FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS TRANSITIONING TO GRADUATE
TEACHERS OF WRITING:
A PROPOSED FIRST-GENERATION PEDAGOGY

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ABSTRACT

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Existing research on first-generation college students has focused on the student and their paths from high school to college, experiences attending college, and expectations of the middle-class academy. Such student populations are not situated within similar positions that conventional students are often faced with. When differences in literacy practices are not brought into consideration, other voices are lost and denied. Based on these conversations, the dissertation focuses on shifting the way we look at first-year writing instructors who identify as first-generation graduate students and how such identifiers may influence their philosophies of teaching.

With its focus on first-generation graduate teachers of writing, the dissertation seeks to determine how these identifiers influence participants’ personal philosophy of teaching and pedagogy. Based on the existing, yet lacking research, in the field of Rhetoric and Composition about first-generation college students, this study focuses on the underrepresented (frequently misrepresented) population of first-generation students who are in graduate school and teach writing. This research provides an additional insight into they identifier, of first-generation at the graduate level, an insight that can benefit undergraduate students with similar identifiers as well as those who provide their writing instruction.

Employing focus group, observation, interview, and textual analysis, this study looks at the practices of seven participants (five identifying as first-generation, one
traditional, and one Writing Program Administrator) and how their experiences may have influenced their philosophies of teaching. The dissertation proposes the need for a first-generation pedagogy as a way to help undergraduates, first-generation and traditional, among others, ease their transition into the academy. Asking first-generation students to share their experiences and make connections to their knowledge-making can place an emphasis on otherwise silenced voices, thereby validating their presence in the academy.
DEDICATION

For my mother, father, and Luanne, who have loved and believed in me unconditionally.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>CHAPTER I: EXTENDING THE CONVERSATION: TRANSITIONING FROM STUDENT TO WRITING TEACHER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defining Terms</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First-Generation Student Populations</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-traditional Literacy Practices</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overview of Study</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Methods and Methodology</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dissertation Summary</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>CHAPTER II. SETTING THE SCENE: PROJECT RATIONALE AND DESIGN</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Components of the Study</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concluding Thoughts</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>CHAPTER III. IN THEIR OWN WORDS: THE DATA AND ITS PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS</strong></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overview of Collected Data by Participants</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Portraits</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>James</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>David</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kilgore .................................................................................................................. 46

Writing Program Administrator .......................................................................... 47

Common Themes ................................................................................................... 49

Addressing the Research Questions .................................................................... 58

Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 64

CHAPTER IV. ANALYZING THEIR ACTIONS: INTERPRETATIONS, OBSERVATIONS,
AND INSIGHTS ....................................................................................................... 66

Participant Observations and Classroom Artifacts Overview ......................... 67

Common Themes ................................................................................................... 67

Addressing the Research Questions .................................................................... 81

Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 90

CHAPTER V. IMPLICATIONS, FINDINGS AND FUTURE RESEARCH .................. 92

Limitations ........................................................................................................... 94

A Proposed First-Generation Pedagogy ............................................................... 96

Implications .......................................................................................................... 102

Future Research ................................................................................................. 105

Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 106

REFERENCES ....................................................................................................... 107

APPENDIX A. WPA INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ...................................................... 117

APPENDIX B. FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS ......................................................... 118

APPENDIX C. INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ........................................... 120

APPENDIX D. HSRB APPROVAL DOCUMENTS .................................................... 121
# LIST OF FIGURES/TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure/Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Figure 1. Chart. Summary of Key Themes by Data Collection Method</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Figure 2. Table. Breakdown of Participants</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Figure 3. Screen Capture. Essay Section of Syllabus for James</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Figure 4. Screen Capture. Essay Section of Syllabus for Frank</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Figure 5. Screen Capture. Essay Section of Syllabus for David</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Figure 6. Screen Capture. Grading Section of Syllabus for James</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Figure 7. Screen Capture. Participant Observation Portion for David</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Figure 8. Screen Capture. Strategy Guide Section for James</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Figure 9. Screen Capture. Writing Tip Section of Strategy Guide for James</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The academic world is often a challenging and trying experience for any newly entering college student. Engaging in a new discourse of the academy and stepping into one’s new role as a college student who is now solely responsible for attending classes, completing assignments and meeting requirements often becomes demanding, with new expectations and goals in place. It is true that the conventional student struggles to cope with transitioning from high school and home life to college life, yet it can become more difficult for the unconventional student due to their lack of the middle-class literacies most often associated with the discourse communities of the academy. The label of unconventional student can encompass a variety of student populations, including but not limited to returning adult learners, exchange students, first-generation college students, transfer students, veterans, and working-class students. As this brief list indicates, these marked groups may experience additional struggles that the stereotypical eighteen year old, middle class, recent high-school graduate may not. Learning the discourses of the academy may be an easy transition for traditional students who have been exposed to such literacies through their parents or family members’ past experiences of attending the university. While these conventional students may not have directly learned to interact and engage in these new discourses, the exposure remains, unlike unconventional students, such as first-generation college students, who most likely have little if any previous knowledge of or connection with academic discourse and are exposed to it only upon their initial submersion in the discourse.

As David Bartholomae elucidates in his seminal article “Inventing the University”: 
students have to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and they have to do this as though they were easily and comfortably one of their audience, as though they were members of the academy… they have to invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language, finding some compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, and the requirements of the convention, the history of a discipline. They must learn to speak our language. Or they must dare to speak it, or carry off the bluff, since speaking and writing will most certainly be required long before the skill is ‘learned’. (403)

Bartholomae focuses on the role of the first–year writing student; this same concept might be shifted to look at the role of a first-time graduate teaching assistant. One of the main goals of a writing teacher then, much as Bartholomae argues, is to “teach students to revise for [their] readers,” for their audience, so they may then begin viewing their ideas and writing in terms of how various audiences will respond, react and potentially accept such ideas. Along this same thought, it is important to teach first-generation graduate students who are also first time teachers of writing to “de-cloak” as Richard A. Greenwald and Elizabeth A. Grant explain of allowing students to know that “‘people just like them’ [such as first-generation] exist…[thus] better serv[ing] as role models and mentors for them” (33). Students will find ways of potentially connecting and communicating better with their teachers in doing so. By providing this knowledge for unconventional students to observe their teachers as identifying much as they do as first-generation and sharing similar experiences, not only will our classrooms provide a better collective environment but also first-generation graduate students will transition into academia better.
To begin this examination, my dissertation serves as an additional view of the conversations and experiences of a population that has been largely overlooked. First-generation students make up a large portion of student populations at community colleges and four-year institutions, and the supporting scholarship is growing. However, as these students complete their two- and four-year degrees, some choose to pursue advanced degrees. These students are often overlooked by researchers of first-generation scholarship. My study fills this space. By providing experiences of first-generation graduate teaching assistants, new insights contribute and extend the conversation on first-generation students, and how they develop their identities from students to graduate teachers of writing.

This Chapter provides an overall introduction to my study and how the project’s goals fit into the larger conversations of the field. A literature review offers grounding and shows how my larger project fits into and extends the already present, but limited, conversations on first-generation college students. The Chapter continues with discussion of my research questions and introduction to how my methods and methodologies provide analysis for my research. Chapter One concludes with a breakdown of the larger document, an outline of the remaining four chapters, and a discussion of how they fit into the overall project.

Defining Terms

When discussing terms and labels of certain student populations, it is important to define the term first-generation and how I choose to use it for the purposes of this dissertation. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the identifier first-generation college student refers to “students whose parents never enrolled in postsecondary education” (v). Based on this definition, students who classify as first-generation often lack prior experiences that make
applying and transitioning to college, middle-class values and, consequently, literacies more difficult. While not all first-generation students may identify as working-class, there is a relevant connection because students still experience a sense of “leaving behind” individuals in their lives that may not have experienced nor had an opportunity for extended and higher education. The relationship can become strained or forced as the student enters a new academic environment. Barbara Jensen’s “Across the Great Divide” further speaks on student transitions and experiences of “survivor’s guilt” as working-class students attempt to enter the space of crossing over from working-class culture to the middle class academy (172). Jensen expounds on working-class crossovers stating: “To succeed in higher education working class people must learn to adopt and represent middle class culture as their own. This culture does not grant dual citizenship. You must ‘leave behind’ your ‘low class’ ways, your ‘bad’ English, your values of humility and inclusion, and much more” (177-178). One must accept this new middle class culture without question and with little effort. This feeling of distance exists for students who pursue college educations, but what happens when first-generation students work towards advanced degrees and become part of the academy as graduate teaching assistants, a population of instructors often working with entering college students--some of which may be first generation? This dissertation uncovers and answers some of these questions and expands on our understanding and experiences of this student population further in their academic and developing professional careers. In addition, the need for a proposed first-generation pedagogy is discussed as well as the contributions of such.

It is these populations, individuals who identify as students, hold positions as teachers of writing in the university, and have a first-generational status that generate such questions. How do such individuals make these transitions from unconventional, first generation college student
to a position of potential authority within the very academic classroom they may have struggled in earlier in their lives? How does a first-generation status influence one’s pedagogical choices within their own writing classroom? How do these identifiers impact teaching styles as compared/contrasted with middle-class identified writing teachers? Charles C. Schroeder raises additional questions:

What do we know about current students – their expectations, attitudes, values, academic needs, and social patterns? How do these characteristics influence their college experience and the learning outcomes prized by their institutions? How can educators use this knowledge to create activities and to create activities and experiences that address their educational needs, promote their learning, and foster their academic and social success? What new strategies and best practices can be employed to respond effectively to these changing needs? (19)

Such questions deserve further attention because they show points of discovery and a direction for new research discussions within our field. Staying abreast and current in student experiences and learning styles, as well as the implications behind the pedagogical choices we make as teachers guides my research questions and dissertation.

**First-Generation Student Populations**

*Definitions of First-Generation*

Most of the definitions of first-generation status include individuals whose parents never attended any college (Ishitani 862; Gibbons and Shoffner 1; Pascarella et al. 249). Other definitions include a “university student from a family where no parents or guardian has earned a baccalaureate degree” (Pike and Kuh 277), which implies parents/guardians may have attended
or experienced some college, with limited experience, but did not graduate. Mark P. Orbe’s defines first-generation students as the “first in their family to earn a college education” (132). While each of these definitions differs slightly, offering slight variations, there are clear overlapping connections. For example, all students lack an exposure to academic literacies, lack a complete understanding to the way the academy works, and only truly experience these situations once entering the institution.

For the purposes of my dissertation, I define first-generation as students whose parents did not earn a baccalaureate degree, but may or may not have experienced some college coursework and college experiences. This definition is important to understand because my research looks at the experiences of first-generation graduate teaching assistants and how the identifier of first-generation may influence one’s teaching pedagogy. By doing so, the questions, among others, can begin being answered and discussed through such research.

In the context of the larger study then, I look at first-generation students who go on to acquire advanced graduate degrees. Though many students pursuing advanced education may be the first in their family to do so, my focus is those students who not only are the first to secure a position in a graduate program but also who were the first in their families to attend and complete a Bachelors degree.

**Current Focus of Research**

Much of the current research surrounding first-generation students is focused on helping students enter the academy or providing support so they believe they can succeed in the academy. In “Prospective First-Generation College Students: Meeting Their Needs Through Social Cognitive Theory,” Gibbons and Shoffner address an audience of high school
administrators and propose ways they might aid first-generation college students through the use of Social Cognitive Theory. This approach is common and is seen in other works by Linda Flower, John R. Hayes, and James Britton among others.

A case study by Gibbons and Shoffner provides high-school counselors with the information necessary for providing support and aid to potential first-generation college students attending college. Scholars such as Pike and Kuh explore whether there are differences between first- and second-generation college students, or whether these differences are an indirect result of association between first-generation status and antecedent characteristics or experiences (278). While not directly addressing the field of Rhetoric and Writing, the study provides insight into the preparation of high school students who, when enrolling or attending college, would identify as first-generation students.

Even though much of the first-generation scholarship is largely about the preparation of students, there is scholarship that also looks at degree completion. Terry T. Ishitani focuses on present behavior characteristics of first-generation college students and their tendencies to finish college degrees by “investigating the effects of precollege attributes of students and their attrition and degree completion behaviors” (865). Similar to Gibbons and Shoffner’s study, Ishitani looks at ways of providing support and guidance to first-generation students who are already enrolled in the academy. A large majority of the research focuses on students either entering the academy for the first time or students who are already in school. The scholarly focus to this point has rested on first-generation students entering and completing the bachelor’s degree, but this ignores a potentially growing population of first-generation students who pursue graduate degrees.
Expanding the conversation on first-generation success not only in transitioning from high-school to college but also transitioning from four-year degree to graduate degree, my dissertation extends the current conversations by looking at first-generation graduate students and how such identifiers influence their pedagogical choices on the teaching of writing, as well as the development of teacher identity. While my focus is slightly later in the education process, the previous scholarship discussions further justify a need for research that emphasizes experiences of first-generation graduate teaching assistants because first-generation students “do not typically have the same sources of support” throughout their education as other possibly more conventional students do (Naumann, Bandolos, and Gutkin 5).

Furthermore, Ernest Pascarella, Christopher T. Pierson, Gregory C. Wolniak and Patrick T. Terenzini’s study expands on previous research on first-generation college students and their experiences with academic preparation, transitioning from high school to college, and their experiences toward completing their degrees. My research extends the conversation on first-generation students by focusing solely on first-generation graduate teaching assistants and their experiences with coping as members of graduate school and first time teachers of writing. Pike and Kuh look at the relationships among background characteristics, engagement and learning, and intellectual development, which is the same for first-generation and second-generation students.

Khanh Vant T. Bui’s “First-Generation College Students at a Four-Year University: Background Characteristics, Reasons for Pursuing Higher Education, and First-Year Experiences” explores the background characteristics of first-generation students, as well as personal experiences of their college experiences. Scholars exploring and theorizing about first-generation students have often primarily focused on the experiences of students, but one voice
missing appears to be first-generation students who pursue advanced degrees. Based on Bui’s
findings, first-generation students’ main reasons for attending college were to “[gain]
respect/status, [bring] honor to their family, and [help] their family out financially after
completing college” (6). Drawing off this information, one might potentially hypothesize a
similar reason behind first-generation students continuing on to graduate school as a way to
further gain respect, honor for their families, and financial stability. This dissertation determines
through focus group discussions, interview research, observational analysis, and textual analysis,
participants’ personal reasons for attending graduate school.

First-generation students often experience lower levels of engagement in college due to
many additional outside responsibilities, such as dependants, full-time employment, among other
tasks (Pike and Kuh). Additionally, the attrition rate for many first-generation students is high
because first-generation students often drop out before finishing their degrees due to these
responsibilities. Naumann, Bandalos and Gutkin discuss graduation and success rates of first-
generation students. While many college-aged students require support when entering and
staying in college, Naumann et al.’s article focuses on “independent variables consisting of
generational status, ACT score,” and motivational factors, “such as goal orientation, task values,
expectancy for success beliefs, control beliefs, and self-efficacy” that first generation students
may need or wish to focus on in order to achieve academic success (5). The results of their study
revealed “the relationship between ACT and GPA was much stronger for the first-generation
students. Therefore, the self-regulated learning variables and ACT were better able to predict
GPA” for this student population (8). While Naumann et al.’s research consists of a variety of
unique variables and factors, their study is relevant, emphasizing the lack of educational support
first-generation students often experience. Naumann et al. conclude such students most likely
will rely heavily on their own motivational factors for achieving academic success. Based on the findings of this and other studies, my own research draws on the knowledge that such programs provide successful support for students. Additionally, the concept of support to aid in first-generation academic success should not be limited solely to undergraduate students, but should extend into other areas of the academy, like advanced degrees or teaching teachers how to engage with first-generation students.

**Limitations of Current Research**

As previously discussed, there is a growing body of research focusing on first-generation students. A large majority of such research however, generally falls into three broad categories:

1. a comparison of first-generation and traditional college students in terms of demographic characteristics, secondary school preparation, college choice process, and college expectations;

2. a description of the experiences and transition from high school to postsecondary education;

3. an examination of college persistence, degree attainment, and early career labor market outcome. (Pascarella, et al. 249-250)

Past research has primarily focused on a limited examination of first-generation students and their experiences. What has not been explored, however, is how the literacy practices of this group are relevant and what role these literacy practices play on the educational development and advancement of this group of students. It is based on this gap in the field that my dissertation speaks by looking at first-generation graduate teaching assistants.
Non-traditional literacy practices

There is much rich work on the literacies of particular populations and how such literacies complicate or contribute to academic literacies. For the contexts and goals of this project, the focus on literacies draws extensively from work on rural literacies. The leading scholars on rural literacies are Kim Donehower, Charlotte Hogg and Eileen E. Schell. Their book *Rural Literacies* “examine[s] the spaces, both inside and outside classrooms, where teaching and learning about rural literacies and rural issues [take] place and to promote models of citizen participation that [will] ensure the future of rural communities and spark potential solidarity between rural, urban and suburban communities” (7-8). They discuss how much of the field’s literacy research focuses not on the rural, but more on the urban. Moreover, when the rural is observed, the trend is to focus on the lack of this population or community, as opposed to what is present, involved, exchanged, or offered (1). Furthering this discussion, Katherine K. Sohn looks at how college changes literacy habits both inside and outside of the academy, and like Donehower, Hogg and Schell focuses on women typically considered “rural.” These and other scholars seek to change and bring about a new way of viewing the idea of rural literacies by changing the ideologies behind them and revealing what is actually present and offered. By utilizing Donehower et al.’s research, the way writing teachers’ potentially endorse such an exchange within the classroom and between students would benefit and reinforce such an interaction, thus, focusing on and creating, in a sense, an activism for the rural. Therefore, focusing on how writing teachers with such history and identifiers of first-generational status and how they may or may not enforce such observations within the classroom, very similarly to Greenwald and Grant’s description of the need for de-cloaking, should be made an option or pedagogical choice.
In “Rhetorics and Realities: The History and Effects of Stereotypes about Rural Literacies,” Donehower breaks down the stereotypes and outcomes of labeling by analyzing the history behind such representations of rural peoples. She determines that many of these ideas about countryside areas have “established rhetorical patterns that have similarly followed in stereotyping the literacy of other rural areas” (33). By challenging and observing accurate literacy practices of such rural areas, Donehower seeks to change the misperceptions and ideas, thus, changing and hopefully eradicating stereotypes. Her research directly addresses the issues of stereotypes, which are important when discussing working class and/or first generation literacies because they are so present and widely used. There are such negative views of rural literacies that by providing research on accurate literacy practices and experiences, such contradictory misperceptions may be further dispelled. Furthermore, while Donehower’s work stems from multiple rural areas, additional connections on first-generation students and their literacies may be included, thereby showing how first-generation students might be included into the conversation and entering academic discourse.

Donehower et al.’s final article, “Toward a Sustainable Citizenship and Pedagogy” offers specific goals and approaches that may be taken by educators, compositionists and researchers for promoting “sustainability for all communities” (35). One specific strategy they promote offers the use of composition readers that can possibly enforce positive impressions of rural communities because the readings focus on “identity and diversity,” “literacy as a topic for inquiry,” and “environment” (154). Many of the readers currently used do not focus on shared relationships, across communities, of literacy or environment and deny a great opportunity for showcasing unique experiences of first-generation students. While this source connects directly into this dissertation, the missing link of first-generation graduate teaching assistants remains
absent from the conversation. Texts that advance information on a variety of literacies, such as first-generation and working-class literacies, might promote discussion on such issues, however, drawing directly from personal experiences and personal connections between students and teachers allow a deeper, perhaps more collaborative dialogue.

Katherine K. Sohn’s book, *Whistlin’ and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia: Literary Practices since College* showcases research on eight women, classified as non-traditional and working class, from Preston County in eastern Kentucky. The study looked at how their attending “college had changed their literacy habits” in “the workplace, home and [their] communities” (9). Three categories of voice further breakdown Sohn’s concluding results and experiences. *Voice as Language* encompasses the idea of dialect and student vernacular and the belief that spoken language does not serve as an indicator of intelligence. Sohn’s second category, *Language as Identity*, argues that the way students speak can reveal facets of their identities and to support students’ discovery of these multiple identities in writing. (153). The final category, *Voice as Power*, reveals Deborah Brandt’s idea of “accumulating literacy” (155). Sohn integrates Brandt’s “accumulating literacy” by defining it as “earlier forms of literacy exist[ing] simultaneously within the society and within the experiences of individuals” (155).

