12 could provide their comments in a textbox that accompanied item 12. Item 13 read, “If you think English 101 is NOT a valuable course, why do you consider it without worth? You may choose more than one answer choice. Select all that apply” and allowed students to choose from the following answers: Skills learned do not apply to other classes; Skills learned do not apply to your future career; The class only fulfills a graduation requirement; and Other. These choices call to mind research that argues transference frequently is low-road and/or short-lived (Fallon, Lahar, & Susman, 2009; Plata, 2008; Wardle, 2007). Students who selected “other” could type in their comments in a textbox that accompanied item 13. I presented the aforementioned items because I wanted to learn whether students thought English 101 offered any skills that they might use outside of the class that made FYC useful to them beyond fulfilling a graduation requirement. In other words, I wanted to know whether students valued the class (or not) for the skills it offered them. Did they find the class a worthwhile, meaningful course that contributed to their growth as college students and professionals? Or did they see the class as offering few or no skills that were transferable to other classes and life beyond college? How they saw the class as functioning in their lives may have determined whether they tried hard to succeed in the class or whether they put forth no appreciable effort beyond merely passing it (Henderson, 1992; Wardle, 2007).

#### *Parts III and IV: Instruction and Interview Items—Items 14-16*

The third and fourth sections of the survey instrument regarded instruction and interview participation, respectively. The third section consisted of two questions about instruction. The first one, item 14 of the survey asked, “In your opinion, would instructors

benefit from knowing students' perceptions of English 101 courses" and provided "yes" "no" and "I am unsure" as answer choices. Students who answered "yes" were directed to item 15 that reads, "How might students benefit from instructors having a better knowledge of students' perceptions of English 101?" and provided a text box that allowed students to provide their answers. Admittedly, item 15 allowed some speculation on students' parts, but it also allowed me the opportunity to learn whether and how instructors impact students' attitudes toward and valuation of FYC. Various researchers suggest student/instructor relationships affect students' perception of, reception of, and resistance to writing instruction (Burford, 2005; Cox, 2009; Durst, 1999; Hairston, 1992; Helmers, 1994; hooks, 1994; Hunt, 2002; Lunsford & Ouzgane, 2004; Miller, 1989; Simard, 1985; Sternglass, 1997). Further, items 14 and 15 allowed students to reflect on experiences in composition instruction and to explain how FYC instruction could have been improved or at least changed had instructors known more about students' perceptions of FYC. My intent was that students' insight and ideas would inform instructors regarding best teaching practices. For example, a student could have written, "my instructor told me how to write but never showed examples of good and bad writing; as a result, I thought I was writing well when apparently I wasn't since I failed the class." This comment implies that instructors should provide models of good and poor writing so that students can see their own writing in relation to others' writing along a spectrum of quality. Seeing students' own writing in relation to others' writing recalls Pajares, Johnson, and Usher (2007) who write, "Students also form their self-efficacy beliefs through the *vicarious experience* of observing others perform tasks" (pp. 106). Students who see their writing in relation to others' writing are in a better position to judge the quality of their own writing than are

students who never see examples or see only examples of poor writing. Additionally, providing models will help students better understand the instructor's expectations regarding writing. Otherwise, students may equate "working hard" with quality work or may mistakenly think that their C- work is really A+ work since they have never seen an A+ paper.

Regardless of the answers provided in item 14, all students eventually were directed to item 16. Students who answered "no" or "I am unsure" in item 14 skipped item 15 and were directed to item 16. Students who provided an answer in the textbox for item 15 were also directed to item 16, the sole item making up the fourth section of the survey. It read, "If you wish to participate in the interview portion of the survey, please include the following information: your name, phone number, best time to call, and e-mail address." Students who self-selected to participate in the interview completed individual fields to provide the required information.

*Parts V and VI: Demographic Items and FYC Sequence Items—Items 17-27*

The fifth section of the survey instrument asked demographic questions and questions regarding students' majors and grades in previous English courses. Items 17 through 20 were strictly demographic and are the standard questions East Carolina University uses for survey research to provide researchers with a description of study populations. The items were: 17) What is your gender? Male; Female; Other; 18) What is your age? 17-19; 20-25; Over 25. 19) Please identify your ethnicity: Are you Hispanic/Latino? Yes; No. 20) Please identify your race by selecting one or more of the following categories: American Indian or Alaskan Native; Asian; Black or African-American; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; White; Other. I asked the demographic

information to provide an accurate description of my sample population. I did not intend to investigate correlations between, for instance, race and attitudes toward FYC; however, studies that investigate such correlations are promising for future research. I did not investigate the aforementioned correlations in this study because they were beyond this study's scope.

Items 21 and 22—while not strictly demographic in nature—pertained specifically to Methodist University students and were not part of the standard demographic questions used by ECU. Item 21 read, “What category best describes your major?” and provided a list of majors broken down by academic school. Item 22 asked students, “How many semester hours are you currently taking?” and provided the following choices: 12-15; 16-18; Over 18. Again, this information helped me to describe my sample population. I did not intend to make correlations.

Items 23 through 27 were FYC sequence items and regarded students' experiences with English 100 and 101 at MU. I presented these items for several reasons. First, I wanted to describe my sample population. Next, knowing how many students took English 100 Skills Development might suggest whether students who participated in the study were generally weak writers or strong ones since only students identified by the institution as weak writers took English 100. According to some researchers (Cox, 2009; Tinberg & Nadeau, 2010), weak writers generally have different perceptions of FYC than do strong writers. The prevailing attitudes toward and valuation of FYC revealed in this study may result from the study population being comprised by already-weak writers, a point worth noting as it bears on the study results. Further, I was interested in learning whether experiences in English 100 might affect success in English 101. For instance, students who

received A's in English 100 may have expected the same results in English 101 and might have been disappointed to receive C's instead.

Item 23 read, "Have you ever taken English 100, Skills Development at Methodist University?" and allowed students to answer "yes" or "no." If students answered "yes" they were directed to item 24 that asked, "What grade did you get in English 100?" and allowed the choices A, B, C, D, F or "I do not recall." Students who took English 100 (a skills development class) were identified by the institution as weak students who needed remediation to move on to English 101. If most of the survey participants who took English 100 have a negative or unfavorable view of English 101, their view might result from having low writing self-efficacy or locating their LOC externally to the course material itself (Chemurs, Hu, & Garcia, 2001; Goodman & Circka, 2009; Jones, 2008; Linnenbrook & Pintrich, 2003; Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007). For instance, if they located their LOC externally to the course, students may have thought, "this is just stupid stuff to learn," or if they located the LOC internally to themselves, students may have thought, "I'm just not smart enough to write well." On the other hand, students who took English 100 may have found that the class improved their view of English generally. Because they learned writing strategies, they may have thought, "I learned a lot and feel better prepared to succeed in English 101" and thus may have approached English 101 with lower anxiety and less apprehension (Schunk, 2003).

If students answered "no" for item 23, they were directed to item 25 that read, "Have you ever taken English 101, Composition before, at Methodist University?" Students could answer "Yes" or "No." I assume that any students who answered "yes" took the course previously and retook it, for example if the student failed the course previously, had

to withdraw and retake the class, or simply retook the class to replace a grade. Knowing whether or not students took English 101 before is important since previously taking the class suggests the students likely had some difficulty with the class originally. Students who answered “No” to item 25 had not previously taken English 101. Item 26 read, “THIS SEMESTER what grade did you EXPECT to get in English 101, when the course began? (If you have taken the course before, I am not referring to the grade you expected to get then; rather, I am referring to the grade you expected to receive THIS TERM WHEN THE TERM BEGAN.) This item allowed students the opportunity to reflect on early experiences in the class (for instance at the class’ beginning or during midterm) and to indicate what grade they thought they would get by the course’s end. Item 27 asked, “What grade did you actually get in English 101 THIS TERM (that is, what grade are you receiving now that you’ve reached midterm/the end of the term)?” Students could choose A, B, C, D, F, or “Incomplete” as answers. I am interested in learning the information generated by items 25 and 26 because the information may indicate a shift in students’ expectations based on previous experiences. A student who expected a D when he started the class or by midterm, may be pleased to find that, with a little effort on his part, he will receive a C+. Conversely, a student who thought she would get an A at the class’s beginning or near midterm, may be dissatisfied to learn that she is actually getting an F. The items allowed me to learn what students expected versus what actually happened.

Further, learning the information from items 23 through 27 could help me understand if experiences in and grades in English 100 affected students’ attitudes toward or valuation of FYC and if so how. For example, students who had positive experiences in English 100 and who received good grades may have approached English 101 with positive

attitudes toward and high valuation of English 101 whereas students with negative experiences in English 100 and poor grades may have approached English 101 with negative attitudes and low valuation. Differences in expected grades versus realized grades might also suggest whether students underestimate their ability (Linnenbrook & Pintrich 2003) or overestimate their ability (Henderson, 1992).

*Part VII: Final Item—Thanks*

The survey ended by thanking the students for their time and participation. While that item is not numbered it read, “Thank you for participating in this survey; the information gained from it may provide insight into how instructors can improve teaching practices to make English 101 a more effective, helpful course for students.” I intended the item to indicate my gratitude at the students’ willingness to participate and to indicate that the data generated from the study may help improve FYC instruction at MU for future FYC students.

*Section IV: Focus Groups’ Instrument Administration and Design*

I held the focus groups September 11, 13, and 16 of 2013. Students self-selected to participate in the focus groups. The groups involved 21 students. There were four groups of four students and one group of five students. I supplied them with informed consent documents that they signed and returned. I then gave them the focus group questions and gave them audio recorders. I briefly explained that students were to take turns reading the questions and answering each question in conversation. I asked students to return the recorders to me once they finished answering interview questions. I then left the room so as not to inadvertently influence their answers. Students recorded themselves answering the questions I had supplied and returned the recorders to me. I thanked them for their

participation and gave them gift cards for pizza. After I received the recorders, I downloaded the recorded audio files to my computer, transcribed students' conversations in MS Word, and uploaded the resulting transcripts to NVivo, so I could code and analyze them. Students' conversations ranged from as short as 9 minutes 21 seconds to as long as 24 minutes 30 seconds. Two were at least 22 minutes long while a third was 11 minutes 6 seconds. In total, students recorded approximately 90 minutes of conversation regarding FYC. Present in Appendix G is the focus group instrument and in Appendix J transcripts from the focus groups.

The focus group questions were the same as the questions I planned to use for the interviews. The first two questions I intended to help me learn what role students thought English 101 played (if any) in their lives. The questions read, "What *role* do you think English 101 plays in your college education?" and "What *role* do you think English 101 plays in your future success, for instance, your career?" Questions 3 through 5 concerned students' attitudes. They read, "How would you describe your attitude toward English 101?"; "What factor(s) do you think most contribute to your attitude?" and "How does your attitude toward English 101 affect the way you value composition? In other words, does having a positive attitude make you value composition more than having a negative attitude toward composition? Is there no difference? Is there an inverse difference?" Questions 6 and 7 concerned students' valuation of English 101 and read, "How valuable do you think English 101 is?" and "Why do you value (or not value) English 101?"

I wanted to learn from students exactly which factor they thought affected their success most, their attitudes toward FYC or their valuation of it, so I asked questions 8, 9, and 10. Knowing students' attitudes toward and valuation of FYC may help instructors

improve their teaching efficacy since instructors can change their teaching tactics to address factors that affect students' attitudes and valuation. The questions read, respectively, "What factor do you think plays a greater role in your success in English 101, your attitude toward the course (how much you like/dislike it)? Or how valuable the course is apart from your attitude toward it?"; "If you think that your attitude is a better predictor of your success in English 101, why do you think so?"; and "If you think how much you value the course is a better predictor of your success in English 101, why do you think so?"

Questions 11 and 12 I intended to address students' and instructors' relationships with the idea being that students could inform instructors' teaching practices if students were allowed the opportunity to describe their thoughts regarding teaching practices. These questions inform my research in the following respect: if students' attitudes toward the class are negative because of their poor relationships with instructors, and further, if students are performing poorly in class because of those poor relationships, instructors can work to improve those relationships and thereby improve students' attitudes toward and potentially success in the class. If students do not value the class because it is required and seemingly irrelevant to anything in their lives, and if students then perform poorly because they feel assignments are irrelevant, instructors can assign relevant assignments or at least explain how skills learned in FYC apply to other classes. Question 11 read, "In your opinion, would instructors benefit from knowing students' perceptions of FYC courses, and if so, how?" and 12 read, "How might students benefit from instructors having a better knowledge of students' perceptions of English 101?" Both of these questions were helpful inasmuch as students explained how instructors and students both would benefit from

instructors having a better understanding of students' perceptions of FYC courses. Students described the problems they often experience in FYC classes and then provided solutions.

#### *Section V: Data Analysis Methods for Survey and Focus Group Data*

Because my study uses mixed methods, I analyzed data using quantitative and qualitative techniques. I used Qualtrics to help me gather and analyze quantitative survey data and used frequencies and chi-square analysis for survey items. I used NVivo to analyze textual (qualitative) survey items and used NVivo to analyze focus groups' data. I hand counted focus groups' comments when I found quantitative analysis of focus groups' data necessary. For qualitative data generated by the survey instrument, I copied and pasted 118 comments from the survey into an MS Word document that I imported into NVivo and analyzed. Some survey comments were as simple as "n/a," "yes," or "no" to as complex as short paragraphs. Focus groups' conversations were more complex than survey comments. I collected students' focus group conversations, saved the conversations as audio files, and transcribed them in MS Word. After writing the transcripts and saving them, I imported them into NVivo for analysis.

In total, I imported into NVivo six MS Word documents representing students' open-ended comments recorded in Qualtrics and transcribed focus groups' conversations. I also imported the five .mp3 files that were the students' recorded conversations from the focus groups in case I needed to reference them. I used the same coding scheme for comments made in the survey instrument and focus groups' transcribed conversations. A description of the coding scheme follows.

### *NVivo Coding Scheme*

I began by looking for words commonly repeated by students that might also indicate certain themes or patterns. I used the word frequency function in the Query menu of NVivo to search for the top 10 most mentioned words. These were, in order of greatest to least frequency: like, think, going, English, class, just, attitude, know, and value. Unfortunately, rather than revealing relevant themes, the list presented only words that appeared frequently in the questions I had given students and that students then repeated. Additionally, the word “like” usually appeared as a conversational marker introducing hypothetical comments or actions rather than an indicator of attitude toward FYC. For example, students responding to questions would say, “The teacher, like said, ‘you need to pay attention in class.’” Given that the word “like” usually was used as a conversational marker that did not indicate students’ like or dislike of FYC, I analyzed the word “like” in context of students’ comments.

After my initial word frequency analysis, I tried yet three more analyses. Each trial was disappointing and produced results similar to the results described above. Given that themes were not surfacing using the word frequency analysis, I decided to read the conversations and assign codes that covered the topics students raised in their comments. I developed the following categories based on themes I noticed in students’ conversations: attitude toward English, class atmosphere and course delivery, dialect issues, fun and enjoyment, graduate work, introductory writing, jobs, looking educated, FYC as a redundant or refresher course, student responsibility, success, teachers, and value of English.

The following table provides descriptions of each category and examples of data that I coded in each category:

**Table 1: Node Categories, Descriptions, and Examples**

<b>Node Category</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example</b>
1. Attitude toward English	How much students like or dislike FYC	"I hate it."
2. Introductory Writing	FYC's role as a writing fundamentals course that prepares students for writing in other courses	"It's the basis for everything you're going to take in the future."
3. Class Atmosphere and Course delivery	How well instructors manage classes	"All he does is go up to the board, walk around the class, and lecture."
4. Dialect Issues	How students learned to speak and write as they were growing up, also ESL issues	"I'm from the South, and I really don't like grammar because the way I talk and the way I write are so different. So it's really hard for me to grasp grammar concepts."
5. Fun and Enjoyment	How engaging, even entertaining, FYC classes are.	"They should make the whole class more enjoyable, so they're [students are] going to want to remember it."
6. Graduate Work	FYC's usefulness in preparing students for graduate school	"Yeah, and if you want to go to graduate school you're going to have to do a thesis paper and all."
7. Jobs	FYC's usefulness in preparing students for jobs/careers	"We all need grammar for our jobs."
8. Looking Educated	FYC's usefulness in helping students present themselves as educated and professional	"Sounding eloquent helps you get a job further on down the line."
9. Redundant or Refresher Course	FYC's potential redundancy relative high school English classes/FYC's role as a "refresher" course in grammar and mechanics	"Yeah, it feels like a refresher course right now."
10. Student Responsibility	Students' responsibility in contributing to their FYC success	"It's the student's job to learn."
11. Success	Factors that support and/or	"My valuation is what

	encourage students' success in FYC	contributes most to my success in composition."
12. Teachers	Instructors' attitudes, personalities, age, and teaching strategies, among other issues as factors affecting students	"I do better with a positive teacher. If she's just degrading you the whole time, I don't see how you can improve." "They should record their lectures and put them on Youtube."
13. Value of English	Why students do or do not value FYC	"You have to take FYC and pass it."

I developed these codes based on repeated themes among survey and focus group comments. I noticed many comments addressed more than one node, so I coded those comments according to the nodes where they fit. For example, one student commented, "I like it [FYC]. I like it because my teacher is really funny." In this case, I coded this comment twice, in the attitude node and the teacher node because it addresses both the student's attitude toward FYC and the student's perception of the teacher as a contributing factor toward his attitude. Ideally, one might code any given comment into only one node, but doing so seemed to undermine the relationships between ideas presented in comments; thus, I coded comments in multiple NVivo nodes as seemed appropriate.

*Section VI: Definitions*

Any investigation into any field of inquiry requires concepts and theories to help researchers interpret and analyze data. My study is no different. Following I present definitions, concepts, and theories I found necessary for my study's conceptual and theoretical bases.

While I mentioned them briefly in chapter one, I present them here in more detail.

### *Attitudes*

Arguably the most important concept in this study is attitude. Kamradt and Kamradt (1999) define attitude as a:

fundamental entity containing elements of all three learning domains: cognitive, psychomotor, and affective. Just as an atom is a fundamental unit of matter, one that cannot be subdivided by any practical means, we propose that an attitude is the fundamental unit of learning. An atom does have components, however: electrons, protons, neutrons, and...quarks. Similarly, bits of cognitive, psychomotor, and affective learning are the components of attitudes. They do not normally exist apart from an attitude, nor is there any practical means to separate them. Attitudes are what the learner learns and, therefore, what the effective teacher must teach. (p. 566)

For this study, when I use the term attitude, I mean how students describe their views of FYC courses: using positive, negative, or neutral terms. A student who says, "I love FYC" would be described as having a positive attitude toward FYC courses while a student who says, "FYC is just another class" or who says, "I hate FYC" would be described as having a neutral or a negative attitude respectively.

### *Valuation*

Valuation is another important concept in my study. Regarding valuation, Jones (2007) writes,

it may be important to determine how much value students attach to doing well in a course or in college because need value is a mediator of locus of control (Phares, 1976). Need value is 'the value attached to the specific goal or outcome sought at a given time and place' (Maddux, 1995, p.26). Mere belief in one's ability to accomplish a writing task or in one's ability to positively affect one's academic performance does not necessarily translate into performing well in a writing classroom. Presumably one must also *want* to do well in the class....One would also expect that students' valuing writing in their future career could also influence their efforts in a writing class. (p. 216)

For my purposes, when I use the term valuation, I mean how worthwhile students see the course for its intrinsic qualities. If students see the course as contributing positively to their success as college students where skills learned in FYC help them succeed in other classes and/or their future careers, I consider the students as having a high valuation of the course. If students feel FYC only minimally impacts their success, fails to contribute to their success, or even detracts from their success, I consider the students as having moderate or low valuation of FYC. According to Jones (2007), valuation affects writing self-efficacy and locus of control (LOC), and students cannot only have confidence in their ability or only like FYC; they must also value it enough to want to succeed in it. Students who dislike FYC and have a low valuation of it may dread it, avoid it, and resist it. Jones (2007) argues researchers have conducted too little research on students' valuation of FYC and valuation's potential effects on students' FYC success. With valuation as one of its foci, my study seeks to help fill this gap in the research.

### *Self-Efficacy and Locus of Control*

I define self-efficacy according to Martinez, Kock, and Cass's (2011) definition as "the belief in one's ability to succeed" (p. 352). The researchers argue self-efficacy beliefs contribute to "students' level of motivation, aspiration, and academic achievement" (Martinez, Kock, and Cass, 2011, p. 352). They, like Pajares, Johnson, and Usher (2007), cite Bandura's (1986; 1989; 1993) research on writing self-efficacy beliefs and indicate that "the higher a student's self-efficacy, the more effort is exerted, which in turn contributes to higher performance regardless of actual ability" (Martinez, Kock, and Cass, 2011, p. 352). According to Pajares, Johnson, and Usher (2007) Bandura (1997) hypothesized four sources of students' writing self-efficacy beliefs: the "interpreted result of one's own

previous performance, or *mastery experience*, . . . the *vicarious experience* of observing others perform tasks, . . . *social persuasions* received from others, including the verbal judgments of others, . . . [and] *physiological and emotional* states such as anxiety, stress, arousal, and mood” (pp. 106-107). Related to self-efficacy is Locus of Control (LOC). Jones (2008) explains Locus of Control (LOC) is “literally, the place of control: in effect, where the individual attributes control for outcomes of her or his efforts . . . within the individual (internal LOC) or outside the individual in actions of authority figures, fate, or luck (external LOC)” (p. 211). LOC complicates my examination of students’ attitudes toward and valuation of FYC by encouraging me to examine where students’ attitudes and values originate—internally as part of the students’ perception of self or externally as a result of environmental factors. One might ask, “Do students locate their performance in FYC internally, as tied intimately to their sense of self and as originating from within, or externally, as a result of factors outside the student’s control?” For example, some students may have a negative attitude toward FYC and have internal LOC; they may blame themselves for poor performance because they doubt their writing ability (thus, they also are said to have low writing self-efficacy.) Other students who dislike FYC and perform poorly might locate the LOC externally, blaming the teacher or the course for poor grades. Students with external LOC are also likely to protect themselves in a strategy called “cooling out” (blaming factors outside their control), described by Goffman (1974) and referenced by Cox (2009).

### *Thinking Dispositions*

While I had not anticipated examining thinking dispositions when I started my study, I found thinking dispositions appear related to attitudes and valuation. According to

Driscoll and Wells (2012), dispositions involve individuals, their learning environments, and learning processes; they are “not knowledge, skills, or abilities—they are qualities that determine how learners use and adapt their knowledge” (“Beyond”, par. 2). Similarly, Ennis (2011) focuses on thinking dispositions’ cognitive quality when he defines thinking dispositions as “reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do” (p. 1). Kamradt and Kamradt (1999) argue, “cognitive, psychomotor, and affective learning are the components of attitudes. They do not normally exist apart from an attitude, nor is there any practical means to separate them” (p. 566). Thus, cognition, according to Kamradt and Kamradt (1999), is automatically a component of attitudes. Further, Ennis’ focus on “what to believe or do,” suggests attitudes’ cognitive and psychomotor components (p. 12) similar to the components described by Kamradt and Kamradt (1999). Also similar to Kamradt and Kamradt’s (1999) argument is Perkins, Tishman, Ritchhart, Donis, and Andrade’s (2000) argument that thinking dispositions are learnable, “much as attitudes of various kinds seem to be acquired from family, ethnic, and classroom cultures” (p. 288). Driscoll and Wells (2012) assert thinking dispositions determine students’, “willingness to engage in transfer,” can positively or negatively affect learning, can be context-specific or broadly generalized, and are always dynamic (“Introduction”, par. 2). Indeed, according to the aforementioned researchers, thinking dispositions and attitudes certainly appear related. Further, it appears that thinking dispositions (and thus attitudes potentially) encourage students to engage in behaviors that either 1) encourage FYC success or 2) encourage FYC failure.

Perkins, et al. (2000) focus on dispositions’ “action” when they write, “dispositions concern not only what people can do, but how they tend to invest their capabilities—what

they are disposed to do, hence the term dispositions” (pp. 270-271). Like Perkins, et al. (2000), Lipman (1987) treats attitudes and thinking dispositions as separate but equally important qualities, with dispositions suggesting action. He writes, “Attitudes and dispositions are an individual’s responses to the quality of the social interaction prevalent in the group situation. One either internalizes the quality or develops a negative attitude toward it” (Lipman, 1987, p. 160). Thinking dispositions are cognitive in nature, according to Ennis (1986) and are either internalized or rejected according to Lipman (1987). Thus, attitudes and values appear to be components of thinking dispositions, as suggested by Perkins, et al. (2000), yet they differ inasmuch as “disposition” suggests *action* whereas “attitude” suggests *feelings* and valuation suggests *perceived usefulness*.

### *Success*

Regarding success, I mean passing FYC with a C or better. This simple definition helped me more easily determine which variable, attitudes or valuation, better determines students’ FYC success. Students’ perceptions of success are subjective since some students consider success getting an A while others consider success simply passing a class. Defining success as attaining a C or better, however, is helpful for my study inasmuch as it gives me a clear point at which to distinguish success from failure. Further, the “C” threshold is in keeping with my department’s recent decision to make passing a C- or higher since many students who pass with a D are performing too marginally at the English 101 level to succeed in English 102.

### *Section VII: Theories for Interpreting and Analyzing Data*

Any investigation requires data interpretation and analysis framed by and understood according to theories relevant to the study. In this study, I used Kamradt and

Kamradt's (1999) attitudinal theory, Ennis' (2011) thinking dispositions, Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory and LOC, and Goffman's (1974) frame theory to interpret and analyze my study data.

### *Attitudinal Theory and Thinking Dispositions*

As already mentioned, thinking dispositions—as described by Ennis (2011), Perkins et al. (2000) and others—are relevant to this study inasmuch as thinking dispositions are related to and arguably inseparable from attitudes and valuation. According to Kamradt and Kamradt (1999) attitudinal theory concerns “attitude development or change” (p. 565).

Kamradt and Kamradt (1999) define attitude as

a psychophysical structure that stores related bits of affective, cognitive, and psychomotor learning in a manner that allows instantaneous, subconscious access by its owner. This structure [attitude] functions as a tool that allows its owner to respond quickly and effectively to environmental situations related to the satisfaction of personal needs (p. 570).

In their model of learning, Kamradt and Kamradt (1999) argue three learning domains make up all attitudes: the affective domain, the cognitive domain, and the psychomotor domain. These three domains are present in all attitudes to varying degrees and can be altered to change attitudes. Typically, the three areas are not all equally present; one domain may out-weigh the other two somewhat, but ideally, a fair degree of equilibrium is present. In cases where one domain grossly dominates the other two domains, attitudinal dissonance occurs resulting in tension. Usually, individuals experiencing such tension will seek a return to equilibrium between the three domains and will thus adapt their behavior to the situation in an attempt to re-establish equilibrium. Regarding teaching and learning, Kamradt and Kamradt (1999) argue that attitudes account for “the great majority of our behavioral choices” (p. 570) and further argue that

contemporary domain-focused instructional techniques do well at integrating cognitive and psychomotor components [of learning] but they consistently fail to properly integrate the affective component. In other words, they don't teach complete attitudes. Instead, after expertly teaching two of the three attitudinal components, we allow ourselves to blame low-performing learners for their attitude deficiencies. (p. 574)

In other words, since all three domains are present in all attitudes, and attitudes affect learning, ideally all three domains should be addressed equally in effective instruction. Failure to address all three domains may result in students' failure of FYC, and instructors blaming students' "poor attitudes" for their failures. As this study progresses, I will address attitudinal theory's implications for students' success in FYC classes and will tie attitudinal theory to self-efficacy theory, LOC, and frame theory.

