FOSTERING LANGUAGE DIVERSITY THROUGH CLASSROOM-BASED WRITING ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

Amanda Gail Athon

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2014

Committee:

Dr. Lee Nickoson, Advisor

Dr. Catherine Cassara
Graduate Faculty Representative

Dr. Kristine L. Blair

Dr. Sue Carter Wood
ABSTRACT

Dr. Lee Nickoson, Advisor

Scholars such as Diane Kelly-Riley and Patricia Bizzell have argued that the student writing feature most likely to place a student into a basic writing course is the presence of dialect other than standard academic English. My dissertation examines this notion and pushes further: if this is true, what are instructors doing to address and assess varieties of English in the first-year writing classroom? What is error to a first-year writing student? What is error to an instructor of first-year writing? To answer these questions, I conducted a semester-long participant observation of two sections of first-year writing, also considered basic writing preparatory courses, in the Fall 2012 academic semester to examine how instructors assess varieties of English. I conducted student surveys twice during the semester to gather student feedback; I also interviewed the instructors near the end of the course to gain additional input. Feminist research methodologies influenced my project; I frequently asked my participants to provide feedback and offered opportunities to review my data through the creation of a dissertation website. After a grounded theory analysis of the data, I found that students adapted the assessment language used by instructors and that this language, paired with the writing models used by instructors, shaped students’ values on writing. To better emphasize the contextual nature of writing, instructors might utilize diverse writing models and rubrics that vary based on the writing assignment.
For my family, especially Linda, Gary, and Joe.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not be possible without the immense support and generosity of my dissertation committee, especially my chair, Dr. Lee Nickoson. Thank you for being such a kind, supportive, and wonderful mentor on this project and all of my work at BGSU. Thank you also to Dr. Kristine L. Blair, for your advice and encouragement on this project as well as for all that you do for our department. Thank you to Dr. Sue Carter Wood, for your assistance not only with this project, but for teaching me that archival research can teach us much about our current projects. Thank you to Dr. Catherine Cassara for your time and support throughout the dissertation process. And thank you to my research participants, “Kay,” and “May,” and the students enrolled in FYW1100, for inviting me into your courses and making me feel at home. I would not have a dissertation without your kindness and willingness to share your valuable teaching expertise with me, and I have learned so much from your approaches to working with student writers. Also, thank you to my family, especially to Joe for your patience, humor, and constant willingness to help me achieve my goals. Finally, thank you to my students, former and future, for inspiring me to do the work that I do.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<p>| CHAPTER I. ASSESSING VARIETIES OF ENGLISH IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM | 1 |
| Defining Terms | 3 |
| Literature Review | 6 |
| Overview of Study | 22 |
| Chapter Abstracts | 26 |
| CHAPTER II. METHODS AND METHODOLOGIES | 28 |
| Research Methodologies | 28 |
| Data Coding | 35 |
| Data Collection Methods | 40 |
| Establishing Ethical Research Practices | 46 |
| Biases | 48 |
| Variables and Limitations | 49 |
| CHAPTER III. BASIC WRITING AT MIDWESTERN UNIVERSITY | 51 |
| What is Basic Writing and Who Are Basic Writers? | 52 |
| Basic Writing as a Research Site | 53 |
| Diverse Varieties of English in First-Year Writing | 55 |
| Grouping Nonnative and Native Speakers | 56 |
| Midwestern University | 57 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructor Participants</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Participants</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Advantages</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHAPTER IV. ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANTS’ REFLECTIONS ON WRITING, ASSESSMENT, AND LANGUAGE: ALIGNING STUDENT EXPECTATIONS AND TEACHER PRACTICE** 81

- Classroom Observations and Textual Analysis                            82
- Student Surveys                                                        94
- Instructor Interviews                                                   110
- Validity                                                               118

**CHAPTER V. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS OF STUDY**                      122

- Exploring Heuristics                                                   122
- Revisiting and Responding to Research Questions                        123
- Future Studies                                                        139
- Project Conclusions                                                    140

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**                                                          144

**APPENDIX A. CLASSROOM OBSERVATION NOTES**                               158
APPENDIX B. INSTRUCTOR INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS..................................................... 170