Brandt furthers this concept by stating: “[this] accumulation of literacy provides as increasingly intricate set of incentives, sources, and barriers for learning to read and write, the negotiation of which becomes a large part of the effort of becoming (and staying) literate” (655). By focusing on student voices, Sohn attempts to develop a new and perhaps more accurate way of viewing our students.

Sohn’s breakdown of her results and subsequent implications for the field inform design and development of my research because I anticipate breaking down my results and conclusions
for the goals of theory building, administration and pedagogical implications. This dissertation moves past a single viewing of the experiences of first-generation graduate teachers of writing and uncovers how their experiences can contribute to theory-building, pedagogical building, and perhaps the advancement of administrative training and support. Furthermore, by giving nontraditional students, like first-generation, a voice that their experiences in academia are valid and important, and my hope is much like Sohn’s in her Implications for the Field section where she addresses teachers, researchers, caregivers, activists and colleges on how her data might be used to further the use of high-level literacies for first-generation and working class individuals and provided practical and useful information on devising strategies for supporting such students; my project models this. Not unlike her final section of advice, my dissertation will supply not only implications for the field, but discussions on potential avenues for first-generation undergraduate but also the participants of my study. Furthermore, I see utilizing her direct recommendations of how we might complement current classroom practices and how my research participants are currently integrating such practices and their potential reasoning behind such personal pedagogical decisions.

Much of my past research has focused on the experiences of the student, the experiences and path from high school to college, the experiences associated with attending college as well as the expectations of the middle-class academy. As mentioned previously, such student populations are not situated within similar positions that conventional students are often faced with. When differences in literacy practices are not brought into consideration, other voices are lost and denied. Based on these conversations, my dissertation focuses on modifying and shifting the way we look at first-year writing instructors who identify as first-generation graduate
students and how their philosophy of teaching and pedagogy may be influenced by such identifiers.

By focusing on first-generation graduate teaching assistants that teach writing, my dissertation determines how these identifiers influence participants’ personal philosophy of teaching and pedagogy. Based on the research and ongoing, yet lacking, discussions in the field of Rhetoric and Composition, focusing on an underrepresented (frequently misrepresented) population that does not have access to support for achieving academic success at an undergraduate level, and pushing past to an even smaller student population who has not only achieved academic success but has entered higher education, this study provides an additional, deeper insight into how identifiers, such as first-generation, can benefit current students with similar identifiers, in our classrooms.

**Overview of Study**

Rather than focusing on the experiences of working-class and first-generation college students and their transition from high school to college, I shift my focus because first-generation college students do not always fit into the working-class definition, nor are working-class students necessarily always first-generation; however, there can be and often is overlap. Furthermore, much of the preliminary research I have utilized highlights the knowledge of students making this transition and their experiences once arriving at college. Ultimately, my dissertation shifts this broader focus from first-generation college students and look at first-generation graduate students who are entering higher education at advanced study for the first time and who are teaching writing for the first time.

As past research has evidenced, first-generation students struggle with attrition rates and negotiating the difficult transition to middle-class academic discourse and values. While it is
important to be aware of the obstacles and experiences first-generation students face this
dissertation looks at and draws on the experiences of first-generation graduate students who are
entering the writing classroom as writing instructors to research how their identity as first-
generation influences their teaching pedagogy. It is based on past research and the current need
for insight into the experiences of first-generation graduate teachers of writing that guides the
following research questions:

**Research Questions**

Below are the research questions that guide this study:

- How does the role as a first-generation student influence pedagogy?
- How does identifying as a first-generation teacher influence teaching philosophy?
- What would a first-generation pedagogy offer to students, the classroom, and the
  field?
  - What environments would this be more relevant?
  - How are traditional and non-traditional students’ needs met from this
    approach?
- What would or does a first-generation pedagogy look like?
  - What does it do?
  - What is its value?
- What supports are in place to help first-generation Graduate Teaching Assistants
  (GTA)?
- How do classroom artifacts reflect a first-generation pedagogy?
• How does a first-generation pedagogy influence artifacts, types of assignments, and selections of readings?

With these questions in mind, I conducted focus groups research by talking with a group of graduate teaching assistants of writing. By collaborating with and interviewing students identifying as first-generation and some identifying as traditional, I discuss the development of their teacherly identity in the writing classroom. Additionally, collaborating with several students offers a way of offering alternate viewpoints to the necessity for, or uncovering of a first-generation pedagogy. Along this same thread, interviewing the Writing Program Administration (WPA) of the same institution, my research provides a richness and depth of perspectives, while also allowing me insight into possible or potential training provided to graduate writing teachers identifying as first-generation.

In addition to interviews and focus groups, my dissertation includes classroom observations so I may take into consideration teacherly identity and classroom dynamic. While classroom dynamic can offer insight into how a teacher conducts class, I also observed my participants’ introductory writing classrooms during the beginning of the fall semester (September 2010-October 2011), or during an initial writing assignment, so observations of the forming classroom dynamic are included in addition to teacher identity.

My research provides an additional insight into first-generation students and their experiences past the undergraduate years and integration into not only higher education but also in the role of writing teacher. This research project also supplies exigency for theory building for the field by providing information on the development and uncovering of a first-generation pedagogy. A third insight addresses teacher training programs where we might provide
additional aid and support for first-generation graduate teaching assistants as they begin developing their own teacher identity and teaching pedagogy.

My dissertation consists of a focus group of students identifying as first-generation graduate teachers of writing, as well as students identifying as traditional. An analysis of textual documents consisting of a variety of classroom artifacts from classrooms is also included. By including students who identify differently, varying viewpoints are provided. Additional explanation and discussion of participants is discussed further in Chapter Two, providing specific demographics.

My dissertation provides an additional insight into first-generation students and their experiences past the undergraduate years and integration into not only higher education but also in the new role of writing teacher. This research project also supplies theory building for the field by providing information on the development and uncovering of a first-generation pedagogy. A third insight addresses teacher training programs where we might provide additional aid and support for first-generation graduate teaching assistants as they begin developing their own teacher identity and teaching pedagogy.

One potential limitation to this project is that observations only took place twice during fall semester, in three sections of one course, with three volunteer participants. Therefore, observations are specific to this particular study and should not be seen as encompassing all experiences or individuals identifying as first-generation. Some of the first generation graduate teaching assistants also entered the classroom as a teacher in this program for the first time, so she/he may have experienced some initial anxiety that could have provided some untypical data, as reflected in displayed teacher persona, initial classroom artifacts, among other possibilities.
Other limitations include the level of comfort between the participants and the researcher. Because new instructors are adjusting to their new roles as writing instructor, they may be hesitant to confidently accept an active role of authority in the writing classroom. Even so, my dissertation overcomes such drawbacks by maintaining contact with the participants, as well as utilizing and reviewing all classroom artifacts, outside of my preliminary observations. While these additional forms of research provide a larger picture of my observations, I also worked with and “view[ed participants] as contributing constituencies who engage [d] actively in [my research] and in [the] textualizations of [my] findings” (Blakeslee et al. 151). By allowing participants to review my observations I triangulated my data and supported my democratic and feminist approach to this project. Additional discussion of my project’s limitations and how I addressed them are discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Methods and Methodology

According to Marjorie L. DeVault and Glenda Gross, “Feminist Interviewing: Experience, Talk, and Knowledge,” “[m]uch qualitative and feminist research has been based on a relatively straightforward commitment to collecting and representing the perspectives of informants, and those projects have often had liberatory effects” (173). The approach suggested by Devault and Gross aligns closely with various qualitative approaches including the use of focus groups. In fact, David L. Morgan’s Focus Groups as Qualitative Research argues, “focus groups typically add to the data that are gathered through other qualitative methods, such as participant observation and individual interviews” (3). Furthermore, “[i]n these combined uses of qualitative methods, the goal is to use each method so that it contributes something unique to the researcher’s understanding of the phenomenon under study” (3). A feminist approach to focus group research allows the researcher to work or collaborate with participants to not only
showcase the researcher’s observations, perceptions and conclusions but also offer a unique opportunity for participants to offer insight into the research, as well. Moreover, “another essential aspect of feminist interview research interrogates the challenges of communication and the inherent contradictions in the desire to give voice to others” (Devault and Gross 173).

According to Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin’s text, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, “the value of [grounded theory] lies in its ability not only to generate theory but also to ground that theory in data. Both theory and data analysis involve interpretation, but at least it is interpretation based on systematically carried out inquiry” (8). Based then on this addition of grounded theory to my dissertation research, I entered this project with questions that will continue to shift and grow as I work and analyze my data, with the goal of generating practical theory. Moreover, this methodology permits researchers to “[represent] those [participants they] study on their own terms/ through their own perspectives (Clarke 348). Adele E. Clarke’s “Feminism, Grounded Theory, and Situational Analysis” argues the importance of grounded theory “in the seriousness of the analyst’s commitment to representing all understanding, all knowledge(s) and action(s) of those studied – as well as their own – as perspectival” (348). It is based on this reason that my dissertation includes a variety of collaborative methodologies that allowed me to provide a feminist approach to my research.

**Dissertation Summary**

In this Chapter, I included an introduction to the project and study. Beginning with a review of the literature, I provided a grounding of my project and how it fits into conversations within the field. Next, Chapter One offers an overview of the larger project, and concludes with a discussion of my research questions and method of data collection and analysis.
Chapter Two of the dissertation further builds on the first Chapter and discusses the goals of the study and the rationale behind the project. The design of how the study was conducted, including the overview of the participant population and how data was collected concludes this Chapter, utilizing interviews, textual analysis, observational analysis, focus group research, and library research.

The third Chapter discusses the observations of the research collected from the focus group meetings and the participants’ perceptions of such observations. In addition, this Chapter includes analysis of the data collected through the focus group meetings and applied classroom artifacts.

Chapter Four furthers the analysis of the data collected and new approaches the field may take based on the research collected. It looks at the possibility or necessity of a new theory based pedagogy for first-generation college students and what this might look like. This Chapter concludes by looking at more in depth responses to the research questions.

The final Chapter of the dissertation focuses on conclusions and implications of the previous four Chapters. This Chapter draws conclusions about the previously posed research questions and suggests possible future study and specific implications for the three areas: Theory, Administration, and Pedagogy.
Chapter Two

Setting the Scene: Project Rationale and Design

Growing up in West Virginia, I have experienced the expectations and opinions many share when discussing educational standards in rural and lower-income communities. There are many conversations specifically targeting the geographic region of Appalachia (which typically includes areas of southern New York extending down into northern Alabama, Mississippi and Georgia and containing sections of Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and all of West Virginia) because these regions have often been connected to areas of extreme poverty, isolation and stereotypes concerning way of life, values, and a perceived lack of education. While many areas of Appalachia are certainly rural and possibly lower-income, other areas exist within the Appalachian region that cannot be labeled bucolic.

Looking at the overall picture of academic success, The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, as of 2008, lists the United States ranking at 55.9% for Six-Year Graduation Rates of Bachelor’s Degree Students. Andrew Porter of “The Daily Campus” confirms this ranking by reporting “…the U.S. ranks fifth internationally in terms of college enrollment, with 35 percent of people attending an institution of higher learning.” Furthermore, “The U.S. only earns 17 degrees for every 100 students enrolled, which places it 16th internationally…” (The Daily Campus). The numbers diminish even further in certain areas of the Appalachian region, including West Virginia, Kentucky, and Ohio with rankings at 44.6%, 44.7%, and 55.6%, respectively (NCHEMS Information Center). The three states listed as residing in the Appalachian region fall below the national ranking of 55.9% and are evidence of an unmistakable disparity among academic success in areas outside and inside the Appalachian
region. Moreover, a mere 35 percent make it to higher education (Porter). This statistic alone offers the reality of the difficulty of entering, attending, and completing higher education for any student population.

Narrowing down to focus on the experiences of first-generation students and their presence in higher education reveals even lower numbers for retention and degree attainment. According to *The Chronicle for Higher Education* in 2008:

> Among students who enrolled in four-year colleges, for example, first-generation students had a graduation rate of 44.9 percent, while the rate for non-first-generation students was 59 percent. Among students who enrolled in two-year institutions, first-generation students were significantly less likely to persist into a second year. (Glenn para 4)

While it cannot be said that all first-generation students struggle with the same obstacles, the data certainly emphasizes the disadvantages such students face. In “Promises to Keep: Working Class Students and Higher Education,” Michelle M. Tokarczyk stresses:

> College education is important for the working class not only because it gives them entrée into living-wage jobs but also, as important, because it can enable them to become critically thinking adults, which working class primary and secondary schools have often failed to do. Yet there are formidable barriers to working class students’ success at colleges and universities. While some barriers are academic, involving college preparedness, many are institutional, resulting in policies and attitudes that are unfriendly to working class students. (160)
Glen and Tokarczyk would most likely agree that based on such low figures of success rates for first-generation and working class students, such groups have largely been ignored in the academy. As mentioned in Chapter One, not all first-generation students may identify as working-class; however, there is certainly overlap when it comes to entering the middle-class academic environment that both first-generation and/or working class individuals experience. Furthermore, some institutions are only beginning to directly address first-generation and working class students and their difference in need compared to traditional students. What’s more, most initiatives specifically target undergraduate students, although there are some programs that offer support to students in higher education. Either way, additional insight into this higher education population is warranted. Such facts only reiterate the extreme need for delving deeper into the history of first-generation college students, including first-generation graduate students as they enter professional positions and begin developing their professional identities, as teachers of writing.

**Components of the Study**

My primary purpose in conducting this research study was to determine how self-identified first-generation graduate student teachers of writing create their writing pedagogy and professional identity as they teach in their own writing classrooms. By investigating how participants’ create their professional identity and looking at the histories behind such choices, I determine what influences such decisions. Insight and research exists on the experiences of first-generation and working-class students pre-college, upon entering college and through graduation. There is minimal insight on such students’ experiences in graduate programs and in the role of writing teacher, or as emerging professionals. Such examination is needed because beyond graduation from post-secondary education, information, research, and support for first-
generation students become limited. Furthermore, by focusing specifically on experiences provided by first-generation graduate students teaching in writing classrooms and during their development as a professional, this research offers insight into not only more effective ways of new teacher training but also holds pedagogical implications for teaching undergraduate first-generation students.

Of the information available on first-generation and/or working-class students succeeding in higher education, much data is provided through and paid for by the U.S. Department of Education. Available supports, like TRIO, offer “outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds” (U.S. Department of Education). There are eight programs included within TRIO “target[ed] to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to postbaccalaureate programs” (U.S. Department of Education). More specifically, the U.S. Department of Education provides a Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program that “supplies support to students coming from typically underrepresented segments of society by encouraging participants to enroll in graduate programs and then tracking their successful completion of advanced degrees.” Such programs certainly provide vital information and necessary support for underrepresented student populations; however, the importance for additional contemplation becomes increasingly vital as the first-generation student population continues to rise within academia.

*Positionality*
In Ethical Dilemmas in Feminist Research, Gesa E. Kirsch asks “Can researchers understand and represent experiences of others without misrepresenting, misappropriating, or distorting their realities? What are researcher’ responsibilities toward their research participants and toward their readers?” (ix). As a researcher, acknowledging and working against my biases was a necessary step once I started recruiting participants and collecting my data. Since I do not identify as a first-generation graduate student nor do I consider myself a student of traditional standing, it became important for me to make sure I did not include personal opinions or values on my participants based on my own unique experiences, background, or beliefs. I also did not wish to project past research or information I held on first-generation students on to my participants.

At the start of my research, I began thinking about how best to approach my participants and the data I received, while being aware of my own assumptions, and how my own biases might influence my data. Lauer and Asher advocate the use of multi-modal approaches when conducting qualitative research, as a way to provide a multitude of insights into the data and “avoid […] nearsightedness” while encouraging “fruitful reciprocity among modes of inquiry” (6-7). Employing focus group data with participant observation and individual interview data supported my role as researcher, thereby allowing individual data sets to inform other data sets, as well as informing my research questions. Participant observations mutually complicate classroom artifacts and individual interviews. Utilizing multiple modes of inquiry ensures triangulation, thus reinforcing the accuracy of the data collected. Acknowledging my biases, I collaborated with participants asking them to read and revise their transcripts and maintained communication with them post interviews as a way to counter potential misconceptions concerning the data collection, and subsequent data analysis.
Setting

The principle site of the study is State University. Rather than being classroom based, this study instead focused on participants and their experiences as graduate student, writing teacher, and their approaches to developing individual teaching practices. State University is a state-funded four-year institution with more than 20,000 students in attendance, according to the University’s Admissions website. The University offers 200 undergraduate majors and programs, 47 Master’s programs, and 18 doctoral and specialist degrees. The student to faculty ratio is 20 to 1. Approximately 70% of all State University’s undergraduates receive some type of financial aid. Furthermore, as of 2009, 73% of graduate students had some type of graduate assistantship or received financial aid.

Participant Selection

In selecting participants for the purposes of this study, I located participants who self-identified as first-generation students, as well as graduate teachers of writing. The previous Chapter defines first-generation as students whose parents did not earn a baccalaureate degree, but may or may not have experienced some college coursework and college experiences. Defining first-generation in this way allows for a wider range of participant experiences to be revealed in my research, as opposed to a participant who has had no link, and therefore limited understanding of the academic environment.

Locating a population of graduate teachers of writing was not challenging because of my position as a graduate teacher of writing and I knew of multiple individuals who shared this vocation. Due to my personal identification as a graduate teacher of writing, my goal became recruiting willing participants who would contribute and share their experiences for the purposes
of my research study. With the objective of collecting information into the experiences of first-generation students, I deemed it necessary to also include self-identified traditional students, so I would have insight into a multitude of experiences and be able to possibly compare based on the participant’s identifier of first-generation or traditional student, as well as their insights in the classroom as teachers of writing.

To this end, I first contacted via email, the Writing Program Administrator of the Writing program where my potential research contributors were employed. After receiving the Director’s approval and permission, I examined lists of currently enrolled graduate student teachers of writing within the Writing program and decided to contact potential volunteers through email early on in the semester. Drawing from the lists, I sent out a request for research participants to 35 individuals, in varying degrees (M.F.A, M.A. or Ph.D) and program years, all within the position of graduate teacher of writing. Of the 35 individuals contacted, 10 people responded expressing interest in participating in the study. After further email communication about my research, project goals, and scheduling attempts, a group of six participants who identified as a traditional student graduate teacher of writing or first-generation student graduate teacher of writing was finalized.

Participants

All six participants were enrolled in the department of English at State University. The department of English offers undergraduate degrees in English, Creative Writing, Scientific and Technical Communication, Master’s degrees in English, Scientific and Technical Communication, a Master’s of Fine Arts in Creative Writing, and a doctorate in Rhetoric and Writing. Four research participants are in the doctoral program; one in the Master of Art’s
Within the Writing program, there are three core courses designed to teach academic writing at the college level. Of the six participants in the study, each individual taught one to two sections per semester of one of three core courses regularly offered. Traditionally, GTA’s will teach two sections of *Introduction to Academic Writing* in the fall, which is typically the first-year writing course geared for incoming students, and one section of *Academic Writing* in the spring semester. Based on this program design, all participants teach at least one section of *Introduction to Academic Writing* during their fall semesters, which is when this study took place and the data was collected.

Of the six participants, five self-identify as first-generation graduate teachers of writing and one identifies as a traditional graduate teacher of writing. The five first-generation students are the first in their immediate families to attend higher education. The one participant identifying as traditional has an immediate family member holding undergraduate and graduate degrees. With a majority of self-identified first-generation graduate students within the participant population, I became concerned of the possible one-sided conversations focusing on non-traditional student expectations, often viewed as the minority in college populations.