### *Self-Efficacy Theory*

The sources of writing self-efficacy described by Pajares, Johnson, and Usher (2007) and Bandura (1997) also, incidentally, are sources of attitudes. For example, in the case of a student with low-writing self-efficacy who dislikes FYC and resists instruction, the student may develop the attitude that "FYC is just stupid" and may assert, "no one needs this stuff anyway." The student's negative attitude toward FYC and resulting negative thinking dispositions are attempts to satisfy a "fundamental personal need," (Kamradt & Kamradt, 1999) in this case protecting the students' sense of self (threatened by the demands of a class and the student's failure of it) by moving the LOC externally and blaming the FYC class for the student's difficulties. Of course, the opposite can also be true. In a case where a student has high writing self-efficacy and likes FYC (or at least is not put off by it), that student also likely feels his sense of self is not threatened and thus may locate his LOC

internally. He thereby satisfies a fundamental personal need for a sense of safety, security, and confidence and likely boasts positive thinking dispositions that encourage FYC success.

The “cycle” of experiences, attitudes, thinking dispositions and resulting behaviors recalls observations made by Goodman and Cirka (2009), Linnenbrook and Pintrich (2003), and Pajares, Johnson, and Usher (2007) who noticed students’ beliefs about their abilities impact students’ performance despite the students’ actual ability. Essentially, it appears that students who have confidence in their writing also have thinking dispositions that encourage success, while students with low confidence in their writing appear to have thinking dispositions that encourage failure. For example, students who suffer from learned helplessness as described by Linnenbrook and Pintrich (2003) believe they cannot succeed and thus fail—not because they are inherently unable to succeed but because they *believe* they cannot succeed. Given that my study question addresses issues associated with writing self-efficacy beliefs, interpreting study results in terms of self-efficacy theory makes sense.

### *Frame Theory*

Like Cox (2009), I also wish to reference Goffman’s frame theory; in the case of my study, I wish to learn how students frame FYC. Goffman (1974) writes, frame theory is “about the organization of experience” (p. 13). He further writes, “Social frameworks . . . provide background understanding for events that incorporate the will, aim, and controlling effort of an intelligence, a live agency, the chief one being the human being” (p. 22). Goffman is interested in how people view and understand social events. According to Goffman (1974), everyone uses frames to understand events. Understanding individuals’ frames is essential to understanding the individuals; ideally, during any given discursive

event, individuals' frames should match for mutual understanding. Goffman (1974) writes that when frames match "all participants share an understanding of what it is that is going on and what it is that everyone is about" (p. 301). However, Goffman (1974) also indicates that sometimes frame errors occur, resulting in confusion. Goffman (1974) writes:

The various kinds of ambiguity, including vagueness and uncertainty, have their counterpart in error, that is, in beliefs unintended and erroneous, as to how events at hand are to be framed. Instead of merely stopping short to try to figure out what is happening, the individual actually lodges himself in certitude and/or action on the basis of wrong premises. He "misframes" events . . . (pp. 308-309)

Goffman (1974) further contends that this misframing of events, "consequently involve[s] . . . [the individual] in systematically sustained, generative error, the breeding of wrongly oriented behavior (p. 309). Goffman asserts that, frequently, frame disputes occur and result in conflict. He writes, "Parties with opposing versions of events may openly dispute with each other over how to define what has been or is happening" (Goffman, 1974, p. 322).

Goffman (1974) further claims:

It is plain that retrospective characterization of the "same" event or social occasion may differ widely, that an individual's role in an undertaking can provide him with a distinctive evaluative assessment of what sort of an instance of the type the particular undertaking was. (Goffman as cited in Lemert and Branaman, 1997, p. 154)

Simply put, parties may frame and thus experience events differently with disagreement the result. Such may be the case with students and composition instructors. Though an instructor and her students may be part of the same class, they may experience it very differently, perhaps with the instructor considering her class successful yet the students considering it a failure. The instructor may consider her role in the class as one type (i.e. facilitator) while the students may consider her role as another type (i.e. mother, friend, or enemy). Thus, not only might the experiences of the class differ, but so too might the

conceptualization of roles. When such frame errors occur, arguably, confusion will result (even attitudinal dissonance as Kamradt and Kamradt (1999) assert) that might negatively affect the learning environment. My research, besides helping determine whether attitudes or valuation more accurately suggests student success, may also reveal whether frame confusion or conflicting frames cause misunderstandings between students and teachers and result in ineffective teaching.

## Chapter Four: Discussion of Survey Data

The survey elicited two types of data, quantitative and qualitative. For the quantitative survey data, I used descriptive statistics and chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) analyses to analyze the data. I used descriptive statistics for most survey items. For item 1 (attitudes) and item 27 (success) along with item 11 (valuation) and 27 (success), I conducted chi-square analysis. I assumed a null hypothesis for each test that the variables were independent. For textual data produced by items 3 (attitudes), 5 (attitudes), 6 (attitudes), 12 (valuation), and 15 (instructors), I used NVivo for qualitative analysis. The following pages address the survey data.

### *Section I: Quantitative Analysis*

Eighty-two students—or approximately 55% of the nearly 200 students enrolled in FYC at MU during the spring 2013 term—participated in the study. Results suggest how a large portion of FYC students enrolled in English 101 during the spring 2013 term felt about FYC. Since most of my survey data is quantitative, I used descriptive statistics to present my findings for all items except items 1, 11, and 27 that required Fisher Exact Probability tests and  $\chi^2$  analyses and items 3, 5, 6, 12, 13, and 15 that required textual analyses. Several divisions comprise the survey: the attitudinal items, the valuation items, the instructors' items, and the demographic items. Analyses for each division follow.

### *Attitudinal Items' Analysis: Items 1-6*

Items 1 through 6 address students' attitudes toward FYC. Item 1 presents a Likert scale and asks students to indicate how much they like or dislike FYC. Item 2 asks students to indicate which sources contribute to their attitude toward FYC and presents students five sources of attitudes as answer choices. Item 3 is an open-ended item that allows

students to describe any other sources of their attitudes toward FYC. Item 4 asks students if they think their attitudes toward FYC affect their performance in the class. Item 5 allows students to describe how their attitudes may affect their performance while item 6 allows students to describe how their attitudes may not affect their performance. Because items 3, 5, and 6 involve qualitative analysis using NVivo, I deal with them in Section III: Qualitative Analysis of Survey Data of this chapter. Analyses of items 1, 2, and 4 follow.

Item 1 was a five-point Likert-scale item asking students, “What answer choice best describes your attitude toward English 101, Composition?” Table 2 presents results.

**Table 2: Item 1 Results—Students’ Attitudes toward FYC**

Response option	1 Like a lot	2 Like some	3 No opinion	4 Dislike some	5 Dislike a lot
No. of students responding (Valid %)	14 (17%)	38 (46%)	14 (17%)	8 (10%)	8 (10%)

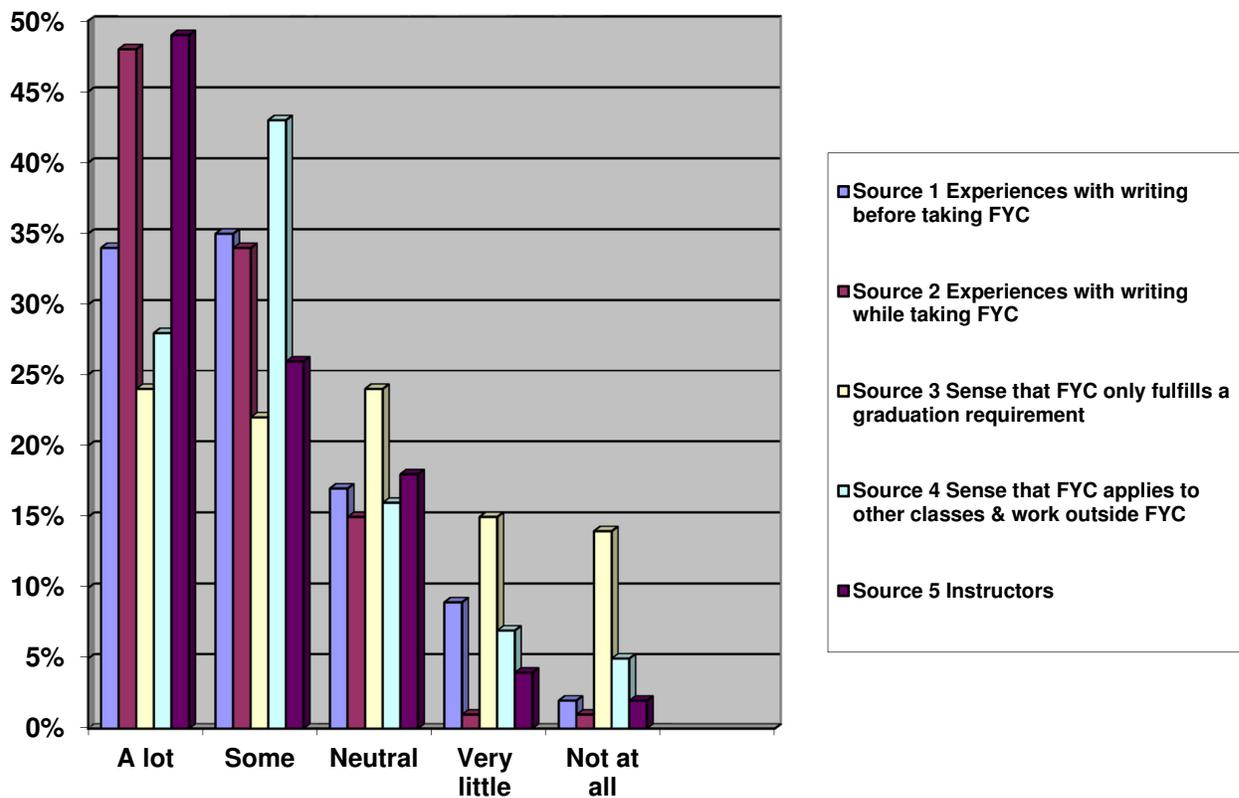
The results indicated 52 students or 63%, view FYC positively to some degree while 30 students or 37% view FYC either negatively or have no opinion. According to Cox (2009), Martinez, Kock, and Cass (2011), and Tinberg and Nadeau (2010) students with favorable attitudes toward FYC are less likely to resist instruction, less likely to have writing anxiety, and more likely to have higher writing self-efficacy than students who dislike FYC.

Potentially, students with poor opinions or no opinion may not perform as well in FYC as students who have positive attitudes.

Item 2 asked, “How much do you think the following factors contribute to your attitude toward English 101?” Item 2 was related to different factors that may affect students’ attitudes toward FYC; these factors were: 1) experiences with writing before

taking FYC; 2) experiences with writing while taking FYC; 3) Sense that FYC only fulfills a graduation requirement; 4) sense that FYC applies to other classes and work outside FYC, and 5) instructors. The item was similar to items 6 and 18 of Trice’s LOC instrument (Trice, 1985) that address FYC’s required status and instructors’ effects on students. I intended the item to investigate what sources most likely contribute to students’ attitudes toward FYC. Students were provided five potential sources of attitudes as choices, and, using a Likert scale, students rated each one as “a lot,” “some,” “neutral,” “very little,” or “not at all.” Eighty students answered. Figure 1 presents results.

**Figure 1: Item 2—Five Sources of Students’ Attitudes Toward FYC**



The three sources of attitudes that affected students most were “instructors,” “experiences with writing while taking FYC,” and FYC’s perceived “applicability to classes

and work outside FYC.” Each one students rated as affecting them either “a lot” or “some.” “FYC as a required course” was more equally distributed among answer choices and suggested the class’ required status bore less on students’ attitudes than did other sources of attitudes. “Experiences with writing before taking FYC,” while not as evenly distributed as “Sense that FYC only fulfills a graduation requirement,” was also more evenly distributed than some other factors affecting students’ attitudes, and therefore was potentially less influential on students’ attitudes. In the following paragraphs, I address each of the sources in more detail.

Eighty students addressed the first source, “Experiences with writing before taking English 101.” Most students who answered—57 students or 69%—indicated their previous experiences with writing affected their attitudes toward FYC. My findings support those made by Martinez, Kock and Cass (2011) who assert, “writing self-efficacy is influenced . . . by past experiences and verbal feedback from others” (p. 352). Martinez, Kock, and Cass (2011) further argue, “higher writing self-efficacy would contribute to better writing performance” (p. 352) and suggest students with negative previous writing experiences are less likely to succeed in FYC than students with positive experiences. Since previous writing experiences likely influence students’ writing-self efficacy and potentially students’ FYC success, learning what these experiences are may help instructors tailor their instruction to improve students’ FYC success. I discuss improvement strategies in chapter six, the conclusion.

The second source was “experiences with writing while taking English 101.” This item was similar to item 18 of Trice’s LOC instrument; that item reads, “What I learn is more determined by college and course requirements than by what I want to learn” (Trice

1985, p. 1045). English 101's required status determines what material instructors must cover, what content students must learn, and thus to some extent what experiences students have in FYC. Eighty-one students—67 students or 82% of the study population—felt their experiences with writing while they were enrolled in English 101 affected their attitudes toward the class—though whether positively or negatively is unclear. Tinberg and Nadeau's (2010) study on FYC students suggests students typically have ambiguous feelings toward FYC. The researchers claim many students think writing is important but consider it a temporary evil; students doubt their abilities as writers but hope to improve; they think they can become better writers, but often avoid tutoring (Tinberg & Nadeau, 2010). Exactly how students felt their experiences affected them was unclear and is subject to future research.

Source 3 was similar to item 18 of Trice's LOC instrument and asked whether the sense that the class appeared only to fulfill a graduation requirement affected students' attitudes toward it. Eighty-one students answered; 38 students or 46% indicated English 101's required status affected their attitudes toward FYC while 43 students or 52% were either neutral or reported little or no effect. One response was missing. The near-even split among students supports findings made by Dias (2000) and Russell (1995) as cited by Beaufort (2007) who writes, the critique of composition:

goes something like this: because it is a compulsory course, taught in isolation from other disciplinary studies at the university as a basic skills course, this social context leads freshman writing to become a course in "writing to produce writing" (Dias, 2000) or to "do school" (Russell, 1995). (p. 9)

Further, Beaufort (2007), herself a proponent of FYC, admits, "For the majority of students, freshman writing is not a precursor to a writing major. It is an isolated course, an end in

itself, a general education requirement to be gotten out of the way” (p. 9). Whether FYC’s required status affected students’ attitudes positively or negatively is unclear from my data and is open to future investigation, but certainly the course’s required status, as Beaufort suggests of FYC, appeared to have affected students.

Source 4 was FYC’s perceived applicability to other classes and work outside FYC. The results indicated students generally considered FYC applicable to other classes and course work outside of composition. Eighty-one students addressed source four; 58 students or 71% found FYC applicable to other classes. Carroll (2002) characterizes FYC’s relationship to general education courses as follows: “The writing in general education courses, though sometimes assessed by students as not their ‘best work’ . . . [is] an important way of learning because it cause[s] students to make connections between their growing skills, knowledge, and personal interests” (Carroll, 2002, p. 56). Indeed, Carroll’s (2002) comments suggest students who are “average” in FYC still learn valuable skills that they transfer to general education courses. Rather than be discouraged by their “C” students, instructors might bear in mind Carroll’s (2002) assertion that “even mediocre papers can represent good learning” (p. 57). My study results support Carroll’s (2002) findings; many students found FYC applicable to other general education courses. However, how FYC’s perceived usefulness affects students’ attitudes toward and success in FYC was unclear and is open to investigation.

Source 5 asked whether the course instructor affected students’ attitudes toward FYC. This source recalls item 6 of Trice’s LOC instrument that reads, “Professors sometimes make an early impression of you and then . . . you cannot change that impression” (Trice, 1985, p. 1045) and recalls hooks’ (1994) claims that instructor/student relationships’

affect students' academic success. Eighty-one students answered. Of those students, 61 students or 75%, indicated their instructors affected their attitudes either "a lot," (49%) or "some" (26%). The responses to this source suggest instructors play as great a role or even a greater role than FYC's required status or FYC's perceived usefulness in affecting students' attitudes. My findings regarding instructors' effect on students' attitudes toward and success in FYC support findings made by Burford (2005), Cox (2011), Evans et al. (2009), Goodman and Cirka (2009), and Tinberg and Nadeau (2010) who also assert instructors affect students' attitudes toward FYC. For example, according to Burford (2005), students who found their instructors unapproachable, impersonal, and/or critical reported greater resistance to FYC instruction and less success in their FYC classes than students who had generally positive experiences with their instructors. Students in my study reported experiences that support Burford's claims. Students claimed positive instructors affected their attitudes toward FYC positively, and negative instructors affected their attitudes negatively.

Item 4 of the survey asked, "Does your attitude toward composition affect your performance in English 101?" This question allowed students to answer, "yes," "no," or "I am unsure." Eighty-one students answered. Fifty-two or 64% of students answered, "yes," while 17 or 21% answered, "no," and 12 or 15% answered, "I am unsure." The percentages suggest nearly two-thirds of students who responded think their attitudes affected their FYC performance. According to Kamradt and Kamradt (1999) attitudes play an important role in learning and even survival; they function at the subconscious level (yet can be consciously accessed if necessary) and are spontaneous responses to perceived needs. Regarding learning, Kamradt and Kamradt (1999) argue, "within the learner, the subject

matter, whatever it is, is stored within attitudes” (p. 567). Thus, *what* individuals learn *becomes* part of the attitudes that individuals develop toward the subject or skill they are learning. For example, one may learn through experience that writing papers is stressful and unpleasant. Thus, one develops a negative attitude toward writing and avoids it. Indeed, according to Kamradt and Kamradt (1999) in the face of *any* perceived threat an individual may think (cognitive response) he or she will be harmed, may fear or dread the perceived threat (affective response), and may respond with flight or avoidance behaviors (psychomotor response) to negate the threat. On occasion, an attitude may become “dysfunctional” and harms rather than helps an individual (Kamradt and Kamradt, 1999, p. 573). Cox (2009) likewise argues that students sometimes perceive FYC as a threat and thus respond negatively. Arguably, in some cases, students may have negative experiences so frequently in writing classes that they develop dysfunctional attitudes toward FYC and thus engage in negative behaviors such as “cooling out,” avoidance, and resistance. The unintended result of such behaviors may be further failure of FYC courses and a corresponding intensification of the “threat” FYC poses. Data I gathered indicated a strong relationship between students’ attitudes and success in FYC, as I will explain further in Section II of this chapter.

#### *Valuation Items’ Analysis: Items 7-13*

I included items 7 through 13 to gauge how valuable students considered FYC courses. Over the course of items 7 through 9, I asked students how well FYC prepared them to write in general education courses, their major courses, and their careers. Item 10 asked how likely students thought it was that their careers would require writing and thus how valuable they found FYC in preparing them for a skill that their careers might require

of them. Items 11 through 13 present Likert scales and asked students to gauge how valuable they felt FYC was generally. Items' analyses follow.

Item 7 presented a Likert scale and asked students to rank FYC's helpfulness in preparing them for general education courses. Eighty-one students responded; results appear in Table 3:

**Table 3: Item 7 Results—FYC's Perceived Usefulness for General Education Courses**

Response options	1 Least helpful	2 Moderately /Somewhat unhelpful	3 Neutral	4 Somewhat/ Moderately helpful	5 Very helpful
No. of students responding (Valid %)	3 (4%)	5 (6%)	14 (17%)	38 (47%)	21 (26%)

Fifty-nine students or 72% indicated that English 101 was at least *somewhat* helpful if not *very* helpful in preparing them for their general education courses. My findings support those made by Wardle (2007) regarding general education classes and transferability. Of her students, Wardle (2007) found that “meta-awareness about writing: the ability to analyze assignments, see similarities and differences across assignments, discern what was being required of them, and determine exactly what they needed to do in response to earn the grade they wanted” was the most likely skill to transfer (pp. 76-77). Since meta-awareness of writing skills, according to Wardle (2007), is one of the most transferable of all writing skills, it is reasonable to expect FYC students may find FYC helpful for general education courses as my data suggests.

Item 8 presented a Likert-scale regarding FYC's applicability to major courses. Eighty-one students responded. Results appear in Table 4.

**Table 4: Item 8 Results—FYC’s Perceived Usefulness for Major Courses**

Response options	1 Least helpful	2 Moderately /Somewhat unhelpful	3 Neutral	4 Somewhat/ Moderately helpful	5 Most helpful
No. of students responding (Valid %)	4 (5%)	11 (13%)	22 (27%)	28 (34%)	16 (20%)

More than half of the students who answered (54%) indicated FYC prepared them for their major courses. Just over 27% were neutral regarding FYC’s helpfulness. However, nearly 19% of students found FYC unhelpful. English 101’s perceived helpfulness remained low regarding career preparation as evidenced by data from item 9 regarding FYC and career preparation. Eighty-one students answered. Results follow.

**Table 5: Item 9 Results—FYC’s Perceived Usefulness for Career Preparation**

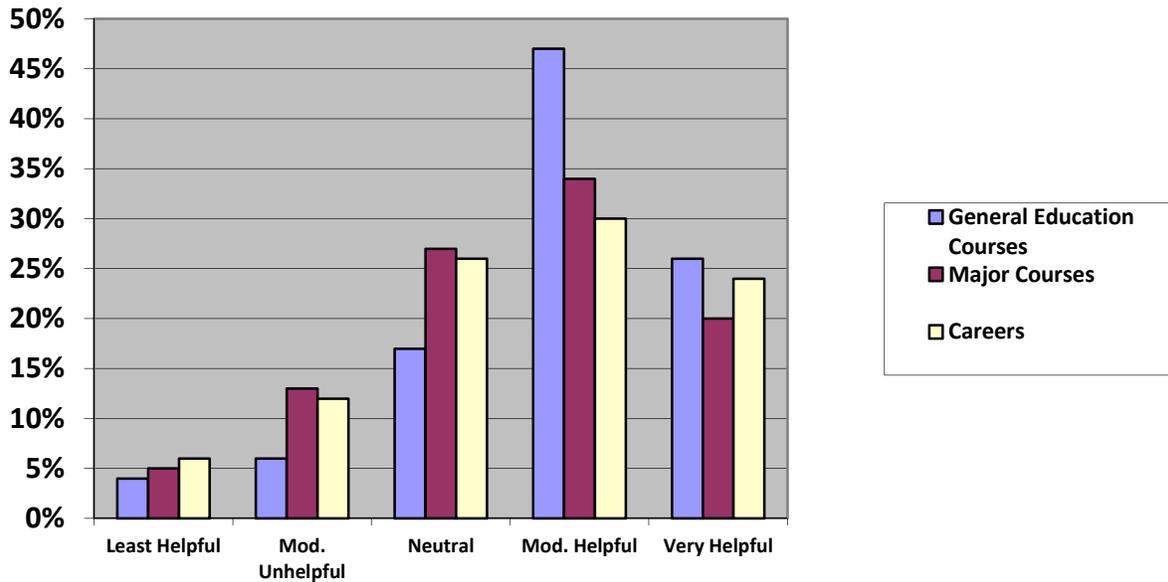
Response options	1 Least helpful	2 Moderately /Somewhat unhelpful	3 Neutral	4 Somewhat/ Moderately helpful	5 Most helpful
No. of students responding (Valid %)	5 (6%)	10 (12%)	21 (26%)	25 (30%)	20 (24%)

Forty-five students or 54% answered that English 101 was helpful at least somewhat in preparing them for their careers, but 26% of students were neutral regarding FYC’s perceived usefulness, and 18% again found FYC unhelpful.

Beaufort (2007), Driscoll and Wells (2012), and Smit (2007) indicate transference from FYC to general education classes is higher than is transference from FYC to major classes and careers. The numbers of students who found FYC helpful, who were neutral

toward it, and who found FYC unhelpful (across items seven through nine) support the aforementioned researchers' findings. Data appears below in Figure 2:

**Figure 2: FYC's Perceived Degree of Transference**



In the first column, “least helpful,” more students found FYC least helpful for careers than for majors or general education courses. The trend continues for columns “moderately helpful” and “neutral.” More students found FYC “moderately helpful” for general education courses than major courses or careers. Some ambiguity occurs in the last column “Very helpful” regarding general education courses, major courses, and careers where students appeared to find FYC more helpful for careers than major courses. However, despite that ambiguity, the trend across items 7 through 9 suggests, generally speaking, students found FYC more helpful for general education courses than for major courses or careers. Tinberg and Nadeau (2010) write of their FYC study population, “while nearly all, 95 percent, of respondents thought that writing was an important skill for college students, many

considered writing a temporary evil; about half, 48 percent, didn't think writing would be important in their chosen careers" (pp. 59-60). While my findings were not as dramatic as Tinberg and Nadeau's (2010) findings, they suggest more students find FYC helpful for general education courses than for major courses or careers.

Students may have found FYC unhelpful for majors and careers because FYC frequently teaches students "general" writing skills, not discipline-specific or career-specific skills. Beaufort (2007) paraphrases Russell (2005) who makes a sports' analogy concerning FYC. Beaufort writes:

it is as if there were a course in general ball handling that were intended to teach skills applicable to playing jacks, tennis, baseball, and soccer. Given the way freshman writing is typically taught, graduates of these courses could easily think the standards for writing they have been given in freshman writing are universal. (p. 11)

The unfortunate result, according to Beaufort (2007) is that typically FYC students:

are ill-prepared to examine, question, or understand the literacy standards of discourse communities they are encountering in other disciplines, in the work world, or in other social spheres they participate in. This can result in negative transfer of learning: what worked for a freshman writing essay is inappropriately applied to writing in history, or social sciences, or the sciences or in business. (p. 11)

Students may also find FYC more useful to them while they are taking FYC or shortly thereafter while they are taking other general education courses rather than later when they are taking major courses. As they progress in their college careers, even by a few terms, they may forget FYC skills they learned their first year or even regress in their writing ability, reverting to pre-college writing strategies (Hassel & Giordano, 2009). My findings further support those made by Smit who asserts, "first-year composition students often do not see how previous learning is relevant to the future" (as cited in Driscoll & Wells, 2012, "Transfer", par. 6). Arguably, students who "do not see how previous learning

is relevant to the future” likely will have low valuation for a class that seemingly has a limited or even no connection to their majors and careers (Driscoll & Wells, 2012, “Transfer”, par. 6). Since my study does not address *why* students answered the way they did for items seven through nine, any possible explanations as to their answer choices are speculative and open to future investigation.

Item 10 asked “How likely do you think it is that your career will require you to use writing skills?” I asked this question with this idea in mind: if students thought their careers *would* require them to write, they likely would value FYC more than if they thought their careers *would not* require them to write. Students chose from Likert-type forced answer choices presented as a scale. Eighty-one students answered; results follow in Table 6.

**Table 6: Item 10 Results—Students’ Beliefs Regarding Writing and Careers**

Response options	1 Very unlikely	2 Somewhat unlikely	3 Undecided	4 Somewhat likely	5 Very likely
No. of students responding (Valid %)	3 (4%)	20 (24%)	10 (12%)	30 (37%)	18 (22%)

Twenty-eight percent of students indicated they found it unlikely their careers would require writing; 12% were unsure. The remaining 59% of students found it at least somewhat likely their careers would require them to write. One student for 1% did not respond.

I found it surprising given students’ generally negative responses to item 9 that nearly two-thirds would then suggest they believe their careers *will* require them to write. Students’ responses to item 9 suggested they did not see FYC as important to their careers;

however, students then admitted they expected their careers *would* require them to write. I expected students might see FYC as unhelpful to their careers simply because students thought their careers would not require writing, but the contrary appears true. Students indeed expect to write in their careers. Possibly students expect their major courses, not FYC, will prepare them for discipline-specific writing used in careers. Fallon, Lahar, and Susman (2009) argue “there is no magic bullet (or single English course) that ensures that students will become effective college writers” (p. 44) or effective writers in their majors or careers. Instead, Fallon, Lahar, and Susman (2009) contend writing across the curriculum is a more logical choice to teach students writing skills than FYC alone. Students’ FYC success may improve if students take FYC classes *and* writing intensive courses in other disciplines concurrently (rather than FYC only) so that students learn writing basics in FYC courses and discipline-specific writing skills in major courses.