APPENDIX C. MIDTERM SURVEY RESULTS............................................................... 184

APPENDIX D. FINAL SURVEY RESULTS.................................................................. 188

APPENDIX E. HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL DOCUMENTS............ 191
# LIST OF FIGURES/TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure/Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1: Research Questions Table</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1: Excerpt from Classroom Observations (Appendix A)</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2: First-year Writing Rubric at Midwestern University</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3: First-year Writing Rubric: Syntax Errors</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4: Student Workstations, Kay’s Course</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5: Observation Area, Kay’s Course</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6: Student Desks, May’s Course</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7: Classroom Map, Education 206</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8: Syllabus Excerpt: Assessment Criteria</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9: Perceived Student Strengths (Midterm)</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10: Perceived Student Weaknesses (Midterm)</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11: Rubric Helpfulness and Potential Improvements (Midterm)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12: Thoughts on Teacher Feedback (Midterm)</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 13: Perceived Strengths and Weaknesses (Final)</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 14: Rubric Helpfulness (Final)</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 15: Thoughts on Grammar (Final)</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 16: Perceived Passing Rate (Final) ................................................................. 110

Figure 17: Research Website Screenshot ................................................................. 119

Table 2: Research Questions Revisited ................................................................. 124

Figure 18: Sentence-level Error Assessment in MU Rubric .................................. 132

Figure 19: University of South Florida Community Rubric ............................... 136
CHAPTER I.

ASSESSING VARIETIES OF ENGLISH IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

One of my first teaching experiences was at Truman College, a two-year college in Chicago with a graduation rate of five percent (Complete College America). This particular class, English 099: Sentence Composition, enrolled thirty-five students. Some of the students were “Generation 1.5,” students who lived in America but whose parents had been born in another country. Other students were native speakers who had graduated from some of Chicago’s worst high schools. While their placement in my course may have given the impression to those outside (or even inside) the academy that these students were academic failures, their attending college showed that they were motivated.

I wanted to assist students with the academic skills they needed to succeed in their coursework and beyond but I felt ill-prepared to do so. A particular concern for me was how to assess a student population with such diverse needs. I had never graded a single piece of writing before the semester and due to college’s limited resources, I had little advice or preparation in this area. I experimented with various assessment practices, using rubrics, grading contracts with detailed assignment requirements, and teacher comments. Yet, I struggled with how to weight the various aspects of writing because the class had such a wide range of writing concerns. The students all needed work with sentence-level composing, but they also needed to think about development and beginning to create paragraphs and essays. Nonnative speakers had a lack of development at the sentence and paragraph-level, while native speakers had trouble with organization. Both groups of
students had features of nonstandard dialects. I did not know if there was a right answer to this question, but I wanted to know how to create assessment methods that would be fair and equitable to students—not privileging either group—and would best assist the students who had the most trouble with standard English; these students were most in need of a college degree and the least likely to receive one due to low completion rates (Complete College America). As I continued through my teaching and academic career, these questions influenced my work: what role does usage play in the assessment process? How does this factor into the assessment of minority students and nonnative speakers? How can basic writing students learn academic writing while respecting their own diverse dialects? This is what led me to my current research project. Through this project, I provide qualitative data through an empirical, classroom-based research study exploring language diversity in the first-year writing classroom and how classroom-based assessment practices such as teacher comments and rubrics can help students using diverse dialects of English in the writing classroom.

This chapter is divided into four sections. In this first section, I outline background information on working with diverse dialects in the writing classroom and assessment’s role. and address the contributions of my dissertation. In section two, I discuss scholarship in Rhetoric and Composition, English Education, and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, addressing language diversity and classroom-based assessment. Section three provides a brief overview of my specific methods and methodologies, as well as my research sites and research participants. The final section describes my subsequent chapters.
This project continues the conversation about writing assessment’s relationship to valuing standard academic English and pulls together scholarship ranging from early standardized testing studies of the 1970s to more recent personal narratives of English Language Learners. If assessment is largely based on the assessor’s values, as Bob Broad found during his student of a university’s portfolio exit assessment process, and our society tacitly values “English Only” (Horner/Trimbur), then our current assessment practices may unintentionally favor those whose native dialect most closely mirrors standard academic English. Studies have shown that nonnative speakers receive less feedback on rhetorical features of their writing (Cummings), putting them at a disadvantage in the classroom. Further studies are needed that continue the conversation on developing heuristics for designing assessment practices in classrooms populated by students with diverse language backgrounds. Studying classroom-based assessment practices, rather than program-wide assessment, may assist teachers in echoing Huot’s call for assessment as a “positive force in the teaching of writing” (166) in order to assist students in developing writing and critical thinking skills.