However, according to the consulting firm, Stamats, “as few as 16 percent of college students today fit the so-called traditional mold: 18- to 22-years-old, financially dependent on parents, in college full time, living on campus” (“Success for Adult Students”). While the statistic confirms the variation in student populations for the undergraduate years, one can certainly deduce similar population changes in higher education. Following the same line of thinking, Michael Zweig suggests, “…the middle class is only about thirty-six percent of the workforce,” despite the
“reinforce[ment]” of “middle-class” beliefs and values often placed on America, including students in academia (39). Regardless of the inundating of middle-class values in academia, the reality is non-traditional students are now the majority, which means new ways of serving this student population is in much demand. Due to such evidence, the emphasis on non-traditional, first-generation students in higher education and in writing instructor roles can offer additional opportunities for understanding and revealing possible unique experiences and insights otherwise unknown from a traditional student standpoint.

*Writing Program Administrator*

When selecting a Writing Program Administrator (WPA) to interview about teacher training currently in place at the selected institution, I interviewed the Director of the Writing program. The Director is in charge of teacher and graduate student training for the department, as well as running the writing department. Originally, I contacted the Director requesting permission to communicate with the graduate student teachers of writing. During this initial contact, I also requested her input on teacher training, orientation, help and support, which resulted in an interview, thus further informing my data collection. I wished to interview a WPA about new teacher training so my research would offer an additional viewpoint into how teachers are supported during their development as a professional. The interview questions posed to the WPA are found in Appendix A as well as listed below:

1. What are the training programs currently in place for graduate teachers of writing?
2. Who developed the training programs currently in place?
3. Do all graduate teachers of writing undergo the training programs, regardless of past teaching experiences?
4. What does the current training program seek to provide to graduate teachers of writing?

5. Are graduate teachers of writing given a set curriculum or guidelines for which to create their classrooms?

6. What are the strengths of the training program currently in place for graduate teachers of writing?

7. What are the weaknesses of the training program currently in place for graduate teachers of writing?

8. How are first-generation graduate teachers of writing supported?

9. What might be some ways of offering additional training or supports for non-traditional students, such as first-generation graduate teachers of writing?

Collecting the Data

Determining means of collecting my research basically fell on choices pertaining to the best ways of supporting feminist methods and methodologies, as well as effectively answering my research questions, found in Chapter One. Offering alternative viewpoints provided necessary triangulation, as well as reciprocity of data. Pamela Moss emphasizes the importance of this concept:

Some feminists follow Reinharz’s (1992) claim that feminist research is about using various feminist perspectives to understand and explain social phenomena. For her, feminist research is a complex amalgam of perspectives arising both from the location of the researcher and from multiple feminist theories that employ different techniques to collect data, bring the researcher into the research process, and effect social change. (371)

My chosen methods of data collection (focus group, participant observation, interview) allowed me to collect data that more accurately represented my participants’ experiences by providing
multiple perspectives and different viewpoints of the inquiries I was seeking. Furthermore, I continue to support feminist methods of research by asking participants to review my data, as well as provide their insights into how I have interpreted their words and actions. The actual analysis of my data occurs in Chapter Three and Four.

Focus Group

In Focus Groups As Qualitative Research, David L. Morgan states “…focus groups are useful…as a supplement to both quantitative and other qualitative methods” (10). With this claim in mind, I also knew of the strengths focus group research would bring to my study, as one of my goals was to “observe a large amount of interaction on a topic in a limited period of time” (15), while supplementing my other chosen research methods, that are discussed in the following sections of Chapter Two. Furthermore, utilizing focus group data directly addresses my first two research questions by asking participants’ of their experiences in the writing classroom and their processes in developing their writing pedagogies and professional identities.

1. How does the role as a first-generation student influence pedagogy?
2. How does identifying as a first-generation teacher influence teaching philosophy?

A specific weakness of focus group lies in the fact focus group research is typically not conducted in natural settings and; therefore, as a researcher I am unable to predict the accuracy or authenticity of the participants’ information. In order to avoid this weakness and provide participants with comfort and ease with answering and providing accurate and truthful information, I decided to give participants the option of remaining confidential during the focus group meeting, later identifying them with self-chosen pseudonyms. I also offered participants the opportunity to provide insight into where the focus group could take place. After all opinions
had been offered, the collective group decided to meet in a public space where refreshments were available and the atmosphere was casual and comfortable.

Prior to meeting, I reminded participants that the focus group meeting would take approximately one hour and would be audio-recorded. In order to keep confidentiality, I assigned participants with their chosen pseudonym as a way to discuss the conversation. Once the six participants arrived, I reintroduced the purposes of my research, how the focus group would be conducted during the hour or so we would be meeting and I passed out a copy of the focus group questions I intended to follow. I also distributed the Informed Consent forms, gave participants a chance to review them again, and collected the signed forms. I ended the introduction of the focus group discussion asking if participants had any questions or concerns. No participants expressed reservations or questions.

The Focus Group questions helped facilitate our discussion about participants’ teaching experiences, thoughts on their professional identity, teaching pedagogy, classroom artifacts (syllabus, assignments), and struggles or difficulties they had experienced as graduate teachers of writing. I encouraged the group to share their thoughts and opinions on their entire teaching experience: negative, positive, and in-between. The Focus Group questions are provided in Appendix B and below.

1. What is your experience with teaching writing?
2. How many writing courses have you taught? How many semesters or years?
3. How would you describe your philosophy of teaching?
4. How might you describe your experiences or process at creating/developing your current philosophy of teaching?
5. What influences contribute to your philosophy of teaching?

6. What influences contribute to your teaching pedagogy?

7. How do you see your identity as a teacher of writing?

8. What kind of environment do you create in your writing classrooms?

9. How do you approach the teaching of writing?

10. What are some difficulties you have experienced or are currently experiencing as a graduate teacher of writing?

11. How do you see the classroom dynamic unfolding as the semester progresses?

12. How do you plan to help cultivate a positive classroom dynamic?

13. Based on the few class meetings you’ve had so far, how would you describe your current identity/role in the writing classroom?

14. How do you see your pedagogy remaining the same, shifting, or drastically changing based on classroom dynamic and student needs?

15. How do you see classroom artifacts, such as assignments, classroom expectations, and goals remaining the same, shifting, or drastically changing based on student needs?

Participant/Classroom Observation

Of the six focus group participants, all volunteered to open their classroom to me as a site for participant/classroom observation. After determining teaching schedules and availability, I selected three participants’ classrooms to observe. Two (David and James) identify as first-generation graduate teachers of writing and one (Frank) as a traditional graduate teacher of
writing. I observed each classroom twice, during lessons specifically on writing one of the course’s required writing assignments.

I took field notes during class meetings, recording my observations of activities, classroom discussions, and assignments. Focusing primarily on the role the teacher played in the learning environment, I paid attention to teaching pedagogy and interactions between teacher and students. In order to verify objectivity of my observed accounts, I sought “elicitation of feedback” from participants (Denzin and Lincoln 112).

Employing participant observation as a supplementary data collection method speaks to the following research questions by providing an understanding of teaching pedagogy and professional identity in practice.

1. How does the role as a first-generation student influence pedagogy?
2. How does identifying as a first-generation teacher influence teaching philosophy?
3. What would or does a first-generation pedagogy look like?
4. How do classroom artifacts reflect a first-generation pedagogy?
5. How does a first-generation pedagogy influence artifacts, types of assignments, and selections of readings?

*Individual Interviews*

At the conclusion of my participant observations in their writing classrooms, I scheduled individual interview times with David, James, and Frank so they might have an opportunity to review my observational notes and provide input into my interpretations of their classroom activities. All three individual interviews took place on the same day and were audio taped. Each
interview began with participants being given a copy of my classroom observations during the two earlier class meetings. I asked them to review my notes, provide any additional feedback or clarification on what I had reported, as well as include their opinions if they felt I had not accurately represented the events or their actions while teaching. Once the notes had been reviewed, the interview officially began as I started the audio recording and asked the following interview questions found in Appendix C and below:

1. Based on my classroom observations and self-reflection, how do you view your identity as a graduate teacher of writing?
2. How do you see classroom artifacts and assignments contributing/taking away from your teaching pedagogy?
3. How might you explain how you created such classroom artifacts, such as writing assignments or course expectations?
4. What might be some ways you continue shifting your teaching pedagogy to continue to meet the needs of your students?

Interviewing participants offered a multi-layered approach to my data collection because discussions could be expanded upon and participants’ had another opportunity to express opinions or ideas they may have thought post focus group meeting, or not felt comfortable discussing during the earlier focus group meeting. Interviewing as a method provides insight into my following research questions.

1. How does the role as a first-generation student influence pedagogy?
2. How does identifying as a first-generation teacher influence teaching philosophy?
3. What would a first-generation pedagogy offer to students; the classroom; and the field?
4. What supports are in place to help first-generation Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA’s)?

Transcription Protocol

Recording and transcribing my data created the concern of reliability of transcription and therefore, accurate data. In order to combat this issue, I utilized an outside transcription service for four of the five audio files that guaranteed their services by having multiple people review the transcripts. To guarantee participant confidentiality before sending the audio files, I reviewed the audio to guarantee no identifying names or information was provided. Additionally, when submitting audio to the outside transcription service, I referred to participants using their self-chosen pseudonyms. After each transcript was finished, I replayed the audio file and verified for additional data integrity. For the audio file consisting of focus group data, I decided to transcribe the audio myself since all six participants were included in the discussion and names were revealed at times during the meeting. In order to verify reliability of my transcription, I reviewed the finished records while listening to the audio files multiple times.

Methods of Analysis

As described by Flick, “The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry (qtd. Denzin and Lincoln). As a way to provide triangulation, I employed several collection methods including a focus group interview, three participant observations within their writing classrooms, three individual interviews, one interview with a WPA of the department, transcripts from the audio files, as well as classroom artifacts. Furthermore, I had participants review notes taken from my observations
as a way to provide additional insight, and the practice of feminist methodology into my experiences while in the classroom.

During the project, I used grounded theory in part, as a way to analyze my data so that I might contribute to what the field currently knows about first-generation graduate students. Since I identify as a feminist researcher, I also wished to remain flexible in my analysis, allowing the data to guide me to conclusions and implications that a grounded theory approach supports. In addition, I worked toward modeling Strauss and Corbin’s characteristics of a grounded theorist approach that includes:

a) the ability to step back and critically analyze situations, b) the ability to recognize the tendency toward bias, c) the ability to think abstractly, d) the ability to be flexible and open to helpful criticism, e) sensitivity to the words and actions of respondents, f) a sense of absorption and devotion to the work process. (7)

By employing such characteristics, I was able to theorize based on data analysis and interpretation utilizing systematically carried out inquiry (Strauss and Corbin 8).

Using open coding, I initially reviewed my data employing line-by-line analysis. As Lauer and Asher remark, this form of open coding “involves close examination of data, phrase by phrase and sometimes word by word. Doing line-by-line coding is especially important in the beginning of a study because it enables the analyst to generate categories quickly and to develop those categories through [theoretical] sampling” (119). Not only does it precipitate categories quickly, data can then be closely examined for key concepts and similarities or differences (Strauss and Corbin 102).
Once my initial categories were established I returned to my data so I might begin axial coding and determining subcategories to the experiences of my participants. Only then was I able to decide how one set of data relates to another set of data and the relationships between experiences and events. As Strauss and Corbin assert “axial coding is the act of relating categories to subcategories along the lines of their properties and dimensions. It looks how categories crosscut and link” (124). By coding axially, I was able to uncover correlations among data and contextualize answers for my research questions.

**Concluding Thoughts**

By providing support to the traditionally under-represented student population of “first-generation, low-income undergraduate students […] for [their] successful admission into graduate school and completion of a Doctoral degree,” the U.S. Department of Education funded McNair program encourages students to pursue degrees they may not consider otherwise (McNair). Reaching out to such under-represented students provides unique opportunities and aid to students as they enter graduate school and succeed in the professional world. Much like the goals of the McNair program, my project investigated the related thread of first-generation graduate students and their experiences or processes as they develop their teaching pedagogies, as well as their professional identities as teachers of writing.

Emphasizing the importance of feminist goals in my research, I strived for the four characteristics of feminist research offered by Mary Fonow and Judith Cook’s *Beyond Methodology*: “reflexivity; an action orientation; attention to the affective components of the research; and use of the situation-at-hand” (2). In doing so, I actively collaborated with my participants, which allowed me to critically reflect on my role as a researcher. Employing an
“action orientation,” I contributed insights to future teacher training programs as a way to provide additional insight into such populations. Furthermore, through my data analysis, allowing my data to guide me and how my research questions are answered situates my attention to research components and the situation-at-hand.
Chapter Three

In Their Own Words: The Data and Its Preliminary Analysis

The Third Chapter discussed the observations of the research collected from the focus group meetings and the individual interviews in the participants’ own words. In addition, this Chapter includes analysis of the data collected through the focus group meetings and individual interviews, as well as begins addressing the research questions.

During the preliminary stages of planning this project, I knew right away that I would engage in qualitative research. As Denzin and Lincoln discuss, “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of […] phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (3). I wanted to collaborate and interact with participants, learning from their experiences and insights. As previously mentioned, I also wanted to learn more about first-generation students and their path to becoming graduate students and writing teachers. Based on these goals, qualitative research appeared the best approach and fit with my research questions.

The previous two Chapters provided not only the rationale and situating of the research, but also my chosen methods and methodologies. Chapter Three first provides an overview of what the data revealed from the focus group interaction and the post observation individual interviews (three graduate teachers of writing and one Writing Program Administrator) and begins considering the research questions outlined in Chapter Two. Applying grounded theory, this Chapter proffers initial interpretations and analysis of how identifying as a first-generation graduate student affects the development of teaching philosophy and pedagogy.
Overview of Collected Data by Participants

All the participants who contributed to this study volunteered their time and experiences during the focus group meeting, as well as granted permission for me to observe them as they taught their classes. In addition, three participants took part in an additional interview where we discussed their experiences and perceptions about teaching. The same three participants also shared multiple classroom artifacts, such as course syllabi, assignment sheets, and activity lessons. Moreover, the Writing Program Administrator participated in an interview discussing the training program currently in place for graduate teaching assistants at State University. The commonality that connects participants is they are all employed by State University as graduate teachers of writing in the Writing Program. The sample, therefore, is fairly homogenous as participants are all graduate students in English as well as writing instructors. Furthermore, participants self-identified as either first-generation or traditional student based on the definitions in Chapter One. It was important for participants to self-identify so I would not place my own biases or definitions of first-generation on them and their experiences. Hennessy insists history is a culture’s narrative of itself and Siebler extends the sentiment adding:

Therefore within one story, depending on who is telling that story, a specific perspective becomes dominant. But to avoid the tunnel vision and blinders of typical history-writing, feminists, among others, have demanded a rigor of historicization or the contextualization of the story, overtly articulating whose perspective is privileged, whose perspectives are left out, and the implications of these choices. (9)
By asking participants to self-identify, it allowed me as a researcher to employ feminist methods, in addition to encouraging participants to share their insights and experiences based on their own beliefs and values. My research asked participants to share their perspectives, often unprivileged perspectives, to inform the field of their histories of being a student and now a graduate teacher of writing. Furthermore, my research asked participants how they developed their teaching pedagogies and philosophies of teaching. Participants spoke for themselves, in order to provide their own perspectives, during the focus group and individual interviews.

**Portraits**

*James*

Participant James identifies as a first generation student as he is the first in his family to achieve a bachelor’s and master’s degree. Currently, he is finishing up a doctorate in Rhetoric and Writing. Additionally, he holds six years of teaching experience at two different institutions. James participated in the initial focus group meeting and allowed me to observe his classroom on two consecutive occasions, supplied classroom artifacts, and contributed to an individual interview session post observations.

James perceives himself as a transitioning professional in training because he is not a student in a traditional sense; he is not being evaluated by what he labels as traditional grading methods. He views this as a transitional position because he is given some amount of freedom in teaching, but he does not feel the full expectation and responsibilities he would imagine full-time faculty members might experience.
David

Self-identifying as a first generation student and the first in his family to achieve a bachelor’s degree, David is now finishing a Master’s degree in fiction writing with the goal of attending a doctorate program in the near future. David has two years of teaching experience at State University. I observed his classroom on two consecutive visits, after his participation in the focus group, acquired a set of his classroom artifacts, and interviewed him one-on-one.

David considers himself “first and foremost….an instructor of writing.” He classifies himself “non-authoritarian,” “de-centered,” and believes one “could attach the label of a Marxist teacher” to him, even though he feels there is a stigma attached to that label. He also considers his teaching to include certain aspects of critical pedagogy, even though he believes the term critical might be a “bit too big and ambiguous.”

Frank

Frank identifies as a traditional student, based on the earlier definition in Chapter Two, although he is the first in his family to work on a doctorate. He did interact and communicate with family members during his transition from high school to college, who had achieved their bachelor’s and master’s degrees several years earlier, so he felt some sense of impact from their academic experiences. He has four years of teaching experience at three different academic institutions. Frank took part in the focus group meeting and allowed his classroom to be observed on two occasions. He supplied classroom artifacts and offered additional insights during his interview.

Frank prefers a different approach to teaching that he believes does not include a specific labeling or classification. He remarks:
I actually spend a couple of days talking about our relations and dynamics in the classroom, you know, foreground that I am also a student here, and so I have multiple obligations. And that you know being that I am financially situated as a grad student/TA, I don’t feel myself that I have the overwhelming authority that, say, hey, a 10 year professor, or even a 10 year track professor would warrant. So I try to, even though I’m getting older and they’re staying the same age, I’m still trying to be more like no, I am part of the student body first. I’m going to try and do my best to alleviate the obvious signs of me just lording my power over you.

Furthermore, Frank aligns himself with neo-Marxism, which is “a term that is loosely applied to any social theory or sociological analysis which draws on the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, but amends or extends these, usually by incorporating elements from other intellectual traditions, such as psychoanalysis, Weberian sociology, or anarchism” (Marshall and Scott). In the classroom, however, he attempts to integrate aspects of critical pedagogy by his reading of critical scholarship.

Robin

Self-identifying as a first generation student and returning adult learner, Robin has taught for four years at two different institutions. She is working on her dissertation in the Rhetoric and Writing program. Robin offered her experiences and beliefs during the focus group meeting. She also shared some of her reasons behind why she decided to return to school full-time after several years of full-time employment.

Robin draws from a number of years of corporate experience, which she pulls from to discuss the importance of writing and literacy development to her students, often supplying
multiple examples for students. Having ‘real world’ experience, Robin argues, helps show students that being a strong writer and communicator is essential for success outside the university confines.

*Melissa*

Melissa identifies as a first generation student and has taught for two years at State University. She is currently a Master’s student in fiction. Melissa included her insights on teaching and her philosophy during the focus group meeting. She strives to meet students on their own level and integrate their personal experiences into how she teaches writing because she believes this practice encourages student-writing development, developing writing confidence, and student engagement not only in the classroom but also with writing assignments.

*Kilgore*

Kilgore identifies as a first generation student and is currently a doctoral student in Rhetoric and Writing. He has taught writing for five years at two different institutions. He contributed to the focus group meeting by discussing his ideas on his experiences, teaching pedagogy, and classroom practice.

Kilgore is a strong supporter of reflection: he demonstrated this by having students learn to self-reflect, as well as reflecting on his own practices. He believes in informing students that “their rhetorical abilities do not match up with their intellectual or critical abilities.” He argues: “They’re light years ahead critically and intellectually, but rhetorically speaking they’re…barely out of the crib.”
Mary Martin identifies as a first-generation student and holds the Directorship of the Writing program at State University. She taught high school for one year, taught as a composition instructor for one year, and held a full-time position in a writing center for eight years. She has served as a Composition Director for 19 years.

During her interview, she offered an overview of State University Writing’s teaching assistant training that takes place during the summer before fall semester begins. She describes the training programs to include a “combination of many kinds of training[s], within the program.” Additional discussion of this takes place later on in Chapter Three.