Item 11 most directly addressed students’ valuation of FYC and asked, “How valuable do you consider English 101 to your success in college and in the future?” Eighty students answered.

**Table 7: Item 11 Results—Students’ Valuation of FYC**

Response options	1 Not valuable at all	2 Somewhat valuable	3 No opinion	4 Valuable	5 Very valuable
No. of students responding (Valid %)	0 (0%)	20 (24%)	16 (20%)	28 (34%)	16 (20%)

Upon initial inspection, the results of this item appear positive, and indeed are to an extent. It is encouraging that no one chose one—not valuable at all. However, less encouraging is that 44% percent of students chose either “somewhat valuable” or “no opinion.” The

remaining 54% of students answered “valuable” or “very valuable.” It is unclear if “no opinion” suggests indifference, apathy, or simple uncertainty. Whatever the case, improving students’ valuation of FYC likely would result in improved FYC performance since indifferent students and apathetic students are likely less inclined to apply themselves than are engaged and interested students.

Item 12 of the survey asked students why they considered English 101 valuable and provided them with five answer choices. Students could choose as many choices as they wished. Sixty-five students answered.

**Table 8: Item 12 Results—Students’ Reasons Why FYC Is Valuable**

Response options	1 Improving writing skills	2 Improving critical thinking	3 Applicability to other classes	4 Applicability to future career	5 Other
No. of students responding (Valid %)	63 (77%)	43 (52%)	35 (43%)	37 (45%)	3 (4%)

Item 12 suggests that most students who answered found English 101 helpful to some degree with “improving writing skills”—suggested by students as the most valuable quality of FYC—followed by “improving critical thinking skills.” In keeping with my own findings, along with findings made by Driscoll and Wells (2012) and Smit (2007), applicability to careers (45%) and other classes (43%) lagged well behind improving writing skills (77%). Less positive is that 17 students of the 82 participating in the study did not answer item twelve. Students may not have thought the aforementioned skills were taught in FYC or may have ignored the question.

Item 13 was an open-ended question that asked students to describe why they thought English 101 was *not* valuable and provided several answer choices. No one answered item 13. Given no one answered the item, students likely were either disinterested in further explaining themselves or perhaps felt English 101 was valuable and that the question therefore was inapplicable to them.

*Instructors' Items Analysis: Items 14-15*

I included items 14 and 15 of the survey to learn how students felt instructors might improve their teaching efficacy. Item 14 asked, "In your opinion, would instructors benefit from knowing students' perceptions of English 101 courses?" Eighty-one students answered item 13; the majority of students, 70%, believed faculty would benefit from knowing students' perceptions of FYC. Students' focus on instructors is consistent with findings made Burford (2005), Evans et al. (2009), Goodman and Cirka (2009), and Tinberg and Nadeau (2010) who indicate students frequently cite their instructors as sources of their attitudes toward and valuation of FYC classes and as sources of their FYC success. Further, worth noting is that my study population was comprised overwhelmingly of former English 100 (Skills Development) students who were identified by the institution as needing remediation before entering the standard FYC course (English 101, Composition). This fact may explain why many students felt instructors would benefit from increased knowledge about students' feelings toward FYC either by asking or by surveying students about their feelings toward the class. Jones (2008) writes, "basic skills students are more like high school students than other incoming freshmen, and LOC tends to be a more powerful predictor of academic achievement among secondary school students than

college students (Findley & Cooper, 1983; Kalechstein & Nowicki, 1997)” (p. 226). Jones (2008) further writes many basic skills students have external LOC:

Basic skills students who get feedback that appears to confirm—for the externally oriented—that the teacher is ‘in control’ may tend quickly to resign themselves to failure. The basic skills student who gets the same feedback—and is internally oriented—may consider it a source of information about how to learn....In a relatively able population of students, LOC may be a less important variable. (pp. 226-228)

Undoubtedly, basic skills students may be more sensitive to instructors’ influence in FYC classes than might be mainstreamed students. To curb students’ resignation to failure, Goodman and Cirka (2009) propose instructors, “work actively to identify, challenge, and alter students’ inaccurate beliefs about their ability to write...;” design assignments with clear goals and grading criteria; provide ample feedback, and bear in mind the unintended consequences of their comments on students’ writing (pp. 22-23).

Item 15 was open-ended and asked, “How might students benefit from instructors having a better knowledge of students’ perceptions of English 101?” Forty-two students responded to item 15. I analyzed students’ comments in NVivo; data for that item appears in Section III of this chapter and supports assertions made by Goodman and Cirka (2009).  
*Students’ Expected Versus Actual FYC Performance: Items 23-27*

Items 23 through 27 regard English 100, English 101, and the expected and actual grades students received in those courses. Information regarding English 100 and 101 reveals students’ strengths as determined by the placement process since former English 100 students needed remediation before they enrolled in English 101. Further, I wanted to learn if grades students received in English 100 might affect students’ expectations for grades in English 101.

Item 23 suggests students' relative strengths as writers based on their placement in English 100. Results indicate 74% of students had taken English 100, Skills Development before enrolling in English 101. Most of the students who participated in the study needed (at least per the institution's recommendation) remediation and possibly were already weak writers given their placement. Regarding basic skills students, Jones (2008) indicates,

If freshmen in general may be said to be inexperienced, basic skills students are particularly inexperienced. The literature in composition stresses that basic writers often occupy a perilous position in the educational system and, by implication, may learn that their initiatives and concerns do not count for much, hence potentially leading to a more external locus of control. (pp. 212-213)

Jones (2009) argues an increased external LOC retards students' sense of self-agency and places more blame on the class and instructors for students' failures. Further, students' writing self-efficacy often results from their self-perceived strengths and weaknesses. Jones (2008) asserts, "self-efficacy has a greater effect on low-achieving students than on normal achieving students" (p.213). Thus, the results of item twenty-three are meaningful inasmuch as participants in my study—many of whom were potentially already-weak writers—may have allowed external LOC, self-perceived weaknesses, and low writing self-efficacy to bear on their attitudes toward and valuation of FYC.

Item 24 asked, "What grade did you get in English 100?" and provided students with several answer choices. Fifty-nine students answered. Results follow in Table 9:

**Table 9: Item 24 Results—Students' Grades in English 100**

Response options	A	B	C	D or F	I do not recall my grade
No. of students responding (Valid %)	11 (13%)	26 (32%)	17 (21%)	1 (1%)	4 (5%)

The two greatest populations of students received either a B or a C, a fact that may account for students' expectations regarding their grades in English 101 as described in item 26.

Item 26 asked what grade students expected to receive in FYC (English 101) when the term began. I wanted to learn what students' expectations were of themselves when they started the class and then wanted to contrast their *expectations* with their *actual performance*.

Eighty students answered.

**Table 10: Item 26 Results—Students' Expected Grades for English 101**

Response options	A	B	C	D or F
No. of students responding (Valid %)	17 (21%)	45 (55%)	14 (17%)	4 (5%)

Answers for item 26 indicate most students expected to receive A's and B's, much the way they received in English 100. However, it is unclear if students' attained grades in English 100 necessarily affected their expectations for English 101. Further research will have to investigate any possible relationships between grades received in previous English classes and grades received in later ones.

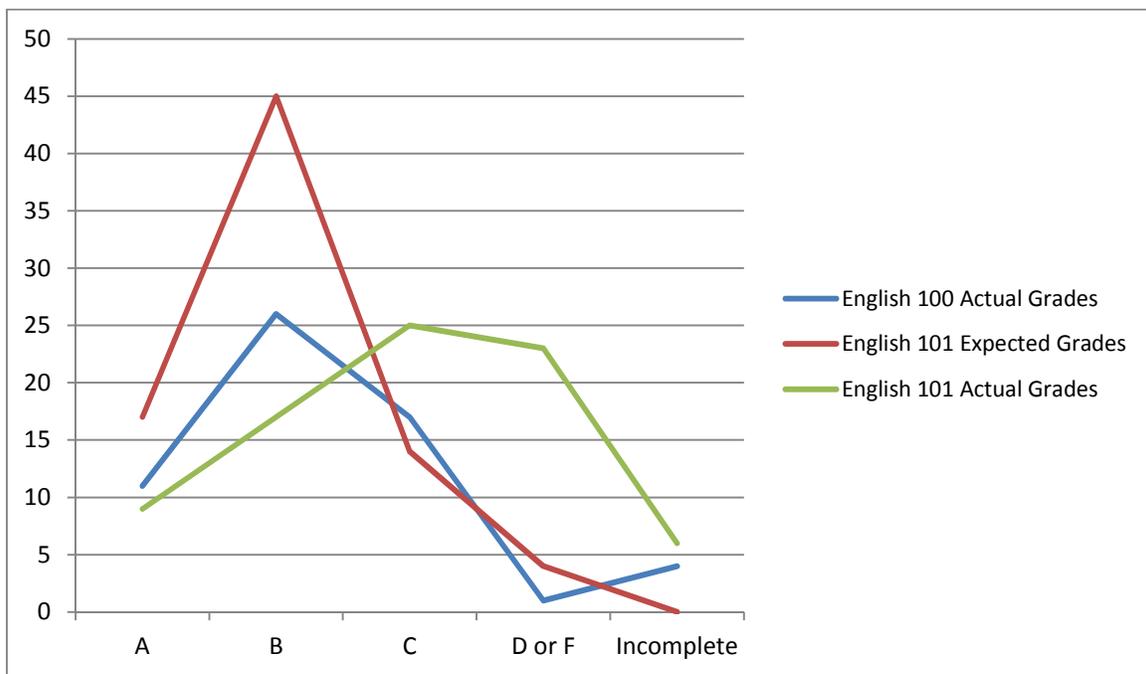
Item 27 indicates what grades students expected to receive at the term's end. Because students completed the survey well after midterm and very near the end of the spring 2013 term, students had a reasonable idea about what grade they would receive in the course and could report that information, thus providing a reasonably accurate presentation of grades actually received. Students' answers revealed that students' expected performance was higher than their actual performance. Students imagined themselves getting A's and B's more frequently than they did. *Actual* grade distribution

results for English 101 showed grades were generally lower than were grades for English 100. Eighty students answered item 27.

**Table 11: Item 27 Results—Actual Grades Received in English 101**

Response options	A	B	C	D or F	Incomplete
No. of students responding (Valid %)	9 (11%)	17 (21%)	25 (30%)	23 (28%)	6 (7%)

**Figure 3: Comparison of English 100 and English 101 Grades**



The majority of students surveyed—60 out of 82 or 73%—took English 100. Further, 48 students out of 82 or just over half of those surveyed, obtained a C or lower. Only 26 students received A's or B's. Students' *expected* grade distribution for English 101 closely resembles the *actual* grade distribution for English 100, Skills Development. The data supports a finding made by Addison and McGee (2010) that indicates, "students, however,

think much more highly of their abilities than their teachers [do]" (p. 161) and behave accordingly. The findings also support Bandura's (1997) argument that "one's own previous performance, or *mastery experience*" influences one's expectations regarding similar, future situations (as cited in Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007, pp. 106-107).

Items 24 through 26 reveal trends between English 100 and English 101. Potentially, students' experiences in English 101 may *decrease* students' writing self-efficacy when students encounter increasingly challenging assignments. Other compositions theorists (Cox, 2011; Jones 2008; Pajares, Johnson, & Usher 2007) have found that basic skills students, at least, become discouraged more easily in writing classes than do mainstreamed FYC students. It is unclear whether students in my study became discouraged upon seeing their English grades drop, but the possibility seems likely. The potential relationship between students' experiences in English skills development courses and FYC, along with students' responses to those courses, is open to future research.

#### *Section II: Chi-Square Analyses—Attitudes and Success versus Valuation and Success*

Items 1 (attitudes), 11 (valuation), and 27 (success) required 2 x 3 Fisher Exact Probability tests and  $\chi^2$  tests of independence to find if there are relationships between the variables "attitudes" (item 1) and "success" (item 27) and the variables "valuation" (item 11) and "success" (item 27). The first test addresses item 1 "attitudes" and item 27 "success," and the second test addresses item 11 "valuation" and item 27 "success." The null hypothesis for the first  $\chi^2$  analysis was: there is no relationship between attitudes and success, and for the second it was: there is no relationship between valuation and success. The alpha level was set at .05.

Eighty students answered the five-point Likert scale item 1 regarding their attitudes toward FYC. The five categories were collapsed into three for ease of analysis: “Likes FYC,” “No Opinion,” and “Dislikes FYC.” The test of independence between the variables “attitudes” and “success” was significant,  $\chi^2 (2)=12$ ,  $p=.00016$ . This means that “attitudes” and “success” are *dependent* variables. According to the contingency table, students who like FYC are more likely to be successful than students who dislike FYC.

**Table 12: Attitudes and Success Contingency Table**

	<b>Like</b>	<b>No Opinion</b>	<b>Dislike</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>Successful (Grades of A B or C)</b>				
Observed	39	7	5	51
Expected	31.87	8.92	10.2	51
<b>Unsuccessful (Grades of D, F or I)</b>				
Observed	11	7	11	29
Expected	18.12	5.07	5.8	29
<b>Totals</b>	50	14	16	80

$\chi^2 Obs = 12.61$

$p\text{-value} = 0.0016$

Eighty students answered the five-point Likert scale item 11 regarding their valuation of FYC. The categories were collapsed into three for ease of analysis: “Values FYC,” “No Opinion,” and “Does Not Value FYC.” The test of independence between the variables “valuation” and “success” was not significant,  $\chi^2 (2)=2$ ,  $p=.33842$ . This means that “valuation” and “success” are *independent* variables. According to the contingency table, students who value FYC are no more likely to be successful than students who do not value

FYC. The variable that matters is attitude: students who like FYC are more likely to succeed than students who dislike FYC despite students' valuation of it. Following is the contingency table for the variables "valuation" and "success."

**Table 13: Valuation and Success Contingency Table**

	<b>Not Valuable/Low Valuation</b>	<b>No opinion</b>	<b>Valuable/High Valuation</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>Successful (Grades of A, B, or C)</b>				
Observed	12	8	31	51
Expected	12.265	10.329	28.405	28
<b>Unsuccessful (Grades of D, F or I)</b>				
Observed	7	8	13	51
Expected	6.734	5.670	15.594	28
<b>Totals</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>79</b>

$\chi^2_{Obs} = 2.165$

$p\text{-value} = 0.338427011$

Based on my data, there is a statistically significant relationship between the variables "attitudes" and "success" but not between the variables "valuation" and "success." Arguably, students with positive attitudes toward FYC are more likely to have more success in FYC than are students with negative attitudes toward FYC. Students' valuation of FYC statistically has no bearing on students' performance in FYC. Thus, a student who does not value FYC but likes the class is likely to perform better in it than a student who values FYC but dislikes it.

### Section III: Qualitative Analysis of Survey Data

I conducted qualitative analysis of the open-ended survey items (3, 5, and 6 from the attitudinal portion of the survey; 12 and 13 from the valuation portion of the survey; and item 15 from the instructors' part of the survey) with NVivo. Based on emerging data patterns, I coded the textual data (as applicable) into the following NVivo nodes: "1. Attitude toward English;" "2. Class Atmosphere/Course Delivery," "5. Fun and Enjoyment;" "6. Introductory Writing," "10. Student Responsibility;" "11. Success;" "12. Teachers;" and "13. Value of English." Some comments I coded in more than one node; for instance, a comment like, "I like English because my teacher makes class fun" would fit in nodes "1. Attitude toward English," and "12. Teachers." Following is a table describing the nodes:

**Table 14: Nodes' Descriptions for Items 3, 5, 6, 12, 13, and 15**

<b>Node</b>	<b>Definition of the Node</b>	<b>Example Comments in Each Node</b>
<b>1. Attitude toward English</b>	How students feel about FYC, whether they like or dislike it.	I hate English class. I enjoy English class. I'm indifferent about writing.
<b>2. Class Atmosphere/ Course Delivery</b>	Instructors' handling of FYC classes	The teacher assigns confusing assignments and forgets deadlines.
<b>5. Fun and Enjoyment</b>	FYC classes' engagement for students	I'd like English better if it were fun.
<b>6. Introductory Writing</b>	Students' perception of FYC as an introductory writing class or as a required course.	This class is required to graduate and helps you learn how to write for other classes.
<b>10. Student Responsibility</b>	Students' agency in their own learning/students' roles in their education	Students will learn if they really want to, but they have to want to try.
<b>11. Success</b>	Passing FYC or at least improving in it	If I like a class, I'm more likely to succeed in it than if I dislike it.
<b>12. Teachers</b>	Instructors' roles in students' FYC success	When teachers are critical, they make learning more difficult than it needs to be.

<b>13. Value of English</b>	FYC as a worthwhile (or worthless) class	I value English, I guess. I mean, it helps me improve my writing.
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Item 3 asked students to describe other sources they thought contributed to their attitudes toward English 101. Only two students answered, so there was insufficient data available for coding and analysis. Similarly, for item 12 (a valuation item) only three students provided textual answers, so I omitted them, too.

Item 5 asked students to explain how their attitudes affect their FYC success if they suspect their attitudes affect it. Forty-four of 82 students responded; respondents describe various attitudes toward FYC, give various reasons *why* their attitudes affect them, and indicate *how* they think their attitudes affect their FYC success. I coded all comments in the “Attitudes toward English” node and some comments into other nodes, too. The following table presents the data for the nodes where I coded comments (other than “Attitudes toward English”).

**Table 15: Item 5 Analysis—How Attitudes Affect Students’ FYC Success**

<b>Nodes</b>	10. Student Respons.	11.Success (in FYC)	12.Teachers	5.Fun and Enjoyment	13.Value of English	6.Intro Writing	2.Class Atmos/ Course Delivery
No. of students responding (Valid %)	25 (31%)	11 (13%)	5 (6%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Of the total participant population, 82 students, only 25 or 30% indicated their attitudes toward the class *and* their own responsibility affected their FYC success. For example, one student wrote, “I think my participation in class and positive attitude both make me successful.” Another wrote, “If I don’t like the class, I’m not going to do the work.” Eleven students, or 13%, commented regarding their attitudes and FYC success. One student

wrote, "I feel like in life you have to do a lot of things that you don't exactly like, but the amount that you value things is going to make you work harder and succeed, so I think that my value is what contributes most to my success in composition." The remaining 8% of comments cited other sources students thought contributed to their attitudes and FYC success: instructors, the course's "enjoyment-level", and the course's perceived usefulness (or uselessness). For instance, one student wrote, "I enjoy this writing class with Dr. [Smith]. This class will help me with other papers once I get further into my degree." Another wrote, "If I am not interested in what we are talking about or reading, I day dream and go into other thoughts about other things."

Students who believe their attitudes affect their FYC performance can potentially improve their FYC success if they improve their attitudes toward FYC. According to Kamradt and Kamradt (1999), there is the possibility that instructors in any discipline can change students' attitudes to help students adopt desirable behaviors that encourage learning. With that said, it is possible instructors can employ strategies to help students adopt desirable attitudes toward FYC that foster increased success in it. I will describe these strategies further in the conclusion.

In item 6, students explained why they thought their attitudes did *not* affect their FYC success. I coded all eleven comments in the node "attitude" along with nodes 6 "introductory writing," 10 "student responsibility," and 13 "Value of English."

**Table 16: Item 6 Analysis—Why Attitudes “Do Not” Affect Students’ FYC Success**

<b>Nodes</b>	10.Student Respons.	11.Success (in FYC)	12.Teachers	5.Fun and Enjoyment	13.Value of English	6.Intro Writing	2.Class Atmos/ Course Delivery
No. of students responding (Valid %)	9 (11%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

All eleven students felt they would perform well in FYC—despite their attitudes toward it—1) because they wanted to do well in all of their classes, 2) felt FYC teachers encouraged learning, and 3) valued FYC. One student wrote, “I never let my attitude interfere with my school work.” Another wrote, “I try not to let my attitude toward a class affect how I perform in a class. I am here to learn.” Yet a third student wrote, “Work is work; if it needs to be done, then it gets done no matter how much I don’t want to do it.” Arguably, instructors might change the attitudes of students who feel their attitudes do not need to be changed, but changing them 1) may not be necessary since some students already have positive attitudes that encourage FYC success or 2) might be difficult since students who doubt their attitudes affect their success may resist changing their attitudes. I will discuss these possibilities and their implications further in the conclusion.

Item 15 regarded how students might benefit from instructors understanding students’ perceptions of FYC. Seven comments were “yes/no” answers that I did not code; I simply indicated the answers. Six of the seven were “N/A or No,” and one was “yes.” All comments I coded into the node “Teachers” along with other nodes as necessary. Results for item 15 appear below.

**Table 17: Item 15 Results—Benefits of Knowing Students’ Attitudes**

<b>Nodes</b>	10.Student Respons.	11.Success (in FYC)	5.Fun and Enjoyment	13.Value of English	6.Intro Writing	2.Class Atmos/ Course Delivery
No. of students responding (Valid %)	0 (0%)	25 (30%)	8 (10%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	13 (16)%

Forty-two students made comments for item 15. All comments appear in the “Teachers” node. Twenty-five comments also appear in the node “Success”; students indicated approachable, caring instructors frequently elicited positive student responses to FYC, lowered students’ anxiety, lessened students’ resistance to instruction, and increased students’ FYC success. Regarding instructors better understanding students, one student wrote, “Students would be more engaged and be more willing to learn and gain a better knowledge of writing and English” while another wrote, “If the professor knows the student, and the student is struggling, the professor can help that student one on one.” Eight references appear in the node “Fun and Enjoyment;” students asserted instructors could make FYC more interesting if they knew what topics and teaching techniques most engage students. For example, one student wrote that knowing what students think “will allow teachers to gain the students’ attention more easily. It will also help because teachers will do activities that are more enjoyable for students.” Another student wrote, “if they knew what their students were interested in and they saw the way their course is going has nothing to do with what their students are interested in they could perhaps tweak the things they are teaching in their course to perhaps make it more interesting and fun for the students. Because when certain things are fun, they are easier to learn.” Thirteen references appear in the node “Class Atmosphere and Course Delivery.” Comments indicate

instructors would benefit by knowing students' thoughts on FYC. For example, one student wrote, by understanding students, "instructors may have a better idea on how to approach a certain topic or the class in general." Another student wrote that understanding students "would help the professor make the assignments better." Yet another wrote, "Many students learn differently. If the instructor was aware of how each student learns the best then that student would have a better chance of succeeding."

My findings support a conclusion reached by Fallon, Lahar, and Susman (2009) who contend personable, empathetic instructors are more likely to elicit student success in FYC than are impersonal, non-empathetic instructors. Further, many comments in the "Success" node indicated students' desire for one-on-one help, closer relationships with their instructors, and improved teaching strategies based on students' wants and needs. For example, one student wrote, "With an instructor knowing the feelings of a student, the instructor can relate on a more personal level and offer help if necessary." Another wrote, "The professor will know them [students] on a personal basis." Indeed, students' comments in my study frequently supported Burford's (2005) claim that students want improved student/instructor relationships, and Wardle's (2007) claim that students enjoy engaging and challenging writing assignments—as long as they are interesting and relevant.

#### *Section IV: Conclusion of the Survey Data Analysis*

My survey findings support and are consistent with other composition theorists' findings, especially regarding transference (Fallon, Lahar, & Susman, 2009; Plata, 2008; Wardle, 2007); sources of students' attitudes toward FYC (i.e. instructors and FYC's required status) (Beaufort, 2007; Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007; Trice, 1985); LOC's role in FYC success (Cox, 2011); writing self-efficacy's effect on students' FYC performance

(Martinez, Kock, & Cass, 2011), and students' expectations of FYC success per students' previous writing experiences (Cox, 2011; Pajares, Johnson & Usher, 2007). My study indicates MU students generally had positive attitudes toward FYC and considered instructors, experiences with writing while taking FYC, and FYC's perceived applicability to classes and work outside FYC as major sources affecting their attitudes toward FYC. My findings also suggest that students wanted improved relationships with FYC instructors. Indeed, students cited instructors as the most influential source of their attitudes toward FYC, a finding that supports those made by Burford (2005), Cox (2011), Evans et al. (2009), Goodman and Cirka (2009), and Tinberg and Nadeau (2010) who likewise suggest instructors greatly affect students' attitudes toward FYC.

Further, my findings indicate students found FYC classes more applicable to other general education classes than to major courses and careers. This finding supports those made by Beaufort (2007) Driscoll and Wells (2012), Smit (2007), and Wardle (2007), among other composition theorists who make similar assertions. My findings also suggest students' previous writing experiences might affect their expectations of FYC, with students imagining obtaining similar grades in FYC as they did in previous English classes. This finding supports Bandura's (1997) argument regarding mastery experience's effect on expectations for future, similar situations (Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007). Further, my study suggests—similar to Burford's (2005) and Wardle's (2007) claims—students desired more engaging classes and more interesting writing assignments. As one student in my study wrote, "If I am not interested in what we are talking about or reading, I day dream and go into other thoughts about other things." Arguably, more interesting classes and challenging assignments might engage students more, as another student wrote, "I feel that

since I like the class I do better in it and focus more. I take more time on my work and look for the things we learn in class in my essays I write.”

Most importantly, the survey indicates the variables “attitude” and “success” are *dependent* whereas the variables “valuation” and “success” are *independent*. While most students (52%) thought their attitudes affected their FYC success, 36% either did not think so or were unsure. The 36% of students who doubted or were uncertain that their attitudes affected them might be surprised to learn that attitudes *do* affect students’ FYC success. With that said, one strategy to improve students’ FYC success—among many other strategies I plan to discuss—might be to change students’ attitudes toward the class, as I will explain in chapter six, the conclusion.

## Chapter Five: Focus Groups Data Analysis

The second half of my study involves focus groups held during the fall 2013 term. These groups held conversations to generate data. Students recorded their conversations, and I imported data in the form of transcribed conversations into NVivo for qualitative analysis. I identified thirteen nodes for students' comments; I describe those nodes in Section III of this chapter. For my analysis of the focus groups' data, while I counted the number of sources and references in each node and thus produced some quantitative data, most data is qualitative. In this chapter, I address only the nodes most relevant to my research question. These nodes are: node 1 (Attitude toward English), node 2 (Class atmosphere and course delivery), node 4 (Fun and enjoyment), node 6 (Introductory writing), node 7 (Jobs), node 8 (Look educated), node 9 (Redundant or refresher course), node 10 (Student responsibility), node 11 (Success), node 12 (Teachers) and node 13 (Value of English).

### *Section I: Study Participants' Description*

Twenty-one students participated in the focus groups. Seven students were African American, one was Latino, twelve were white, and one was a Caribbean islander. There were fourteen women and seven men. Two students were sophomores—one because she was a transfer student who entered MU with transfer credits and one because he was an international student who took ESL classes his first year at the institution. The other participants were first-year students. There was/were: one accounting major; one applied exercise science major; one athletic training major; four biology majors; two business majors; one education major; one double major in environmental/occupational management *and* political science; one health care administration major; one justice

studies major; one management major; one music major; one nursing major; three social work majors; one special education major; and one sports management major.