**Defining Terms**

Throughout this dissertation, I employ terms frequently mentioned throughout language diversity scholarship, including standard academic English, monolingualism, and language diversity.

- **Standard Academic English**

  Although I use the terms standard academic English and nonstandard academic English for ease of dialect identification, these labels are a myth because no one user of English speaks the language of the university naturally due to the “dynamic, fluid, ever-
changing nature” of language (Logan 183). However, in this project, standard academic English refers to the language of the academy. Standard English is what Horner et al. deem “unaccented” speech and writing, invoked to “simplify the teaching and learning of language” (305). It is also referred to as Edited American English. Nonstandard academic English refers to regional and community dialects traditionally deemed inappropriate for academic writing.

- **Monolingualism**

  Building off of Paul Kei Matsuda’s definition of a cultural “assumption that students are by default native speakers of a privileged variety of English from the United States” (“The Myth of Linguistic Homogeneity” 88), I use the phrase monolingualism to mean the valuing of one dialect—in this case, standard academic English—above all others. Monolingualism is in opposition to multilingualism, which serves “as a way of preserving ethnic diversity” (Horner and Trimbur 595). Monolingualism can put speakers of diverse dialects at risk for lower attrition rates due to educational gaps. As Geneva Smitherman writes in *Talkin’ and Testifin’: The Language of Black America* “though poverty and racism created and sustained the economically impoverished position of blacks, still it is blacks who must surrender the ‘socially stigmatized’ cultural and linguistic forms which are intolerable to the white mainstream” (208).

- **Language Diversity**

  Language diversity refers to the valuing of multiple dialects equally, both in the composition classroom and in society. By fostering language diversity, writing instructors diverge from “unidirectional” English (Horner and Trimbur 595) that devalues vernacular language and instead call for the “changeability of languages” (Horner et al. 306).
Pedagogies that foster language diversity should acknowledge the “collectively owned” nature of language (Logan 183).

- **Dialects**

I identify dialects as any variety or pattern of English usage, such as standard academic English, African American English, or Appalachian English, similar to Dorothy M. Griffin’s discussion of dialects as a “regional and social variations of spoken English” and “the many different kinds of language behavior that exists in our country” (551 – 552). Reid Luhman points out in “Appalachian English Stereotypes” that varieties of English “differ from Standard American English in grammar, phonology, lexicon, and intonation” (331), giving the example “I’m a-fixin’ to do a right smart bit of work in the morning but they ain’t no way I can git it don’t til pert ‘near dinner time,” as an Appalachian dialect. Luhman argues that this pattern proves that the dialect is not “an incorrect variation of the standard but a language system in its own right with its own set of rules for correct speech” (332). June Jordan defines the conventions of African American dialect in her essay “Nobody Mean More to Me than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan,” as displaying the following traits, “a minimal number of words for every idea...clarity...eliminate use of the verb to be whenever possible...use be or been only when you want to describe a chronic, ongoing state of things” (164). Jordan had her high school English students translate these rules into African American dialect, with clarity being changed to “If it don’t sound like something that come out somebody mouth then it don’t sound right—If it don’t sound right then it ain’t hardly right. Period” (163).

- **Classroom-based Assessment**
This term refers to evaluation of student writing in a classroom setting. These assessments, such as rubrics, essay comments, and progress reports typically made by the instructor, can be influenced by program-wide practices, such as portfolio exit requirements or rubrics used throughout a writing program. Huot refers to classroom-based assessment as “a way to teach and learn writing” (170) and calls for the teaching of writing to be more intertwined with the assessment process.

- **Usage**

In this dissertation, I refer to usage as the use of grammatical conventions, word choice, and spelling to convey meaning in writing. In their study of student error patterns, Connor and Lunsford refer to correction of these issues as an “ever-shifting pattern of skills judged by an ever-shifting pattern of prejudices” (399). In this sense, I embrace an activist definition of usage to refer to stylistics used by writers differently depending on the given context and audience expectations.