Once the focus group data and individual interview data were transcribed, using grounded theory I concentrated on the focus group data first so the common themes could emerge from the data sets. I then repeated the process with the classroom artifacts, participant observations, and individual interviews so I could start piecing together and analyzing some of the key categories, both individually and across methods. While the data patterns were unlimited, my analysis and subsequent discussion focuses specifically on four patterns dictated by the research data. There were many repeating patterns across data collection methods, as Figure 1 shows. Many participants spoke of the importance in overlap and interdependence among key concepts and how they worked toward these goals in the development of their teaching pedagogy.

By breaking down emphasized data themes by method, it is possible to see what threads are highlighted and favored. While all concepts cannot be addressed, I focused on the four themes of: Transparency, Engagement, Reflection, and Responsibility. Chapter Three then
concentrates on themes voiced by the participants, in their own words, during the focus group and individual interviews sessions, as well as analysis and addressing of research questions. Chapter Four focuses on my view of participants through their shared classroom artifacts and participant observations paired with analysis, and connection to the research questions.

**Figure 1: Chart. Summary of Key Themes by Data Collection Method**

Figure 2 provides a quick look at participants, how they self-identified, how they view themselves as graduate teachers of writing, and how they describe their teaching experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Self-Identification</th>
<th>Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Guiding Principles in Teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Generation Type</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Role/Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>First-Generation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Transitioning professional in training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>First-Generation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>First and foremost a teacher of writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Graduate Student First, Instructor Second</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>First-Generation/Returning Adult Learner</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Real World” Experience Instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>First-Generation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Meets students at their level by integrating their goals and interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilgore</td>
<td>First-Generation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Self-Reflection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2: Table. Breakdown of Participants**

**Common Themes**

**Transparency**

Transparency became a reoccurring theme throughout the focus group discussion and again in the individual interview sessions. While transparency typically refers to clarity, openness and communication, participants considered the term transparency in a variety of contexts: The importance of having open teacher-student/student-student relationships, exploring the idea of accountability for students and their work but also teacher accountability in grading or scheduling, as well as supporting independent learning for students. Participants also commented on providing students with the rationale behind how and why specific decisions are made in class, such as certain course expectations, requirements, and assignment designs. This
allows students an understanding behind why certain decisions are made, often not made easily, and the importance of certain decisions.

While discussing the importance of transparency to students, David explains:

I try to place an emphasis on them understanding why those expectations are expected from them and why I’m establishing certain requirements and why it is that I’m doing what I’m doing in a certain manner. Because I think that when students learn a certain kind of critical transparency that allows them to meet those expectations more easily and they’ll know why it is they’re doing it to begin with.

David’s goal in encouraging open dialogue in his classroom not only informs students the reasons behind course expectations but also offers students insight into a different type of teacher-student relationship: one where the teacher values student opinions and input into how the class is being conducted to a certain degree. Many students may not have experienced such an open interaction before college, so by informing and viewing students as adults, according to David, a kind of critical transparency occurs.

Similarly, James agrees with David’s focus on teaching critical literacy, but extends his idea of transparency in the classroom by discussing how his classroom artifacts support students. James explains:

But the idea is supposed to be designing the course materials…to be aids to help my students when I’m not there. Like I might be sleeping and they might be at three in the morning working on my paper and they have a question. You could email me, but you’re not going to get an answer until at least after I get up. But
my students have told me that that [course materials] is helpful; that they did think that it is helpful and that I should keep doing that mostly I think because of the transparency of it. There’re no secrets. There’s no anything; no tricks. It’s every tip and trick I can think of that a student would run into or have run into.

Concurring with the need for critical transparency argued for by David, Robin adds “I like the idea of transparency because I think to often we have implications in our Achievement Requirements or syllabi and students don’t really understand why […].”

Antithetical to other participants, Frank actively chooses to, at times, engage in difficult concepts with students in teaching the forms of argument. Franks reveals during the focus group meeting his deliberate choice for ambiguity:

I’m guilty of my own weird…I like to do propaganda, like really hard…and dishonestly. We’ll look at some Noam Chomsky…and I will talk about how, well, this guy is basically infallible. And then we’ll talk about another Dinesh D’Souza’ who…is on the same kind of publishing, intellectual level but I will, just like you know, tear him apart. The tough things for me is that it’s really easy to build politics on the backs of students. And that is difficult because its not entirely what our job is.

Further elaborating in his personal interview, he argues that much of what he does in the classroom originates from his desire to imitate professors that he admires and what they have done. He admits that he does try to “alleviate the obvious signs of lording [his] power over [students].”
The Writing Program Administrator in discussing the Writing program’s training series elaborates on the transparency of the training program due to its many facets and parts. There are multiple pieces that go into the training so there is much support for graduate teachers of writing. Dr. Martin states “Actually, I think our model or program is probably particularly good for first generation grad students, because it does have all the components, including the mentoring. We do activities, like I mentioned, establish a persona…the kinds of things to start thinking of yourself as a graduate student, but also beyond that as somebody who’s going to be in academia as your career.” By offering a communicative dialogue with not only graduate students in the training program but also informing them of the importance of transparency in their own classrooms, feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty might be alleviated.

Often termed *imposter syndrome*, many first-generation students and minorities may experience such a feeling when faced with experiences they have never faced before. Connal defines *imposter syndrome* as questioning “having a legitimate place or space in the institution, given [one’s] academic and political concerns or their written or spoken discourse” (519). Comparable to Connal’s definition, Clance defines *imposter syndrome* as feelings of “not being as capable or adequate as others perceive or evaluate them to be” (184). Further elaborating, Clance describes some common symptoms to include feelings of phoniness, self-doubt, and inability to take credit for one’s accomplishments. These symptoms can also impact self-esteem, accomplishing goals set, mood, and how one interacts with their peers (184). To combat or lessen such feelings, Martin emphasizes that during the training program, she tries to use “confidence building [exercises], both in class and one-on-one. [She says] if you help people feel like super heroes, they rise to the occasion.” Furthermore, addressing the possible feelings associated with *imposter syndrome* will only offer additional communicative transparency and
support for students but also allow them to enter into a dialogue about their own experiences in and outside of the classroom.

**Engagement**

Participants applied the term of engagement to include multiple concepts. Frank’s desire to capture and keep students’ attention during class discussions falls under the theme of engagement. One way he does this is by frequently showing videos and clips in the classroom. Frank’s personal interview reveals his basis for integrating media into his pedagogy stems from Paulo Freire’s idea of teaching people how to gain literacy. He describes: “What he [Freire] says is you need to start with pictures of things that are relevant to that person’s life already, and bring that into the context of this new language.” Freire says:

> Often, educators and politicians speak and are not understood because their language is not attuned to the concrete situation of the people they address. Accordingly, their talk is just alienated and alienating rhetoric. The language of the educator […] like the language of the people cannot exist without thought; and neither language nor thought can exist without a structure to which they refer. In order to communicate effectively, [the] educator […] must understand the structural conditions in which the thought and language of the people are dialectically framed. (77)

Freire argues that it is not the role of the educator to speak or impose their view of the world on students, but to dialogue with students about their view and the view of the educator (77). Annas extends this idea by saying, “People write well –with passion and color – when they write out of their experience and when that experience is seen as valuable so that they have the confidence to
write it. Students’ lives will ‘intrude’ into their classroom performance, their attendance, their attention, and their writing. They need to ground their writing in their lives rather than to surmount their lives before they write “ (62). Similarly, Frank utilizes Freire’s idea of dialoguing and Annas’ thread of student experience by entering a dialogue with students through visual means or media clips that are relevant to their lives already.

In addition to the integration of visuals and media clips supporting student engagement, Frank relies on his past experiences of employment, unemployment, and working conditions. He often connects to students in this way because many students hold jobs outside of the classes they take at the university. Frank recollects, “And so on that level, that’s kind of where I can meet them eye to eye literally because my history of service work is gloriously extensive. I’ve managed a Subway for almost a year and a half. I got paid better than I’m getting paid here, but I hated the job. So, I mean, I can relate to them on that level very easily.”

James utilizes video clips and media also, but he doesn’t specifically use the word engagement to describe his rationale behind such pedagogical decisions. Drawing heavily from his own research and research interests, much of James’ class is organized around the concept of video games and popular culture references. While an expanded explanation of James’ strategy guide is discussed in the subsequent Chapter, he relies on a strategy guide document and movie and audio clips that supports his class discussions, and activities for specific writing assignments. He states:

I realize that I will teach the same content, like ‘The idea of rhetorical situation is this. These are the parts. These are how it works. This is how it’s supposed to go together.’ That’s not going to change. What does change is what example I’ll
bring in to use…” In different times, I’ve used movie clips from *Back to the Future* or *Casino Royale* or whatever might work.

Although he does not identify student engagement as the reason for doing so, tying in his own personal research interests could possibly support student engagement because they observe during class discussions James’ enthusiasm and interest in the video game and video/media clips he uses. Furthermore, students may recognize some of the more recent clips, which may encourage them to not only relate to such media but also share their experiences with James and their fellow peers.

**Reflection**

In *Composing Feminism*, Kay Siebler posits that,

> teacher critical reflection is a category that distinguishes feminist pedagogy from other schools of liberatory and critical pedagogies; no other pedagogical theory insists so strongly on the centrality of teacher self-reflection of pedagogical choices. Liberatory and other critical pedagogies focus on moving students toward critical consciousness. With feminist pedagogy, turning that critical eye not only toward students and classroom dynamics but back on oneself is imperative to creating a classroom that meets specific needs of students. (40)

Self-reflection or re-visioning, as Foss, Foss and Griffin contend is the “act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, [and] of entering an old text from a new critical direction” (1). Many instructors incorporate some form of reflection in their own writing and even on classroom assignments, and pedagogical practices. Conversely, not all instructors teach the importance of self-reflection to students, so students are often unfamiliar with reflecting or re-seeing their
writing in new ways, often instead thinking of revision simply as spell-checking or editing their work, instead of approaching their ideas in new ways.

Self-identified traditional student Frank supports reflection by collaborating with a colleague from his Master’s program. He shares that he continues to read and reread texts on critical pedagogy, Kenneth Burke, and Victor Villanueva. By reading and rereading such texts, Frank argues that he’ll continue to refine and make adjustments on class activities and other pedagogical choices.

David not only participates in critical teacher self-reflection but also tries to impress on his students what it means to self-reflect, and why it is important to do so. He elucidates: “What I really aim to do is to get them [students] to think about how and why they’re writing what they’re writing. Not just to write to pass an essay but to think of why they actually wrote in that manner and I think it’s important for students to realize all of the conditions that influence them to write a certain way.” Furthermore, David practices what he teaches to his students by often reflecting on his own classroom practices and even the evaluations he receives from his students each semester.

One complaint that I find to be recurring that I’d like to fix is I reach high [expectations] and I think that proves to be very beneficial for a lot of them. I assume that they can do more than perhaps other people in the university at large think that they’re capable of doing. And I think that most of the time that’s true, however, what is the unfortunate consequence of that is that some of them really can’t. And I think that that could certainly be resolved by finding a way to be
more clear. There’s no easy solution to doing that but, certainly clarity, organization.

David’s goal of critically reflecting on his own teaching practices shows his willingness and openness to possibly shift or revise some of his own choices as a teacher. Moreover, teaching and then asking students to self-reflect on their writing as well as why they make certain rhetorical moves or choices supports students’ critical thinking development.

While not necessarily identifying as a feminist pedagogue, James relies on a form of self-reflection, which he refers to as “scraping and starting over.” When planning a course, James often conceives an assignment and then attempts to “imagine all the possible outcomes and try to account for that.” He may then experience a set back with the assignment or find the assignment does not turn out the way he expected. James will then return to the drawing board by keeping the idea and redoing the procedure or select different equipment to use. Therefore, his practice of reflection stems from a difficulty or set back he has experienced with his students and in his teaching, not necessarily based on the renewal of a personal pedagogy.

Robin and Kilgore agree and practice a similar form of reflection in their classrooms. Kilgore reveals his decision to talk with his students, typically during one on one conferences, and ask what they think, feel, and want from the course. Robin concurs and informs students that she views them as adults, so she expects them to make their own decisions on how they interact and conduct themselves in the classroom. She tells students: “Do what you need to do. It’s your choice.” However, what often happens is students make certain decisions, such as not attending class on a regular basis, and then fall behind or must withdraw from the course. Either way,
Robin reemphasizes that students are adults, even if many of them don’t think of themselves as adult yet, and treats them as such.

*Responsibility*

Research participants referred to the theme of responsibility as meaning several things. James spoke of student responsibility as well as teacher responsibility, saying, “I’m up here doing my thing [teaching]. Are you [students] out there doing yours? I want my students to understand what their responsibilities are and what mine are. And that way they hold… we hold each other accountable.” James further explains that he believes such responsibility is implied, but he often does engage in a dialogue about responsibility once the first graded assignment has been returned, especially if students have started “slacking off.” Robin extends the discussion on responsibility revealing her inclination to inform students of her past years of corporate experience. Disclosing to students that she has watched people get fired as well as being denied promotion due to their lack of writing abilities offers students a real-world perspective about the importance of learning how to write well and also the importance potential employers might place on such skills. Using a real world example can show students that while they might not be working now, they will be applying for jobs in the future, so learning responsibility is a positive skill to gain.

*Addressing the Research Questions*

*Question 1: How does the role as a first-generation student influence pedagogy?*

Of the seven total participants, none openly admitted to identifying as a first-generation or traditional student to their writing students. As the focus group and interview shows, Frank lets students know of his past work experience as well as the reasons why he now teaches, which
stems partly from his parents’ experiences as educators. He does not inform students of identifying as traditional, but instead focuses more on his past experiences outside of school. James, David, and Robin choose not to reveal their first-generation status to their classrooms, as they do not view the information as relevant or important for students to know. They all agreed they feel students would see it as irrelevant or unimportant. Although Melissa does not inform students she is first-generation in the classroom, she stated if she observes students who are first-generation struggling, she might choose to reveal her status to them in a one-on-one conference. This conference serves as a way to connect with students and let them see a successful first-generation student model.

Focus group data and individual interviews revealed that the majority of participants identifying as first-generation did not view the identification as particularly relevant to their students. Conversely, all of them agreed that as first-generation undergraduates, they did experience additional obstacles and difficulties in transitioning from high school and their home discourses to the academic environment. This is most likely related to the lack of connection or tie to the academy existing before their entrance. All participants spoke of their reasons for attending college and graduate school that stemmed from their families expectations and that education was highly valued in their homes. So regardless of identifying as traditional or first-generation, the study’s participants being partially influenced by their families’ all held the beliefs of achieving additional education beyond high school.

Discussing some of the contrasts often found between first generation and traditional students in their preparation and success in college, Warburton, Bugarin and Nunez 95-96 study on beginning post secondary students communicates.
Of students who attend 4-year institutions, first-generation students [are] much more likely to attend public comprehensive institutions instead of research universities than those with at least one parent who has a bachelor’s degree. More than one-quarter of first-generation students attended part time in the 1997-98 academic year, and these students were much more likely to work full time compared to students whose parents had a college degree. [Moreover], first-generation students had lower first-year GPAs than students whose parents had a college degree[…]. (3-4)

These findings attest to the reference many of the participants alluded to as their struggles during their transition from high school to college. What confuses the findings however are the participants’ views on their role as writing instructor. Kilgore and James stated, as the above themes support, that they felt all students need to accept responsibility as students and adults when they arrive at college, meaning that students should assume maturity and self-responsibility with regards to grades, attendance, and deadlines among others. Kilgore and James mentioned that they experienced obstacles and struggles as first-generation students during their undergraduate years, but ultimately accepted that their success depended on their attitude and diligence to their goals. Potentially complicating the theme of student responsibility argued for by Kilgore and James, students are not necessarily entering the classroom at the same experience, communication or independence level as each other. Therefore, should students be expected to accept full responsibility for classroom expectations without teacher input and guidance? How are students able to meet certain expectations or reach certain goals without being given the tools to do so? Furthermore, if traditional students are at least, more familiar with certain classroom expectations and easily assume independence and responsibility for classroom
expectations, are first-generation students and minority students who are coming from vastly
different backgrounds and literacies expected to assume the same level of responsibility? Should
they be held to the same expectations even if they enter the academy at a different level of
experience? If so, is this a reasonable supposition? There are no simple answers.

Question 2: How does identifying as a first-generation teacher influence teaching philosophy?

As previously stated, most of the participants chose not to reveal their first-generation
identification to their students, feeling that most of their students do not see it as particularly
relevant to their own studies. The question remains, however, if first-generation students do not
feel their identifying as first-generation is relevant or their students do not see it as relevant.
Most of the participants, except Melissa, do not reveal their status during class time or during
conferences. Melissa stated she only reveals her status if she feels the student would benefit from
the knowledge and usually only during face-to-face individual conferences. Frank, on the other
hand, openly discusses his past experiences with work, as well as his mother’s experiences as a
teacher, who most likely served as his connection to the academy prior to his entrance. Connal
and Clance might agree a possible reason behind the participants’ choice to remain silent on their
identification of first-generation comes from a form of imposter syndrome. Participants may still
feel self-conscious of their standing as a new teacher of writing, especially as a graduate student
teacher of writing.

While not informing students of his first-generation status, James discusses his desire to
openly communicate with his students, emphasizing the importance of transparency in the
classroom, which he feels he benefited from when he was a first-generation undergraduate and
he acknowledges his experiences as being behind his frequent practice of transparency. He often
draws off of past experiences as an undergraduate to help inform some of how he conducts his classes now, even though he does not necessarily discuss how his classroom practices came about to his students in detail.

Frank, identifying as a traditional student, draws on his mother’s difficult experiences as an educator and how he interacts and communicates with students, often tying in examples from her experiences, as well as his own life and work experiences. While Frank does not call this type of discussion with his students transparent, the idea of establishing one’s ethos does come into play. Frank often informs students of his background, going so far as to label himself a member of the student body first, then as a teacher of writing, which can suggest his ease of entering the academic environment. Frank admits he speaks about power relationships and dynamics with his students, but only doing so by revealing much about his background and what he values as an individual.

**Question 3: What supports are in place to help first-generation Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA)?**

Dr. Martin strives for multiple components of training for all incoming graduate teachers of writing. This combination includes reading a text (“First Time Up”) before arriving at training, which discusses seeing oneself as a composition teacher and a graduate student. Furthermore, an electronic questionnaire is sent asking them about their previous teaching experience, their ease with technology, and teaching with technology. They are also asked about any reservations or questions that have about teaching composition or about the Writing Program itself. There is a course Blackboard site that offers resources for all incoming instructors and all new instructors are paired with a mentor that offers support for the first year of teaching in the
program. While the training program begins with a ten day orientation, all of the new graduate teachers of writing also meet twice a week for a pedagogy class. Dr. Martin admits the training program is not specifically addressed to first-generation students, but many of the components she includes, such as mentoring, confidence building exercises, and the pedagogy class greatly benefits first-generation students because they have the support they benefit from, without revealing their backgrounds if they choose not too. She admits she is very aware of the struggles of many first-generation students, as she herself identifies, but she finds herself talking to more of them privately then publicly about their background. She also states that she feels the university offers some really helpful supports for all teachers and faculty, but also can really benefit the development of one’s teaching identity and building of professional identity.

Yeah, I just think get them taking advantage of any faculty development opportunities. CCL [Center for Teaching and Learning] here is great; go to that. With the right kind of readings, the right kind of support, the right kind of tools, like blogs and teaching journals. Teaching portfolios is another one, those kinds of things. Just to keep helping them figure out their identity, for all of us it keeps changing and evolving, but to get them to start thinking about it and start building on it.

At the close of fall semester, Dr. Martin also asked the graduate teachers of writing to complete an anonymous questionnaire designed to evaluate the class, as well as the activities associated with the class. She feels this offers students an opportunity to voice their opinions, offer suggestions, and possibly introduce new ways of conducting the class. Dr. Martin’s desire for transparency, self-reflection, and student engagement connects directly with many of the participants’ desires for such relationships with their own students. Whether such relationships
are viewed in the same way, between Martin and graduate teachers of writing in contrast with graduate teachers of writing and their students is unclear. Regardless, the value of transparent communication, reflection, student engagement, and responsibility remains consistent.