**Table 18: Focus Groups Participants' Descriptions**

<b>Student</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Academic School</b>	<b>Major</b>
Jenny	White	Female	First-year	Reeves School of Business	Accounting
Danielle	White	Female	First-year		Business administration
John	White	Male	First-year		Business administration
Esther	African-American	Female	First-year		Management
Amber	White	Female	First-year		Sport management
Reggie	African-American	Male	First-year	School of Arts and Humanities	Music
Kathryn	White	Female	First-year	School of Health Sciences	Applied exercise science
Sean	White	Male	First-year		Athletic training
Chelsea	White	Female	Sophomore transfer student		Health care administration
Dean	White	Male	First-year		Nursing
Pierre-Ricardo	Haitian	Male	Sophomore, international student	School of Public Affairs	Environmental and occupational management <i>and</i> political science
Sydney	African-American	Male	First-year		Justice studies
Corin	African-American	Female	First-year		Social work
Regina	White	Female	First-year		Social work
Samantha	White	Female	First-year		Social work
Briana	African-American	Female	First-year	School of Science and Human	Biology

				Development	
Manuel	Latino	Male	First-year		Biology
Melonie	White	Female	First-year		Biology
Sierra	African-American	Female	First-year		Biology
Claire	White	Female	First-year		Education
Macaila	African-American	Female	First-year		Special education

*Section II: Nodes' Description and Data*

Following is a table presenting each node, the definition of each node, and example comments for each node. I must note that while some comments fit neatly into one node alone, most comments fit into two or more nodes. Those comments I coded accordingly into the nodes where they fit.

**Table 19: Nodes, Their Definitions, and Example Comments**

<b>Node</b>	<b>Definition of the Node</b>	<b>Example Comments in Each Node</b>
<b>1. Attitude toward English</b>	How students feel about FYC, whether they like or dislike it.	I hate English class. I enjoy English class. I'm indifferent about writing.
<b>2. Class Atmosphere and Course Delivery</b>	Instructors' handling of FYC classes	The teacher assigns confusing assignments and forgets deadlines.
<b>3. Dialect Issues</b>	Dialects' and L2 languages' effect on student learning in FYC	I write the way I talk.
<b>4. Fun and Enjoyment</b>	FYC classes' engagement for students	I'd like English better if it were fun.
<b>5. Graduate Work</b>	FYC classes' usefulness (or uselessness) preparing students for graduate work	English is important for graduate school.
<b>6. Introductory Writing</b>	Students' perception of FYC as an introductory writing class or as a required course	This class is required to graduate and helps you learn how to write for other classes.
<b>7. Jobs</b>	FYC classes' usefulness (or uselessness) preparing	Good grammar is necessary to get a good job.

	students of careers	
<b>8. Look Educated</b>	FYC classes' usefulness (or uselessness) at improving students' ability with SAE	Knowing how to write well makes you look smart.
<b>9. Redundant or Refresher Course</b>	FYC's role covering material students learned in high school or in other college courses	I've had this stuff before; it's a waste of time. I'm glad to take English because I forgot what I learned last year.
<b>10. Student Responsibility</b>	Students' agency in their own learning/students' roles in their education	Students will learn if they really want to, but they have to want to try.
<b>11. Success</b>	Passing FYC or at least improving in it	If I like a class, I'm more likely to succeed in it than if I dislike it.
<b>12. Teachers</b>	Instructors' roles in students' FYC success	When teachers are critical, they make learning more difficult than it should be.
<b>13. Value of English</b>	FYC as a worthwhile (or worthless) class	I value English, I guess. I mean, it helps me improve my writing.

Following is the data broken down by node, number of references, and number of sources. Here "sources" refers to the focus groups themselves, while "references" refers to the actual statements made by the participants. For example, if the number of sources is five, comments came from all five focus groups. If the number of sources is three, comments came from only three of the five groups. If a node contains twelve references, students across all groups made a total of twelve comments that fit into that node.

**Table 20: Nodes, References per Node, and Number of Sources per Node**

<b>Node</b>	<b>Number of References</b>	<b>Number of Sources</b>
1. Attitude toward English	31	5
2. Class Atmosphere and Course Delivery	18	5
3. Dialect Issues	12	2
4. Fun and Enjoyment	14	3

5. Graduate Work	6	3
6. Introductory Writing	23	5
7. Jobs	16	5
8. Look Educated	11	4
9. Redundant or Refresher Course	9	4
10. Student Responsibility	13	4
11. Success	7	4
12. Teachers	37	5
13. Value of English	32	5

### *Section III: Node-by-Node Analysis*

Node 1, “Attitude toward English,” includes comments that indicate how students perceive FYC. Simply put, “attitude” means how much students like or dislike FYC. Only node 1 has categories. The following table describes node 1.

**Table 21: “Attitude” Node’s Categories**

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Example Comments in Each Category</b>
Cat. 1—dislikes FYC	I hate English class.
Cat. 2—likes FYC	I enjoy English class.
Cat. 3—neutral/unsure	I’m indifferent about writing. Attitude affects performance, I guess.

Students’ comments that indicated they disliked English or held negative attitudes toward it I coded in the first category of the “attitude” node—dislikes English. Comments that indicated students liked English or held positive attitudes toward it I coded in the second category—likes English. Students’ comments that indicated indifference, uncertainty or ambivalence, I coded in the third category, neutral/unsure.

Of the data entered in NVivo, a total of 31 responses concerned attitude. The following table presents the number of students’ responses and their percentages:

**Table 22: “Attitude” Node’s Data Analysis**

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Number of Comments/Valid Percent</b>
Likes FYC	6 (19%)
Dislikes FYC	7 (23%0
Neutral (indifferent toward FYC/general comments about FYC)	18 (58%)

Comments varied widely. For example, Sierra said regarding FYC, “I hate it.” Chelsea said, “I like it.” Esther said, “I’m very indifferent about writing. If it’s about a topic I enjoy, I can write and can write pretty well, but if it’s something that is not interesting to me, I will not do well, and writing pretty much is not interesting to me. I’d rather talk and tell the story...than write it out.” Some students indicated an ambivalent or uncertain attitude about FYC. Dean said, “I guess having a positive attitude makes you value composition more because if you think you need, if you know that you need it, you will be more positive about learning it.” The students’ comments give some indication of the varying attitudes toward FYC, among students attending Methodist University; similarly, Beaufort (2007) describes students’ varying attitudes toward FYC classes. She writes that Tim, her research participant and an FYC student, liked his English 101 class because he felt it provided him with “freedom” and the opportunity to be creative since his instructor allowed him to write papers with few restrictions (p. 35). On the other hand, Beaufort (2007) also suggests some students dislike FYC because they see it as a compulsory course required for graduation and thus and end in itself. Other researchers indicate students dislike FYC for various reasons. Cox (2009), Goodman and Cirka (2009), and Martinez, Kock, and Cass (2011) contend many students have negative attitudes toward FYC because they frequently have

low writing self-efficacy and high anxiety. Tinberg and Naudeau (2010) suggest students' backgrounds (home life, race, language proficiency, previous experiences in English classes, and career status among other factors) affect students' attitudes toward FYC. For example, students with positive experiences in previous English classes, stable home lives, and supportive family members are more likely to have positive attitudes toward FYC than are students with negative previous experiences, unstable home lives, and unsupportive family members. Undoubtedly, many factors affect students' attitudes toward FYC. The varying attitudes described by students in my study, thus, are consistent with the varying attitudes described by the aforementioned composition researchers and support those researchers' findings.

Besides addressing FYC as a course, students also addressed their FYC instructors who appeared to be a major source of students' attitudes toward FYC. Indeed, students gave their instructors as much or more attention regarding FYC as they did FYC itself, noting that their instructors' teaching practices, attitudes toward the class and students, class management abilities, and personalities played significant roles in students' attitudes toward FYC and thus how well they succeed in it. In my study, the NVivo nodes that pertained specifically to instructors were node 2 "class atmosphere and course delivery," node 5 "fun and enjoyment," and node 12 "teachers"; together these three nodes represent a total of 64 references. Similarly, Martinez, Kock, and Cass (2011) found that students' perceptions of their instructors affected students' success in FYC classes. They further cite G.B. Crumbo (1999) who "found that as students' perceptions of their professor became more positive, their writing anxiety decreased and writing self-efficacy increased" (as cited

in Martinez, Kock, & Cass, 2011, p. 358). According to Martinez, Kock, and Cass (2011), decreased writing anxiety and increased writing self-efficacy result in improved FYC performance. Similarly, Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) write, “teachers play a significant role in a student writer’s development....[Thaiss and Zawacki’s] survey respondents overwhelmingly listed teachers as the major factor in learning the characteristics of writing in the disciplines” (pp. 121-122). According to the aforementioned researchers, instructors play an important role in students’ success in FYC, so it is little wonder students focused on instructors so much.

Comments in the “class atmosphere and course delivery” node (node 2) addressed how teachers managed classes. There were a total of 18 references from 5 sources. For example, regarding class atmosphere and course delivery, two students complained about one instructor’s teaching style:

Kathryn: It’s just like I got out of a class. All he does is go up to the board, walk around the class, and lectures. The class is huge and we have this huge stack of notes.

Briana: Yeah, you have no clue. It’s all in your head. That’s how he’s teaching. It’s all in your head. He doesn’t understand that we didn’t go to school for this. We don’t understand this.

Likewise, several students enrolled together in another English instructor’s class had a conversation about his class delivery and presentation:

Corin: He’s a really nice professor, and he’s been a bit lenient, so far. [laughing] Sometimes he talks really monotone.

Regina: Sometimes I don’t try as hard because...I don’t really know when things are due; he’ll say one due date and then somebody will ask him again, and he’ll give another due date.

In both conversations, students described how their instructors' course delivery affected their reception of FYC. Students preferred clear instructions and instruction that involved technology; they also preferred instructors refrain from delivering lectures. One student summed up students' feelings regarding instructors' class delivery:

Manuel: Or record your lectures and put them on YouTube, things like that. For example, I don't know what the teacher is talking about. They're standing at the front of the classroom, and I'm lost in the sauce, I'm staring at the lights because, you know, I can't comprehend, which goes back into style. For me, in order to learn and progress in that class, I have to go to YouTube, go to some educator I don't know, and find an appropriate style that suits me the way they're teaching, and that's pretty much been a good way for success for me, unfortunately, and I say unfortunately because I can't rely on my educator.

This student, like others participating in the study, indicated a dissatisfaction with course delivery and suggested increased use of technology to better accommodate different learning styles and increase student engagement. Briana makes an observation similar to Manuel's: "And everybody has their own learning styles. Your learning style could affect your perception. So if you are sitting there and you are a visual learner, but all they do up there is go up there and lecture, your perception of the class is going to be bad because you're like, 'I don't know what the heck they're talking about.'"

Similar to node 2, node 4 "fun and enjoyment," included students' comments on how instructors' making FYC pleasant affected their attitudes toward the class and their success in it. For example, Sierra and Macaila briefly discussed together how "good" their high school teachers were and how surprised they were to find college instructors "poor" because they made class less "fun and enjoyable" than did their high school instructors. Sierra said, "I loved my high school teachers. They were really cool....We watched movies and analyzed movies. We did a lot of really interesting stuff." Students further indicated

they were more likely to participate in and succeed in “fun” classes because they better caught and kept students’ attention than did boring ones. A conversation follows:

Esther: It also kind of depends on the teacher, too. If you have a strict teacher you’re not going to have fun, but if you have a teacher who is looser and jokes with you, then you’re going to have fun in that class regardless the subject.

Pierre-Ricardo: The more you like the professor, the more you like the class.

Kathryn: Exactly, and that works for all classes, not just composition.

The comment above concerning “a teacher who is looser and jokes with you” suggests how instructors may make class pleasant for students. While it may be tempting to accuse students of “missing the boat” by expecting their classes to be entertaining—a quality usually reserved for television, movies, sports, and the Internet—that students expect engaging classes is reasonable. The following conversation presents one student’s take on a “fun” activity:

Sierra: Yeah, the analyzing song lyrics we did in the other class, that was pretty good.

Dean: Analyzing song lyrics?

Manuel: Yeah, I did that in high school.

Sierra: By picking out the actual sentence in the song whether it’s a sentence, fragment, or whatever. It was a lot of fun. You’re learning but in a more fun way.

Manuel: And the sentence structure, how the song is composed.

Dean: We never did that; I wish we had done that.

Similar to the students cited above, hooks (1994) asserts she was:

most inspired by those teachers who . . . had the courage to transgress those boundaries that would confine each pupil to a rote, assembly-line approach to learning. Such teachers approach students with the will and desire to respond to our unique beings even if the situation does not allow the full emergence of a relationship based on mutual recognition. (p. 13)

hooks suggests instructors abandon traditional, lecture-style classes and instead foster more holistic classes that are attuned to students' needs, encourage student involvement, and foster student-instructor relationships. She further argues students today are more demanding of their instructors than students were decades ago; present-day students expect their educations to be liberatory and expect their instructors to connect the information students are learning to students' overall life experiences. Following is a conversation from my research that supports hooks' assertion:

Macaila: I think all teachers should do that, should make it fun, so you want to learn instead of dreading going to class every day.

Dean: Some teachers...don't think that making class fun is right; it's not right. If it's not just writing stuff down on paper and reading about it, you're not going to learn anything. You can make class interesting.

Data that I collected in my study supports hooks' assertions and reveals students' perceptions of their instructors and their instructors' teaching styles affect their attitudes toward FYC. Samantha described what happens when instructors fail to understand how students receive instruction:

Samantha: Teachers can go into a classroom and teach for hours. They can just go in and teach and not know a student's perspective and think, "Oh I'm doing a really good job," but from the student's point-of-view they could be a really bad teacher and they could be not helping the kids. The kids could not understand what is going on, but the teacher could think he's doing a really good job.

The perceived "disconnect" between instructors' expectations of class, students' expectations, how instructors conduct classes, and how students expect classes to be conducted is a concern for students. The "disconnect" also suggests the frame dispute described by Goffman (1974) wherein parties who approach the same discursive situation

with different frames likely will disagree with one another and/or experience difficulty interacting upon realizing their expectations do not match. A way to address the “disconnect” is to make frames match as I will discuss in my study’s conclusion.

Node 12 the “teachers” node included the most references of all nodes, 37 references from 5 sources, and largely concerned teachers’ attitudes and personalities. Indeed, instructors’ attitudes and personalities proved to be major concerns of students. Students complained instructors who were critical and unapproachable limited students’ FYC success. The following two conversations describe students’ perceptions of instructors’ attitudes and personalities:

#### Conversation 1

Jenny: I know the teacher affects my attitude. I really like my teacher this year, but I know in years past I don’t do as well if the teacher is not as helpful, but I feel that’s true for most classes, any subject.

Sean: Yeah and in my opinion, I do better with a positive teacher. If she’s just degrading you the whole time, I don’t see how you can improve.

Jenny: A teacher who’s approachable.

Sean: Yeah.

#### Conversation 2

Chelsea: I value it [FYC] because the teacher is really good, approachable; I feel like she knows what she’s talking about, and she can communicate easily to me in a way that I understand.

John: I do not value English 101 because it’s boring, and I do not like the way my teacher teaches.

Other students also commented on personality, particularly instructors’ approachability, as a factor directly affecting students’ success. Herrington and Curtis’ book *Persons in Process* (2000) present some of the concerns students make regarding approachability. Herrington

and Curtis (2000) write teachers who disregard students' humanity in favor of strict adherence to their discipline's standards can damage students "when teachers dislocate student writers from their own texts, demean the positions they take within them, or disregard the fundamental tenet of humane education" (p. 362). Conversely, Herrington and Curtis (2000) found in their study that teachers who "listened with respect and evinced understanding spurred" students "to learn more, to write more thoughtfully, and to digest critiques of their papers more acceptingly" (p. 362).

Although many comments were critical of instructors, not all comments were. Some students indicated instructors helped them enjoy class, learn, and succeed. The following conversations reveal what students thought teachers should do to help them succeed:

#### Conversation 1

John: Yeah, I'm not saying make it easier; I'm saying you could accommodate students better and maybe they wouldn't do badly in your class if you understood what they were going through.

Chelsea: I think, yeah, they could do that and how you're actually talking to students kind of has an effect on them. If you ask them a question and they answer the question wrong, don't kind of degrade them and make them feel bad for guessing. At least they took a chance and guessed. It may not have been right, but they took a chance, so don't make them feel bad for the answer they gave you.

#### Conversation 2

Dean: See my teacher incorporates a lot of humor. She'll ask a question and then you'll give your answer, and then if you're wrong she'll tell you, but she'll make it funny at least.

Macaila: My teacher is really strict; even if we're doing a paper on our opinions, she will mark grammar and stuff.

Dean: If it's an official paper, she'll do that, but not otherwise.

Manuel: My teacher grades opinions. I get negative remarks for my opinions.

Macaila: On your opinions?

Dean: For your opinions? That's terrible. Mine doesn't do that.

In both of these conversations, students suggest instructors “lighten” the “classroom mood” by being empathetic, incorporating humor, and helping students save face—as Dean mentioned, “if you're wrong she'll tell you, but she'll make it funny at least”—when they make mistakes rather than degrading students, being inflexible, and criticizing students' opinions. Indeed, students had much to say about their instructors. I was surprised to find instructors were such a prominent topic in this study given that I planned to focus on what students thought about FYC *as a course*. I found that instructors meant as much or more to students as FYC itself does and furthermore, students' attitudes toward, valuation of, and success in FYC relate largely to their instructors as also suggested by Burford (2005), Durst (1999), Herrington and Curtis (2000), and hooks (1994).

Students also made many comments regarding FYC's value as an introductory writing course useful for college classes, FYC's value as a preparatory course for careers, FYC's value as a course in Standard American English, and FYC's potential uselessness as a redundant course. Node 6 “introductory writing” included 23 references from 5 sources. Node 7 “jobs” contained 16 references from 5 sources, and node 8 “look educated” contained 11 references from 4 sources. Node 9, “redundant or refresher course,” included 9 comments from 4 sources and suggested FYC is a course that either 1) reviews concepts already covered in high school English classes or 2) reviews concepts covered in other college courses, for instance speech communication.

Regarding careers, comments in node 7 “jobs” pertained largely to FYC's role in helping students learn proper English and grammar because, as Danielle put it, FYC “plays a

large part in helping you get a job and hold a job.” Students frequently argued, though, that the type of job determines how much writing preparation students need. Briana commented, “It plays a pretty big role in some careers while not in others. Everyone has to write; everyone has to do some form of writing. I mean, in my career mine is going to be shorthand mostly . . . It just depends.” Another conversation echoes the earlier comment:

John: I think it also depends on what your career is, though. If you are a doctor, you’re not writing too many papers, more like prescription signing and that’s it. If you’re a nurse, you use a lot of short hand, so it really depends on what your career is how much impact it is going to have on you.

Chelsea: And it helps you communicate efficiently because you can’t write what you’re not going to communicate; even if you’re a nurse or a doctor you’ve got to communicate well by writing well.

Sydney: Yeah.

Another conversation also supports the notion that the type of career influences students’ perceptions of how valuable FYC is:

Claire: Since I want to be an elementary school teacher, I think it’s good for me to take an English class or English 101 because you have to teach little kids English, and if I ever teach higher grades, it’s good for me to know how to teach students grammar; it’s important.

Regina. Well, since I’m a social work major, I’m obviously going to have to be filling out paperwork, and it’s going to be very unprofessional if I don’t know how to write a grammatically correct sentence.

Samantha: That’s true.

Other students likewise asserted their jobs would require writing. Besides the prospective elementary school teacher and social worker in the above conversation, there were a prospective forensic lab technician (Sydney), a prospective public relations representative in the athletic industry (Amber), and a prospective general manager of a golf course (Danielle). Reggie, the music major who also incidentally plans to get his doctorate, stated,

“I value English 101 to an extent because I know in some way, shape or form I’m going to have to write, but I don’t put English 101 on a pedestal as one of my top priorities just because of the field I’m going into, which is music, so it wouldn’t really be an extreme priority.” While Reggie realizes FYC’s importance in preparing him to write generally, he finds FYC of only limited importance to his career since he plans to be a musician and does not anticipate writing much beyond his graduate work.

It appears from the comments I collected that how much students *thought* their careers would require them to write affected how much they valued FYC and was thus a source of their valuation of the course. Students who anticipated their careers would not require much writing valued FYC less than students who anticipated their careers would require writing. What is troubling is how much students often misunderstand jobs’ writing requirements. John commented, “I think it also depends on what your career is, though. If you are a doctor, you’re not writing too many papers, more like prescription signing, and that’s it. If you’re a nurse, you use a lot of short hand, so it really depends on what your career is how much impact it is going to have on you.” Undoubtedly, doctors and nurses write more than many students realize. Further, many individuals are likely to hold doctors and nurses to high standards of writing quality because people widely regard them as well-educated individuals who should be literate, capable writers. Similarly, although Reggie doubts he will write much as a music major, he will undoubtedly write in graduate school and must write well. As I was reviewing the focus groups’ data, I recalled my survey data and realized the focus groups’ findings are consistent with the survey’s findings; in other words, students generally do not find FYC useful in preparing them for majors and careers.

While not all students thought FYC would impact them equally given differences in careers, some students found FYC useful for *getting* jobs, at least, as evidenced by 11 comments from 4 sources in node 8, “look educated.” Students mentioned the importance of writing good resumes and sounding intelligent during interviews; students’ concern was that potential employers might judge students’ worth based on the quality of their resumes and cover letters, their command of SAE. One conversation describes a student who failed to use proper grammar when he applied for a job:

Esther: Why do you value or not value English 101? Well, it’s like I said; it teaches you to speak English properly. When people abbreviate and mix up the words and use adverbs in adjectives’ spots, it doesn’t fit. English teaches you to make everything fit, and sounding eloquent helps you get a job further on down the line and all that stuff, so that’s why I value it. It will get you a job.

Pierre-Ricardo: I have a friend who just sent a letter for a job, but they denied him; they didn’t give him the job because of the way he worded the letter. It was like an instant message.

Esther: Like a text message.

Pierre-Ricardo: Yes. A lot of punctuation errors a lot of words like we use on the Internet.

Esther: Oh no.

Pierre-Ricardo: He was really very competent, but they said no.

In the above conversation, the students note the importance of writing properly and cite a student who failed to get a job despite his actual ability because he failed to write a quality cover letter. The above conversation and the many other comments students made indicate that students think FYC has real-world effects on them, especially when they look for jobs, but how well they understand these real-world implications is questionable as evidenced by the fact that many students doubted their careers would require writing.

Several comments further represent the “look educated” node. Macaila commented, “It is important so you can write a paper properly and look educated.” Esther said, “We do need to have it because people are so illiterate nowadays. They’re always text-talking in real life, and that’s not cool. It annoys me so much. They need to learn proper English.” The comments in the “look educated” node focused on FYC’s role in preparing students to write well and thus appear intelligent and well educated.

Node 6, “introductory writing” included 23 references from 5 sources while node 9, “redundant or refresher course” presented 9 references from 4 sources. In terms of FYC as an introductory writing course, some students found FYC valuable; conversely, some students found FYC redundant. FYC’s perceived role—either as an introductory writing class or as a refresher or redundant course—appeared to affect students’ valuation of FYC. For instance, Macaila commented, “I think it’s the basis for . . . all your other classes that you’ll have to take.” Esther indicated, “I feel it doesn’t really play a role; a lot of this is stuff you should already know.” Corin felt positively about FYC and commented, “This class sets the tone for other classes. If you do poorly in English 101 then how are you going to do in 102 or 207 if you have to take those classes? I just like the class, and I think it’s a good refresher for me, not having taken a composition class in the past.” The comments in nodes 6 and 9 indicate students’ valuation of FYC potentially was: 1) positive, because FYC prepared students for writing in other classes and in their careers; 2) positive, because FYC helped students recall writing concepts they may have forgotten; 3) negative, because FYC was redundant and therefore a waste of time; or 4) negative, because FYC was inapplicable to other classes and careers.

While many students addressed *instructors'* roles in students' FYC success as indicated in nodes 2 (class atmosphere and course delivery), 4 (fun and enjoyment), and 12 (teachers), some students addressed their *own* roles in their success. Node 10, "student responsibility," represented 13 references from 4 sources. Comments included in the "student responsibility" node indicated students' acknowledgment of their agency in failing or passing FYC courses. For example, Briana commented, "Yeah, it is students' job to learn because we pay all this money to be here; you might want to apply yourself a little bit." Kathryn, however, followed up with the comment, "It is the students' job to apply themselves, but it's the teachers' job to take interest in their education; it's what they're getting paid for." Danielle focused on students' agency and indicated:

I think it will depend on the student whether or not it's going to benefit them because there are some students who are going to come through here and just feel like they don't care. It doesn't matter what the teacher does, they don't care; they're stubborn. They're not going to like the class. They just won't benefit from it, but the students who want to be here, who want to learn will better themselves in the learning, and they're going to benefit because the instructors are going to help them and then the students are going to want to take that and it's just going to bounce off each other.

A conversation two students held also suggested their acknowledgement of students' responsibility in succeeding in FYC:

Corin: If you value the course, you're going to be more inclined to turn assignments in and more inclined to ask questions. You're going to have a lot to learn if you don't think the course is important. If you don't think the course is important, you aren't going to try to do anything.

Samantha: If it's important to you, you're going to participate more in class to understand the material.

These comments place the burden of responsibility on students for FYC success.

Interestingly, the "student responsibility" node includes only about half as many comments

as the “teachers” node. Students came to focus on instructors on their own; I asked only two questions regarding instructors, but in answering other questions on different aspects of FYC, students invariably brought up instructors. There are several possibilities why. It may be that students felt they had less responsibility for their education than they thought instructors did since students are novices and instructors are experts. Durst (1999) makes similar observations. From my research, it appears students may think it is not their “job” to invest in their education, especially given many students are accustomed to passively “absorbing” information rather than actively engaging with it. On the other hand, students may feel more invested in their education if they have more opportunities to control it. For example, the inordinate number of comments directed at instructors may just be an instance of students “othering” instructors—in a reversal of what Helmers (1994) describes instructors sometimes do to students—and blaming instructors for students’ difficulties in FYC. Focusing blame/responsibility on instructors may be a “cooling out” technique, described by Cox (2009) through which students place the blame for their FYC troubles on instructors, locating their LOC externally, rather than internally. Whatever the reason—and there is no sure way of knowing from this study—students made twice as many comments on instructors as on themselves, suggesting students directed more attention to instructors’ responsibility in students’ FYC success than students’ responsibility in their success.

Node 13 “value of English,” presented 32 references from 5 sources. Students provided many reasons for valuing FYC. Some cited its worth as a review course; others indicated its helpfulness for second-language learners. For instance, Kathryn said, “I think it is moderately valuable because a lot of this is review.” Pierre-Ricardo, an international

student whose first language is French commented, “As an international my first language is French. I speak Spanish too, but I have difficulty to speak English sometimes, but I think English 101 like will help me to be better in writing and speaking.” Indeed, L2 learners’ attitudes toward and valuation of FYC—outside this study’s scope—merit future research. Other students indicated FYC helps them with their writing in other classes, as Danielle commented, “I feel like it prepares you well for other English classes you’re going to have to take in the future, and it’s a good refresher from high school on how to properly write and how to correct grammatical errors.” Some students indicated that the class helps “standardize” concepts since some students during high school might have learned writing concepts that other students did not. For example, Kathryn said:

Some people may not have had this course before. Like many high schools are different. They don’t have the same structures of learning; it could be new. It could be a refresher. For some people it may be new, for others a refresher. Sometimes a refresher is what you need because you don’t remember everything, so the course does have value.

As already mentioned, some students indicated that FYC prepares students for their careers. Others valued FYC because it helps them develop their creativity. Reggie commented:

When you approach ideas or are presenting ideas, you have to be creative in the way you present those ideas; you have to be creative in your approach, creative in your ideas, period, and I believe English 101 allows you to use creative juices when you are writing.