**Literature Review**

*Early Positions on Dialects and Writing Assessment*

Social movements in the 1960s and 70s had an impact on classroom pedagogies, leading to increased calls for diversity in the writing classroom (Lamos 46). The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) established support for language diversity with their 1974 document “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” (SRTOL). The document, according to one of the document’s creators, Geneva Smitherman, responded to “a developing crisis in college composition classrooms, a crisis caused by the cultural and linguistic mismatch between higher education and the nontraditional (by
virtue of Color and class) students who were making their imprint upon the academic landscape for the first time in history” (Smitherman 19). As the CCCC statement points out, our attitudes toward acceptable English usage originate from the English classroom itself. Because the writing classroom played a role in creating the myth of one standard academic English, it must also be the site of change. Yet, writing instructors encounter a dilemma. While many in the field recognize the need to value diverse language heritages, the authors of SRTOL argue that some outside of our field may not agree, preferring standard academic English. Are instructors truly preparing our students to write outside the classroom then, knowing that most still view standard academic English as the mark of an educated citizen? The resolution states that:

The English profession, then, faces a dilemma: until public attitudes can be changed—and it is worth remembering that the past teaching in English classes has been largely responsible for those attitudes—shall we place our emphasis on what the vocal elements of the public think it wants or on what the actual available linguistic evidence indicates we should emphasize? Shall we blame the business world by saying, ‘Well, we realize that human beings use language in a wide variety of ways, but employers demand a single variety?’ (3)

Whether or not to advocate the teaching of standard academic English is a dilemma for any project addressing issues of language diversity. Should teachers of writing abandon standard academic English, knowing that its usage goes against what writing instructors know about language learning—that is the most “pure” form of English—and instead allow students to write in their home languages? What repercussions will our students face once
they leave our classes and enter the professional world (if they have not already) for using nonstandard varieties of English? For a society to truly value diversity, structures and systems outside of our classroom would need to change. Social and economic inequalities that create educational gaps for students would need to be eliminated to ensure equitable access to education. Still, changes to the way instructors teach writing can help to foster this change and make the classroom a welcoming environment for our students. Instructors can teach standard academic English while still acknowledging the existence and importance of other complex dialects such as Appalachian English or African American Vernacular.

SRTOL also resolves that “Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity” and that teaching that one dialect is superior to another is simply “immoral advice for humans” (1). While first-year writing students need awareness of standard academic English as a means of composing as a means of academic writing and in order to fulfill the expectations of a variety of audiences, it should not be valued above a student’s home dialect but rather as another option in relation to audience, situation, and context. Employing assessment strategies, such as those I later describe in the literature review, to accommodate the variety of language dialects our students speak creates a diverse language culture and engenders diversity in general.

Post-SRTOL, writing assessment scholars continued to examine the connection between race and writing assessment. In 1981, Edward White and Leon Thomas examined standardized testing in California through an analysis of the California State Universities and College English Placement Test. The tests measured “correctness” in student writing with standard academic English being the measure of correctness. White and Thomas
found that African American students scored lower overall on the placement tests, noting it was possible that the English professors scoring the essays had less familiarity with or were “insensitive” to the types of dialects used by African-American students, although the authors felt that this was unlikely due to “strict quality control procedures” (281). White and Thomas note that both the National Council of Teachers of English and the Conference on College Composition and Communication hold the position that standardized tests that greatly factor usage into scoring penalize minority students and should be considered invalid (278). Standardized testing practices tend to position diverse varieties of English opposite “correctness,” because standard academic English has a traditional grammatical pattern that differs from diverse dialects. Yet, by examining the wide range of composing practices, situations, and audiences, students are better prepared for real-world writing.

Writing research continued to focus on student errors and error patterns. In 1988, Robert J. Connors and Andrea A. Lunsford published “Frequency of Formal Errors in Current College Writing, or Ma and Pa Kettle Do Research,” where the authors studied 3,000 student essays and their error patterns and argued that student errors are not simply mechanical errors but also a rhetorical construction; while current pedagogical models may have shifted from teaching writing solely as error correction, these errors can hinder a writer’s meaning, “Errors are not merely mechanical, therefore, but rhetorical as well. The world judges a writer by her mastery of conventions, and we all know it. Students, parents, university colleagues, and administrators expect us to deal somehow with those unmet rhetorical expectations, and, like it or not, pointing out errors seems to most of us pan of what we do” (397). Perhaps due to this, the authors found that writing instructors mark only about 43% of student errors (402). The authors write that our
notion of error is a flaw in the transaction between writer and reader, citing Joe William's "The Phenomenology of Error," where Williams writes that instructors might, “shift our attention from error treated strictly as an isolated item on a page, to error perceived as a flawed verbal transaction between a writer and a reader” (153). Ultimately, Connors and Lunsford found that spelling errors were the most predominant pattern of error by a margin of 300% but that this might change with time, since student writing has and will continued to evolve (401). As evidence of this, a 2008 update to the study by Andrea Lunsford and Karen Lunsford titled “Mistakes are a Fact of Life,” found that incorrect word choice was now the most common error pattern and other errors such as verb endings and preposition use had dropped off as top errors (791). Lunsford and Lunsford also found that student writing have become more argumentative and research-based as well as longer in length while the rate of errors has remained mostly consistent (793).