Conclusion

In Chapter Three, I provided an overview of the data collected and what themes the participants valued as graduate teachers of writing. Many of the first-generation participants admitted to not revealing their status to their students, arguing they did not feel the information was particularly relevant to their own students. However, many of the first-generation participants openly spoke about the importance of transparency, or engagement for example, connecting the themes to their past experiences and struggles as an undergraduate student. This juxtaposition of what they view as important for their students to know and how they teach their classes certainly offers two different ideas. First-generation participants, whether conscious of this contradiction or not, often rely on their own obstacles as an undergraduate when communicating with their students. A compelling distinction that is made clear during the focus group and individual interviews, however, is that the first-generation participants, although proud of their accomplishments and success in higher education will often exclude their identification. While the scope of this study does not address this particular aspect of participants’ exclusion, the data certainly supports the viewpoint that many of the first-generation participants’ consider the first-generation identification as a way of potentially classifying or othering the group. Much like Connal and Clance suggest about imposter syndrome, first-generation and minority students can feel like their role or space in the academy is illegitimate and that they must constantly prove themselves as belonging in this environment. It is possible that participants, although relying on their own struggles and past experiences as first-generation in teaching choose not to reveal their
identification to everyone. They view it as unimportant because they feel they may be judged about whether they belong in the academy. Concealing it from students or other individuals lessens the possibility of questioning their place or role as a teacher. This does not indicate all first-generation students feel this way, but suggests instead a potential reason behind participants’ decisions to reveal their identification and to whom.

Chapter Three offered an overview of the data collected from the focus group and individual interviews, or in the participants’ own perspectives. An initial look at three of the seven research questions is also present in Chapter Three with specific focus on the data-driven common themes including: transparency, engagement, reflection and responsibility. Specific emphasis has been placed on the focus group and interview data in this Chapter with Chapter Four paying particular attention to the other data collection methods of classroom observation and classroom artifacts and what such texts and contexts imply. Furthermore, the remaining research questions are addressed in Chapter Four that primarily focus on how participants’ classroom artifacts potentially reflect a first-generation pedagogy, as well as how a first-generation pedagogy may influence types of assignments, reading selections, and classroom artifacts. Chapter Four also grapples with the possible creation of a first-generation pedagogy and what it might look like. The Chapter also looks at how the creation of a first-generation pedagogy might aid and support traditional and non-traditional students and what a new pedagogy would offer students, teachers, and the field of rhetoric and writing.
Chapter Four
Analyzing Their Actions: Interpretations, Observations and Insights

Throughout the research stages of this project, I have greatly enjoyed the interactions with and learning about my participants’ experiences and values as well as how they feel about teaching writing. By relying on participants’ accounts of their beliefs and experiences during their academic years and now as graduate teachers of writing, their own words added considerable richness and depth to my work that would have been lacking otherwise. In addition, making use of participants’ narratives during the focus group and individual interviews allowed insight into perspectives I never would have known if my research solely focused on my own perceptions and experiences of first generation writing teachers and their pedagogical choices.

Dividing Chapters Three and Four into two distinct designs offered the opportunity to focus first on what the participants had to say about their teaching philosophies, pedagogical decisions, and practices as well as their past experiences as graduate students and writing teachers. Chapter Three proffers an overview of participants’ focus group conversations and individual interviews with participants and a writing program administrator. The Fourth Chapter discusses the observations of the classroom artifacts and antecedent participant observations. Then this Chapter continues by providing insight into the distinctions between the various data sets and my analysis behind some of the distinctions. Furthermore, this Chapter considers the connections between the data in the third and fourth Chapters and addresses the remaining research questions.

Participant Observations and Classroom Artifacts Overview
Three participants volunteered their classrooms for observation and offered their accompanying classroom artifacts. Observing the three participants on two consecutive occasions provided an opportunity to witness a variety of interactions involving the participant and her or his students, along with her or his presentation of an array of information on writing and the current writing assignment as well as pending deadlines.

I collected assignment sheets, course syllabi, and assorted informative handouts from each participant for the classes I observed. Chapter Three and Figure One emphasize the various themes that guide the data; Chapter Four also focuses on the directed themes found in the data and my perceptions of such data from my own point of view, as I concentrate specifically on my observations and interpretations of the classroom documents.

**Common Themes**

*Transparency*

The theme of transparency reemerged during the class observations and often showed up in multiple ways in the teaching artifacts. Although James did not emphasize transparency during the focus group, the participant observation and his accompanying classroom artifacts did illustrate his desire to not only practice but also introduce and teach the importance of transparency to his students. James employs a 28-page syllabus that outlines multiple classroom policies (attendance, grading, format, etc.), delineates writing assignments and course expectations, and advises students on how to succeed in his class. While the syllabus is distributed on the first or second day of the semester, assignment sheets and the strategy guide are circulated strategically during the semester when students may benefit from them the most, typically during the assigning of written assignments. Believing that a 28-page syllabus might
overwhelm students, James attests that all assignment sheets, the syllabus, and the strategy guide are designed to provide students with detailed instructions and information so the documents may be used outside of the course, thereby supplying a support for students on many aspects of the course. He also states that students have expressed an appreciation for the documents as they can continually refer back, as needed. Furthermore, James attests that artifacts may be used as a way to support students if and when he is not available for questions or help. James describes:

But the idea is supposed to be designing the course materials…to be aids to help my students when I’m not there. Like I might be sleeping and they might be at three in the morning working on my paper and they have a question. You could email me, but you’re not going to get an answer until at least after I get up. But my students have told me that that is helpful; that they did think that it is helpful and that I should keep doing that mostly I think because of the transparency of it. There’re no secrets. There’s no anything; no tricks. It’s every tip and trick I can think of that a student would run into or have run into.

Figure 2 illustrates a sample section of James’ syllabus, which offers a detailed explanation of how each written assignment is broken down and the expectations for the assignment, thus reinforcing his emphasis of transparency in his teaching. Because students are given the syllabus during the first week of the course, they have a document that outlines necessary and important information they can refer to during and outside of class time.
Essays

- Observation
  Students will observe a given space, present an analysis about the subject using details gathered from observation, and argue conclusions based on those observed details in 3-5 pages. No academic research required.

- Arguing for a Position with Sources
  Students will choose a real-world issue and give appropriate background information about it, present both sides of the issue using at least three academic sources, and argue which side is more successful with its argument in 3-5 pages. Academic research required.

- Analyzing Causes
  Students will identify a real-world problem and give appropriate background information about it, present probable causes of the problem using a minimum of three academic sources as support, and argue which cause is most likely the reason for the problem using research as support in 3-5 pages. Academic research required.

- Analyzing Texts
  Students will choose an advertisement for analysis and give appropriate background information about it, present messages communicated in the advertisement using text and image, and argue how that advertisement’s messages are effective in 3-5 pages. No academic research required.

- Evaluation
  Students will choose a music review OR video game review for analysis and give appropriate background information about it, develop criteria for determining the review’s effectiveness, and argue how effective the review is compared with that criteria in 3-5 pages. No academic research required.

Figure 3: Screen Capture. Essay Section of Syllabus for James

The above screen shot offers a detailed explanation of each of the five required written assignments for the writing course. While the section on Essays certainly does not serve as the only information available to students, the document does offer students openness and clarity of what is expected for each assignment, including page requirements and if outside research is expected. Students learn early on in the course of the writing expectations and assignments, before more detailed discussions and assignment sheets have been distributed during class discussions. The practice of transparency in James’ syllabus highlights the importance and attention he places on a diaphanous relationship. Moreover, my participant observations of
James’ two class sessions revealed discussions of student and teacher expectations. Such conversations demonstrate the importance of open, communicative relationships.

A second example taken from a comparable section of Frank’s syllabus shows a much different approach to the description of the written assignments for the same Writing course. As evidenced in Figure Four, Frank’s syllabus utilizes the term Essays for the heading, very similar to James’ similarly titled section; however, Frank’s segment describes assessment and how the five written assignments will be graded. Frank’s sampling offers an opposing perspective on the assigned writing assignments, unlike James who chooses to provide brief breakdowns of each of the essays. Furthermore, Frank introduces the concept of holistic grading, but does not describe or explain to students what that entails within his syllabus section. Although both writing instructors teach the same five writing assignments and follow the same end of term portfolio evaluation process per program requirements, they are able to exercise their independence in how they interact with their students in the classroom and through their classroom artifacts. As Figures Three and Four make obvious, teachers often inform students about classroom expectations in different ways, emphasizing aspects they value while working toward common, programmatic goals.
Essays—Each of the five major essays you will write will be based on chapters from *The St. Martin’s Guide to Writing*, 9th ed. You will also work with *A Writer’s Resource* for assistance with writing and revising the multiple drafts you will be required to write for each essay. Essays will be graded on a Pass, Almost Pass, and No Pass scale. The rubrics included in your portfolio are on what I will base my assessment of your writing. As well, I will fill out an evaluation chart (called a “rubric”) for each final draft to indicate the paper’s strengths and weaknesses; like commentary on early drafts, your evaluated final drafts will be returned to you within a week’s time. The grade for each essay will be a Pass, Almost-Pass, or No-Pass.

- A Passing (P) essay shows good control in all of the categories of the rubric. Although there may be a few minor problems, the entire essay is generally well-written and clearly and effectively communicates its ideas.
- An Almost-Passing (AP) essay shows a combination of strengths and weaknesses on the rubric. There is room for improvement in some rubric categories of the essay and the essay does not consistently communicate its ideas clearly and effectively. An Almost-Pass means the essay is not passing, but it is getting close to being a passing essay.
- A No-Passing (NP) essay shows a serious weakness in at least one category of the rubric, and other categories may need attention, too. The overall quality of the essay is significantly hindered because of these weaknesses.

This is a holistic grading system and you will have the opportunity for me to provide ample feedback throughout the semester. *You must have at least two passing essays to have your portfolio be considered for evaluation.* At the end of the semester your entire writing portfolio will be judged by other members of the General Studies Writing staff (following my evaluation of your work). Ultimately, this portfolio evaluation will determine whether or not you will pass GSW 1110.

*Figure 4: Screen Capture. Essay Section of Syllabus for Frank*

In comparison to Frank’s *Essays* section, David’s *Essays* segment exemplifies a difference in information for students. Instead of focusing on the specific breakdown of individual essay assignments as James section, or Frank’s overview of writing assignment assessment methods, Figure Five offers David’s emphasis on essay format requirements, such as font size, spacing requirements, and even submission guidelines for during the semester and the
portfolio evaluation process. David shares a similar *Essays* section with Frank, telling students that all five writing assignments will be based on chapters from the course textbook.

**Essays**

Each of the five major essays you will write will be based on chapters from the e-book version of *The St. Martin’s Guide to Writing* 8th ed. You will also work with *A Writer’s Resource* for assistance with writing and revising the multiple drafts you will be required to write for each essay. At the end of the semester your entire writing portfolio will be judged by other members of the General Studies Writing staff (following my evaluation of your work). Ultimately, this portfolio evaluation will determine whether or not you will pass GSW 1110.

To ensure that you are ready for the portfolio evaluation process at the end of the semester, you will need to keep your prewriting, various drafts, and peer review comments for every paper you write. Though evaluators primarily will examine your final drafts, they will also assess the steps that you took to reach those final drafts, looking for improvement and progress in your writing.

Please follow these format requirements for submitting your work:

- Papers should follow MLA format. Examples and information on MLA can be found in *A Writer’s Resource*. As well, we will discuss MLA format in class.
- Essays must be word processed, double-spaced, and have standard 1” margins on the right and left sides, top, and bottom of the page.
- The font used for your final drafts should be 12-point Times New Roman or another similarly proportioned and sized font.
- Pages must be numbered with your last name and page number in the upper right-hand corner.
- Your essays must have a title, but please don’t include a separate title page with your papers.
- When you submit a final draft of an essay to me for evaluation, you will need to include a number of other materials along with it, arranged in the following order:
  - A GSW Rubric should be on top (goldenrod color).
  - The assignment sheet should be included next.
  - The final (or most recent) draft of your essay should be included next.
  - The various drafts of your paper should be included next, in reverse chronological order. Only drafts which contain substantial revisions or which peers or I have commented upon should be included, however.
  - On the bottom of the stack should be a completed Audience and Values Exploration/Student Process Analysis Sheet (peach color) and all other prewriting you have done for the assignment.

Please be sure to secure these various documents together with a staple or large paper clip. Do not use a binder clip.

**Figure 5: Screen Shot. Essays Section of Syllabus for David**

In addition, James includes information about how papers will be assessed in a separate section within his syllabus. Figure Six elucidates his assessment practices and how students can determine their strengths and weakness on specific assignments. As illustrated, James’ section
provides additional detail in how students’ papers will be assessed by explaining the use of the required rubric and that “a ‘+’ (impressive), ‘√’ (satisfactory), or a ‘—’ (needs work) in six areas” will be used to show where students fall on the evaluative scale associated with the rubric (Figure Six). Therefore, students are given a better sense of how to use and read the rubric as James has described his use of the assessment tool. What does not show up in any participants’ syllabi, however, are explanations or further discussion of the rubric, how and why it is used in assessment, and how students can understand and use it during their writing processes. While participant observations did not reveal discussions of the rubric, it is possible participants discussed how they used the rubric during class meetings early in the semester. Consequently, the absence of explanation on syllabi might suggest participants expect students to examine and understand all of the elements on the rubric themselves, which certainly does not reinforce transparent relationships. While the absence does not confirm or deny this held belief among participants, another influencing factor could certainly stem from the programmatic expectations and standards placed on such documents.
Grading

All five essays will call for multiple drafts beginning with a rough draft. I will comment on each draft submitted and return them within a week for revision. Rough drafts are not graded. Final drafts will receive comments and a grade. I will use a rubric and indicate strengths and weaknesses using a “+” (impressive), “x” (satisfactory), or a “—” (needs work) in six areas. The grade for each essay will be a Pass or a No-Pass.

- A Passing (P) essay passes all six areas of the rubric and shows good control over language. A few minor problems may be present, but the essay is written well and communicates ideas effectively with clarity.
- A No-Pass (NP) essay shows serious weakness in at least one rubric category. The overall essay quality significantly suffers from these weaknesses.

A course grade of S (Satisfactory) will be given with successful portfolio assessment at the end of the semester, but it is not calculated into grade point averages.

An unrevised paper submitted as a revised or final draft will result in an automatic No-Pass (NP) and an incomplete portfolio may result. Incomplete portfolios will not be evaluated and students will not pass this course.

General Studies Writing 1120 is more challenging because it focuses upon argumentative academic writing and further develops writing abilities gained in General Studies Writing 1110. However, not everyone develops writing abilities at the same pace, so sometimes students must repeat 1110. If a student’s portfolio is ineligible for assessment, a student cannot meet all of the course requirements, or does not pass portfolio assessment, then an NC (No Credit) is given and nothing is calculated into grade point averages. However, an NC (No Credit) is recorded on transcripts. A student must complete General Studies Writing 1110 and 1120 in order to graduate.

Figure 6: Screen Shot. Grading Section of Syllabus for James

During the observation periods, each participant featured their value of transparency to their students in similar ways. James, Frank, and David offered brief overviews of the goals of the class sessions, but also how the week of classes would most likely play out. All three participants also provided verbal reminders to students about pending assignment deadlines, as well as their weekly office hours in the attempts to encourage students to drop by for help. Unlike Frank and James, however, David reinforced his verbal reminders to students by writing the information on the board, offering students a chance to hear and see the information that David obviously values, thus, promoting a transparent relationship.
The instructor has written on the board on the left side the goals for today’s class:
1. Students Riot in UK
2. Finish Activity
3. Papers Back
4. Thursday 2-6pm

The instructor writes on the right side of the board:
1. $25 million budget shortfall
2. tuition increases
3. $9 million in grad scholarship reduction
4. Ideology/hegemony

**Figure 7: Screen Shot: Participant Observation Portion for David**

The two separate sections of information offer students a sense of how the 50-minute class will most likely play out but also the topics that will be addressed as each class goal is focused on.

*Engagement*

Capturing and maintaining student engagement became an evident goal for many, as I discussed in Chapter Three based on participant focus group and interviews; likewise, participant observations revealed a similar objective in teaching pedagogy and student-teacher interactions. Utilizing Figure Seven, David integrates his desire for transparency with his students while striving to catch their interest while also keeping them engaged and active as communicators. He does this by connecting world events to events occurring at State University and their current writing assignments. During this specific class, David utilizes the recent events of the student riots in the UK in comparison to recent budget cuts happening on campus, asking students what they have heard about the two events. Previously having set up a recent news clip from BBC News, David plays the news clip for students. Several students ask why UK students are rioting
and David provides a brief overview of the events taking place. After he has provided context, David reminds students of their current writing assignment: a proposing solutions paper. David asserts, “The issue in England is what is happening here. Why out of all the solutions the class has come up with did this happen in England, but this demonstrating wasn’t a possible solution here?” David attempts to engage students by offering real world circumstances to events affecting their education on their own campus as a way to get them to see and engage with their writing assignments, as opposed to writing about simulated scenarios. Furthermore, his pedagogical choices show his willingness for student engagement in their writing and becoming greater engaged citizens in academic and personal communities.

Tying in engagement, anthropologist John Szwed argues if one wishes “to understand how literacy is meaningful to members of a particular group and how they use literacy, [one] needs to pay attention to the intersections of five main elements [that include] text, context, function, participants, and motivation” (73). Much like Szwed claims, James integrates what he labels a strategy guide in his classroom artifacts that offers students text, context, and function on how the course will run, as well as writing assignments guidelines. This document runs 25-pages and includes in James’ words: “It’s every tip and trick I can think of that a student would run into or have run into.” The strategy guide is organized very similarly to a video game strategy guide that aids and supports players while they play. James, a video game fan, feels this type of document and the way he has designed it engages students because many of them are familiar with the format because they play video games. James argues that the strategy guide provides students with a form of motivation and engagement when writing their papers. FigureEight provides an example of the Table of Contents for James’ strategy guide, so students are able to navigate through the document very similarly to a video game guide.
As Figure Eight shows, James also employs some of the video game language or literacy with his use of “moves” in how he discusses the writing assignments. Figure 8 provides a sample of the strategy guide offering students information about the purpose of the document and guides them through each writing assignment successfully.

The artifact furthers James’ desire for student engagement by including tip boxes, likening student writing and student experiences with the specific writing assignment to succeeding in a video game level. Figure Nine illustrates examples of James’ tip boxes and his experiences with past student writing weaknesses with the writing assignment students are currently working on.
Students are able to read through each writing tip James provides about their first writing assignment, an observation essay; and, this provides them with a variety of ways of viewing how they might approach the impending writing task and subsequent assignment. As Figure Nine reveals, each tip offers additional information for students on how they can do their best and succeed at the assignment.

Reflection

As Chapter Three elucidates, many of the participants practice some type of self-reflection on their own, whether it is in the form of a dialogue with a fellow colleague, self-reflective writing about their own ideas and teaching practices, or even actively considering changing and re-visioning their teaching practices with advice from student evaluations. While participants did not necessarily always teach students to self-reflect on all their work, Frank’s
sylabus directly addresses his value of self-reflection for himself and students. On page six, his syllabus includes a small paragraph on “Reflective Essay Requirements”:

After you turn in a second draft of each essay, the following Monday you will be required to turn in a 1-2 page reflection on the writing process you undertook in the most recent essay. Designed to prepare you to write the cover letter, the reflective essay is a place for you to critically consider and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your own writing. Also this is an opportunity for you to grow accustomed to underlining the positive aspects of your work while minimizing (but not denying) its weaknesses.

Outside of this paragraph on self-reflection, due to the limitations and restrictions of participant observation time, it is unclear whether Frank offers additional explanation on student self-reflection, about its value, and how to successfully integrate this practice into student writing. Additional explanation on self-reflection might certainly take place during class discussions, but as Yancey argues in Reflection in the Writing Classroom, “reflection must itself be woven not so much throughout the curricula as into it” (201). Expecting students to know how to reflect on their new experiences and the writing of new genres is problematic if thought of in a secondary manner.