Many students, like Danielle, made comments like, “you have to take FYC and pass it to graduate,” thus indicating their recognition of the class as a general education requirement with gate-keeping functions, much as Cox (2009) describes in her study. Students who

focused on FYC's required status appeared to value FYC only because it was required for graduation—not for any intrinsic worth it might offer.

#### *Section IV: Conclusion of the Focus Groups Data Analysis*

The data gathered from the focus groups does not clearly suggest whether attitudes share a stronger relationship to students' FYC success than valuation does. Despite that fact, the focus groups' data provides more depth than the survey data does regarding what students think about FYC and why. Indeed, the focus groups' data indicates various sources—most notably instructors, FYC's perceived role, and students' perceived role in their own education—appear to affect students' attitudes toward and valuation of FYC.

First, *FYC instructors* appear to influence students' attitudes toward FYC a great deal. The data support findings made by G.B. Crumbo (1999), Herrington and Curtis (2000), and Martinez, Kock, and Cass (2011) who make similar claims regarding instructors. My data suggests approachable, empathetic instructors who make classes engaging and who present course material as relevant to students' lives and goals elicit positive attitudes toward FYC. My data further suggests students who find classes pleasant, engaging and “fun” are more likely to apply themselves. Next, *FYC's role* (per students' perceptions of it) appeared to affect students' attitudes toward and valuation of FYC. Students who think FYC has real-world effects on them—especially when they write in other classes, look for jobs, and/or prepare for careers—value FYC more than students who see the course strictly as a gate-keeping course, a graduation requirement, or a redundant course. Further, students' understanding of their *own role* in their education affects their FYC success. In this study, students made twice as many comments regarding *instructors' roles* in students' FYC success as students made regarding their *own roles* in their FYC success. Possibly students

think instructors play a greater role in students' success than students think they themselves do, or students could be locating their LOC externally with instructors.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

My conclusion addresses four topics in four sections. Section I addresses contributions my study makes to the field of composition research. My study makes the finding that attitude, not valuation, is more closely related to students' FYC success and fills gaps in FYC research. Next, Section II describes what approaches instructors can take (per my study's findings) to increase students' FYC success. Section III describes my study's limitations, and Section IV suggests areas of future research.

### *Section I: How the Study Advances FYC Research*

The research question and the methods that I used have potentially advanced the field of composition research in several ways. First, I found that students' attitudes toward FYC, not their valuation of it, affect their FYC success. Knowing that means instructors can focus on improving students' attitudes to increase students' FYC success. Attitudes do count, merit consideration, and can be changed.

Second, my study fills a gap in the research inasmuch as it sought to discover a link between students' FYC success and their attitudes toward or valuation of composition courses. None of the studies that I read sought to find such a link. My study involved quantitative and qualitative methods in an attempt to discover a link between attitudes and success or valuation and success. The survey data indicated a statistically significant relationship between students' attitudes and their FYC success and shed some insight into what sources affect students' attitudes. The focus group data provided detailed information regarding sources of attitudes and suggested how students view their instructors, the course, themselves as FYC students, and the role of writing in college and their future careers.

Third, my study also provided students with another opportunity to voice themselves regarding FYC and thus inform FYC instructors of students' thoughts on the course. While my colleagues and I sometimes fault students for failing FYC, the students appeared often to fault instructors. On the other hand, students also often credited their instructors for students' FYC success, especially when students perceived instructors as "good teachers" who were pleasant, approachable, enthusiastic, and concerned. Students also often linked their own enthusiasm and desire to perform well to enthusiastic instructors who motivated students to succeed.

### *Section II: Approaches to Improve Students' FYC Success*

Following are three approaches instructors might use to improve students' FYC success. I base each approach on my study findings: 1) that attitudes affect students' FYC success; 2) that self-efficacy and LOC affect students' FYC success, and 3) that instructors affect students' FYC success.

#### *Approach I—Address Students' Attitudes and Thinking Dispositions*

That attitude is the variable affecting students' success in FYC is significant inasmuch as, according to Kamradt and Kamradt (1999), instructors can change students' attitudes to increase students' success. Kamradt and Kamradt (1999) write, "People can and do change their attitudes. They do it frequently and they do it willing" (p. 579) despite people's tendency, often, to resist changing their attitudes. Kamradt and Kamradt (1999) use a "rubberband analogy" to describe attitudes. They argue cognitive, affective, and psycho-motor learning domains comprise any given attitude and write, "most of the time, in most situations . . . the affective signal, the cognitive concept, and the chosen behavior [psychomotor response] all share a tight and durable fit with each other" (Kamradt &

Kamradt, 1999, p.573). In other words, there is relatively little tension on the three domains. As long as attitudes function well to address a given situation, there is no need to change them. However, when an attitude fails to serve an individual well, dissonance occurs, and the attitude must change. To change an undesirable attitude into a desirable one, Kamradt and Kamradt (1999) assert, instructors must create tension to a small degree (resulting in attitudinal dissonance) to prompt changes in students' attitudes. They write, as instructors, we:

must alternately nudge each component of an existing attitude a small amount in the direction of the matching component in the target attitude. This certainly causes dissonance and motivates learners to protect their existing attitudes, but if we quickly and effectively shift our instructional focus from one component to the next, nudging each an identical direction until all three have been addressed, the dissonance can be promptly relaxed [and a new attitude adopted]. (Kamradt & Kamradt, 1999, p. 580)

Repeating these steps can result in instructors shifting students' attitudes away from the undesirable attitude toward a target one.

Related to Kamradt and Kamradt's (1999) attitudinal theory is thinking dispositions. Indeed, thinking dispositions and attitudes arguably are related. Ennis (2011) defines thinking dispositions as "reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do" (p. 1). Ennis' (2011) focus on "thinking" and "what to believe or do," along with Perkins et al's (2000) claim that dispositions "concern not only what people can do, but how they tend to invest their capabilities," (pp. 270-271; 288) suggests the cognitive and psychomotor components described by Kamradt and Kamradt (1999) concerning attitudes. Put simply, thinking dispositions involve individuals, their learning environments, and learning processes; they are "not knowledge, skills, or abilities—they are qualities that determine how learners use and adapt their knowledge" (Driscoll &

Wells, 2012, "Beyond", par. 2). Further, Perkins et al (2000) claim, "dispositions are learnable, much as attitudes of various kinds seem to be acquired from family, ethnic, and classroom cultures" (p. 288). If thinking dispositions are "learnable" as Perkins et al (2000) suggest, and if instructors can change students' attitudes, as Kamradt and Kamradt (1999) suggest, it stands to reason that one approach to increasing students' FYC success is to encourage students' adoption of positive attitudes toward FYC and adoption of helpful thinking dispositions.

A scenario seems in order to explain how Kamradt and Kamradt's (1999) attitudinal instruction and Driscoll and Well's (2012) and Perkins et al's (2000) improved thinking dispositions would work. One might consider this situation: An instructor is teaching an FYC class. The instructor notices that some of her students exhibit a poor attitude, apathy, toward the course. Three students are texting on cellular phones, two are chatting, a few are doodling in their notebooks, and one is even sleeping in class. These behaviors may indicate students do not care (affective domain) about their FYC class. Arguably, these students may think (cognitive domain) other activities (psychomotor domain) are more important than their class and thus behave (psychomotor domain) accordingly. Further, these students' thinking dispositions arguably are poor. The students likely are not engaged in "reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do" (Ennis, 1986, p. 12), nor are they concerned with "how they tend to invest their capabilities" (Perkins et al, 2000, pp. 270-271). The instructor, frustrated with and concerned by the students' apathy, decides to change students' attitudes and to encourage helpful thinking dispositions.

Before the students' poor attitudes and undesirable thinking dispositions can change, the instructor must identify a target attitude, in this case concern for the class, and must encourage positive thinking about the class and thus useful behavior. Once the target attitude is established, the instructor must nudge the attitudinal domains one at a time in the target direction. Kamradt and Kamradt (1999) explain that typically they begin changing individuals' attitudes by having them engage in a few preliminary exercises that help individuals think about their current attitudes.

Regarding the scenario, as a preliminary exercise, the instructor may have students free-write during class about their feelings toward FYC. Such an activity calls to mind literacy narratives, and certainly, such an exercise may well be merited in any FYC class at its outset to encourage students to examine their attitudes toward FYC. For example, the instructor may ask students, as an informal in-class writing assignment, to write a paragraph or two in which the students describe their attitudes toward FYC, explain why they think they have the attitudes they do, and describe what steps they think they and the instructor can take to improve their attitudes. Such an assignment will 1) raise students' consciousness of their feelings about FYC, 2) encourage them to examine why they feel the way they do, and 3) encourage them to identify ways they and the instructor can improve students' attitudes toward and success in FYC. Ideally, the instructor would collect these narratives for review but not for grading. This way, the instructor can learn about students and consider their suggestions for increased student FYC success without students feeling pressured to perform well on the assignment for a grade. Such an assignment would further likely foster positive relationships between students and the instructor because the assignment suggests the instructor cares about students and because it allows students a

chance to guide the class's direction (thus moving the LOC internally—students have some say in the class) without increasing students' writing anxiety (since the assignment is ungraded). After students complete the assignment and before the instructor collects it, the instructor can “survey” students by show of hands to determine who likes FYC, who dislikes it, and who is neutral or undecided toward it. Upon making these determinations, the instructor might group together students with similar attitudes toward the class and then ask students who are comfortable doing so to share comments aloud from their narratives. The comments could be any the students choose. For instance, students may describe how they feel about FYC, what they think they could do to improve their success, and what they think their instructor could do to improve success. Sharing comments aloud will help get the issue of FYC on the table. Students and the instructor can engage in dialogue; during the conversation, the instructor can clarify her expectations of FYC students, explain why the class matters, and describe what she intends to do in the class (a way of making “frames” match). Students can likewise ask questions and air any concerns they might have. At this point, the instructor would use positive reinforcement to encourage positive attitudes and would question students whether they think their current attitudes are the “best” they can have. According to Kamradt and Kamradt (1999), upon being questioned about attitudes, individuals will often admit their attitudes can improve; thus, it is important that instructors ask students whether they think their attitudes are really the best they can have just to get them thinking about potential improvement of their attitudes. Instructors should reassure anxious students and at all times during the exercise should refrain from criticizing students. If students answer their attitudes are not the best,

the instructor might ask students where they think their attitudes should be and how they think they can change them.

After having students recognize their present attitudes and identify preferable ones, the instructor will work to change students' attitudes, improve thinking dispositions, and improve behavior. The instructor's focus likely will be on those students who most strongly dislike FYC given that they are the ones who most need to change their attitudes and improve their thinking dispositions. Kamradt and Kamradt (1999) write, to change an attitude, one must begin with

Step 1 . . . activation of the existing attitude. The most reliable activation technique is to ask the learner to perform some action (psychomotor) that is slightly inconsistent with their existing attitude and in the direction of being consistent with the target attitude. In other words, the requested action should be consistent with a carefully selected intermediate attitude. (The intervention design, of course, must ensure that the action is feasible.) This request stimulates mild dissonance and prepares the learner to mount a mild defense. In the activated state, all components of the existing attitude become accessible to both learner and teacher by way of the key component-specific questions. (p. 587)

In the scenario described, the instructor may "activate" the attitude by having students describe to each other what they would rather be doing during FYC class and why (texting, chatting, doodling, or sleeping) and then describe what they *should* be doing and why (taking notes, listening to the instructor, participating in class activities). Then, to move students toward the target attitude, according to step 1, instructors should ask students to *do* something related to the desired attitude. Doing something related to the desired attitude also suggests the adoption of helpful thinking dispositions. The instructor might challenge students to stop doing what they are doing, and start doing what they themselves recognize they should do, like participating in a group activity instead of texting during class. With that said, instructors may ask students to clear their desks, put their phones in

their pockets, or in their book bags, and begin working on class material in groups. While such a sudden change in tempo may disrupt the class temporarily, it will also redirect students' attention to the task at hand while raising awareness of student's current attitudes and behavior. Indeed, students may realize upon doing what they should be doing (participating in class) instead of what they have been doing (texting, chatting, or sleeping) that their thinking regarding FYC class (disregarding it) typically disposes them to weaker FYC performance than they might otherwise experience. They ideally will realize that they should engage in "reasonable reflective thinking" (Ennis, 1986, p. 12) about their own actions in class and how those actions may detract from or contribute to their FYC success.

While it is possible to address entire classes this way, it is unlikely that instructors will need to change every student's attitude and thinking disposition (given not all students will have poor attitudes toward and poor thinking dispositions about FYC). Instead, it is more likely instructors will determine (per the aforementioned show of hands) which students have the strongest attitudes and behaviors against FYC and will, over time, gently change those students' attitudes, dispositions, and resulting behaviors per step 2 described next.

Step 2, according to Kamradt and Kamradt (1999) is "the two-sided encounter. If the objection is component or need specific, respond to it with feedback that is carefully focused on the same component or need, using appropriate instructional techniques" (p. 587). The clause "if the objection is component or need specific" refers to the three components of an attitude (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor) and to individuals' perceived needs, for instance, protection of self (Kamradt & Kamradt, 1999, p. 587). Kamradt and Kamradt (1999) argue that any objection an individual raises should be

countered with feedback that is the same as the type of objection. For example, if a student objects that he thinks (cognitive) FYC is useless, the instructor can counter with the feedback that she knows (cognitive) every other college class will require the student to use FYC skills to write in those classes.

Instructors would carry out Step 2 with students who particularly resist adopting a new attitude. For example, one student may vehemently object to writing. He may say, “writing doesn’t make sense (cognitive objection). I cannot write (psychomotor objection). I don’t want to write because doing so makes me feel frightened, or embarrassed, or angry, etc. (affective objection).” According to Kamradt and Kamradt (1999), the instructor should respond accordingly to each type of objection, with rationale per the cognitive objection, demonstration or action for the psychomotor objection, and “operant conditioning techniques to demonstrate the aversive feeling can readily be avoided and that positive feelings can readily be achieved” for the affective objection (Kamradt & Kamradt, 1999, pp. 587-588). The aforementioned student who objects to writing papers because he thinks he cannot write (cognitive response) should be encouraged to change his behavior. The instructor might challenge him to “write a paragraph” (psychomotor activity) because she thinks (cognitive response) he can write (psychomotor activity) and he should then read aloud (psychomotor activity) his paragraph to her after class or in her office. In mildly pressuring the student to adopt attitudes and behaviors contrary to those he is accustomed to having, she can prove that he is smart enough (cognitive ability) to write (psychomotor ability) a paragraph without any harm (affective response) to him and that he need not fear (affective response) writing.

To further encourage the adoption of a positive attitude toward and positive thinking dispositions regarding writing, the instructor should review the students' paragraph with him immediately following class or sometime during her office hours when she can praise the student for his writing's positive qualities and offer recommendations for how he might improve his writing. Again, the instructor should refrain from criticizing the student and should instead remain positive. Once the student realizes his writing has some positive qualities and can easily be further improved with some carefully thought-out revisions, he should gradually increase his writing self-efficacy. Additionally, he should likely adopt thinking dispositions that dispose him to increased FYC success. The instructor may have to repeat these sessions of reviewing the student's work with him several times over, encouraging the adoption of positive attitudes, and encouraging the adoption of helpful thinking dispositions before the student fully changes his attitudes and thinking dispositions. Over time, as the student sees improvement in his FYC success, he should adopt a more positive attitude toward FYC, abandon his former, dysfunctional one, and adopt positive thinking dispositions toward and thus beneficial behaviors in FYC class.

Ideally, such an intervention with a student should minimize embarrassment and should demonstrate the instructor's genuine concern for the student. At no time should the instructor be critical, demeaning, or demoralizing in her attempts at intervention. Such behavior on the instructor's part will likely further galvanize the student's dysfunctional attitude and counterproductive thinking dispositions since he will likely perceive her efforts as bullying him or singling him out.

Admittedly, I have simplified the above scenarios for demonstrative purposes. Most of the time, instructors will have to address students on a case-by-case basis and usually

only the ones who demonstrate the worst attitudes and poorest thinking dispositions. Possibly instructors might encourage the adoption of positive attitudes among students who appear most willing to change their attitudes, despite whether or not their attitudes are particularly bad. In other words, while attitudinal change is possible, it is more likely among some students than among others (for example, those who are most likely to accept change) and is not necessary for everyone (for instance, students who already have positive attitudes and constructive thinking dispositions). Instructors might identify students “in need” of attitudinal change and improved thinking dispositions through the writing and group discussion exercises already described during which students self-identify as needing improved attitudes and thinking dispositions. In some cases, a student’s attitude and disposition may be so poor that the instructor recognizes the student as needing intervention, for instance, if the student text-messages during class, chats, falls asleep, and otherwise ignores instruction. One must bear in mind that the suggestion instructors change students’ attitudes and address thinking dispositions to improve FYC success is not a global “fix” that will work all the time, for every class, and everyone. Kamradt and Kamradt (1999) admit that, while they frequently have success changing individuals’ attitudes, there are obstacles to learning. For instance they write, “most of us are quite sure that our attitudes are already as ‘good’ as they can be” (arguably a thinking disposition) and current instructional techniques frequently offer “very little guidance for teaching attitudes as fundamental entities” (p. 577). I would further add that sometimes instructors might not have the resources or energy necessary to change students’ attitudes, particularly in difficult cases where a student may be especially resistant to change. Thus, instructors should use Kamradt and Kamradt’s (1999) suggestions on a case-by-case basis

as instructors deem fit. Changing students' attitudes and thinking dispositions is not a cure all, but is one approach to improve students' FYC success.

*Approach 2—Address Students' Self-efficacy and LOC*

I define self-efficacy and writing self-efficacy as the power to produce certain effects or results; the confidence in one's own ability to produce certain effects or results; and one's confidence in one's own writing ability. Jones (2008) asserts students with high writing self-efficacy typically "plan, organize, and revise writing, generate topics and introductions, and manage their own behavior" better than do students with low writing self-efficacy (p. 215). Further, Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2001) assert students with high writing self-efficacy are engaged and learn to write well while students with low writing self-efficacy are typically unengaged and have difficulty learning to write. In other words, some researchers suggest successful FYC students have high writing self-efficacy and respond positively to writing instruction while unsuccessful FYC students have low writing self-efficacy and often resist writing instruction. According to Jones (2008) students with low self-efficacy often experience a cycle of failure, fear, and doubt. Until their self-efficacy improves, they are not likely to succeed in FYC.

Addressing self-efficacy and LOC probably is one of the easier approaches to improving students' FYC success. Instructors need simply to encourage students and help them notice improvement in their writing to address self-efficacy; instructors need only help students feel they have a say in the class's direction and influence in their own educations to move students' LOC internally. Again, a scenario is in order for further explanation.

An instructor notices that one of his students, Sara, appears to have low writing self-efficacy. The instructor has noticed that each time he asks Sara a question in class and each time he has conversations with Sara regarding writing she makes comments like, "I don't know the answer; I never do," and "I'm not smart enough to write well; writing's not my thing." Further, the instructor may realize that Sara has persisted in making such comments over the first week or two of class and seems unlikely to change her thinking regarding her writing ability. The instructor decides intervention is in order.

Sara likely has low writing self-efficacy as evidenced by her comments. To improve her writing self-efficacy, the instructor must help her identify positive qualities of her writing, encourage her that improvement is possible, and reassure her that she is capable of writing well if she applies herself and seeks support from the instructor and writing center staff. In the case of an individual like Sara, the student needs encouragement, by meeting regularly with her instructor to review her writing, to discuss the progress she is making, and to determine steps for improving her writing. Indeed, Martinez, Kock, and Cass (2011) assert writing self-efficacy beliefs contribute to "students' level of motivation, aspiration, and academic achievement" and further indicate that "the higher a student's self-efficacy, the more effort is exerted, which in turn contributes to higher performance regardless of actual ability" (p. 352). According to Martinez, Kock, and Cass (2011) students need not necessarily have a lot of actual ability; rather, they need to exert effort. The harder they try and apply themselves (per their belief that they can succeed) the more likely they are to succeed, even if they have to get more assistance from the instructor and writing center staff than do other students.

Locus of Control (LOC) is another attitudinal source of students' FYC success. Where students locate their LOC—externally or internally—affects how they view themselves, the class, and their instructors. With that said, instructors should bear in mind students' LOC when teaching FYC. A scenario is in order to describe LOC. One might imagine many of the students enrolled in a section of FYC appear to locate their LOC externally. Frequently, they complain “the course is just stupid,” and “the instructor is too hard and difficult to follow.” If students locate the LOC externally to the course or instructor and blame either one for the students' FYC failures, the instructor might change his teaching strategies to give students more control in the class and more influence in their own education (Jones, 2008; Cox, 2009). Instead of lecturing regularly, the instructor may assign students presentation assignments where they help teach the class. Students may engage in regular peer review of their writing to get feedback from sources other than the instructor alone. Further, the instructor may ask students to help set assignment deadlines (within reason) and even help choose class readings. All of these actions on the instructor's part *involve* students in the class's delivery. Students who help design and teach the class should be less likely to see themselves as helpless victims of the course and the instructor than students who have no input in the class's design and delivery.

In some cases, students locate the LOC internally to themselves. A student, Steve, may think, “I'm just not smart enough to write well.” Internal LOC in which the student considers himself incapable of writing likely would be best addressed using the earlier techniques suggested regarding improving writing self-efficacy. Again, the instructor should take a lot of time with Steve to regularly review his writing, praise his improvements, gently offer correction, and encourage him to continue applying himself.

Improving low writing self-efficacy should also result in improved internal LOC since the student has improved self-confidence in his writing ability and an improved sense of agency. Making external LOC internal potentially is easier than improving internal LOC because moving external LOC simply requires involving students more in the class whereas improving poor internal LOC requires more one-on-one work between the instructor and student, such as I describe in Steve's case.

*Approach 3—Address Sources of Students' Attitudes*

In some cases, it may make more sense to address the sources of students' attitudes to improve students' attitudes and FYC success than to address the students' attitudes directly as Kamradt and Kamradt (1999) suggest or to address self-efficacy and LOC. My data indicates students cited many sources that affect their attitudes toward FYC, but the greatest one was instructors. Some sources I consider "acute," that is to say related to immediate environmental factors outside students' control, such as illness, the previous night's rest, traffic congestion on the way to school, and test anxiety. However, other sources students mentioned appear more "chronic"—that is to say related to students, instructors, and the course itself and unlikely to change on a daily basis—for example, the course's required status, its subject matter, and course instructors, particularly their personalities and course delivery.

My suspicion is that students who dislike FYC due to their instructors may blame instructors for students' weak performance (and in some cases perhaps rightly so), rather than attributing their poor performance to themselves; thus students locate the LOC outside themselves. If this is the case, students are likely engaging in a "cooling out" action

meant to protect the students' sense of self while compensating for an otherwise perceived failure on students' parts (Cox, 2009; Goffman, 1974).

Many composition instructors probably have anecdotal evidence similar to my study's data, where weak students blame "the hard teacher" for the students' difficulty writing. Given that my research suggests instructors are arguably the most influential source of students' attitudes toward FYC, instructors might consider adopting teaching methods that will account for the instructors' effect on students' attitudes toward FYC. Further, arguably, changing oneself as an instructor is likely easier than changing the attitudes and thinking dispositions of potentially resistant students. Following are some suggestions:

1. Make sure "frames" match.
2. Be approachable, empathetic, and non-critical of students (understand students' needs)
3. Improve course delivery and assignments to improve students' FYC success

In the following paragraphs, I will address each suggestion in more detail.

1. Make sure "frames" match.

Ideally, instructors should ensure their and students' FYC "frames" match. Goffman (1974) calls people's understandings of discursive events "frames" and indicates for successful communication to occur these frames must match. In this case, instructors and students must see FYC the same way. If instructors think that FYC is valuable and necessary for students' FYC success, students must see it as valuable and necessary. Indeed, valuation likely is a source of students' attitudes toward FYC as Jones (2008) suggests when he asserts valuation affects writing self-efficacy and locus of control (LOC), two factors that

other researchers (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001; Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007) claim affect FYC success. For example, students who see FYC as a waste of time are likely not going to agree with their instructors that FYC is an important course; they may even disregard FYC instructors' earnestness as unfounded devotion to what students may consider an obscure and useless discipline. Durst (1999) supports the notion that students often are "at odds with the views and approaches of the teacher" (p. 2), and Henderson (1992) explains that many students question why they have to take FYC classes.

So, what might one do? Some researchers suggest getting instructors and students "on the same page at the course's outset," when the term begins, in other words, making "frames" match (Cox, 2009; Simard, 1985). Simard (1985) asserts instructors and students should have a conversation about FYC when the term begins, so students and instructors know what the class is about and why. To learn more about students' views of FYC, instructors need only ask them. One might have students take a survey at the class's outset to learn students' expectations of FYC and ask them what they think about the class. As one student in my study commented on the survey, "I feel it is a good idea to give a survey like this before students come into this class, so the professor knows what to expect." While gathering such information once the class has already started may be difficult—since most instructors have already arranged and scheduled class activities—doing so may be worthwhile for several reasons: 1) the course can likely be adjusted at least some per students' needs; 2) the instructor might learn what writing skills she most needs to address; 3) students will see the instructor as caring about students needs, thus potentially improving student/instructor relationships; and 4) the students' LOC will likely become

more internal and less external as they feel they have actively provided input in the course's direction.

At the very least, learning what students think, how they feel, and what skills they would like to learn will do no harm. If instructors cannot change class material as much as students would like, or if students' expectations are unrealistic, for example, instructors need not change the class dramatically. To help the students' and the instructor's frames match as closely as possible, though, the instructor should explain why the course cannot change as much as students wish. In this way, students can come to understand *why* the instructor cannot accommodate their wishes as much as they would like.

Again, an example is in order. One might imagine, for example, the instructor learning from students that students consider some of the proposed class readings boring. Instead of reading exactly what the instructor has proposed, students would like to explore some of the other readings in the textbook. Upon learning students' desire for different readings, the instructor can establish with students a list of commonly agreed upon readings. The result is that 1) students are more engaged in the class given they are reading selections they find interesting, and 2) students' sense of agency is increased with the result that their LOC moves internally (since they have had a say in the course's direction and are not solely at "the mercy" of an instructor who does not understand their needs nor cares to know them.) On the other hand, in some cases, the instructor simply cannot accommodate the students' wish for "fewer papers," a request I have commonly heard. With that said, the instructor can explain that research-based writing is expected in and important in other college courses, and FYC prepares them to compose research-based writing. She might further explain that FYC is a composition class, after all, and as such

requires students to write, much the same way math classes require students to solve equations.

What perhaps is more important than changing the course to fit students' desires is just getting instructors' and students' frames to match regarding the course's role in students' lives; showing students the instructor cares about them enough to ask how they feel and what they think is just a bonus. One might suppose an instructor surveys her students about her FYC course. She learns from the survey that students are unsure why a research paper is necessary. They prefer reflective writing about personal experiences since that is the kind of writing they were accustomed to in high school. Upon learning the students' perception of the FYC class, the instructor can address students' concern in class and explain why the research paper is necessary. She may explain, for instance, that most college-level writing for most classes is research-based, not experience-based, and that the FYC research paper prepares students for the research-based writing they will compose throughout their college careers. She can further add that research-based writing is expected in and required of practically all college classes. Thus, students can adjust their frames by realizing 1) the assignment is typical of college-level writing, and 2) prepares them for research-based writing in other classes. The instructor might adjust her frame by adding a reflective essay as an assignment and even use that essay as a springboard for the research paper. In this way, the instructor has adjusted students' frames and her frame so that they match better, has involved students in the course delivery (thus improving agency and LOC), and has scaffolded the research paper so that students' personal experiences become a starting point for the research paper.