In 1997, Arnetha Ball’s “Expanding the Dialogue on Culture as a Critical Component When Assessing Writing” described a similar study to White and Thomas’s California State Universities and College English Placement Test research by examining a link between assessors’ race and their assessment of students of different races. Her study viewed the scoring practices of four European-American instructors assessing ethnically diverse students and compared these practices to those of African American instructors. Ball found that race was a factor in writing assessment and that the European-American instructors generally scored diverse student populations lower than European-American students. As a result, Ball calls for an examination of “cultural” components in writing assessment (30). Studies such as Ball’s, White’s, and Thomas’s show that validity and reliability in assessment need to be considered in issues of classroom based assessment as well as
program-wide, raising such questions as what is correctness in student writing and what is its purpose in writing?

*Language History and “English Only”*

Ball’s study was published only months after a movement by the Oakland, California school board to recognize the legitimacy of Ebonics (Marback 11) in an effort to help students and teachers understand the differences between Ebonics and standard academic English. The resulting controversy regarding this effort toward language diversity in K – 12 education echoes the cultural assumption that standard academic English is the norm amongst student populations. Studies in English Education reveal the tension between best pedagogical practices and the demands and expectations of the community for one “correct” English, such as the case of Oakland’s hostile reaction to the school board’s declaration. Dorothy Griffin’s 1970 piece “Dialects and Democracy,” discusses her “dialectology” lesson plan designed as a response to this tension, where students analyze various dialects of spoken usage in an effort to “discover such facts as that even nonstandard dialects may have a perfectly consistent grammar, that they are not necessarily sloppy or ‘bad’ English, but only a different English” (557). Griffin’s lesson plans, like the Oakland Resolution, were not designed to have students writing in varieties of English per se but to examine the differences in dialects in an effort to foster language diversity. Pedagogies for teaching standard academic English to speakers of diverse dialects highlights the code-switching or code-meshing students practice in the writing classroom.

Much contemporary scholarship in Composition and Rhetoric has examined how the rhetoric of English Only has affected university writing programs (Ball, Riley-Kelly, Miller-
Cochran, for example). These policies, which John Trimbur and Bruce Horner argue manifest in the composition classroom as a “tacit policy of English Only” (622) put students who do not write in standard academic English at a disadvantage in the classroom. Trimbur provides a history of multilingualism in the US in his essay, “Linguistic Memory and the Politics of U.S. English,” arguing that there have always been unspoken English Only policies in place since colonization. Trimbur, like many other scholars who criticize English Only policies, points out that those today who believe that Spanish-speaking in America should be limited are similar to those who rallied against German-speaking a hundred years ago. Both groups were hostile to immigrants and extended this to language policy. He provides a quote from Benjamin Franklin discussing Germans: “Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs...” (580) It is this continual “language forgetting” of our nation that causes monolingualism, Trimbur writes, manifesting itself in our composition classes where instructors unknowingly perpetuate this myth. This emphasis on one universal dialect tends to penalize students in diverse institutions, such as my own students at the City Colleges. These students must go through a transformation process that is arguably more drastic than students who are already familiar with standard academic English. Students arguably need more assistance in bridging the gap between their home dialect and standard English, one of the factors that can lead to the “cooling off period” at-risk students face as they progress through college-level writing courses (Rose).

Monolingualism has tangible effects on the assessment process. Current practices should balance discussion of syntax and rhetorical features in order to put an end to what
Trimbur and Horner call the “tacit policy of monolingualism” (622). By continuing to promote language diversity, we lessen any possible implication that students’ home languages (which even native speakers have) are somehow deficient. While it is not realistic within a university setting to abandon standard academic English, there are practices that teachers can adhere to that promote best pedagogical standards regarding respecting students’ languages, which I explore in more detail in Chapter 5.