David chooses an alternative form of reflection, but not necessarily student self-reflection. Located on his course schedule of due dates and reading assignments, he asks students to “[w]rite a brief summary of what you found helpful – and perhaps, not so helpful – with the peer review workshop.” This asks students to reflect on the task they were involved in and what they found helpful, as well as possibly how well their peers offered feedback. This activity could
also be viewed as a way for David to further revise his use of peer review and how he might use it in the future. David’s use of reflection, unlike Frank’s, presents students with a smaller stakes task of their interactions and experiences with peer review. While David’s goal is to determine if students are giving and receiving communicative feedback, Frank seeks for students to “critically consider” while “discuss[ing] the strengths and weaknesses” of their writing in their self-reflections (Reflective Essay Requirements). What remains unclear is if students understand what “critically consider[ing]” means and how to succeed at the task. Furthermore, one of the goals outlined for Writing 1110 is for students to “demonstrate critical reading, writing and thinking strategies” by the end of the course (Learning Outcomes).

*Responsibility*

The theme of responsibility was much more visible in the participant observations and classroom artifacts than the previous two themes of engagement and reflection. Frank, David, and James all addressed the importance of responsibility to students during their participant observations. Many of the points made consisted of reminding students of their responsibility to meet deadlines, completing their reading assignments in time, and staying focused and on task by using their syllabi and course schedules provided to them. All three participants also reminded students that if they chose not to send them rough drafts of their essays, the lack of comments would fall on students as their choice and subsequently should assume responsibility if they struggled during revising.

Although not specifically addressed in the course documents, David uses such language about student responsibility in his syllabus stating, “You are responsible for maintaining a copy of each draft of your essays. Ultimately, it is your responsibility to submit a complete portfolio.” As he has made the conscious decision to bold some of the syllabus language throughout the
document, these specific statements on student responsibility are not pronounced. James employs similar language in his syllabus, on page six, unlike David who includes his section on page three. Frank discusses student responsibility in regards to “Academic Honesty/Integrity.” He informs students generally that they hold a responsibility to “acknowledging [their] own state of indebtedness in academic writing” and that “academic honestly also includes [their] personal responsibility to fully understanding what is and what is not plagiarism.” This statement seems to suggest that students are expected to learn about and practice academic honesty, but Frank’s language appears to indicate the class will not cover this important information that students are expected to learn. Frank’s use of “personal responsibility” shifts accountability to students, without taking into account that many students may not enter the classroom understanding what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. This complicates the theme of responsibility by focusing solely on student and not teacher responsibility.

Addressing the Research Questions

**Question 1: How do classroom artifacts reflect a first-generation pedagogy?**

Of all the classroom documents analyzed, none of the artifacts openly addressed students’ potential difficulties with learning their new academic literacy of the classroom or obstacles they might face due to job obligations, child-care obligations or other additional struggles some students may face when attending college. Recent conversations that have taken place at my university, specifically from the College of Arts and Sciences, consist of adding information on course syllabi regarding returning students who hold veteran’s status and addressing students who regularly attend military training or weekend drills. Conversations about unique student obstacles and outside responsibilities often do not take place in the classroom, but more often during one-on-one conferences, so as not to alienate students. Much of the information found on
participants’ classroom documents offered a multitude of helpful pieces of information about programs or supports in place, often provided by the university, where students might find additional information outside of the classroom. Resources such as the writing center, study skills center, the library and research librarians are all useful supports, but none directly address the unique needs of first-generation students. The study skills center supplies students with help in reading and study skills; however, of the classroom artifacts studied, the only resource listed consistently on all three participants’ syllabi was information about the writing center that targets a myriad of students.

Moreover, other than the variations regarding placement of information in participants’ syllabi and course schedules, all participants’ texts were basically the same, showing many of the same goals of the class, which certainly makes sense due to their obligations to meeting program requirements. However, much of the themes participants’ emphasized (reflection and responsibility) during their individual interviews and the focus group meeting are not necessarily reflected in the course documents. Or if so, only in very limited ways, as Frank’s earlier example on student responsibility and academic honesty/integrity. He places the responsibility on his students to conduct themselves ethically and follow academic honesty but based on the language of the syllabus, it is solely the students’ responsibility.

While course documents may not reflect some of the common themes that were emphasized during focus group and interviews, the question must be asked: are classroom artifacts representative of the instructors or the standardized nature of the program in which they are employed? Many of the similar segments used by all the participants certainly suggest a following of programmatic requirements. But, the participants’ syllabi variations, like James’ strategy guide, insinuate a “making it their own” approach. It is evident participants must follow
program guidelines; however, they are not restricted from emphasizing their own experiences and additional guidelines in their course documents or in the classroom.

**Question 2: How does a first-generation pedagogy influence artifacts?**

Of the three participants I worked with and through the analysis of their classroom artifacts, there were no significant differences among the course documents. As William DeGenaro claims, “Quintillian’s ‘good man speaking well’ is still with us,” (1) which directly connects to Connal and Clance’s earlier definitions of *imposter syndrome* found in Chapter Three. Quintillian’s ‘good man speaking well’ directly ties in with what academia values: speaking well, writing well, and communicating well. When DeGenaro speaks of Quintillian’s concept of the educated man, he is referring to well-spoken individuals who are knowledgeable and communicate well in the discourse of the academy. It is evident that if, according to DeGenaro, we value Quintillian’s image and first-generation graduates are experiencing a form of imposter syndrome, it is clear why they might not wish to reveal their first-generation status.

Participants’ focus group and interview data revealed the majority of the first-generation participants do not reveal to their students their identification, seeing it as irrelevant. Melissa, on the other hand, admitted she might reveal her identity as first-generation if she felt the student might benefit from the information but only during a conference with the student, which still suggests a sense of apprehension about identifying as a first-generation student.

Furthermore, the three sets of classroom artifacts analyzed followed the same opinions expressed during the previous focus group and interviews. There is no specific information included that directly addresses or supports first-generation students and their unique needs. Most participants, as their teaching documents revealed, do not see it as particularly relevant to
student success in the classroom, although many undergraduate first-generation students experience additional struggles and outside responsibilities showing there are definite distinctions present. In addition, many first-generation participants admitted to struggling as undergraduates and in learning the discourse of the academia that traditional students often do not.

Collier as well as Morgan discuss Becker and Mead’s Symbolic Interactionist version of role theory which can be described as a concept involving roles that serve as resources that individuals use to pursue their goals through interactions with others (427). Collier expands on Becker and Mead’s approach by creating the Differentiated Model of Identity Acquisition:

there are multiple, alternative conceptions for broad societal roles, such as ‘college student.’ For example, students at different schools, a community college, a large public urban university, or an elite private university must typically deal with different sets of expectations in order to be recognized as ‘successful’ at their respective schools. Having differentiated versions of the same role allows individuals to generate more effective responses to the actual circumstances they experience as they pursue their goals. (427)

In addition, Collier’s approach repositions Ralph Turner’s theory of role playing and role making by including role mastery. Collier’s offers further explanation:

Role playing occurs when an individual in a new or uncertain situation uses an existing role standard to perform a ‘conventional’ version of the role in question, as when a college freshman concentrates on meeting a professor’s standards, as a step toward learning the college student role. In contrast, role making occurs
when an individual develops her or his own ‘version’ of the role, usually as a result of a series of previous performances of that role…Individuals tend to start out with ‘role playing’ (enacting a standardized version of a role), then, as their level of expertise increases, they do more ‘role making’ (developing their personal version of that role. (427)

Traditionally identified students have experienced some form of the college student role, with the attendance of older siblings, family members, or through extended family relationships. Through these relationships, traditional students have witnessed and possibly even experienced a form of role playing in the college student role, even before they enter college that first-generation students do not have access to. Moreover, with traditional students holding increased experience and expertise in role playing, upon entering the academy, their transition to role making becomes that much smoother. First-generation students must step into a new discourse, unlike their home discourse, and assume the practices of role playing and role making simultaneously. It is no surprise then that first-generation students do not experience the academy the same as traditional students. Furthermore, if first-generation individuals, even at the graduate school and teaching level, are experiencing a sense of trepidation about their identity and their very relevant experiences while continuing to feel marginalized, how can instructors adequately help their own first-generation students succeed in the classroom when as instructors they are aware of the difficulties in stepping into the ‘college student’ role?

DeGenaro discusses that often rhetoric has “consisted of elites concerned more with theorizing and less with doing. This limited and limiting scope is particularly ironic, given that rhetoric is a living and breathing practice that takes place in real social contexts” (4). Thomas P. Miller, a historian of rhetoric, agrees and argues for a more dynamic relationship with a
multiplicity of traditions. He posits:

Instead of just the rhetorical tradition, we need to study the rhetoric of traditions—the ways that political parties, ethnic groups, social movements, and other discourse communities constitute and maintain shared values and assumptions that authorize discourse. If we adopt this more broadly engaged approach, we can begin to make the discursive practices of marginalized traditions a central part of the history of rhetoric, and the history of rhetoric will then become more central to our interest in rhetoric as social praxis. (26)

Agreeing with DeGenaro and Miller, I would extend the relationship to include marginalized traditions of first-generation undergraduates, graduates and teachers. Who better to speak for the obstacles and struggles first-generation students experience when making the transition to the academy than the individuals who lived the experiences?

First-generation graduate teachers of writing have already fully integrated and assumed the discourse of the academy and have chosen to teach students to do the same. However, as the research participants illustrate here, many actively choose not to reveal their self-identification, seeing it as unimportant. Such silence denies the opportunity for students to hear stories of success and prevents support and understanding specifically to first-generation students who can benefit from such insights.

Question 3: What would or does a first-generation pedagogy look like? What does it do? What is its value?

According to Stephen G. Pelletier, “the stereotypical [college] student is but a sliver of today’s college going population” (2). The consulting firm Stamats further reveals that “as few
as 16 percent of college students today fit the so-called traditional mold: 18- to 22- years old, financially dependent on parents, in college full time and living on campus” (2). Pelletier extends the conversation on this student population change by claiming, “the very label of ‘nontraditional’ suggests that business as usual might not work in serving this large cohort of current and potential students” (2). While Pelletier is referring to regular academic administrative business, the same concept can be connected to how teachers are teaching in the classroom. If teachers are employing some of the same interactions and pedagogical choices as they have in the past but the student population has changed, as have their needs, experiences, and expectations, should not teaching practices shift as well?

While certainly not limited to returning adult-learners Jamie Merisotis, of the Lumina Foundation for Educations, states, “one problem for adults is the constant, competing tensions between life obligations and educational obligations” (3). First-generation students certainly experience similar transitions as the first in their families to attend college as well as attempting to balance their home life and discourse in relationship to their new lives and discourse in the academy. Additionally, first-generation students often enter the classroom at a different level of understanding responsibility than more traditional students. As Merisotis would probably agree, “first-generation students are less likely to live on campus, develop relationships with faculty members, or perceive faculty as being concerned about their development; they also work more hours off campus” (Richardson, Skinner and Terenzini et al). They are also less likely to create bonds with their fellow peers or become active in campus clubs or organizations (Billson and Terry). However, with the proposed creation of a first-generation pedagogy, first-generation students would enter the space often held by traditional students who the academy typically addresses as their audience but supported in ways that feminist pedagogy and critical pedagogy
do not. First-generation pedagogy would provide students with the metaphorical keys to the nuances of the academy that they often enter not knowing. Examples of such nuances might include the reading and interpreting the genre of a course syllabus that students may have never used or possibly never seen before. Insights into the aspects of the college student role could also be discussed that would certainly provide support to students as they make their transitions.

*Question 4: What would a first-generation pedagogy offer to students, the classroom, and the field? What environments would this be more relevant? How are traditional and non-traditional students’ needs met from this approach?*

Research Questions three and four provide much overlap and connection about how a first-generation pedagogy would work in the academy. A first-generation pedagogy would serve as a type of support or aid for not only first-generation students but also students identifying as traditional because the supportive pedagogical practices would supply the information and knowledge making needed for successfully entering and becoming part of a new environment. While specifically designed to address first-generation students’ needs and unique experiences, all students would benefit from this pedagogical approach. Furthermore, instructors who practice a first-generation pedagogy would provide students with their own experiences as a student, often reflecting on what they felt and how they coped with the struggles as an undergraduate student. If writing teachers identify as first-generation, then sharing this knowledge and experience with their students will only further the ways they can provide support. In contrast, if first-generation instructors choose not to reveal their identification, or undergraduate students felt uneasy about disclosing their status, such a first-generation pedagogy could still be employed.

While a first-generation pedagogy provides insight into the nuances of role playing and role making the “college student” role, these beneficial insights should certainly not be limited to
only supporting first-generation students, but all students making these transitions. Whether identifying as first-generation or not, utilizing a first-generation pedagogy does not suggest full disclosure should be forced on all teachers and students. I would hope, however, that if first-generation instructors see students struggling with similar situations they have experienced, revealing their identification would only provide support to the student, not shame or dishonor. Furthermore, the idea of students being expected to struggle because we as teachers struggled as students should not persist.

Possibly to that end, Laura Gray-Rosendale and Sibylle Gruber, editors of *Alternative Rhetorics: Challenges to the Rhetorical Tradition*, discuss the importance of “exploring new territories, territories that [are] considered negligible, unimportant, or nonexistent” (3). Their anthology offers scholarship as *alternative*, meaning “there is an attempt to ‘disrupt and challenge the hierarchical nature of some traditional rhetorical studies while recognizing that such challenges are temporary and open to co-optation’” (5). Employing a first-generation pedagogy, students will benefit from learning from their fellow peers and instructor in the classroom. By knowing of their instructors’ personal experiences and that of their fellow students, the underlying, often unspoken rules connected to being a student in the academy can be revealed. Should instructors choose not to reveal their first-generation status, conversations could still be shared about obstacles or struggles all students might face, such as learning how to thrive in classes and ways of emerging successfully.

If first-generation teachers, like the participants in this study, feel as though their identification as first-generation is unimportant, how do we address and continue to change how we interact and support the new student populations entering our schools? With a re-envisioning or new look at how we interact with and teach all students, as teachers in the field, it remains
constantly important to return to our teaching practices and the reasoning behind the choices we make in the classroom as well as finding new ways of supporting the ever-changing student population by first looking at what we possess as educators and how our knowledge and experiences may potentially support students.

Conclusion

Drawing off Bartholomae’s seminal text:

Every time a student sits down to write for us, [she or] he has to invent the university for the occasion – invent the university, that is, or a branch of it, like history or anthropology or economics or English. The student has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourses of our community. Or perhaps I should say the various discourses of our community… (3)

The need for a first-generation pedagogy exists. New incoming college students role play and role make (Collier and Turner) as they enter new roles, like the “college student” role. As Bartholomae posits, students must learn to speak the language of the academy and it is the job of writing teachers to support them as they learn this new discourse. While the participants in the study have already learned to write and perform academic literacies, many of them choose not to reveal their first-generation status to colleagues or students, even if their insights might aid student development. Employing a first-generation pedagogy, with or without revealing one’s identification as first-generation or traditional, would provide all students with the agency for role mastery once arriving in college. Students experience their transition to college in a variety
of ways; accommodating all students in the discourses of the academy through a first-generation pedagogy may certainly ease the passage. As Bartholomae makes clear, it is the job of writing teachers to support this literacy learning, so I would argue it is also the job of writing teachers to support the transition of students into the academy and the learning of the nuances that accompany such entrance.

In Chapter Four I discussed a variety of distinctions among data and the reemergence of the four common themes that bridged between the participants’ own words and my observations and interpretations of their teaching practices and artifacts. Furthermore, Chapter Four included data analyses, examination of the remaining research questions, and the connections between the data in Chapters Three and Four.

In the final Chapter, the broader implications of the importance and need for a first-generation pedagogy is discussed as well as a more specific description of a proposed first-generation pedagogy. Chapter Five also includes a culmination of the four previous chapters, as well as goals for future study. The Chapter concludes with insights and specific focus on the three areas: Theory, Administration, and Pedagogy.
Chapter Five

Implications, Findings and Future Research

Nunez and Carroll argue, “In order for postsecondary institutions to better understand the unique needs of first-generation students, more must be known about who they are and their particular enrollment experiences” (3). Through the many stages of this study, I sought to uncover unique narratives from a research population that has remained virtually untouched as a way to further understand a growing population of students entering our classrooms. As Chapter One established, the majority of first-generation research generally fits into three broad categories: comparisons of first-generation and traditional college students in terms of demographics, preparation, and college expectations; description of experiences and transitions from high school to college, and the examination of college persistence, degree attainment and early career labor market outcome (Pascarella et al. 249-250). As this study has attempted to showcase, shifting the focus from current research on first-generation undergraduates to first-generation graduate teachers of writing provides insight and a “re-visioning” into the experiences of the first-generation population, how they transition to new roles within academia, and potentially interact with their own students. My study serves as an “act of looking back” and “entering an old text from a new critical direction” (Rich) and provides a new, previously un-voiced perspective in the field.

Composition is typically a middle class enterprise and supports the learning of academic, middle class literacies. Many first-generation students experience difficulty and struggle when entering college as they make the transition from their home discourses to academic discourses. Oldfield concurs by saying, “cultural capital is the knowledge, skills, education, and other
advantages a person has that make the educational system a comfortable, familiar environment in which he or she can succeed easily” (2). Moreover, many first-generation students do not enter college at the same starting place as other more traditional students. Bloom asserts:

> Composition is taught by middle-class teachers in middle-class institutions to students who are middle class either in actuality or in aspiration – economic if not cultural. In this—as perhaps in any—middle-class enterprise, the students’ vices must be eradicated and they must be indoctrinated against further transgressions before they, now pristine and proper, can proceed to the real business of the university. Like swimmers passing through a chlorine footbath en route to plunging into the pool, students must first be disinfected in Freshman English.

(656)

Such bold thinking, as Bloom and Oldfield would most likely agree, is evidence of the ever-present belief that the literacies of first-generation students are not embraced in the academy. It is no surprise then that the participants, or first-generation graduate teachers of writing, feel indignant about revealing their identification to their students and colleagues.

While feeling a sense of shame is a reality for some first-generation students, fear of not belonging in academia is another. Sohn writes, “Fear silences. Fear paralyzes” (150). While I do not identify as first-generation, I am one of the first individuals in my family to work towards a doctorate. As my paternal grandparents hold baccalaureate degrees and my parents hold graduate degrees, my experiences during my doctoral program have been new not only for me as the individual experiencing them but also for my immediate family eagerly awaiting my degree completion. I also identify as Appalachian and the stereotypes often associated with being
Appalachian certainly have influenced my upbringing and how I view the world and my role in it. Experiencing such challenges has created many situations where I encountered fear of failing, as well as fear of success. Confronting such fear, although difficult at times, became easier for me because I was able to connect with my parents who could relate on some level to my graduate school experiences and interactions. I can only imagine the difficulties and fear first-generation graduate students face if they lack the familial support I fortunately have always had.

Additionally, as first-generation graduate students have already transitioned into and most-likely mastered academic literacies, a different type of fear emerges: imposter syndrome (Connell). Often connected to fear of revealing one’s first-generation status as inferior, individuals can feel self-doubt and a feeling of not truly belonging in the academy (Clance). To this end, the development of a proposed first-generation pedagogy not only would offer graduate teachers of writing a way of feeling differently about their place in the academy but would also allow change in the way we interact with students, first-generation and traditional alike.

Moreover, teacher training programs and supports currently in place in many institutions will benefit from the grounded theory analysis found in this study because they can continue to develop and shape such advocacies. By utilizing the proposed first-generation pedagogy, we will begin changing how we think about teaching, teacher identity, and pedagogical practices. There are many implications of this study; however, before addressing them, it is necessary to discuss some of the limitations.

**Limitations**

All research studies carry limitations and as researchers we aim to work around them. As this particular study was for my dissertation, the time spent collecting data was limited, as was
the amount of time I spent with each individual participant. By making use of multiple methods, my data provided a complex view of the participants’ values and experiences. However, re-visioning the study with additional participants, increased interview times, and expanded research questions might allow for a more focused view of this research population.