2. Be approachable, empathetic, and non-critical of students

Considering students' needs, as suggested in point one above, also presents the instructor as caring. As already mentioned, students regard instructors who are approachable, empathetic, and non-critical as fostering students' increased FYC success more so than unapproachable, non-empathetic, and critical instructors do. How might one become a positive influence on students? Simard (1985) provides one approach. He writes, "an open honest dialogue [about FYC] helps my students see me not as an antagonist but as a guide" (p. 101). Beth, an instructor interviewed by Cox (2009) reduces antagonism by avoiding publicly "singling out" students who need help writing; further, she encourages weak students to schedule regular conferences with her. She actively avoids fomenting conflict between students and herself when she can since antagonistic relationships discourage students' FYC success. Further, as Burford (2005), hooks (1994), Miller (1998), Hairston (1992), Lundsford and Ouzgane (2004) and Sternglass (1997) indicate, instructors should get to know their students personally—not "other" them as "generic" students. For instance, instructors should learn students' names, a little about their backgrounds, and a little about their present situations to foster improved instructor/student relationships and to understand students' situations when difficulties arise in class. Merely speaking to a student by name or holding the occasional quick conversation about students' interests and activities will "humanize" the instructor for students, show the instructor cares for students, and potentially foster improved instructor/student relationships. Undoubtedly, the above mentioned tactics are impractical at large institutions where FYC classes may be well over 50 students, but at smaller institutions like the study site, there is little reason why instructors cannot engage in such interactions with students.

### 3. Improve course delivery and assignments to improve students' FYC success

One student who took my study's survey wrote, "If the student hates the class then the teacher needs to change they way they teach." The student's comment relates to several points students raised about instructors' course delivery. Refraining from delivering too many lectures, encouraging student involvement in class (student presentations, group work, peer review, and other activities), using online and electronic resources to encourage student engagement, understanding students' learning styles, and providing interesting, relevant assignments will likely increase students' FYC success. Notably, what instructors consider interesting, relevant and engaging may not be the same as what students consider interesting, relevant and engaging. As one student wrote:

If they knew what their students were interested in and they see the way their course is going has nothing to do with what their students are interested in they could perhaps tweak the things they are teaching in their course to perhaps make it more interesting and fun for the students. Because when certain things are fun, they are easier to learn.

Providing students with opportunities to be involved in the class is one way to improve course delivery while locating the LOC internally for students. For example, some of my colleagues have students complete several projects over the course of the class and then present an artistic or multi-media presentation at the end of the course as the students' final projects. In this case, students are actively engaged the entire class and are not merely listening to lectures. Typically, in my FYC classes, I have students vote on which readings we will review as a class. I tell students that I do not like assigning readings since what is interesting to me may not be interesting to them. While presently I limit students to readings from the class textbook, students at least decide what to read and discuss in class based on what readings they consider most interesting. In the future, following my own

advice about involving students more in the class, I might have students bring articles and essays into class for class discussion.

Regarding technology, students prefer instructors to actively and regularly use technology (Smartboards, Blackboard, blogs, online-learning programs, recorded class lectures, and Youtube videos) and assert the use of such technology fosters increased student interest in the class. In an age when students are well-accustomed to the Internet, cell phones, television, and video games, it makes sense that courses integrate technology to deliver course material. Again, using technology in classes likely piques students' interest in the class while not detracting from content delivery so long as the media does not overwhelm the message. For example, an instructor may record her lectures and place them online (Youtube or Blackboard) so that students can review the lectures again at their own pace to understand the material better. The instructor might also do the same with students' presentations (assuming students do not object) so that students can review each other's presentations. While there is no reason to involve technology just for technology's sake, in some cases, where using technology serves a purpose (such as allowing students to review material again at their own pace) there is little reason not to use technology. Further, as interested in technology as most students are, using technology to facilitate course delivery likely will encourage students' engagement with the course simply because the course uses technology.

### *Section III: Limitations*

All studies have limitations, and this one is no different. While I worked hard to ensure the study provided solid information, there unfortunately were difficulties I did not expect. First, the timing of the study may have impacted findings. Students' attitudes may

have reflected how they felt at the time when the survey was administered and when the focus groups were held. Survey participants took the survey at the end of the spring 2013 term; their attitudes may have changed substantially from the beginning of the term to the end of the term (per their performance and anticipated grade), and that change potentially affects my study findings. Focus group participants participated at the beginning of the fall 2013 term; they likewise may have had very different attitudes at the outset of the fall 2013 term when they participated in the study than what they had by the end of the term. Undoubtedly, one area for future research is a pre/post testing study design to see how attitudes change over the course of a term and to learn what the changes in attitude may suggest.

Additionally, the interview portion of the study, intended to link what students reported on the survey with what they said during the interview, failed. Instead, I held focus groups that consisted of students who had not taken the survey. This situation was not ideal but was my only recourse at the time. Because two groups of students participated in the study, I was unable to have the continuity provided by one group of participants the way I originally planned. An unexpected outcome, though, (and potentially a beneficial one) was the fact that two different groups of students made many of the same claims regarding attitudes, valuation, and sources of attitudes; thus, the two groups support each other and by extension, my findings. Third, during the process of analyzing the data, I began to realize that what my data showed was which variable students *thought* better determined their success in FYC, not necessarily which variable *actually did*. Ideally, to answer my research question the chain of causality should have looked something like this:

Students' thoughts regarding valuation and attitude → students' comments linked to actual grades → determination of which variable actually determined success

Unfortunately, while I had hoped to follow the above pattern, I did not include a question on students' grades in the focus group questions, so I was unable to link students' comments to actual grades for the focus groups. The survey data *did* allow me to make the link, fortunately, but the survey alone provided only part of the picture. So then, what I found is this: according to the survey positive attitudes = increased FYC success. In the focus groups, students focused less on which variable, attitudes or valuation, was more closely related to students' FYC success and instead focused on sources of students' attitudes toward and valuation of FYC. For example, instructors proved to be a major source of students' attitudes toward and valuation of FYC classes according to students.

One limitation is that I did not break down my findings by instructor. Rather, I considered the data more generally. I had not expected instructors to be of such great importance to students (given that I was asking students what they thought about and how they felt about FYC as a course), and did not design the study in such a way as to make breakdown of the data by instructor possible.

One last limitation is that, because I had to conduct my research on my own with no other researchers helping me, my study lacks triangulation. This is unfortunate. Since I did not have other researchers help me code, I tried to be as methodical as possible in my coding and data analysis to encourage consistency and to compensate for the lack of triangulation. I reviewed transcribed material several times to ensure consistency in coding.

#### *Section IV: Future Research*

There are several possibilities for future research suggested by this study. First, one might investigate correlations between, for instance, race and attitudes toward FYC or gender and attitudes toward FYC. If indeed race and gender affect students' attitudes toward FYC, knowing that possibility and learning how the relationships between the variables affect students' FYC success may help instructors further improve their course delivery to encourage students' FYC success. Second, future studies might address students' feelings regarding their past and present experiences in English courses to learn if past experiences affect future expectations and if so, how. Third, composition researchers may wish to investigate whether students' attained grades in developmental English courses affect students' expectations of grades in FYC or even predict grades in FYC. Fourth, L2 learners were outside this study's scope. Since this is the case, L2 learners' attitudes toward and valuation of FYC merit future research, too.

Finally, researchers may want to further investigate the roles instructors play in influencing students' attitudes toward and success in FYC, for instance by linking students' perceptions of instructors (as empathetic, approachable, and personable, or not) to students' reception of FYC and students' success in FYC. Researchers may even question whether instructors are a variable affecting students' FYC success, much the way I considered attitudes and valuation variables. Undoubtedly, many more areas of future research are apparent and await further consideration by my fellow FYC researchers.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

**EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY**

**University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office**

4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682

600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834

Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · [www.ecu.edu/irb](http://www.ecu.edu/irb)

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB

To: Whitney Larrimore

CC: Wendy Sharer

Date: 2/14/2013

Re: UMCIRB 13-000133  
Students' Attitudes Toward and Valuation of FYC

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 2/13/2013 to 2/12/2014. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category #6, 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

The approval includes the following items:

E-mail Consent Form (Consent Forms)

Informed Consent Documents (Recruitment Documents/Scripts)

Recruitment Document (Recruitment Documents/Scripts)

Student Survey and Interview Questions (Surveys and Questionnaires)

Students' Attitudes Toward and Valuation of First-Year Composition (FYC) as Predictors of Students' English 101 Success (Study Protocol or Grant Application)

Survey and Interview Questions (Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions)

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418

IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418 IRB00004973

APPENDIX B: AMMENDMENT APPROVAL TO CHANGE STUDY PROTOCOL FROM  
INTERVIEWS TO FOCUS GROUPS

**EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY**

**University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office**

4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682

600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834

Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · [www.ecu.edu/irb](http://www.ecu.edu/irb)

Amendment Approved: 7/26/2013

ID: Ame1 UMCIRB 13-000133

Title: Amendment 1 for IRB Study #UMCIRB 13-000133

Description: Your amendment has been approved. To navigate to the project workspace,  
click on the above ID.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418

IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418

APPENDIX C: LETTER OF SUPPORT FROM STUDY SITE (METHODIST UNIVERSITY)

To: Kenneth W. Briley, MSW, CIP  
Assistant Director for Quality Improvement & Education  
Office for Human Research Integrity (OHRI)  
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board  
4N-72A Brody Medical Sciences Building  
600 Moye Boulevard  
East Carolina University  
Greenville, NC 27834-4354  
Telephone: 252-744-5313  
Fax: 252-744-2284  
Email: [brileyk@ecu.edu](mailto:brileyk@ecu.edu)

From: Hugh W. Harling EdD, LAT, ATC  
Methodist University Institutional Review Board Chair  
5400 Ramsey Street  
Fayetteville NC 28311  
Telephone: 910 630-7418  
FAX: 910 630-7676  
Email: [hharling@methodist.edu](mailto:hharling@methodist.edu)

Date: January 29, 2013

Mr. Briley,

Per Methodist University Institutional Review Board (IRB) policy, the Methodist University IRB reviews human or animal subjects research to review and provide continuing oversight for research:

- sponsored by the University;
- conducted by or under the direction of any employee or agent of the University in connection with his or her institutional responsibilities;
- conducted by or under the direction of any employee or agent of the University using any property or facility of the University; or,
- involving the use of Methodist University non-public information to identify or contact human and animal subjects.

However, as this project can be viewed as a collaborative project and it requires review by the East Carolina University Institutional Review Board (IRB), Methodist University will designate and rely on the East Carolina University IRB for review and continuing oversight of the human subjects for the dissertation project submitted by East Carolina University

Doctoral student and Methodist University faculty member Whitney Larrimore Strickland. The Methodist University IRB requests notification demonstrating ECU IRB review, agreement for continuing oversight, and approval of the project is provided to the MUIRB chair before any research begins. A final copy of the ECU IRB approval form will suffice as evidence. Any further questions can be directed to the chair of the Methodist University Institutional Review Board as listed above.

## APPENDIX D: SURVEY GROUP INVITATION AND INFORMED CONSENT

### **Informed Consent Form (E-mail Consent, No Signature Required)**

Dear Participant,

I am a Whitney Larrimore Strickland at East Carolina University in the English department. I am asking you to take part in my research study entitled, "Students' Attitudes Toward and Valuation of First-Year Composition (FYC) as Predictors of Students' English 101 Success".

The purpose of this research is to learn students' attitudes toward and valuation of English 101 at Methodist University. The research hopefully will improve teaching approaches in composition. By doing this research, I hope to learn whether students' attitudes toward or valuation of FYC is a better predictor of student success and what relationship students' attitudes and valuation may have with student success if a relationship exists. Your participation is voluntary.

You are being invited to take part in this research because you are a day student currently enrolled in English 101 at Methodist University. The amount of time it will take you to complete this study is approximately 10-30 minutes depending upon whether you complete the survey alone or complete the survey and the interview. You are being asked to complete a brief, anonymous online survey that asks questions about your attitudes toward and valuation of first-year composition. The survey will take only about 10 minutes to complete. If you wish, you may also complete an interview with me. You will remain anonymous, and the information you provide during the interview may be used to improve composition instruction at Methodist University and other institutions. You do not have to participate in the interview portion of the study unless you want to.

Because this research is overseen by the ECU Institutional Review Board, some of its members or staff may need to review my research data. However, the information you provide will not be linked to you in any way. Therefore, your responses cannot be traced back to you by anyone, including me.

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the UMCIRB Office at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director of UMCIRB Office, at 252-744-1971.

You do not have to take part in this research, and you can stop at any time. If you decide you are willing to take part in this study, click on the survey link below appearing in this e-mail.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my research.

Sincerely,  
Whitney Larrimore Strickland, Principal Investigator

## APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP INVITATION AND INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Dear Participant,

I am Whitney Larrimore Strickland a student at East Carolina University in the English department. I am asking you to take part in my research study entitled, "Students' Attitudes Toward and Valuation of First-Year Composition (FYC) as Predictors of Students' English 101 Success".

The purpose of this research is to learn students' attitudes toward and valuation of English 101 at Methodist University. The research hopefully will improve teaching approaches in composition. By doing this research, I hope to learn whether students' attitudes toward or valuation of FYC is a better predictor of student success and what relationship students' attitudes and valuation may have with student success if a relationship exists. Your participation is voluntary.

You are being invited to take part in this research because you are a day student currently enrolled in English 101 at Methodist University. The amount of time it will take you to complete this study is approximately 10-30 minutes depending upon whether you complete the survey alone or complete the survey and the interview or the focus group alone.

You are being asked to complete a brief, anonymous online survey that asks questions about your attitudes toward and valuation of first-year composition. The survey will take only about 10 minutes to complete. If you wish, you may also complete an interview with me. You will remain anonymous, and the information you provide during the interview may be used to improve composition instruction at Methodist University and other institutions. **For students enrolled in summer term 2013 classes or fall 2013 classes, you are invited to participate in focus group research during which pizza and refreshments will be offered.** You do not have to participate in the any portion of the study unless you want to.

Because this research is overseen by the ECU Institutional Review Board, some of its members or staff may need to review my research data. However, the information you provide will not be linked to you in any way. Therefore, your responses cannot be traced back to you by anyone, including me.

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the UMCIRB Office at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director of UMCIRB Office, at 252-744-1971.

You do not have to take part in this research, and you can stop at any time. If you decide you are willing to take part in this study, click on the survey link below appearing in this e-mail.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my research.

Sincerely, Whitney Larrimore Strickland, Principal Investigator

## APPENDIX F: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

### Section 1: Attitudes

1. What answer choice best describes your attitude toward English 101, composition?

- I like it a lot
- I like it some
- I dislike it some
- I dislike it a lot

2. What factor do you think MOST contributes to the attitude you have toward English 101?

- Experiences with writing before taking English 101 (writing assignments during high school, at another university, or while you were taking English 100 for instance)
- Experiences with writing while taking English 101 (writing assignments that you completed as a student in English 101)
- Sense that the class only fulfills a graduation requirement--the class doesn't apply to other classes  
or work outside of composition
- Sense that the class applies to other classes/work outside of composition
- The Instructor
- Other (Textbox to provide answer)

3. Do you suspect that your attitude toward composition affects your performance in English 101?

- Yes
- No

4. If you think your attitude does affect your success/performance in the class, please explain HOW you think it affects your success/performance and WHY.

5. If you think your attitude does NOT affect your success/performance in the class, please explain WHY you think it does NOT affect your success/performance.

### Section 2: Valuation

6. Using the following Likert Scale, where 1 is least helpful and 8 is most helpful, indicate how helpful you think English 101 is in preparing you for your **general education courses**.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8

7. Using the following Likert Scale, where 1 is least helpful and 8 is most helpful, indicate how helpful you think English 101 is in preparing you for your **major courses**.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8

8. Using the following Likert Scale, where 1 is least helpful and 8 is most helpful, indicate how helpful you think English 101 is in preparing you for your **future career**.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8

9. How likely do you think it is that your career will require you to use writing skills?

- Very Unlikely
- Somewhat Unlikely
- Undecided
- Somewhat Likely
- Very Likely

10. How *valuable* do you consider English 101 to your success in college and in the future?

- Not Valuable at All
- Somewhat Valuable
- Valuable
- Very Valuable

11. Why do you consider English 101 valuable in terms of its usefulness to you? You may choose more than one answer. Select all that apply.

- Improving Writing Skills
- Improving Critical Thinking Skills
- Applicability to Other Classes
- Applicability to Your Future Career
- Other (text box to provide answer)

12. If you think English 101 is NOT a valuable course, why do you consider it without worth? You may choose more than one answer. Select all that apply.

- Skills learned do not apply to other classes
- Skills learned do not apply to your future career
- The class only fulfills a graduation requirement
- Other (text box to provide answer)

### Section 3: Instruction

13. In your opinion, would instructors benefit from knowing students' perceptions of English 101 courses?

- Yes
- No

14. How might students benefit from instructors having a better knowledge of students' perceptions of English 101?

### Section 4: Interview Participation

15. If you wish to participate in the interview portion of the survey, please include the following information: your name, phone number, best time to call, and e-mail address.

Name\_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number\_\_\_\_\_

Best Time to Call\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address\_\_\_\_\_

#### Section 5: Demographics

16. What is your gender?

Male

Female

Other

17. What is your age?

17-19

20-25

Over 25

18. Please identify your ethnicity: Are you Hispanic/Latino?

Yes

No

19. Please identify your race by selecting one or more of the following categories.

American Indian or Alaskan Native

Asian

Black or African-American

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

White

Other

20. What category best describes your major?

Art, English & Writing, History, Modern Language and Literature, Music, Philosophy and

Religion, Psychology, Sociology, Theatre (School of Arts and Humanities)

Accounting, Business, Management, Marketing (Reeves School of Business)

Athletic Training/Applied Exercise Science, Health Care Administration, Nursing  
(School of Health Sciences)

Communication, Government Studies, Justice Studies, Military Science/ROTC, Social  
Work (School of Public Affairs)

Biology, Chemistry & Physical Science, Computer Science, Math, Physical Education and  
Exercise Science, Teacher Education (School of Science and Human Development)

21. How many semester hours are you currently taking?

12-15

16-18

Over 18

22. Have you ever taken English 100, Skills Development at Methodist University?

Yes

No

23. What grade did you get in English 100?

A

B

C

D or F

I do not recall my grade in the course

24. Have you ever taken English 101, Composition before, at Methodist University?

Yes

No

25. THIS SEMESTER what grade did you EXPECT to get in English 101, when the course began? (If you have taken the course before, I am not referring to the grade you expected to get then; rather, I am referring to the grade you expected to receive THIS TERM WHEN THE TERM BEGAN.)

A

B

C

D or F

26. What grade did you actually get in English 101 (that is, what grade do you expect to receive now that you're reached midterm/the end of the term)?

A

B

C

D or F

Incomplete

Thank you for participating in this survey; the information gained from it may provide insight into how instructors can improve teaching practices to make English 101 a more effective, helpful course for students.

## APPENDIX G: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

How do students' attitudes toward FYC influence their valuation of the course; is attitude or valuation a better predictor of student success in FYC; and what are the implications for teachers of the relationship (if one exists) between students' attitudes and students' valuation of the course?

1. What *role* do you think English 101 plays in your college education?
2. What *role* do you think English 101 plays in your future success, for instance, your career?
3. How would you describe your attitude toward English 101?
4. What factor(s) do you think most contribute to your attitude?
5. How does your attitude toward English 101 affect the way you value composition? In other words, does having a positive attitude make you value composition more than having a negative attitude toward composition? Is there no difference? Is there an inverse difference?
6. How valuable do you think English 101 is?
7. Why do you value (or not value) English 101?
8. What factor do you think plays a greater role in your success in English 101, your attitude toward the course (how much you like/dislike it)? Or how valuable the course is apart from your attitude toward it?
9. If you think that your attitude is a better predictor of your success in English 101, why do you think so?
10. If you think how much you value the course is a better predictor of your success in English 101, why do you think so?
11. In your opinion, would instructors benefit from knowing students' perceptions of FYC courses, and if so, how?
12. How might students benefit from instructors having a better knowledge of students' perceptions of English 101?

## APPENDIX H: FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPTS

### Group 1

D: I'm Dean.

Ma: I'm Manny.

S: I'm Sierra.

Mi: I'm Macaila.

S: What role do you think English 101 plays in your college education?

D: Um, okay, I'll start off. It I think helps you with just like your basic writing you'll need over your next four years because you're going to have a lot of papers, a lot of papers. So like MLA citing, grammatical errors, some stuff.

Mi: I think it's the basis for like all your other classes that you'll have to take. You have to take it to get into those classes or help you with those classes.

Ma: I agree. I think it's a good base line to start your writing career in college definitely so you can write a paper properly and look educated.

D: Yeah, got to look smart.

D: All right, okay number two. What role do you think English 101 plays in your future success for instance your career?

Ma: I think we've ended up touching on a few points in our last question especially to look educated and appear to look like you know what you're talking about especially in a good format. Using the MLA and college formats are rather universal for future papers and future courses you may take.

Mi: Yeah, I agree with what you said because we did talk about how it is the basis for everything you're going to take in the future.

S: Yeah, and if you want to do graduate school you're going to have to do a thesis paper and all.

Ma: Graduate school, yeah, I got to do that, so I'm going to do a lot of writing also.

D: Yeah, I didn't think about that; graduate school, that's pretty good.

D: Number three.

Mi: How would you describe your attitude toward English 101?

S: I hate it.

D: You hate it, really?

S: Yeah, I'm from the South, and I really don't like grammar because the way I talk and the way you write are so different. So it's really hard for me to grasp grammar aspects.

D: So you write like you talk? You just write...

S: Most of the time, most of the time. It sounds right to me and I know it might be wrong, but it sounds right to me, so I put it anyways, but I'm getting better at it.

D: What are you, I actually want to know just like what would you say that wouldn't write right.

Ma: Something like ya'll....

D: Would you write ya'll?

[unintelligible]

D: Okay, that's what I was thinking.

[laughter]

Mi: You can use that in proper grammar.

Ma: Used in quotations.

S: In quotations.

S: Yeah, that's my attitude; I don't like grammar. I like reading, though. Reading is pretty cool I guess. It's better than grammar.

D: True.

Ma: Uh, for my personal opinion I'm a little hesitant because I'm a nontraditional student so for me having to remember things grammar wise hasn't been something I've used regularly. Coming out of the military it's always been to write in whatever format you're supposed to be writing in, mostly memo format, but to tell a story and use the proper punctuation is something I have to relearn, so I am hesitant, but I am looking forward to it.

D: I like it. I like it because my teacher is really funny. I don't think we're supposed to say her name, but she's really funny. I don't know, a lot of times my papers, I'm not good at grammar either but I like knowing, so I enjoy it because I want to know. I don't think you

really care. [laughter] You just don't want to deal with it. I want to know because I'm a terrible writer, so I know I need to get better, so I think it's good for me at least.

Mi: It's the opposite for me. I don't really like my teacher.

D: You don't like your teacher.

Mi: No.

D: See mine incorporates a lot of humor. She'll ask a question and then you'll give your answer, and then if you're wrong she'll tell you, but she'll make it funny at least.

Ma: My teacher is really strict. Even if we're doing a paragraph on our opinion, she'll grade us for our punctuation, and I'm like...awww

Ma: Ours won't do that.

D: Our like if it's an official paper, she'll do that.

Ma: My teacher will make negative marks for my opinions.

D: For your opinions? That's terrible. Mine doesn't do that.

Ma: Okay, number four. What factors do you think most contribute to your attitude?

S and Mi: Teachers! [in unison]

Ma: Yeah. I would say the educators definitely.

S: I would say where you're from, too.

Ma: Good educators want to help you learn and progress as opposed to nitpick whatever your work which is really demoralizing.

D: It is demoralizing. My teacher is really negative. She tells you to talk in class, and then when you do, she just dismisses it, so then you really just don't want to talk cause, some teachers do that.

Ma: I don't really like that.

S: I think your region affects your attitude toward English too, because in Lumberton, they [teachers] don't do the English.

D: They don't do the English [laughter]

S: They don't do the English.

Mi: Where I'm from they don't do that either and I'm from North Carolina too. Yeah, but it's bad when I have better grammar than my teacher. Like not, not necessarily my English teacher, but I have better grammar than one of my teachers, and I'm like seriously, you went to school for this, why do I have better grammar than you do? I don't even know what I'm talking about.

Ma: I'm from up North, and we had English all four years of high school. We had to take either English or a language arts composition class.

Mi: Like in high school?

Ma: Yes.

Mi: We did too.

Ma: And for us, same thing. Make sure you have your colons and your semicolons in the right place, but they weren't as critical to the level as they are here. Or the instructor as well.

S: How does your attitude toward English 101 affect the way you value composition? In other words, does having a positive attitude help you value composition more than having a negative attitude? Is there no difference or an inverse difference?

D: I guess having a positive attitude makes you value composition more because if you think you need it if you know that you need it you'll be positive about learning it.

Mi: Yeah, a positive attitude toward anything makes it simpler to learn it.

D: So if you think it's needed you'll learn it, and it'll be better, I guess.

Ma: I think the same thing you think. Definitely a positive attitude because writing is really the only form we can use to express our thoughts to a broad spectrum of people. The written language is what started civilization since its earliest discoveries, so in order for us to maintain that education for to other generations, we have to learn write to inform them and teach them and I think writing is going to be the lasting medium that will always be there. Because I believe technology can fail. Something can get erased, gone forever. Writing, obviously you can write on stone, mud, parchment, whatever.

D: Mud, that's pretty funny.

Ma: Exactly.

D: Six, how valuable do you think English 101 is? It's kind of like number 1.

S: It's very valuable but you don't have to value it; it's valuable to education, but not necessarily to yourself.

D: So, is it valuable to you?

Mi: Yes and no

D: Yes and no.

Mi: It's valuable to me because I want to learn the right way to write and to speak and all that stuff but then again I don't really care.

S: I feel the same way she does.

D: You got to do it because you got to do it but you don't want to.

Mi: Exactly.

D: I'm the same way she does.

S: I don't think I'll ever talk properly. It's just not my thing.

D: I hope this thing really isn't geared to making you talk proper. I hope it's just a writing thing. If it turns out to be a talking thing I'm going to be in trouble.

Mi: That's probably more like speech.

S: Yeah.

Ma: I think ultimately the learning to write in that aspect also contributes to the way you talk because you know just for someone who isn't a doctor when their born but they go through medical school and learn to talk the jargon so now a doctor will talk and you have no idea what he's saying because he knows that medical terminology, so English in the same aspect you've grown and you know how to speak and how to communicate orally but you've also learned how to communicate by writing.

D: In a sophisticated way.

Ma: right and then I think while you progress in your education you say "I want to be viewed as a more intelligent person," it does kind of bleed into that aspect.

D: That was pretty good; that makes sense. You learn how to write, you learn how to talk. It makes sense.

D: Okay all right. Number seven?

Mi: Why do you value or not value English 101?

Ma: That's kind of the same question as number six.

D: Yeah that's what I was thinking. Basically if you know how to write you learn how to talk better. We all need grammar for our jobs.

S: and every class they're going to ask you to do some kind of research, some kind of paper.

D: yeah, you need to learn how to write it.

Ma: yeah.

D: Number eight.

Ma: What factor do you think plays a greater role in your success in English 101, your attitude toward the course, how much you like or dislike it, or how valuable the course is apart from your attitude about it?

D: I'm definitely going to go with how valuable the course is.

Mi: Yeah.

D: Basically whether you like it or dislike it you need this class you need to learn this stuff; you need it, so it's got to be done.

Mi: Sometimes you just have to get over what you don't like and just go with it.

D: It's a necessary class, something for the rest of college, so you have to do it.