Native and Nonnative Dialects

Much of the scholarship on language diversity reveals the highly personal nature of one’s language and the effects of negative cultural attitudes toward speakers of “nonstandard” dialects. To this end, in “Holdin’ It Down: Students’ Right and the Struggle over Language Diversity,” Keith Gilyard rebukes the claim that standard English is the only language of educated peoples. He discusses a speech by Professor Stix, who criticizes the Linguistic Society of America’s 1997 pro-Ebonics resolution, where Stix asks, “Can one then do physics and philosophy in Ebonics? Please.” Gilyard replies, “It is a particular verbal barb given the fact that indeed one can do physics and philosophy in Ebonics or any other language variety” (116) and concludes “Stix is for kids” (117). This negativity toward African American dialects has the potential, Gilyard claims, to promote “humiliating consciousness” (119). While writing instructors may acknowledge diverse dialects, instructors should also remember that varieties of English are socialized. In his essay “Your Average Nigga,” Ashanti Vershawn Young builds upon Gilyard’s justification for African American English but also argues that the label of Black English Vernacular can imply that in order to be a masculine and African American, one must speak a specific dialect. Young describes his experiences as an African American male and teacher of first-
year composition, where he often felt that he was labeled and as a result expected to speak or write a certain way. He recalls teaching at a mostly African American high school on Chicago’s West Side, where the principal told him, "Some of the students think you’re not masculine enough. You got to change that. You got to act like a man" (694) or conversely, how white instructors at Columbia College would unexpectedly quiz him on his knowledge of literary theorists or his PhD credentials (693). The author recalls that he never felt like he belonged to any group that he was a part of; thus, he felt instructors should not privilege any dialect over another, but instead accept and accommodate all dialects. Young’s research reminds us to avoid categorizing any language as endemic to any given student population. These personal revelations remind us that our teaching and assessment strategies have real effects on our ideas of identity, self-worth, and belonging.

Still, while dialects are socialized, so are our notions of what makes good writing. Similar to Gilyard, “Writin’ da Funk Dealer: Songs of Reflections and Reflex/shuns” by Kelvin Monroe gives a first-hand account of the author’s experiences with racism in the writing classroom. Monroe code-switches from what is traditionally considered African American English to academic English, recounting the same issue in both sections—the racism he felt directed at him in college as an African American student. The personal experiences shared by these authors remind us that issues in language diversity so often relate to one’s personal identity and self-worth.

*Classroom-based Assessment*

The privileging of academic English has the potential to create unfair assessment practices for nonnative speakers and speakers of “nonstandard” dialects. Alister Cummings, a TESOL scholar, analyzes how assessors scored ESOL writing in “Decision
Making While Ratings ESL/EFL Writing Tasks.” Cummings found that assessors spent more time discussing rhetorical textual features only if there were fewer grammatical mistakes; otherwise, rhetorical features were discussed little. Cummings study reveals that, similar to the standardized assessments analyzed by White and Thomas, usage and sentence-level correctness are still of primary importance in teacher feedback.

Considering the results of Cummings et al’s study, students who write in “nonstandard” English may lack the same quality of feedback as their peers. Like Ball and White, Cummings explores our ideas of “correctness” and why it is subjective. Similarly, Asao B. Inoue argues in “Racial Methodologies for Composition” that race should be a factor in assessment validity and more needs to be done in examining how race factors into assessment criteria for student writing because students of color may be more likely to show evidence of diverse writing patterns (Ball, Smitherman). Importantly, Inoue clarifies that ignorance of best pedagogical practices does not necessarily equal racism when he writes: “It should be noted that “racist” or “racism” does not refer to the attitudes, behaviors, or intentions of agents around assessments. The terms refer to the social outcomes and arrangements from assessments, and/or the methods used to produce assessment results and decisions” (129). Inoue asks instructors to acknowledge our differences and biases in assessment and design new technologies that benefit student populations.