One limitation of this study is that I do not identify as a first-generation student. Though I am not first-generation, I do position myself as an Appalachian, which is often viewed negatively, as lacking, and uneducated. Furthermore, I hold two years of teaching experience in West Virginia where the large majority of my students identified as working-class and/or first-generation. Drawing on my Appalachian roots and past teaching experiences, I feel a sense of connection to first-generation experiences and struggles. While I am not first-generation and therefore, cannot offer first-hand experiences, I can draw off my knowledge through my role as a teacher of first-generation students, my ongoing research, and my devotion to better understanding the experiences of individuals who do identify as first-generation. Although I may not identify as first-generation, I can relate to some of the negative views often shared by being first-generation and/or Appalachian, which includes an absence and deficit of skills needed for academic success.

As a feminist researcher, asking my participants to review my observation research notes remained an important step in supporting feminist methods. All three of the interviewed participants reviewed my observations, with only one participant, traditional graduate student Frank, further clarifying some of his pedagogical choices. He argued, “I feel as though I should expand on what I was attempting to do that day.” While participants had an opportunity to offer additional insights into my observations before and after their individual interviews, if additional
time and copies of my notes had been given, additional feedback and perspectives may have surfaced.

The type of contributors I address provides limited perspectives, as well. Though I had six participants (five first-generation and one traditional), additional volunteers would certainly provide a richer collection of data. Due to these disadvantages, I only had access to one traditional viewpoint. With supplementary traditional voices, the comparison of participants would have been much more generous. Furthermore, adding survey data from a larger research population and other writing programs would provide richer insights into the perceptions of first-generation graduate teachers of writing and their practices. Having an additional writing program participate, perhaps one with different programmatic goals and requirements also might have offered unique outcomes.

Finally, although I value the views that my use of feminist theory, feminist research practices, and grounded theory enable, this study is evidence of only a finite amount of time and analysis. Addressing the data through additional lenses would possibly provide additional viewpoints, alternative interpretations, and perhaps expanded themes. Such changes would allow for a larger scope and picture of the data to emerge, thereby offering a more complete picture of the research population.

A Proposed First-Generation Pedagogy

In discussing the need for an emerging pedagogy, it is important to discuss some of its key concepts and how they could potentially work to help not only the teachers employing them but also the students being taught by such teaching practices. Therefore, a first-generation pedagogy would offer a different approach that feminist and critical pedagogies do not. It serves
more as an accompanying support for students, perhaps often paired with feminist or critical pedagogy, by offering them the keys and knowledge that is needed to unlock the hidden aspects of academia that is traditionally left out. Some examples of this may include supplying students with the tools and information needed to successfully transition into the new role of college student.

**Criticism**

As Bloom described earlier, academia illustrates a middle-class picture and requires students to prescribe to certain values and ways of thinking. While conversations take place among administrators about ways to better prepare and support minority students in their transitions, the ways in which we think, define, and communicate about first-generation students must shift to focus on abilities, rather than inabilities or lack. Green extends the sentiment by arguing:

> A critical examination of the educational pipeline is needed to discern which structural elements—policies, programs, or common practices—require an overhaul. However, that examination is not possible unless administrators, policymakers, and researchers first scrutinize their over-reliance on a deficit model, in which minority, low-income, and first-generation college students are characterized as lacking the skills and abilities necessary to succeed in higher education. (24)

I would expand on Green’s argument, however, and include all the stakeholders involved, including teachers and students. Anstrom posits one direction to shifting our focus is to help “students understand how answers are derived, related to each other, or could be applied in
different situations.” This way of critical thinking is different from the more traditional view of asking students to simply provide the “right answer.”

Goals

A primary goal of a first-generation pedagogy involves working towards a closer alignment of the expectations of academia to that of how our students are actually communicating and what they are bringing to the academy. Student populations have drastically changed, but the way the academy is interacting, communicating, and supporting students has not. More often than not, programs have been created offering support to minority, working-class, and first-generation students, but have lacked the full integration and participation of the other facets of college life. Most programs currently in place also emphasize the deficit of such students and work towards teaching them the cultural capital needed for successful integration into the college environment.

A first-generation pedagogy would aim to build and “reinforce the self-confidence” of first-generation and minority students to not feel like outsiders in their new academic surroundings (Lam et al 14). Moreover, by accentuating more experiential learning experiences, students would have the opportunity to develop a stronger sense of their world, how they fit, and interact in it. By integrating more authentic learning experiences, learning becomes purposeful and meaningful. Jehangir shares “For many first-generation students, the acknowledgement of their ideas, experiences or beliefs within the learning process has been absent or muted” (57). Employing a first-generation pedagogy would support the voicing and sharing of lived experiences. By tying in such lived experiences to their learning, students would become more confident and independent learners, knowers, and teachers (57). Furthermore, by allowing
students to share and tie in their own experiences in the classroom, they become masters in their own knowledge. By having students to share such knowledge in the classroom places value on such student experiences, thereby allowing students to “[see] themselves and others as contributors to knowledge construction rather than as merely bystanders” (58).

To this end, opening up the dialogues we have about race, class, sex, and gender to include first-generational status can help make students aware of the overlapping classifications. While many students may have experienced some type of discussions about race, class, sex, and gender, many most likely have not discussed the classification of first-generation. By not having such conversations, the silence only further supports the negative emotions associated with being first-generation. Not only will these conversations help to inform students but hopefully with continual discussions begin to shift the way the term first-generation is viewed to not be associated with absence of skills. Instead the dialogues will change to how we might update the way we are teaching our new classroom of students.

Praxis

Having all lived through the transition, the first year of college can be a very trying time for students as they learn how to step into new roles, embrace their independence, new expectations, and successfully survive their studies. With the help of a first-generation pedagogy, introducing such new genres as syllabi, assignment sheets, and new classroom dynamics would be covered. Discussions about interacting with their peers in new ways, approaching and communicating effectively with their instructors, and learning to become active citizens in their academic communities would be included. Additionally, engaging in more forms of subtle
support, such as validation fosters academic and personal development (Rendon as qtd in Davis 53). “Validation occurs, Terenzini et all. writes:

when administrators, faculty, and other students all send important signals that they [first-generation students] are competent learners, that they can succeed, that they have a rightful place in the academic community, and that their background and past experiences are sources of knowledge and pride, not something to be demeaned or devalued. (Davis 54)

Expecting students to fulfill all of these very necessary steps, in addition to outside responsibilities that many students have, should not be expected if we have not given them the tools with which they need to learn such new skills. If we expect certain outcomes from students, we must teach for those outcomes. Supplying the tools needed for meeting such outcomes and becoming successful students is further supported through a first-generation pedagogy.

Green provides insight into many of the current support programs available for underserved students by stating:

In the 1960s, 1970s, and partially in the 1980s, a proliferation of support services, state policies, and federal programs such as Upward Bound helped underserved students recognize that college was a viable choice and ushered them into postsecondary institutions. Tutoring, summer jobs, visits to college campuses, exposure to cultural activities, and increased financial aid have all been seen as useful ways to help students move through the pipeline. (23)
Green continues, “in spite of these valiant efforts, historically underserved students continue to face difficulties as they attempt to progress through the educational pipeline, and leaks at critical points of transition are leaving them vulnerable” (23).

Addressing such ‘leaks,’ a first-generation pedagogy would not only provide support for undergraduate students inside and outside of the classroom, in the forms of exposure to academic discourses but students and teachers in higher education. As this study has shown, there is reservation among first-generation participants about discussing and admitting their status to students and colleagues. So how might such reservations be softened? With the inclusion of narratives by first-generation and underserved individuals during teacher-training programs and in the classroom, like the participants in this study, the sense of shame or embarrassment may subside due to the gradual acceptance and understanding of the importance of such successful transitions. Additionally, bringing the obstacles of first-generation to the forefront and informing new teachers of new teaching goals and practices will continue to change some of the negative perceptions connected with such identifier.

It is important, however, to acknowledge that although it is called a first-generation pedagogy, one does not have to identify as first-generation, nor is it only for first-generation students. What such pedagogy provides are the skills needed for supporting the transitions students undertake and focusing on what students bring to the classroom, instead of what they lack. Expecting students to make the transition easily, as many of us struggled with during our undergraduate years, is expecting students to successfully step into a new environment already holding the language, skills, and understanding of how the new environment works. When students enter our classrooms, we do not give exams and expect students to already know the
material upon entering the classroom. So, why should we expect students to already hold the cultural capital of the academy? Why should this transition be any different?

**Implications**

*Theory*

Knowing how a group of first-generation graduate teachers of writing make pedagogical decisions and where such choices originate offers unique insight into the transition and experiences of this under-researched population. Though past research has revealed a sense of disconnect for many first-generation students, this study has extended the conversation to unearth that first-generation graduate students still feel a sense of difference and perhaps division based on their status; thus, partly resulting in their decision for privacy. As Bloom stated earlier, “[c]omposition is taught by middle-class teachers in middle-class institutions to students who are middle class either in actuality or in aspiration – economic if not cultural” (656). Although the field of composition and rhetoric has certainly opened up the conversations on literacy studies and practices, thereby, including the acceptance of other acceptable forms of literacy, the inherent belief remains consistent that the academy embraces middle class values and literacies. While we may teach alternative literacies in the classroom, the inherent belief of the academy remains middle-class. To this end, it should be no surprise that many first-generation graduate students still feel a sense of apprehension when they represent an identity the academy does not hold in high regard.

Moreover, while many first-generation participants spoke of their desires for transparent relationships with their students, their practices did not always reflect such earlier statements. As Chapter Four illustrated, under the programmatic requirements participants employed rubrics
with which to assess student writing. While the rubrics did not serve as the only form of assessment, all grading was determined with the help of this rubric. James, David, and Frank provided brief explanations of the rubric on the course syllabi; however, additional explanation on the rubric categories were not included in the course syllabi or documents which does not support transparency and open communication with students.

In addition, Frank openly shared his past experiences as a student and his time in the work force with students often relating such experiences to experiences in the classroom. Of the first-generation participants I spoke with and observed, any identifying information about their first-generation experiences were excluded, showing a distinction from their traditional counterpart. While this distinction does not prove that all first-generation graduate teachers of writing feel similarly, the data does reveal an important variance for this specific study.

Strauss and Corbin stress that, “theory derived from data is more likely to resemble the ‘reality’ than is theory derived by putting together a series of concepts based on experience” (12). Furthermore, “grounded theories, because they are drawn from data, are more likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action” (12). To this end, I chose to draw off of participants’ data as a way to begin theory building and discover new directions the research may take otherwise.

**Teacher Training**

During the brief individual interview with the writing program administrator, I learned one perspective about how incoming teachers are trained and supported for this specific program. While much of the training offered extensive discussions on developing teaching identity, creating a classroom, and working with students, among others, specific conversations about
first-generation students remains an important topic that is left out. I am certainly not suggesting first-generation students or teachers should be singled out. By merely introducing and emphasizing the importance of the transitions made by first-generation students, as well as informing instructors of their unique struggles, the way first-generation graduate teachers and first-generation students feel will gradually begin to change. Having such conversations and the need for keeping ones’ first-generation identification secret will no longer be necessary.

Another aspect that a first-generation pedagogy would support consists of teacher pedagogical and theoretical training. In this specific program, there are discussions about pedagogy. During this time, many new teachers may have never experienced or been made aware of the theory driving teaching practices, so this serves as their first time at thinking about such ideas. Though I cannot speak to other training programs, expanding theoretical and pedagogical discussions to include the importance of a first-generation pedagogy would serve well here. For new teachers, they would learn of this and other pedagogical tools during the initial training. For more experienced teachers, discussing the goals and importance of a first-generation pedagogy would supplement their already established knowledge as teachers and perhaps include additional practices to meet the needs of all students. Therefore, it remains important that certain discussions begin during teacher trainings and workshops so as to reach many teachers and eventually students, first-generation and traditional students alike.

**Pedagogy**

Including a first-generation pedagogy to teacher education would include adding such discussions to current theory and pedagogy courses. Employing such practices would allow new teachers to learn and potentially incorporate such theory into their current teaching practices.
Similar to my own pedagogy courses during my master’s and doctorate program, I learned a number of theories, the history behind them, and the goals with which they were created. I also learned how pedagogies worked in the classroom and how they could benefit students.

Adding to the ways we teach and reach students only helps to support students in succeeding once they arrive in college. As many institutions now have changed the way they advertise and recruit students, it seems fitting that adding to how we teach and interact with students would change as well. Interconnecting our teaching practices with new ways of thinking to better reach our new student populations becomes increasingly important. Therefore, putting into practice a first-generation pedagogy is a definite first step.

**Future Research**

Working with the participants in this study brought me much satisfaction and knowledge that otherwise might have been left unnoticed. Though I drew from a large data collection and was unable to include all of the themes the data revealed, the importance of this study, and its future goals remain certain. The scope of this project primarily discussed the four common themes of transparency, engagement, reflection, and responsibility. As Chapter Three illustrated, four additional themes emerged from the data sets to include: critical literacy, independent learning, collaboration, and personal experience. As my future research goals grow, I see continuing to analyze the data sets so additional perspectives might be discovered and shared as a way to further develop a first-generation pedagogy.

Another necessary step in the development of such theory would benefit from additional programmatic voices and participants. Under the current scope of my project, I relied on one group of participants whom I am particularly grateful and fortunate to have worked with. Tying
in additional viewpoints and voices would undoubtedly add a much richer picture of the need for new ways of reaching and interacting with students.

**Conclusion**

hooks writes, “confession involves telling ‘the past as we have learned it mouth-to-mouth, telling the present as we see, know, and feel it in our hearts and with our words” (3). Often experiences are shared as a way of building community. We participate in such ‘confessions’ with friends or family to form relationships. Opening up how we discuss and reveal our experiences with colleagues and students, especially experiences as underserved or first-generation individuals can help transform the way we view such identifications in the academy. By connecting our shared experiences to a critical framework, such as a first-generation pedagogy, we will continue to change how we view underserved and first-generation students and find additional ways of helping students succeed in the academy. This project, I hope has provided a representation of some of the voices of first-generation graduate teachers of writing. It is through such perspectives that we can continue to learn and understand often unarticulated voices.
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APPENDIX A

- What are the training programs currently in place for graduate teachers of writing?

- Who developed the training programs currently in place?

- Do all graduate teachers of writing undergo the training programs, regardless of past teaching experiences?

- What does the current training program seek to provide to graduate teachers of writing?

- Are graduate teachers of writing given a set curriculum or guidelines for which to create their classrooms?

- What are the strengths of the training program currently in place for graduate teachers of writing?

- What are the weaknesses of the training program currently in place for graduate teachers of writing?

- How are first-generation graduate teachers of writing supported?

- What might be some ways of offering additional training or supports for non-traditional students, such as first-generation graduate teachers of writing?
APPENDIX B

• What is your experience with teaching writing?

• How many writing courses have you taught? How many semesters or years?

• How would you describe your philosophy of teaching?

• How might you describe your experiences or process at creating/developing your current philosophy of teaching?

• What influences contribute to your philosophy of teaching?

• What influences contribute to your teaching pedagogy?

• How do you see your identity as a teacher of writing?

• What kind of environment do you create in your writing classrooms?

• How do you approach the teaching of writing?

• What are some difficulties you have experienced or are currently experiencing as a graduate teacher of writing?

• How do you see the classroom dynamic unfolding as the semester progresses?

• How do you plan to help cultivate a positive classroom dynamic?

• Based on the few class meetings you’ve had so far, how would you describe your current identity/role in the writing classroom?

• How do you see your pedagogy remaining the same, shifting, or drastically changing based on classroom dynamic and student needs?
• How do you see classroom artifacts, such as assignments, classroom expectations, and goals remaining the same, shifting, or drastically changing based on student needs?
APPENDIX C

• Based on my classroom observations and self-reflection, how do you view your identity as a graduate teacher of writing?

• How do you see classroom artifacts and assignments contributing/taking away from your teaching pedagogy?

• How might you explain how you created such classroom artifacts, such as writing assignments or course expectations?

• What might be some ways you continue shifting your teaching pedagogy to continue to meet the needs of your students?
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD
Application for Approval of Research Involving Human Subjects – As of August 2008
(The most current version of this application is available online at www.bgsu.edu/offices/orc/hsrb.)

Please answer all applicable questions and provide the material identified.

*Please complete electronically.*

- Applications judged to be illegible, incomplete, or vague will be returned to the Principal Investigator (PI) for revision.
- *All boxes are expandable* so be sure to include complete information, attaching continuation sheets as necessary.
- Submit the original, signed, hard copy application and necessary supporting documentation to the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB), 309A University Hall.
- **SUBMISSION LEAD TIMES** – For Full Board projects – submit at least 2 months before your planned start of recruiting and data collection. For Expedited Review projects – submit at least 2 weeks before your planned start of recruiting and data collection.
- For projects reviewed via the expedited review process - You should receive notification of the results of the initial review of this application 5 - 7 business days (7 – 9 during the summer and breaks) from the date of receipt of the application by the Office of Research Compliance.
- **IMPORTANT NOTE:** This application will not be reviewed unless Human Subjects training has been completed by the PI (and the Advisor, if the PI is a student) – see the HSRB web page for scheduled training dates.

Ia. General Information:

Name of applicant (Principal Investigator): Emily J. Beard

The Principal Investigator is (check one):

- Faculty
- BGSU Staff
- Undergraduate Student
- Graduate Student

☐ Off-campus applicant (check this box if you are not affiliated with BGSU but propose to conduct research involving BGSU Faculty, Staff, or Students)

Department or Division: English - Rhetoric and Writing

Campus Phone: 372-0380

E-mail: ejbeard@bgsu.edu

Fax: n/a

Have You Completed BGSU Human Subjects Training?

- ☒ Yes (Office of Research Compliance will confirm training date)
- ☐ No (Please see IMPORTANT NOTE above)

The HSRB will send all correspondence to your departmental address unless otherwise indicated below:

315C East Hall

Title of the Proposed Research Project:
"Inventing the Teacher: The Pedagogy of First-Generation Writing Instructors"

Names of Other Students or Staff Associated with the Project (Student PIs note – Do not include your advisor for this research project here):

Have you requested, or do you plan to request, external support for this project?

- ☐ yes
- ☒ no

If yes, external Funding Agency or Source:
If the funding source requires certification of IRB approval or if federal funding is requested, this application will go to the full Board for review— in that case please submit the original plus 13 copies of the application and supporting materials.

Ib. If you are a BGSU student, please provide the following information:

This research is for: ☐ Thesis ☑ Dissertation ☐ Class Project ☐ Other

(Note: If the class project box is checked and the PI is a student no continuing review form will be sent. The P.I. will receive an expiration notice at the end of the approval period. The Office of Research Compliance must be notified in writing, before the end of the approval period, of intent to continue the project.)

Advisor’s Name (This is the advisor for this research project): Dr. Kristine Blair

Department or Division: English - Rhetoric and Writing Phone: 372-8033 Fax: 372-0333 E-mail: kblair@bgsu.edu

Has Advisor Completed BGSU Human Subjects Training?

☑ Yes (Office of Research Compliance will confirm training date)
☐ No (Please see IMPORTANT NOTE, page 1)

II. Information on Projects Using Pre-existing Data

(Skip to Section III if this project does NOT use pre-existing data. Pre-existing data includes retrospective medical chart reviews, public data sets, etc. Sometimes it is referred to as secondary data or archival data.) Some projects involving the use of pre-existing data may not require review by the HSRB. However – it is the HSRB’s responsibility to make that determination – not the researcher’s.

NOTE: If you are obtaining medically-related information from a “Covered Entity” (a health plan, health care clearinghouse or a health care provider who bills health insurers – e.g., hospitals, doctor’s offices, dentists, the BGSU Student Health Service, the BGSU Speech and Hearing Clinic, the BGSU Psychological Services Center), the HIPAA Privacy Rule may apply.

a. Name(s) of existing data set(s) [Include any ancillary data sets you might be linking the main data set(s) to]:

b. Source(s) of existing data set(s):

c. Please provide a brief description of the content of the data set(s):

d. When you obtain the data, will the individual records be anonymous or will they have identifiers/codes attached?

☐ Anonymous (i.e., no identifiers or codes attached to any records in any of the listed data sets)

If your project also involves direct data collection, please go to section III and complete the rest of the application. Otherwise, please go to and complete sections VII.a, VII.b, and IX.
Identifiers/codes attached (examples would include, but not be limited to, record numbers, subject numbers, case numbers, etc.)