Ma: I think one of the biggest factors is the educator the instructor because the same points we've reached if you have a teacher that is not teaching you or is demoralizing you, demeaning you it kind of eliminates that want to learn, that want to succeed and if you have a bad teacher and they give you negative attitude, all you're going to do is reciprocate that negative attitude.

S: I loved my high school teachers. They were really cool; they edited all my college essays and still helped me. Watched movies and analyzed the movies. We did a lot of really interesting stuff.

D: They made it fun?

S: Yeah, they made it fun.

Mi: I think all teachers should do that, should make it fun, so you want to learn instead of dreading going to class every day.

D: Some teachers they don't think that making it fun is right it's not right. If it's not just writing stuff down on paper and reading about it you're not going to learn anything; you can make it interesting.

Ma: Right, and I think you, as an educator, you should tailor your teaching style to your class because obviously times have changed and someone who taught 20 years ago is not going to succeed in today's environment, so if you're teaching, you know, by like books, and pamphlets, and writing things out, you're kind of behind the bar curve. You've got to start using tools like the Internet, using mass media outlets, things like that you know that way you can project your ideas or what you want your students to do.

D: That's pretty good. Which one are we on, nine?

S: Yeah.

D: Okay. If you think your attitude is a better predictor of your success in English 101 why do you think so? (Starts reading it again)

Mi: Nine and ten go together. Ten says if you think how much you value the course is a better predictor of your success in English 101, why do you think so? It means do you think the course is valuable, does it play a bigger role than your attitude toward the course?

S: I think how valuable it is plays a bigger role.

Ma: I think nine and ten really correlate with each other because I want to say they're are asking the same question [unintelligible] and ten is because why do you feel that sense. I think even with your attitude again going in that circle with the instructor, we are trying to feed off that energy they give us also your predictor is if I feel that good energy and I feel like I want to succeed, I will succeed, that mind over matter mentality.

Dean: Um hmm

Ma: You have again an educator who is demeaning, who is demoralizing you, then that want to succeed is going to diminish. There's no way you're going to feel acceptable enough to pass that course, so you know therefore why try?

S: If you get a 90 on your opinion, that's like, wow. You know what I'm talking about.

Ma: [laughter]

S: That's really discouraging.

D: You've got to want to be able to succeed I guess; you've got to, even if you get a bad grade, you've still got to want to do better in the class. If you don't care after that, you aren't going to get any better.

Ma: And if you have someone who is motivating you to want to do better, to succeed or want to progress then that's definitely going to increase your opinion of or your value for the course.

D: All right, so I say we go to number 11. In your opinion, would instructors benefit from knowing students' perceptions of FYC courses and if so, how?

D: I'm going to go with yes, because basically FYC is an English class by itself. So far I've had to write three reflection papers and I have five or six more. They're actually graded on grammar and stuff like that and actual English. It's basically another English class so we're covering stuff in that class that we'll probably cover in this class again, and it will be pretty useless because we're already doing it in that class.

Mi: I think like he was saying talking about the instructors they should base how they teach on the students. They should know our opinions about how they teach and what would be better for us to learn.

Ma: And to caveat what you said every class is a different class also, so for my thing, I always think of why do they give us our class ratings our opinions after the course? They should do one in the middle, or one at the beginning and one at the end, so you can give the teacher your expectations and at the end whether or not they met those expectations, primarily because the expectations are over the course what do they call those things at the end of the class, the course critiques? So then you are giving your critique for your class, what your class's learning style was. The next class might not fall into that category. They might not learn the same way, so you need to learn to morph, to mutate, for each class.

D: Makes sense. And if you give your opinion early when you give your opinion at the end for the critiques your class is already over with so if you tell how the class was for you, sorry, it doesn't matter because the class is already over with if you get the information at the beginning you can adjust to how they are learning. You need communication early.

Ma: Or three stages. One at the beginning, one at the middle, and one at the end. So they can see if their evaluation methods are working or if they need to be changed.

S: Or needs to be Changed.

Ma: exactly to see if they are working.

D: Number twelve, final one.

Mi: How might students benefit from having a better knowledge of students' perceptions of English 101?

S: It's exactly the same thing we just said.

Ma: Yeah, the same thing.

D: If the students tell the teachers what they're telling them isn't really helping then maybe they can try a different direction with it. Maybe they can use the media or something.

S: Yeah, the analyzing song lyrics we did in the other class, that was pretty good.

D: Analyzing song lyrics?

Ma: Yeah, I did that in high school.

S: By picking out the actual sentence in the song whether it's a sentence fragment or whatever. It was a lot of fun. You're learning but in a more fun way.

Ma: And the sentence structure, how the song is composed.

D: We never did that; I wish we had done that.

Ma: Yeah it threw a whole new aspect on the traditional learning style and for an example, that's a good way to show how the progression of technology also helps in learning. Again, I think now we have become more of a visual learning generation. This is my opinion, and I'm not a psychologist. That's my two cents there. We've become more of a visual learning society because I think for the past, what, 50 years we've had a television in our living room, right? And in the past thirty years most people have three or more televisions in their homes on average, so that media that is right there could totally be used for educating people. And for us being a younger generation, we're used to staring at screens for a while, so why not give us media that is more appropriate to us, like computer stuff?

D: Not just sitting looking at a board but presentations, electronics, hotbooks.

Ma: Or record your lectures and put them on YouTube, things like that. Cause I'm going to give you, for example, I don't know what the teacher is talking about. They're standing at the front of the classroom, and I'm lost in the sauce, I'm staring at the lights because, you know, I can't comprehend, which goes back into style. For me, in order to learn and progress in that class, I have to go to YouTube, go to some educator I don't know, and find an appropriate style that suits me the way they're teaching, and that's pretty much been a good way for success for me, unfortunately, and I say unfortunately because I can't rely on my educator.

D: Yeah, the person you're paying for. It's a waste.

Ma: Yes, I'm paying for them to teach me something, and they're not teaching me. I think if you were, say, to record an instructor for the lecture and play it back for them and say, "look, you've got everyone up to this point, and right after that, they're all lost."

D: You might want to try something different.

Ma: Yeah, you might want to try something different or slow down.

S: Take a break. Do something fun now and again.

D: Yeah, take a break. My English teacher actually when we get done with a section will say, “Okay, I’m going to get some water. Relax a minute. Take it all in. And that actually helps because at that point we’re about to fall asleep, we’re all distracted. It gives us time to regroup and get ready for the next thing because if we go straight from one thing to another, it’s usually just too much for some people , but if you get a break and get to do whatever you need to do to get focused that helps a lot.

Ma: Exactly, it falls into a sensory overload

## **Group 2**

B: Briana

E: Esther

R: Ricardo

K: Katherine

E: All right. I’ll read the first one. What role do you think English 101 plays in your college education?

E: I feel it doesn’t really play a role; a lot of this is stuff you should already know. It’s like a refresher course to me. Yeah, it feels like a refresher course right now.

R: I’ll read the second one. What role do you think English 101 plays in your future success for instance your career? Well, I think it plays a very important role because in your future you have to write like projects and will have to write some important issues about your career. So I think English 101 gives us more ability to write better, so I think it plays an important role.

B: Can I go back and elaborate on these two?

E: Yeah, you can.

B: the role that you think English 101 plays in education—I think it actually plays a pretty big role in your education because you are always trying to write papers and you are trying to impress your professors . It’s like, hey, I’m going to turn in this, and if it has like text talk and things like that because some people actually write like that and it gets on your nerves,

but some people will do that, and I think in English 101 you are introducing back into college, back into life; it's just like, okay, you need to transition back into this so your professors don't fail you, and in education, future success, for number two it plays a pretty big role in some careers while not in others. Everyone has to write, everyone has to do some form of writing. I mean, in my career mine is going to be shorthand mostly for the most part. It just depends on either one. How would you describe your attitude toward English 101? Personally, mine is positive because I like to write and that's a big part of my thing.

K: I'm pretty mellow, but like, on the other hand I'm not very good at doing essays, but I do need this class to help me further on my essay writing because like you said we will need to write a lot in our lives, so I feel this is beneficial, but it's boring.

R: I would like to add something. As an international my first language is French. I speak Spanish too, but I have difficulty to speak English sometimes, but I think English 101 like will help me to be better in writing and speaking.

K: What factors do you think most contribute to your attitude?

E: I'm very indifferent about writing. If it's about a topic I enjoy I can write and can write pretty well but if it's something that is not interesting to me I will not do well and writing pretty much is not interesting to me. I'd rather talk and tell the story rather than write it out. So like I said, beneficial boring. This is boring to me.

R: How does your attitude toward English 101 affect the way you value composition? In other words does having a positive attitude toward make you value composition more than having a negative attitude toward composition? Is there no difference? Is there an inverse difference? I think my attitude toward English is positive. If it was not positive I don't think I would have an interest in it. I would say I don't like this class. I would give less time toward reading books or to do my assignment. I have to do it.

B: I'm going to go back to four for just a minute and tie it back into number five. The factors that contribute to your attitude are your view toward it the factors toward whether you enjoy it or not, and it also depends on the amount of work they give you. If they give you busy work or say oh, you know what, go home and write a ten page paper tonight, won't that be fun? No, no it's not. I'm not going to do that, no, sorry.

E: It also kind of depends on the teacher too. If you have a strict teacher you're not going to have fun, but if you have a teacher who is looser and jokes with you, then you're going to have fun in that class regardless the subject.

R: The more you like the professor, the more you like the class.

K: Exactly and that works for all classes, not just composition.

B: And how does your attitude toward English 101 affect how you value composition? Well, that's basically what we just went over. Having a better attitude toward it makes you want to go, makes you want to put effort into it. Sometimes the assignments you may not be too fond of but you're more willing to do them.

K: How valuable do you think English 101 is? I think it is moderately valuable because a lot of this is review. It just depends on student to student. Some people already know all this. Sometimes it's just a repeat and it gets so boring, and you just lose interest eventually, especially if your teacher is monotone, boring, all this work, no fun, but it can also be really valuable for the ones that are transitioning back or if it's a second language or something like that.

E: Going back to five a little bit, I do say that English is boring, but we do need to have it because people are so illiterate nowadays. They're always text-talking in real life, and that's not cool. It annoys me so much. They need to learn proper English, so I value English I just don't like it, but it is valuable. (7:21)

B: Everything sort of has a time and a place.

E: Yeah, it really does.

B: School is not that place. Don't come up to me and say "LOL." It's like, what are you doing? Go away.

E: Why do you value or not value English 101? Well, it's like I said; it teaches you to speak English properly. When people abbreviate and mix up the words and use adverbs in adjectives' spots, it doesn't fit. English teaches you to make everything fit and sounding eloquent helps you get a job further on down the line and all that stuff, so that's why I value it. It will get you a job.

R: I have a friend who just sent a letter for a job but they denied him; they didn't give him the job because of the way he worded the letter. It was like an instant message.

E: Like a text message.

R: Yes. A lot of punctuation [errors] a lot of words like we use on the Internet.

E: Oh no.

R: He was really very competent, but they said no.

R: What factor do you think plays a greater role in your success in English 101, your attitude toward the course, how much you like or dislike it, or how valuable the course is

despite your attitude toward it? I think the factor that plays the greater role in my success, and this is from my writing, I'm better writing, but it's my strength, too. 101 is more writing than conversation, and I think this class is going to make me better writing day-by-day. I think I'll do greater and greater work.

K: Um, touching on something right quick, I actually value English 101 because it helps influence my actual writing outside of class as well. I mean, I don't like to write essays and stuff in class, but I'll go home and write ten pages. Yeah, I mean I think it helps better, that kind of writing outside but I don't want to apply it in school because it's required. A factor that plays a greater role, I think it's actually equal because your attitude affects how valuable the course is to you. I mean if you go in there saying "I don't need this class" it's not valuable to you, and if it's not as valuable it's going to affect your attitude. It's sort of like, it's a balance if one is over-weighed the other one's out of balance.

E: For number nine if you think your attitude is a better predictor of your success in English 101 why do you think so?

K: I think it can be a better predictor but you don't need to go specifically on that because people's ideas change everybody's always changing. Your life circumstances, the stresses you're under, all that plays a part of what you're thinking of your course. I mean your instructor. It can be as simple as that. It might not be the content of it. There are so many factors you're not able to specify exactly what is what when you are looking at a course such as this one. It is all part of your personal experiences.

B: Like touching on that your attitude all depends on what your attitude for the day is too. Like if you have a test that day, and you were caught in traffic, and you're in a bad mood that's going to affect how you do on that test. But if you slept in, you're fully rested, you had a nice coffee or something, and you got to school with plenty of time, you're going to be nice, you're going to do well on that test. You're going to be relaxed; it's going to be awesome. It all depends on that day attitude as well, too, not just the long term attitude but the short term as well.

E: Number ten, you want to touch on number nine?

R: No.

E: Number ten if you think how much you value the course is a better predictor of your success in the course, why do you think so?

K: I'm not really sure what to say. The course does have value; it is a refresher. Some people may not have had this course before. Like many high schools are different. They don't have the same structures of learning; it could be new. It could be refresher. For some people it

may be new, for others a refresher. Sometimes refresher is what you need because you don't remember everything, so the course does have value.

R: Yeah, I think we had said something about how much we value the course. If we give or are negative about the class, like this class is bad or boring or I don't like it, I don't have too much interest in this class, that means that if we value the class positively, it is possible we will have success in it.

R: In your opinion, would professors benefit from knowing students' perceptions of FYC courses, and if so, how? In my opinion I would say yes because first we know that professors are not perfect. Because he is a professor, that does not mean he is perfect. Every day we learn from people. It is like neutral. Students learn from professors and professors learn from students. I think when the professor knows our perception of the class, for example if we can say "this way should be better for us, but for some others there is another way that is better for them" I believe all that can give the professor another idea of how to do the class to fix everything.

B: I'm sort of in combination with what you are saying. I really think that the instructor would benefit from knowing the perceptions because everyone has a different view. With different things they do they can try to change that view. I mean if you go into class and you're a teacher, You know everything; you've taught this class twice before the same day, you're coming in for your third class, you just up to the board, you put up the powerpoint, you read the powerpoint, you understand it, everybody just sits there. You take that as an assumed yes and walk out. There are so many teachers who do something like that. It's of no value whatsoever. If the teacher is not really interested in the subject, first of all I know this is a little off subject, if they are not interested in what they are teaching anymore, students aren't going to pay attention.

E: Yeah we're not going to be interested.

B: And everybody has their own learning styles and things like that. Your learning style could affect your perception. So if you are sitting there and you are a visual learner, but all they do up there is go up there and lecture, you supposed to take your own notes, your perception of the class is going to be bad because you're like, I don't know what the heck they're talking about, what do they know?

E: Exactly.

B: If they implement different varieties of learning styles, everyone is going to have a little bit of a changed perception. They are going to be like, okay, maybe today we're going to do this or wait, I understand this.

E: They can see things from a different perspective. If you are an auditory learner but you see it, you may say, hey I have it backwards or sideways or something. Oh it's supposed to be like this. Okay. And then you think about it and it helps you understand it better. Yes instructors would benefit from knowing students' perceptions of FYC. We are first-year college kids; we don't know what we are getting into. We know there is going to be a lot of work, but we really don't understand it until we get here. I think the teachers already know we are dumb. We have no time management skills. And they are pretty good about giving us work and time to do the work, but if there is a teacher who is straight up mean and says, no, it has to be done by this time and this day, I mean straight up mean, they need to learn that students don't abide by time limits or anything. Everybody skips a day of class or we are late to class at least once. We don't have time management, and teachers, I think they know that now; they realize we're not perfect.

K: They also need to understand we're not robots. Not everybody is exactly the same. We're not all going to be ideal students who sit in class like this and raise their hands and say, "Yes, ma'am."

E: Exactly. We're not robots. And the teacher just reads us stuff and assumes everybody gets it. Well, not everybody gets it. Like I'll converse with my classmates and ask, do you understand it, and we'll talk about it. But like, everybody is too scared to ask or say "I don't understand" and teachers should be more engaging, I guess rather than just be hanging down.

K: Something they could do, if they have questions, and they are too afraid to talk in class, I think I had a teacher in high school who did this, they had like a box and if you had questions or something you could go by, put your question in the box, and they go over it the next time in class because someone doesn't get it but they don't want to be identified. "You don't understand this; you're not smart enough to be here."

E: Or if there is a webpage or something or online chat or something. It could be anonymous as well.

K: Yeah, that's so simple.

E: You can say, "I don't understand this part," to the teacher, and then everybody sees it, so then if anyone else is too afraid to ask the teacher can say, "This is how you do it." Everyone can see it, and then you can read it aloud for the auditory people. That would work; plus it integrates today's technology as well, so.

K: Exactly. There are so many different ways, and it [technology] is not always being implemented.

E: That's true. That's very true.

B: Um, for number twelve how could students benefit from instructors having a better knowledge of students' perception of English 101. We sort of already went over that.

E: There'd be a better understanding of everything basically.

K: There'd be better schools, better understanding, more class involvement. I mean if you're just sitting there watching a screen, it's really not going to do much good.

E: Exactly. Plus you can learn how to use more skills like what I said about the online chat room. Some people may not be computer literate. Once they've learned they can apply it, and then they can tell some other people and then it expands, like, everyone else can do it too.

K: Exactly. And if they're saying something like, "it's too difficult to go do this just for this class," the teacher, "I don't know how to do this" it's very, very, very simple to do; there's no reason why you shouldn't be able to do it. It's your job to learn because making something as simple as a webpage, it takes ten minutes.

E: Depending on who you are.

K: Well, that's true, but I'm just saying. I mean even a weebly, it takes just ten minutes to make because it's pre-made.

B: Yeah, it is students' job to learn because we pay all this money to be here, you might want to apply yourself a little bit.

K: It's the students' job to apply themselves, but it's the teachers' to take interest in their education. It's what they are getting paid for. Oh snap. I forgot...woops

B: But it's true. We pay them enough money. They should cater to our needs a little bit.

K: It's just like I got out of a class. All he does is go up to the board, walk around the class, and lectures. The class is huge and we have this huge stack of notes. If he does not catch my attention in the first five minutes, I zone out. I daydream for the rest of the class. I glance at the notes and am like, this is too much.

B: Yeah, you have no clue. It's all in your head. That's how he's teaching. It's all in your head. He doesn't understand that we didn't go to school for this. We don't understand this. If you say it once, it's not going to sink in.

K: He has the PHD in whatever.

B: Exactly, and I'm not going to get that, so yeah. Okay guys, anything else left to say?

E: Not that I know of.

K: I'm pretty much good.

B: Do you think we should say our names again?

E: Probably.

K: Okay. I'm Katherine.

R: I'm Ricardo.

B: I'm Briana

E: I'm Esther, and this is the end of the recording.

B, E, and K: BEEP!

### **Group 3**

John

Chelsea

Sydney

Sean

Jenny

Sydney: Hopefully she can hear this. What role do you think English 101 plays in your college education?

Chelsea: it's a vital role; if you build your foundation now and you master it well you will succeed in other courses because they require writing in a lot of courses.

Jenny: It's going to help you down the line, like in your other English courses.

Sean: Yeah, you write research papers in other courses, so it's important to know how to write a paper and what not.

John: I think it will help more so when you get your major specific classes all those papers you have to write and if you plan on going to graduate school, you are prepared to do that.

Sydney: What role do you think English 101 plays regarding your future success for instance your career? Like we just said, learning to write papers the right way and correct grammar especially in resumes, including that type of stuff not just research papers it's going help with that.

Sean: Yeah like a boss is going to see you made a grammatical error; he's going to say, oh no, and throw it away.

[laughter]

John: I think it also depends on what your career is, though. If you are a doctor you're not writing too much papers, more like prescription signing and that's it. If you're a nurse you use a lot of short hand, so it really depends on what your career is how much impact it [writing] is going to have on you.

Chelsea: And also communicate efficiently because you can't write what you're not going to communicate, even if you're a nurse or a doctor you've got to communicate well by writing well.

Sydney: Yeah. How would you describe your attitude toward English 101?

[laughter]

John: I hate this class. It's boring to me but that's because I've already taken 102 and I've taken Southern American lit so I'm going back to the beginning; it's too slow going.

Sydney: I think coming out of high school it helps because I know I just completely forget grammar every summer, so I think it's good review going further with my English classes.

Chelsea: Yeah, I think the same thing.

Sean: I'm an awful writer but I try to be a good one. I strive to be a good writer, but it's something I struggle in, so other classes like Math I kind of blow off, but writing I really try to pay attention and try to get better at it.

Sydney: What factors do you think most contribute to your attitude?

Chelsea: Just keeping an open mind. Staying positive.

Sydney: Yeah.

John: I've taken advanced classes in this already so that's mostly why.

Jenny: I know the teacher affects my attitude. I really like my teacher this year, but I know in years past I don't do as well if the teacher is not as helpful, but I feel that's true for most classes, any subject.

Sean: Yeah and in my opinion I do better with a positive teacher. If she's just degrading you the whole time, I don't see how you can improve.

Jenny: A teacher who's approachable.

Sean: Yeah.

Sydney: How does your attitude toward English 101 affect the way you value composition? In other words, does having a positive attitude make you value composition more than if you had a negative attitude toward composition? Is there no difference? Is there an inverse difference?

John: I value composition, I just me valuing composition has nothing to do with how I feel about the class; the class is just boring to me, but I understand that it needs to be done. It does help me improve my writing.

Sydney: I know I don't know if everyone takes this but I know with my English class and then I have a speech class as well and I don't see the point in having both because you're writing just as much for speech even though you're talking out loud and you're not necessarily doing that in English I feel like it's the same class, so it does kind of bug me, like I like to write, but that part bugs me that I have to do it twice, so.

Sean: yeah, and I feel like no matter what attitude you have you can still value it. Like you realize it is important.

Sydney: How valuable do you think English 101 is?

Chelsea: Real valuable, because it's an essential we all have to take.

Jenny: Yeah, whether you like it or not, it's going to help you.

John: It's really valuable especially if once you're coming out of high school depending on whether you took AP or not it kind of does make a difference.

Sean: And it's kind of like, like a foundation to the rest of the courses you could take.

Sydney: Why do you value or not value English 101? (4:26)

Jenny: Um, I know it's going to help me down the line, so I know if I pay attention now, it will come easier to me later in life.

Chelsea: I value it because the teacher is really good, approachable I feel like she knows what she's talking about and she can communicate easily to me in a way that I understand it.

John: I do not value English 101 because it's boring and I do not like the way my teacher teaches.

Sean: I try to get better at writing, so I try to give 100% whenever I'm in here.

Sydney: What factor do you think plays a greater role in your success in English 101? Your attitude toward the course or how valuable the course is apart from your attitude toward it?

John: How valuable the course is apart from your attitude toward it. You may not like it but you need to get grades, so you can get out of it and graduate. That's how I see it.

Jenny: No matter what type of attitude you have towards it, it's going to help you. You might hate it, going to that class, but you have to deal with it.

Sean: I think a role that plays a greater role in our success is the teacher, obviously, like we mentioned previously. And like you all said, like it or dislike it, you can still pass it.

Sydney: If you think that your attitude is a better predictor of your success in English 101 why do you think so?

Jenny: If you're more positive about the class you're going to get through it more easily.

Sean: It won't seem like a nuisance.

Sydney: Yeah.

Jenny: Yeah. If it doesn't bug you as much you're not going to have a problem doing the homework or doing the assignments, so.

Chelsea: It bugs me. I mean, I don't mind doing the stuff; it's just that if I could take it online I would be happy.

Sydney: Yeah. If you didn't have to spend an hour in the classroom three times a week.

Chelsea: I'll still do well in the class and actually try.

Sydney: If you think how much you value the course is a better predictor of your success in English 101 why do you think so?

Jenny: Well if you know that it's good for you, you're going to do better in it, like, if you realize it's going to help and it has value to you, you're not going to blow it off.

Sean: Yeah you'll spend more time learning the stuff.

Jenny: You're actually going to try I think.

John: You'll try to comprehend it even if it's difficult.

Sean: Or you should anyway.

Chelsea: I think in some cases even if you value it a lot it's not going to really predictor you're success because there are some people who just can't write; there are some people who just can't take tests well. They know the material but when you put a test in front of them...

Sean: They freeze up.

Chelsea: Yeah, they can't translate what they know onto the paper itself, so I think it matters somewhat, but I also don't think it's a great predictor because it depends on the individuals themselves.

Sydney: In your opinion would instructors benefit from knowing what students' perceptions of FYC courses and if so, how? I think each teacher, I know there are a lot of teachers out there who are so set in their ways that no matter what students they have, but I think a teacher needs to be adaptive towards what kind of class she has.

Sean: More flexible.

Sydney: Yeah, it's not always about the way you teach; it's about how your classes take it, and each class is different so I think they need to take that into consideration. I do think teachers should ask their students more how they feel about the class because they might be questioning why nobody is passing their tests but if they knew what was going on in people's heads they might be able to fix it.

Sean: Yeah.

John: Well that's usually reserved more the end of the semester during course evaluations, though.

Sydney: I know, but I think they should do it earlier.

John: That's exactly what I'm saying.

Sydney: They should do it earlier, maybe halfway through the semester when you can be more successful toward the end instead of waiting until the end to find out.

Jenny: And if an instructor gets a better feel for how the class is going it flows better throughout the semester too, so you can get more done.

Sydney: How might students benefit from instructors having a better knowledge of students' perceptions in English 101.

Chelsea: Well, it's like we said. Maybe they can change just a little bit not completely a lot, just to accommodate some of their needs.

Sydney: Yeah, I'm not saying make it easier, I'm saying you could accommodate students better and maybe they wouldn't do badly in your class if you understood what they were going through.

John: I think, yeah, they could do that and watch how you're actually talking to students kind of has an effect on them. If you ask them a question and they answer the question wrong, don't kind of degrade them and make them feel bad for guessing. At least they took a chance and guessed. It may not have been right but they took a chance, so don't make them feel bad for the answer they gave you.

Sydney: Anything else?

Chelsea: No.

Sydney: All right. That's it.

#### **Group 4**

Samantha

Regina

Corin

Claire

Samantha: What role do you think English 101 plays in your college education?

Regina: I think it's like a basis of your English career regardless of what major you have English 101 is going to be the base to set up papers and everything you do.

Corin: I think that it helps us with our grammar and it's like the first class to help you; you have to have this class to know what you're going to do in the upper-level English classes.

Claire: I think it plays a big role because most people when they come from high school there's summer time, so they need a review of how to make sentence structures; a lot of people didn't do sentence structure in high school is was mostly like reading based, like, let's read literature, so it's really different I think and it's good for every student to take English 101 because it gives you a starting point.

Samantha: What role do you think English 101 plays in your future success, for instance your career?

Claire: Since I want to be an elementary school teacher, I think it's good for me to take an English class or English 101 because you have to teach little kids English, and if I ever teach higher grades, it's good for me to know how to teach them grammar; it's important.

Corin. Well, since I'm a social work major, I'm obviously going to have to be filling out paperwork and things, and it's not going to be very professional if I don't know how to grammatically write a correct sentence.

Claire: That's true.

Regina: I think, well, I don't think I necessarily need it for the papers and stuff, but for the grammar and to learn how to correctly write research papers. I'll need that later in the future.

Samantha: How would you describe your attitude toward English 101?

Claire: I like it; I mean the professor is cool. He helps us out. He's kind of old, but he's still a good guy.

Corin: Yeah, I like it too, but I feel like I don't try as hard as I should because it's kind of easy, but he's a really nice professor, and he's been a bit lenient, so far.

Regina: I think he knows what he's doing; he's a good professor; it's just hard to stay awake in there sometimes because he reviews the material over and over.

Claire: What factors do you think most contribute to your attitude?

Samantha: [laughing] sometimes he talks really monotone.