If our teaching practices have moved from teaching grammar in isolation and sentence-level correctness as being of primary importance, then our assessment practices might follow. Diane Kelly-Riley echoes Inoue’s call for assessment that examines cultural attitudes toward race. Kelly-Riley enacted a large-scale study at Washington State
University to determine assessment validity in the portfolio process. While she did not find that the evaluator’s race factored into the scoring of any given student, mechanics and grammar were weighted especially high in the evaluation process (31). Kelly-Riley cites Schmidt and Camara’s essay “Group Differences in Standardized Test Scores and Other Educational Indicators” to argue that “inequitable educational preparation, poverty, discrimination, and poor educational opportunities and lack of access to educational resources” contribute to the lower scores of minority students during portfolio assessment and she suggests that local writing programs both publish and compare results of self-studies regarding race and writing assessment (32 – 34). Previous studies in how race factors into an instructor’s assessment of student writing by Smitherman, White, Thomas, and Ball have had conflicting results as to whether a students’ race factors into an instructors assessment of that students’ writing, but each study confirmed that presence of dialect indicated that a student was less likely to pass the course.

Language values manifest themselves through our current assessment practices. Bob Broad’s What We Really Value: Beyond Rubrics in Teaching and Assessing Writing describes how an instructor’s view of sentence-level correctness impacts the assessment process. If writing assessment is based on values, then it’s worth exploring how our value of standard, academic English affect those in other discourse communities. Broad points out that many instructors place so much value on grammar because it can be easily “recognized—and evaluated—at a glance” (61). He notes that at City University’s FYE program, “How did Mechanics come to count above all other criteria (Thinking, Significance, Sentences, Authority, Voice, Style, Focus, and Organization, to name just a few) for evaluating students’ writing?” (63) If instructors value mechanics instead of more complex acts of
composing (rather than in addition to), then speakers of dialects or nonnative speakers are at a serious disadvantage as these speakers show evidence of sentence-level issues more so than native speakers and speakers of standard academic English. Broad’s work reveals that writing instructors should be aware of instructors’ biases when assessing a student’s work and how this may place certain groups of students at a disadvantage. Likely, assessment practices reflect this value on usage above content and development due to instructors’ viewing grammar as foundational.

While Inoue, Huot, and Broad, call for race to be a factor in writing assessment Catherine Prendergast’s 1998 essay “Race: The Absent Presence in Composition Studies” calls for whiteness to be analyzed as its status as the norm in first-year writing. While Prendergast focuses more on issues of critical race theory rather than dialects and avoids explicitly explaining race as a factor in assessment, she repeats Min Zhan-Lu’s critique of Mina Shaughnessy’s Errors and Expectations for its lack of discussion of race, reminding composition teachers that “The present challenge for compositionists is to develop theorizations of race that do not reinscribe people of color as either foreign or invisible, nor leave whiteness uninvestigated” (51). Through this project, I explore how instructors investigate issues of usage and writing assessment in their own classrooms.

Program-Wide Issues and Practices

Although I seek to provide heuristics for classroom-based assessment practices such as rubrics and teacher feedback, assessment is inherently tied into the local context of a writing program. A recurrent theme throughout the field is the importance of teacher preparation in language diversity. In “The Myth of Linguistic Homogeneity in U.S. College Composition,” Paul Kei Matsuda argues that, despite the pressing need, few graduate
composition programs offer coursework on issues in ESOL or language diversity. Writing programs may assume that students are native speakers of English despite the increasing presence of nonnative speakers. Writing from the perspective of a Writing Program Administrator, Susan K. Miller-Cochran’s “Language Diversity and the Responsibility of the WPA” details five assumptions WPAs make about second language writers and possible ways to implement a language diverse FYC curriculum. These are that “second language writers are easy to identify”; “second language writers are a small minority”; “as long as you have a second language writing specialist at your school, that person can handle any challenges that students might face”; “second language students can just be placed in a class, and then you don’t have to worry about them anymore”; and “second language writers need to focus on grammatical issues more than rhetorical ones” (215). These assumptions are important because they guide so much of our current views on what nonnative students need in terms of assessment. As Miller-Cochran points out, grammar is not the only featured that nonnative speakers must improve. This project includes nonnative speakers enrolled in first year writing courses as research participants because of the varieties of dialects often present in their writing.