**d.1** If the records have identifiers or codes attached, can you readily ascertain the identity of individuals to whom the data pertain (e.g., through use of a key that links identifiers with identities; linking to other files that allow individual identities to be discerned)?

☐ Yes, I can ascertain the identity of the individuals.

☐ No, I cannot readily ascertain the identity of the individuals.

Please explain in the box below how you will protect the confidentiality of subjects. The Human Subjects Review Board is concerned about 2 dimensions of confidentiality: (1) that the researcher has legitimate access to the records, i.e., the records are not protected by any special confidentiality conditions, and (2) that the researcher will not reveal individual identities unless permission has been granted to do so.

Please continue with section II.e

If your project also involves direct data collection, please go to section III and complete the rest of the application. Otherwise, please go to and complete sections IV (as appropriate), VIIa, VIIb, and IX.

**e.** Are the data from a public data set? (A public data set is data available to any member of the public through a library, public archive or the Freedom of Information Act. Data obtained from private companies, hospital records, agency membership lists or similar sources are not usually public data)

☐ Yes

Are you requesting permission to conduct multiple research projects with these data?

☐ Yes ☐ No

(If your project also involves direct data collection, please go to section III and complete the rest of the application. Otherwise, please go to and complete sections VII.a, VII.b and IX.)

☐ No (if no, please answer the following questions)

**f.** If you are obtaining access to non-public information, please explain in the box below how you will obtain access to the information (e.g., permission from the CEO, permission from the Board of Education). **Note:** a condition for approval will be written documentation of this permission – this can be hard copy or an email from the relevant authority.
g. Before the data were collected, did respondents give their permission for the information to be used for research purposes?  □ Yes  □ No

h. Are you recording the data in a manner that will allow you to identify subjects, either directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

i. If your project also involves direct data collection, please continue completing the rest of the application. Otherwise, please go to and complete sections IV (as appropriate), VII.a, VII.b, and IX.

III. General Project Characteristics: Does the research involve any of the following? (If the response to any of the following is “yes,” provide a justification and/or rationale in the box provided below)

Yes  No

☐ ☒ a. Deception of subjects
   (if “yes,” please submit the original plus 13 copies of this application and supporting materials).

☐ ☒ b. Shock or other forms of punishment
   (if “yes,” please submit the original plus 13 copies of this application and supporting materials).

☐ ☒ c. Sexually explicit materials or questions

☐ ☒ d. Handling of money or other valuable commodities

☐ ☒ e. Extraction of blood or other bodily fluids

☐ ☒ f. Questions about drug and/or alcohol use

☐ ☒ g. Questions about sexual orientation, sexual experience, or sexual abuse

☐ ☒ h. Purposeful creation of anxiety

☐ ☒ i. Any procedure that might be viewed as an invasion of privacy

☐ ☒ j. Physical exercise or stress

☐ ☒ k. Administration of substances (food, drugs, etc.) to subjects

☐ ☒ l. Any procedure that might place subjects at risk (e.g., disclosure of criminal activity).

☐ ☒ m. Systematic selection or exclusion of any group. This includes the selection or exclusion of any group based on age, gender, race, ethnicity, etc.

IV. HIPAA: If you answer “Yes” to any of the following questions, your project is subject to HIPAA and you must complete the HIPAA Supplement (available online at www.bgsu.edu/offices/orc/hsrb) and attach it to the application.

Yes  No

☐ ☒ a. Will health information (information relating to the past, present, or future physical or mental health or condition of an individual) be obtained from a covered entity (a health plan, health care clearinghouse or a health care provider who bills health insurers – e.g., hospitals, doctor’s offices, dentists, the BGSU Student Health Service, the BGSU Speech and Hearing Clinic, the BGSU Psychological Services Center)?

☐ ☒ b. Will the study involve the provision of health care in a covered entity?

Yes  No

b.2 (Complete this only if you answered “Yes” to IV.b – otherwise, skip this item).
If the study involves the provision of health care, will a health insurer or billing agency be contacted for billing or eligibility?
V. Subject Information: (If the response to any of the following is "yes," the researcher should be sure to address any special needs of the potential subjects in the informed consent process. For example, if subjects are over the age of 65, then it may be appropriate to use a larger font in all correspondence with subjects to ensure readability.)

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VI. Risks and Benefits: (Note: the HSRB retains final authority for determining risk status of a project)

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VII. Project Description: (Please provide as much information as you feel will adequately answer the following questions. Attach additional sheets if necessary.)

a. What are you going to study? What is (are) the research question(s) to be answered / hypotheses to be tested?
This proposed research study will answer the following questions:
- How does your role as a first-generation student influence your pedagogy?
- How does identifying as a first-generation teacher influence the way you teach (teaching philosophy)?
- Do we need a first-generation pedagogy?
  - Is this more relevant in certain environments?
  - How are traditional and non-traditional students’ needs met from this approach?
- What would or does a first-generation pedagogy look like?
  - What does it do?
  - What is its value?
- Are there supports in place to help first-generation Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA)?
- Do classroom artifacts reflect a first-generation pedagogy?
- Does first-generation pedagogy influence artifacts, types of assignments, selections of readings?
- How is a first-generation pedagogy different from feminist pedagogy?

b. Discuss the benefit(s) of this study. Why is this study important? (provide scholarly support)
   Include a discussion of benefits to individual participants as well as to society as a whole.
   **NOTE:** Compensation or incentives (e.g., gift cards, research credit, extra credit, etc.) offered for participation are not considered to be benefits.

   The possible benefits of this study include providing an additional insight into first-generation students and their experiences past the undergraduate years and integration into not only higher education, but also in the role of writing teacher. This research project will also supply exigency for theory building for the field by providing information on the development and uncovering of a first-generation pedagogy. A third insight will be for teacher training programs where we might provide additional aid and support for first-generation graduate teaching assistants as they begin developing their own teacher identity and teaching pedagogy.

c. Are there any risks associated with this study? If so, explain how you will minimize the risks to subjects.

   There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study

d. Who will be your subjects?

   The participants of this study will be a first-generation graduate student teaching writing for the first time and a graduate student teacher of writing who is not a first-generation student. I also plan to interview a Writing Program Administrator of the same writing program that both graduate students are employees of.

e. Approximately how many subjects do you plan to enroll? Please provide a realistic estimate.

   (Recruiting is not enrollment – you will likely recruit more individuals than will be enrolled in the project. Also, don’t forget to factor in the possibility of withdrawals, which may require enrolling of additional subjects in order to achieve your desired sample size. If, during the course of the project, you need to increase the number of subjects to be enrolled, you should request Board approval for the increase – in many cases the Office of Research Compliance can handle this administratively.)

   This study will focus on three research participants. One traditional graduate student teaching assistant who teaches writing. One first-generation graduate student teaching assistant who teaches writing. One Writing Program Administrator of the research participants program.
f. How will you recruit your subjects? Please describe the method(s) you will use to recruit (examples include via telephone, mailings, sign-up sheets, etc.). Please include recruitment letters, scripts, sign-up sheets as appropriate with the application.

I plan to recruit my subjects by emailing a recruitment letter (see attached) to Directors of Writing/English departments at Bowling Green State University and University of Toledo, asking for participants who identify as first-generation graduate teaching assistants and/or traditional graduate teaching assistants. I will also request participation from a Writing Program Administrator or Writing Program Director from one of the two institutions subjects are recruited from for additional interviewing.

g. Describe the process you will use to seek informed consent from the subjects (example – provide information sheet to potential participants, allow them to read over the information, ask them if they have any questions, answer questions to their satisfaction, then request them to sign the consent form). If you are using an information sheet please include that with the application. (See www.bgsu.edu/downloads/gradcol/file44764.doc for relevant elements of consent, sample wording, and a suggested outline of a consent form.)

Participants will be verbally introduced to the project and its goals and will be given an informed consent form (see attached). The researcher will ask them if they have any questions, answer their questions, and will ask participants to sign the consent form.

Yes ☒ No ☐ g.1. Are you seeking consent/assent from all relevant parties? (If "No", explain why not in the box provided below)

Yes ☒ No ☐ g.2. Are you having your participants physically sign hard copies of consent/assent form(s)? (If "No," you are requesting a waiver of written consent. Provide justification in the box below.) [For more information relative to requesting and justifying a waiver of written consent see HSRB Policy and Procedure Statement “Waiver of Written Consent – Request and Review” at www.bgsu.edu/offices/orc/hsrb/page44847.html]

h. If deception or emotional or physical stress is involved, subjects must be debriefed about the purposes, consequences, and benefits of the research and given information on procedures they can follow or resources that are available to them to help them handle the stress. Please attach a copy of all debriefing materials, if applicable.

Debriefing form attached: ☐ Yes ☒ No

i. Explain in the box below the procedures you will follow to protect the confidentiality of your subjects. Include considerations associated with data and/or consent form collection and storage, and dissemination of results. Explain whether or not the study is anonymous. (Note: It is not always necessary to protect the confidentiality of your subjects, but they must be informed if you plan to quote them directly or reveal their identities in any way.)
Although absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, confidentiality will be protected to the extent permitted by law. The identity of participants will be kept confidential unless a participant wishes to be identified, and pseudonyms will be used for participants and the university.

j. Describe what subjects will be asked to do or have done to them from the time they are first contacted about the study until their participation in the study ends. Note – a summary of this information should be included in information provided to the subjects as part of the consent process.

The researcher will initially interview participants to determine background information and participants thoughts and ideas on teaching pedagogy and teaching philosophy.

The researcher will then sit in on class meetings and take notes of the discussions and activities. These observations and notes will be used as a way to understand the teacher’s pedagogy and interaction with the first-year writing classroom.

Throughout the semester, participants will be asked to take part in several short interview sessions where the researcher will ask for participant’s reflections on the researcher’s observations, as well as discussions pertaining to the participants’ experiences as a first-year writing teacher and identifying as a first generation graduate student. Such interviews will be audio-recorded.

Participants will be asked to review researcher's conclusions, observations and recordings so as to provide a collaborative environment between participant and researcher.

VIII. Supplemental Materials:

Attach a copy of the following:
1. All materials (including scripts, advertisements, etc.) that will be used to recruit subjects.
2. The consent/assent form(s) or script(s), if applicable (see the Informed Consent Checklist, which can be found at www.bgsu.edu/offices/orc/hsrb for guidance in developing consent documents).
3. Survey instrument(s), interview questions, observation protocols, etc.
4. If your project is subject to HIPAA, the HIPAA Supplement.

NOTE: You should receive notification of the results of the initial review of the application within 5 to 7 business days (7 to 9 during the summer and breaks) of the date of submission of the application to the Office of Research Compliance.

IX. Assurance by Principal Investigator (PI) and Advisor (if applicable):

By signing below as the Principal Investigator, I:
1. Certify that the information provided in this application is accurate and complete.
2. Acknowledge ultimate responsibility for the protection of the rights and welfare of human subjects and adherence to any study-specific requirements imposed by the HSRB.
3. Will comply with all HSRB and BGSU policies and procedures, as well as with all applicable Federal, State and local laws and regulations regarding the protection of human subjects in research.
4. Also agree to the following:
   • I accept responsibility for the scientific and ethical conduct of this research study
   • I will obtain HSRB approval before amending or altering the research protocol or implementing changes in the approved consent documents or recruitment procedures
   • I will immediately report to the HSRB any serious adverse events and/or unanticipated effects on subjects which may occur as a result of this study
   • I will train study personnel in the proper conduct of human subjects research
   • I will complete and return the Continuing Review form when requested to do so by the HSRB
   • I will retain signed consent forms for at least 3 years following completion of the study
**Required for student applicants:**

By signing below as Project Advisor, I certify that:

1. I have reviewed the information provided in this student’s HSRB application and approve of the procedures (including subject recruiting, obtaining informed consent, provisions for protection of confidentiality, and data collection) described therein.
2. I will facilitate my student's compliance with all HSRB and BGSU policies and procedures, as well as with all applicable Federal, State and local laws and regulations regarding the protection of human subjects in research.

Advisor Signature ___________________________ Date __________________

Submit the application to the **Human Subjects Review Board, 309A University Hall.**
Note: Do not submit this or any of the following pages with your HSRB application.

HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD MEMBERS

Colleen Mandell, Intervention Services – HSRB Chair 372-7280 mandell@bgsu.edu
D. Wayne Bell, Wood Health Corp. 353-6225 dwaynebellmd@dacor.net
Cheryl Conley, Alzheimer's Assn., NW Ohio 537-1999 conleyc@bgsu.edu
L. Fleming Fallon, Jr., Public and Allied Health 372-8316 ffallon@bgsu.edu
Mary Hare, Psychology 372-2526 mlhare@bgsu.edu
Hillary Harms, Office of Research Compliance 372-7716 hsrb@bgsu.edu
Montana Miller, Popular Culture 372-0184 montanm@bgsu.edu
Amy Morgan, Kinesiology 372-0596 amorgan@bgsu.edu
Ruben Viramontez Anguiano, Family & Consumer Sciences 372-6490 rubenv@bgsu.edu

Steps in the Process of Review by the HSRB

1. A completed Application for Review (the original) should be submitted to the 309A University Hall (When necessary, a letter to a prospective funding agency will be issued stating that the proposed research protocol is under review and that the HSRB will make a decision within 60 days.)

2. The Chair assigns the application to two reviewers. The reviewers may either make a recommendation regarding approval or call for review by the full HSRB at a regularly convened meeting.

3. If the reviewers decide that the research project is expedited and is eligible for expedited review and the Chair concurs, then approval can be granted either with or without conditions. If there are conditions, they will be specified in a letter to the Principal Investigator and must be addressed before the project can be fully approved and subject recruitment and data collection may begin. Research projects deemed expedited will be reviewed within 5-7 business days of submission.

4. If the reviewers or the Chair decide that the project should receive full Board review, the Chair places the application on the agenda of the next regular meeting of the HSRB. The Board may approve the application as submitted, approve it with conditions, disapprove it or defer a decision if sufficient information is not provided by the investigator. The action of the committee will be reported in writing to the investigator. Any conditions must be addressed before the project can be fully approved and subject recruitment and data collection may begin. The HSRB meets the first Wednesday of each month.

5. Either the Board or the investigator can request that the investigator be present at the part of the meeting of the HSRB when a specific project is being considered.

6. If required, a letter describing the decision of the HSRB will be addressed to the funding agency. Normally, this letter will be forwarded to the agency by the investigator.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
All research involving human subjects must receive review and approval from the Human Subject Review Board (HSRB) prior to collecting data in accordance with Federal Regulations and University Policy. **THERE ARE NO EXCEPTIONS.** Failure to receive prior review can result in disciplinary action by the University and/or legal actions against the faculty members, student assistants, staff members, and the University; suspension or termination of a research project; and, in the case of graduate students, potential delays of graduation.

The legal authority for the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) comes from the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects (described in 45 CFR Part 46). In addition, Bowling Green State University has on file with the Public Health Service a statement of assurance committing the University to compliance with Federal Policy. No research involving humans may be undertaken without prior review and approval by the HSRB.

When in doubt about whether HSRB review is necessary or not, the appropriate course of action is to **seek review.** The role of the HSRB is to ensure compliance with federal regulations of research projects for faculty, staff, and student researchers, as well as to protect the rights of human subjects. The Office of Research Compliance (372-7716 or hsrb@bgnet.bgsu.edu) can assist researchers in making decisions about all aspects of the research process.

Any research project involving human subjects that is conducted by BGSU faculty, staff, or students must be reviewed. Research using BGSU faculty, staff, or students as research subjects must also be reviewed. Even if the researcher is from another institution, the Human Subjects Review Board has the authority to require review of a project if it involves the recruitment of BGSU faculty, staff, or students as subjects.

**Class projects**

Data to be collected in a **classroom** must be reviewed if it is part of a research project (as opposed to teaching). Also, **class projects conducted by students** must be reviewed if they:

- Would identify the interviewee or respondent either by name or by the responses to specific questions and/or recorded behaviors.
- Systematically select subjects from a potentially vulnerable or sensitive group (e.g., prisoners, pregnant women, children who are gifted and talented, alcoholics, sexual minorities, people with disabilities, people with cognitive impairment, people unable to give informed consent).
- Systematically collect private or protected information about individuals (e.g., school records, medical records, criminal records, membership or participation in self-help organizations).
- Propose to investigate opinions, behaviors, and/or experiences regarding sensitive topic areas (e.g., sexually explicit materials or questions, questions about drug use, questions about sexual orientation or sexual experience, illegal activities, purposeful creation of anxiety).
- Ask participants to engage in behavior that carries greater than minimal risk (see section V of the application above for a definition of minimal risk).
- Have the potential to become a thesis or dissertation project.
- Have a reasonable expectation of being externally funded (regardless of the source), published and/or presented outside the course for which the project was originally conducted.

Any research project using **vulnerable individuals** as subjects requires extensive review (usually by the full HSRB). Vulnerable individuals include:

- Children involved in certain types of research
- Individuals in institutions (e.g., prisons, nursing homes, halfway houses)
- Physically or mentally impaired individuals
- Economically or educationally disadvantaged individuals; or
- Anyone unable to provide their own informed consent

If using members of vulnerable groups, the HSRB recommends you submit your application at least 2 months prior to the desired project start date.

Any research project must have extensive review if it involves **socially controversial stimuli or potentially questionable procedures or materials** such as (but not restricted to) the following:

- Shock or other forms of punishment
- Sexually explicit materials or questions
- Handling of money or other valuable commodities
- Extraction of blood or other bodily fluids
• Questions about drug use
• Administration of substances to subjects
• Questions about sexual orientation or sexual experience
• Purposeful creation of anxiety, or
• Any procedure which might be considered an invasion of privacy

If you are doing research for a thesis or dissertation and human subjects are involved, it must be reviewed. You must be sure to list the faculty advisor on the form and have them sign the application.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS AND DEFINITIONS FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

These following definitions are taken from the Federal Policy for Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR Part 46)

"Research means a systematic investigation, including research development, testing, and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge."

"Human subject means a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or (2) identifiable private information."

"Intervention includes both physical procedures by which data are gathered and manipulations of the subject or the subject's environment that are performed for research purposes."

"Interactions includes communication or interpersonal contact between investigator and subject."

"Private information includes information about behavior that occurs in a context in which an individual can reasonably expect that no observation or recording is taking place, ... and which the individual can reasonably expect will not be made public."

"HSRB approval means the determination of the HSRB that the research has been reviewed and may be conducted at an institution within the constraints set forth by ... institutional and federal requirements....An IRB shall have the authority to suspend ... research that is not being conducted in accordance with the IRB's requirements."

"No investigator may involve a human being as a subject in research unless the investigator has obtained the legally effective informed consent of the subject or the subject's legally authorized representative."

"An IRB shall require documentation of informed consent.... Informed consent will be sought from each prospective subject or the subject's legally authorized representative. Informed consent will be appropriately documented...by the use of a written form approved by the IRB."

"When some or all of the subjects are likely to be vulnerable..., such as children,... or economically or educationally disadvantaged persons, additional safeguards (should) be included...to protect the rights and welfare of these subjects."

Confidentiality means that the name or other identifying characteristics of the individual providing information to the researcher is known to the researcher but will not be revealed and will remain secret.

Anonymous means that the name or other identifying characteristics of participants will not be disclosed to the researcher.
May 25, 2011

TO: Emily Beard
ENG

FROM: Hillary Harms, Ph.D.
HSRB Administrator

RE: Continuing HSRB Review for Project H10D333GE7

TITLE: Inventing the Teacher: The Pedagogy of First-Generation Writing Instructors

This is to inform you that your research study indicated above has received continuing Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) review and approval. This approval is effective June 4, 2011 for a period of 12 months and will expire on June 3, 2012. You may continue with the project.

Please communicate any proposed changes in your project procedures or activities involving human subjects, including consent form changes or increases in the number of participants, to the HSRB via this office. Please notify me, at 372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu, upon completion of your project.

Good luck with your work. Let me know if this office or the HSRB can be of assistance as your project proceeds.

Comments:

C: Dr. Kristine Blair