Regina: Sometimes I don't try as hard because sometimes I don't really know when things are due because he'll say one due date and then somebody will ask him again, and he'll give another due date, and he'll go back and forth.

Corin: Every day, like every single class, he changes the syllabus, so it's really hard to know when stuff is actually due.

Claire: I agree; he changes...he changes it up, and then sometimes he's not sure of his own answer because he loses his answer keys, but he's still a really smart guy.

Corin: How does your attitude toward English 101 affect the way you value composition? In other words, does having a positive attitude make you value composition more than a negative attitude towards composition? Is there no difference? Is there an inverse difference?

Regina: Okay, I don't have the best attitude towards it because I don't try very hard, but I still value it a lot; I don't think attitude diminishes the value. It's still an important class.

Claire: I don't think, oh I hate English. I value the English language because I need it to talk; If I didn't have it, I'd be...I don't know. The English language is the basis for a lot of other languages that you could learn, so I mean I value it.

Corin: I think that if you have a negative attitude going into the class and you go in there every day and just don't care, I feel like that's going to make you not want to take the upper-level English classes. English 101 is the basis, so it [attitude] does have an effect.

Corin: How valuable do you think English 101 is?

Claire: I think it's really valuable.

Samantha: Yeah. I mean it's incredibly valuable.

Claire: Because you need to learn how to put words in a sentence together. Talking like, "we ain't going nowhere" ever, like that

Samantha: Nobody is going to take you seriously in life.

Claire: No. Exactly. You don't go to a job interview and be like, "Hi, my name are..." You say, "Hi my name is"

Samantha: And you don't put on your resume bad grammar.

Regina: Everybody needs to know correct grammar because it is the basis of, this is the basic class so everyone needs to know how to do it.

Corin: Why do you value or not value English 101?

Samantha: It's important. I value it because it's important because everything you do the rest of your college career is going to be kind of based on what you learned in English 101 because you're always going to have to turn in papers for classes no matter what major you're in.

Regina: Yeah, that's true. I value it because it is the basic class. If you do bad in this class, then it's going to set you up to do bad in the other upper-level classes.

Corin: Yeah, this class, like she said, kind of sets the tone for other classes. If you do bad in English 101 then how are you going to do in 102 or 207 if you have to take those classes? I personally value it because I just like English. I just like the class and I think it's a good refresher for me, not having taken a composition class in the past.

Samantha: What factor do you think plays a greater role in your success in English 101? Your attitude toward the course? How much you like the course or dislike it? How much you value the course apart from your attitude toward it?

Claire: I think how the professor teaches the material has a big role in my attitude towards it. Whenever he does have a monotone voice it's really hard, but whenever he's reading the papers, giving us examples of the papers, I think he's really enthusiastic about that, and so I feel like I gain more knowledge from listening to him when he's more enthusiastic.

Samantha: I feel like my opinion of how valuable it is helps me pass it because if I went by my attitude, I wouldn't turn anything in.

Corin: I think it's a little bit of both. If you have a good attitude, like sometimes you don't have a good attitude and some days you're going to think "I really don't want to do it," but then you remember it's a valuable course, so it works both ways. If you have a good attitude you about it, yeah, attitude is everything so if you have a good attitude, you'll be more likely to be motivated to do good.

Claire: If you think your attitude is a better predictor of your success in English 101 why do you think so?

Corin: Um, because if you go into something with a good attitude, then you're going to feel like, "I can do it. There's no problem, and if you do run into a problem you're not going to be let down about it or be down about it. You're going to be like, "It's just one problem; I can handle this."

Samantha: Yeah if you have a good attitude you're not going to give up when you don't understand something. You're going to be confident in what you do.

Claire: Yeah, a good attitude helps a lot.

Regina: If you think how much you value the course is a better predictor of your success in English 101, why do you think so?

Samantha: Because if you value the course you're going to be more inclined to turn things in and more inclined to ask questions, and you're going to have a lot to learn if you don't think the course is important. If you don't think the course is important, you aren't going to try to do anything.

Claire: If it's important to you, you're going to participate more in class to understand the material.

Regina: In your opinion, would instructors benefit from knowing students' perceptions of FYC courses, and if so, how?

Samantha: Yes, because students, teachers can go into a classroom and teach for hours. They can just go in and teach and not know a student's perspective and think, "Oh I'm doing a really good job," but from the student's point-of-view they could be a really bad teacher and they could be not helping the kids, not going in order. The kids could totally not understand what is going on, but the teacher could think they're doing a really good job, so I think teachers would benefit from knowing students' opinions of the class.

Claire: But do you think professors would change based on students' opinions?

Samantha: I think to make it easier for them to learn, I mean

Claire: I mean I would hope they would but...

Samantha: Yeah, I hope they would.

Corin: Some professors say, "It's just a student."

Samantha: Yeah.

Claire: Yeah.

Corin: They're not going to think [unintelligible]; they're just going to say, "it's just a student."

Regina: They instructors, they would, they would have another side to the story.

Claire: I think it would benefit them to know.

Regina: They wouldn't be like, "Oh, I'm a good teacher and that's that. They would also be like "Oh, well the students, most of the students think this about my class; maybe I should change something."

Corin: I agree. Like an evaluation sheet, if teachers actually read that or read into it, maybe they would be like, "there are some things I could change," because everyone has their flaws. You're not going to be perfect by the end, but there are some things you could make better if someone's really not, really not getting it, and there could be other students like that, you know. You're just trying to make yourself better.

Samantha: How might students benefit from instructors having a better knowledge of students' perceptions of English 101?

Regina: Well I know in our class we would have a better understanding of due dates.

Corin: Yes.

Regina: Like if he knew how confused we were, on, when everything was due he would probably try harder to let us know when the correct due date is.

Corin: he wouldn't, I think he wouldn't forget things like he wouldn't forget that he gave one class one thing but he didn't give the other class one thing; he gives one class a whole bunch of work. It's just, it's just a mess, so. I mean, I know, I guess he's trying to switch it up, but I'm not really sure.

Claire: I think he would be more organized and that would be a lot helpful.

Corin: Yeah, that's true. I agree.

### **Group 5**

D: I'm Danielle.

A: I'm Amber.

M: I'm Melonie.

R: And I'm Reggie.

D: What role do you think English 101 plays in your college education? Well, I think that it's a good foundation to learn how to write so that way when, depending on what your major is, you have to write presentations or give a report on something you actually know the grammatical way to correctly write it.

A: I feel like it's a good basis, but mainly more for just English classes, so if you're not an English major it's helpful but it's not in the future. It's just mainly for college.

M: For me, I just feel like English 101 plays a significant role, maybe for me just because I have a love for English, but because I believe it helps you write papers, and once you graduate college you're going to have to use the stuff that you are learning to write reports and memos and things like that in your work and in the professional field anyway.

R: Um, being a music major we don't really use writing as much, but honestly writing, English 101, is an important class, mainly because it's kind of like you're learning how to write because you start learning how to write when you're in middle school, you go all the way through high school, and continue to develop your skills with the college-development skills. As a music major I'm still going to have to write. I have to get my doctorate in order to actually be top class in my profession, so I'm going to have to write a dissertation, and in order to do that, I'm going to have to know how to write, which is what this class is for.

A: Okay, so what role do you think English 101 plays in your future success, for instance, your career?

M: I...in the career...I want to do forensic science in the lab, so I could write lab reports but it's not necessarily going to be like a five-page paper or anything, it's going to be results from tests, so I guess it depends on what portion of forensics I do.

A: For me, I want to go into PR for, in the athletic industry, so for me it will, I guess, play a major role because I'm going to have to represent my company and that will probably entail a whole lot of writing. and then working in the office and having to propose ideas and things like that, writing will be a major asset.

R: As far as being a musician and a music major, writing will not be as significant in my profession besides whenever I am going through school to get my degrees in order to get certified and be at the top of the market, so for the beginning, for the beginning stages of me progressing in my profession then I consider English being important.

D: Um, in regards to my career which is the general manager of a golf course, English will have a large effect because I'm going to have to write reports on how my business is doing, I'm going to have to be able to write letters to people and know grammatically how to write them, and just, it will play a huge role in my career.

A: What would you describe your attitudes toward English 101? Um I don't mind it. The grammar is a lot for me; I don't like grammar very much, but it is beneficial for me, so I put up with it.

R: Ever since I was a child I couldn't stand English. English has just irritated me because I feel like if you know how to write your letters, and you can write a sentence and not sound stupid, then you'll be fine, and my mom is an English teacher, so it makes it kind of harder for me not to like English. I don't hate English. I'm a good writer, but as far as the grammar, that is probably the most irritating part of the whole process in English.

D: My attitude toward English is pretty positive. I like writing, I love reading and writing, but the grammar is just not my strong point, and so that—but in English 101 it is a nice review from high school of the grammar.

M: yeah, I think it's a nice review too; I'm actually pretty good at the grammar part. It's like reading a book and taking a test on the book. That's harder for me. So we're doing mainly grammar and I'm okay with it since I know I can do that much.

R: What factors do you think most contribute to your attitude? I think the fact that I was bombarded with a whole bunch of English all my life in my house because of my mom who was a teacher kind of added on to the fact that I don't like English, and not being an avid reader, I read whenever I find something I enjoy, and I'm a very good writer, but the grammar and the reading things that you're not used to reading as far as things that are not

your taste, which I know is supposed to broaden your horizons but that would pretty much explain why I feel the way I feel.

D: My attitude toward it, well, yeah, my attitude is the factors that contribute are I love reading anything. I'll read anything and everything, love it, love it, love it, and I like to write about it, so that's why I think I have a positive attitude toward it, but I can't handle the grammar. [laughter]

M: I like reading, but I like reading books that I want to read, not books that I'm assigned that I have to read and take tests on because I've had a teacher pretty much taught me to write on a paper that I got a 44 on, so I'm not that positive when it comes to taking tests on books that I've read, but the grammar part I'm pretty confident on.

A: I'm a big pleasure reader, like I love to read books that I choose, and my mom, being an English major in college, she's basically forced English down my throat, so English has kind of been my life since forever, so.

D: Okay, um, how does your attitude toward English 101 affect the way you value composition? In other words, does having a positive attitude make you value composition more than having a negative attitude towards composition? Is there no difference? Is there an inverse difference? I don't think my attitude towards composition really affects whether or not I like it because I see the value in it in the long run, what it's going to do for me, for my job, my career, but I don't think that really has an effect on whether or not I like English.

M: I think the value is more important because if you want to get through college you're going to have to do this, so whether you like it or not you're just going to have to do it.

A: I don't really think my attitude towards composition affects my value on it just mostly because even though I may not like composition that much I know I have to take it, so it makes me value it more I guess because I know in the long run it's going to benefit me.

R: Just because I don't particularly like English and composition, well, I like writing, but as far as English, just because I don't particularly like it doesn't make me ignorant to the importance of it because if I am a music major I am going to write in some way, shape, or form whether it's writing a play, writing composition notes, a piece, I'm going to have to write in some way, and I don't really think my attitude makes a difference on the way I feel towards composition just because I know how important it is.

A: How valuable do you think English 101 is? I find it very valuable because it helps refresh your memory and gets you set for the rest of the years that you have English so you're more prepared versus having to write research papers, and then you're worried about grammar errors and all that, so it's very valuable.

M: I think it's valuable. Um, I feel like it prepares you well for other English classes you're going to have to take in the future and it's a good refresher from high school on how to properly write and how to correct grammatical errors that you would make on the regular.

R: I believe that it is valuable because in English 101 you write; this is more of a writing class to teach you how to write, teach you about grammar and what not to do when writing, and with writing you have somewhat creativity, you have creative power over what you write, like you can present your ideas in the way you want to lay your ideas, and I believe creativity is a very important aspect in anyone's life because when you approach ideas or are presenting ideas you have to be creative in the way you present those ideas, you have to be creative in your approach, creative in your ideas, period. And I believe English 101 allows you to use creative juices when you are writing.

D: I think English 101 is definitely valuable towards college education and careers. I think it plays a large part in helping you get a job and hold a job.

A: Why do you value or not value English 101? I feel like English 101 is important; that makes me value it more, also just simply because I know that it's going to benefit me. I guess the long-term effect is what makes me value it.

R: I value English 101 to an extent because I know in some way, shape or form I'm going to have to write, but I don't put English 101 on a pedestal as one of my top priorities just because of the field I'm going into, which is music, so it wouldn't really be an extreme priority.

D: I value it in the sense of what it can do for me in my career, but then I also like English I like writing, so this class. I like it because I get to write about a lot of things, and I can share my opinion, so I value it both ways.

M: I may not necessarily like English 101, but I value it just like I value you all of my required courses because if I don't value it, I'm not going to want to do the work, so I have to have some level of values in all the classes that I have to take, but it's not like at the top of my list of values, but, yeah.

R: What factor do you think plays a greater role in your success in English 101, your attitude toward the course (how much you like it or dislike it) or how valuable the course is apart from your attitude toward it? I believe that how valuable the course is, is ultimately going to determine whether you do well in the class or not. I know in high school we took classes that we didn't like. I couldn't stand history, and I took that history class, and I ended up passing that history class with an A because I knew that I had to have my GPA somewhere, at a particular place, in order to get where I want to go, so regardless of how you feel toward the class, I feel like the value of the class and how important the class is, as

in you need this class in order to graduate college, you're going to perform in that class in order to pass, period.

D: I agree with that because I think that it depends on how valuable the course is to your major and what you want to do, so if you really value English you're going to do well in it, but then it also really helps you succeed if you like English, but that's not the ultimate on whether or not you're going to pass English, is whether or not you like it; it's how much you value it in general.

M: Yeah, and also it's how dedicated you are to your work; that's like the main part of valuing it, so you have to stay focused in it whether you like it or not, so value apart from attitude toward it, whether you like it or not, is definitely important.

A: For me, I feel like in life you have to do a lot of things that you don't exactly like, but the amount that you value things is going to make you work harder and succeed, so I think that my value is what contributes most to my success in composition.

D: If you think your attitude is a better predictor of your success in English 101, why do you think so? I don't think your attitude is a better predictor because your attitude toward English may be that you hate it, but if you value it in terms of your career, or the rest of your college education then you're going to do fine, you're going to pass the class, because you know it's really valuable, but you might not like it at all.

A: Yeah, I agree with what you said because you can be like, "Man, I don't want to do this paper; I hate writing papers," but if you do it anyway, and you work hard at it, then you're going to get a good grade because you tried your best and you worked on it. You may not have liked it, but you still had to do it you knew that you had to do it, so you did it to the best of your abilities.

M: Um, I don't think that your attitude is a better predictor simply because like everyone else said, as long as value it and work hard at it, you're going to succeed in it regardless of how much you like it or how much you don't like it.

R: Piggybacking off of what you all said, I don't think attitude is the best, most accurate predictor of your success in English 101, just because in college as freshmen, even as freshmen, freshmen are smart enough to know, and wise enough to know that these classes, what we do for the next four or five or three years is going to be one of the most important milestones of our life to determine what we do with the rest of our life, and at least here, at Methodist University, English 101 is a required course for just about every major, and seeing the value that that one class has on your possibility of graduating from college will automatically just let you know that you need to pass this class. And I can go into a classroom and absolutely despise everything about that class from the professor, to

the craft, to the lesson plans, to the work we have to do, and I see the value of that class, and I know how valuable that class is towards my future and what I have to do; I'm still going to perform in that class in order to pass.

M: If you think how much you value the course is a better predictor of your success in English 101 why do you think so? Like I said earlier, I think dedication to your work is everything, whether you hate it or whether you love it as long as you're dedicated to it, that's really all that matters.

A: I believe that like you said the value is a better predictor simply because the more you value it, the more dedicated you are to it, and the more determined you are to succeed in it.

R: Well, since we are agreeing with what everyone else has to say, I'm going to agree with the two of you who talked before me just because of the fact that in the last question one person said that in life you are going to have to do things that you don't necessarily like to do and why do you think that you are going to continue to do those things? Because you understand how valuable those things are to what you want to do with your life, so value, automatically, has more control and more power than attitude when determining what you have to do.

D: I'm not sure how much more I can add because we all basically just covered it, but I agree with what they said. It all depends on how much you realize how important it is to us.

M: In your opinion would instructors benefit from knowing students' opinions of FYC courses, and if so, how? I feel like knowing the students' perceptions of a course makes it easier or more efficient in teaching the course simply because you know how the students feel about it, so you know how to teach them and how to make the course so that your students benefit from it in the best way possible.

R: I believe instructors will benefit tremendously from knowing how the students feel about the class just because if you know how your students feel towards what you're teaching then you can kind of understand where they are coming from and teach in a way that will grasp them, and maybe you can come in not liking the class, and the way the teacher teaches it changes your whole perspective on that one subject, for as far as English, at least, I believe that the teacher, having the perspective of the students that she is about to teach or that he or she is about to teach will overall benefit how productive the class is and how productive it is on the student.

D: I think it depends on the instructor whether or not it's going to benefit them or not. There are some instructors who don't care what the students think; they're just going to keep teaching their class the way it is, but for those instructors that do care what their students think and want to better teach the students, they're going to take the information

they're given and use it to create their lesson plans so that they can better teach all aspects of the student.

A: I agree with what you just said with it depending on the teacher because you can have a person that's been the professor or the teacher so long that they're kind of set in their ways so they're not going to want to change it versus a newer teacher who wants all of their students to do well in the class, so they're going to try to come up with new ways for them to do better, like remember certain materials and make the whole class more enjoyable, so they're going to want to do it.

R: How might students benefit from instructors having better knowledge of students' perceptions of English 101? I believe that students would benefit tremendously, as I said in the last question just because in my mind as a student I don't want to do anything that I'm being forced to do or I don't want to do anything that I feel is going to bore me to death or is just going to make me not want to apply myself. So if the teacher knows how I feel coming into the class she'll understand where I'm coming from and I think just psychologically that will help me know that will help me when I'm dealing with the class just because I know the teacher knows how I feel about the class so she knows that I might not like this class; she knows I might love this class and based on the fact that she knows that it will most likely help me work harder in the class. I'm not completely sure if that makes sense.

D: I think it will depend on the student whether or not it's going to benefit them because there are some students who are going to come through here and just feel like they don't care. It doesn't matter what the teacher does, they don't care; they're stubborn. They're not going to like the class. They just won't benefit from it, but the students who want to be here, who want to learn will better themselves in the learning, and they're going to benefit because the instructors are going to help them and then the students are going to want to take that and it's just going to bounce off each other.

M: I basically agree with what you just said. It depends on the students and the professors altogether and the combination of the two.

A: Basically I agree with what everyone else said. How much a student values a course is going to determine their success regardless. If a student want to succeed they aren't going to succeed no matter how the instructor is giving out the information . For students who want to be there and understand the value of the course they will benefit strongly from it simply because with the instructors knowing better what the students' perception of the course is they can mold their lesson plans around how their students learn and how they perceive it, it will make their success in the course a little bit easier.

## APPENDIX I: QUALTRICS OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS' ANSWERS

### Question 1

If I don't like the class then I am not going to do the work. same thing goes for liking the class.

It affects your performance because if some one does not want to do something they're not going to put their best effort forward in the class.

I wont give much effort if I dont like the topic or subject. If I am interested in the topic and subject then then my performance will be much greater then the effort I will give if I am not interested.

This affects my performance because I don't put all of my effort in what I am writing.

I think it can have a positive or negative affect. If I like the class then I might have a better grade.

Attitude interacts wf i'm writing a paper and i have ideas && lots to talk about i'm confident in my paper.

I thith my performance in Composition 1 by affecting my motivation. If I look forward to writing an assignment, then I am more likely to do that assignment earlier than later.

I enjoy writing and my professor has given me full reign on what I write about. This fuels my imagination in and outside of class. I love it

I can write better material when I am having a positive attitude about the material.

I have never liked writing, therefore it is just a requirement to me. I know that I need this class to help me writing skills, but I dont enjoy writing

When someone is not motivated, or lacks the necessary impulse to accomplish a task, it is likely the task will not be completed to the best of their ability. I am greatly motivated to do well in this course by numerous sources.

I think that my attitude determines the quality of work that i will produce. The higher quality of work means better performance in the class.

i think that be doig wel in the class I wil enjoy the calss more. On the other hand the worse I do in class will make me not want to work harder and I will do less work in the class. This goes for all of my classes and thats why i strive to do the best in all of my classes

I don't like writing very much, therefore I don't work at it and I don't take the time to create a good essay. I will usually procrastinate until 2 or 3 days before the essay is due.

feel as though some days it does affect my success/performance because of how tired I am or if I feel ill or not. Also if I am committed to want to achieve in the future and in my future career.

I believe my attitude towards english really affects my grade. I do not care much for english so I really do not push myself and i have trouble getting motivated to write all these papers.

I just never liked any english class I have taken. I do not like writing english papers and this tends to lead to me not doing all of my assignments given to me.

I feel that since I like the class I do better in it and focus more. I take more time on my work and look for the things we learn in class in my essays I write.

If I am not interested in what we are talking about or reading, i day dream and go into other thoughts about other things.

If your attitude is not good then your performance can't reach its potential.

If I am not enjoying a certain assignment in the class, the topic is uninteresting ect. it will affect my performance in the class.

if I have a bad attitude while writing a paper than more than likely it won't be very good

If you don't have a good attitude toward english you won't have as much success as other will that do have a good attitude.

It effects my determination to do the work and do it well.

Because I like the class and I am satisfied with the professor and classmates, I find it easier and find myself more willing to do the work and participate.

I am not a big fan of writing and english in general so it is one of those classes that I prefer not to have no matter who my professor is.

I believe when I work on an assignment for a class I enjoy I tend to do better rather than for a class I do not technically like.

If you have a poor attitude then your performance will be poor as well.

I am not all that interested in composition and it reflects when I do not have a good attitude while writing a paper and putting forth the amount of effort I should.

I know that I am not a strong writer so going into this class I really wanted to focus on making myself a better writer than when I started. So my attitude towards the class was already decided before the first day of class.

If I'm not in a good mood I do poorly.

I enjoy this writing class with Dr. Rach. This class will help me with other papers once I get further into my degree.

going into an assignment with a good attitude helps me a lot because I know I can get it done and know I can get a good grade

because if one does not like English he or she may not put in as much effort to better themselves. One may just "go through the motions" to get a passing grade.

Attitude affects your success/performance in class because a bad attitude can mean, either flunking the class because of attendance or failing because you're not paying attention in class.

it makes me want to work harder towards my homework and papers that I have to write

I think that your attitude affects your success because if you have a positive attitude your grades will show.

I feel as if your attitude determines your grade. You will get an A if you want an A.

I think my participation in class and positive attitude both make successful

In order to be successful in English 101, he or she has to have a positive attitude. If he or she does not have a positive attitude then more than likely it will reflect on his or her grade.

I think it [attitude] does affect my success.

I never let my attitude interfere with my school work.

Because although I do not like to write, I know I have to do the writing and do it well.

I feel even if you have a great attitude towards English 101 the instructor could still point out all your mistakes and tell you what you're doing wrong when you think you did good.

I am a person that will execute excellence in order to become successful, so if an English course is in that path, I will perform well.

There are plenty of classes I do not like that I do well in, because trying to pass all of my classes.

It does not affect my performance because I think if I would've taken English 100 before this class I could've done a better job. I have never write assignments for any English class before this class. And I graduated from high school 8 years ago. I barely remember anything. Also I was not giving a placement test when I came to this school, and I think I should of take one so my advisor knew in which English level to place me when I register for this class.

I try not to let my attitude toward a class affect how I perform in a class. I am here to learn. because my attitude toward every class is the same

It would give them an understanding of how students react to English work. Some believe it is not very helpful

### **Question 3**

Not a lot is done in class to help you learn to write, if you have had very little experience with it. Teachers pretty much leave you on your own.

The class is fine to me and the instructor is very knowledgeable. I think I just need it to take English 100 first since i haven't been in school for 8 years.

### **Question 5**

No

No

I like it when the teacher takes the time to explain why I have to write in class.

It does.

Yes.

Yes.

Usually when I'm feeling lazy or not exactly in the mood to do work, that affects the amount of work I complete in class.

I feel like it affects my success/performance because I'm really not that great of a writer, so I feel like because of that, I will not succeed in the class.

my teacher I feel does not like me and gives me grades that I dont deserve.

English is the most tedious course. Requires a lot of time and effort and even that doesn't guarantee success.

(50 responses to question 3)

**Question 6**

N

N

N

Testtest

Yes

Yes

If I'm having a bad day I'll still do my work correctly.

Work is work, if it needs to be done than it gets done no matter how much I dont want to do it.

I think this because either way i am going to try ma heardiest in any class that i am in.

(18 reponses)

**Question 15**

N

N

N

N

Instructors would know what students need.

Yes

They will have a better understanding.

They would know how to interact with the student and what study skills will help the student.

It will benefit with the success of the students learning abilities.

This will allow teachers to gain the students attention much easier. It will also help because teachers will do things that are more enjoyable for students.

I feel as though the instrutors will be able to modify their teaching strategies.

They could understand their outlook on writing paper & the types of topics or testing given out.

they could help us understand writing skills a lot better

It can help to fine tune a student.

Instructors having a better knowledge of the student's perspectives on English 101 will improve how the instructor might explain and teach the class

They would understand that we want to write about something interesting in a way that helps us understand

The instructors could better apply the information that they are teaching to how they teach their class. This would allow students to be taught in a more efficient manner and in a way that help better prepare them for their future.

If the instructor knows that a student(s) do not favor English 101, they might put more emphasis in making the class a bit more interesting for them.

With an instructor knowing the feelings of a student, the instructor can relate on a more personal level and offer help if necessary.

They will understand better of the material at hand.

He or she will be more prepared as to what to expect when coming into a new semester with brand new students. I feel it is a good idea to give a survey like this out before students come into this class so the professor knows what to expect.

They will realize that not all students want to be an english major or that they do not think english applies to them. Will help them understand that not every studernt in the class really understamnds how to write.

If the instructors know how a students thinks about English 101 then it might help the instructor teach in a way the student will unless or help them through the class and the

student will benefit by being able to interact with the instructor in a way that makes it easier for the student.

The instructor would try to teach the students the topics that they do not find interesting and teach them in a different manner to help the student get a better understanding of the topic.

Students would be more engaged and be more willing to learn and gain a better knowledge of writing and English.

If they knew what their students were interested in and they see the way their course is going has nothing to do with what their students are interested in they could perhaps tweak the things they are teaching in their course to perhaps make it more interesting and fun for the students. Because when certain things are fun, they are easier to learn.

the professors know them on a personal basis

If the student hates the class then the teacher needs to change the way they teach

n/a

They will have some sort of guide to view opinions that students believe is necessary

With a better knowledge of how students perceive English 101, the course can be improved more.

understanding why they might struggle in the class or what parts they enjoy most.

We can benefit a lot

If the teachers knew how students feel about their instructors' course objectives and activities they provide for the students, they can do more of what the students enjoy, and what is most beneficial to the students.

Instructors would have the upper hand by knowing what students think before they arrive for class. This gives the instructors the privilege to guide their course to not only teach students but change their perspectives.

That way the instructors may have a better idea on how to approach a certain topic or the class in general.

Because it helps the instructors to get a better understanding of how students write.

Helps the instructors understand the students' mindset.

N/A

So the teacher can make the class more interactive and fun or more structured and strict

If the professor know's the student and the student is struggling, the professor can help that student one on one.

It will make the students more interested in learning the material

it would help the professor make the assignments better

beacase then the instructor can help you better.

Because the instructor will know how to work on the students weakness.

instructors would know where the student stands on English and why they like the subject or don't like it. This insight might give them ideas to better reach the student

Many students learn differently. If the instructor was aware of how each student learns the best then that student would have a better chance of succeeding.

(48 responses)