From the perspective of a WPA, “Preparing for the Tipping Point: Designing Writing Programs to Meet the Needs of the Changing Population,” Ana Maria Preto-Bay and Kristine Hansen argue that first-year composition was once the practice of teachers exercising “their students in the production of formally correct writing that could be graded with relative speed, on the assumption that correctness would be prime desideratum...” (41) and that this model is outdated and does not acknowledge the changing classroom. The problem with “correctness” as a method of assessment for
nonnative speakers of English is that what teachers may assume is sloppy writing could actually be the result of a student not knowing a grammatical rule in English, such as the ordering of verbs and direct objects. The rules of English do not always align with the grammatical rules of other languages, so writing instructors might consider talking about and educating students on these differences so that students do not feel like their teachers are labeling them as careless. “Correctness” as a goal for student writing is an arbitrary term; defining it solely as knowledge of grammatical convention can limits the purpose of writing and might prevent students from experiencing a wide range of writing styles and conventions.

Although I describe my own experiences at an urban community college as the impetus for my exploration of these issues, issues of language diversity are increasingly present even at rural institutions. Gail Shuck uses her experience as a writing program administrator to argue that administrators need to review their own pedagogical practices in light of “English Only” policies that force political tensions upon educators. She discusses Boise State University—a school some might think does not need a language diverse curriculum due to its rural location—but that actually has 8% of its student body made up of second language writers (60). Schuck writes that instructors and administrators need to think about who they determine as “ESL” as many students who are labeled as such do not belong in a traditional ESL classroom and instead could function well in a native speaker classroom. Shuck’s argument proves that even the most rural campuses can benefit from language diversity pedagogies and that it does not only apply to urban schools with high percentages of nonnative speakers. My own research at rural Midwestern University found that the university enrolled significant percentages of
international students, who often enrolled in writing courses for native speakers. These groups of students are important to consider when researching diverse language pedagogies due to their presence in first-year writing courses. Monolingual attitudes in the classroom may lead native and nonnative speakers alike to feel that they have to change their cultural heritage through language in order to become a more successful student.

Creating the type of pedagogies that Shuck recommends may seem overwhelming for instructors. It may be difficult to know where to begin or how to emphasize the value of varieties of English. Shirley Wilson Logan suggests asking students to collect examples of vernacular writing that they encounter in a given week as a method of opening up the conversation about what it means to speak standard English (183). John W. White shows his English Education students passages from Old, Middle, and contemporary English to highlight the changing nature of language. He also has students read a difficult passage on Heidegger’s definition of truth, so as to demonstrate the challenges that nonnative speakers and speakers of dialects encounter when reading dialects so distant from their own. June Jordan conducted a similar activity, assigning her students passages from The Color Purple to translate into standard academic English. Together, the class translated the lines “You’d better not never tell nobody but God. It’d kill your mammy” to “Absolutely, one should never confide in anybody besides God. Your secrets could prove devastating to your mother” (365). These activities can be especially useful because although instructors may continue to teach standard academic English, they can still explore the challenges it presents for diverse groups of students. Similarly, Jessica Whitney advocates the teaching of code-switching in the classroom, citing Wheeler and Swords’s definition of having
students "choose the language variety appropriate to the time, place, audience, and communicative purpose" (474). Activities such as those suggested by Whitney, White, and Jordan may help students bridge into academic writing and compose for diverse audiences and situations.

*Grammar, Usage, and Language Diversity*

Pedagogical practices that explore a need for language diversity must be matched by assessments that do the same in order to better tie pedagogy to assessment. Understanding grammar, especially in relation to usage, is important to diverse language pedagogies since usage heavily factors into assessment (Broad). Peck MacDonald surveys language-related scholarship in issues of College Composition and Communication and argues that the field’s decreasing study of language leads to a lack of knowledge about grammar and sentence-level pedagogies, perhaps contributing to the privileging of standard academic English. In this way, a lack of understanding about grammar could contribute to language myths such as what some perceive to be sentence-level “errors” present in dialects are not unintentional mistakes but rather sophisticated grammatical patterns. Sentence-level errors tend to be a natural part of the writing process and can be a sign of growth as a writer, as shown in Shaughnessy’s *Errors and Expectations*. To help her English Education students make the connection between usage and convention, Leah Zuidema asks the question, “A taxi must obey the laws of physics, but it can disobey state laws. How is English like a taxi?” (15) What makes for good writing varies based on situation and context as Zuidema’s example shows.

The source described in this literature review are important contributions to the field, detailing our increasing need to accommodate and foster language diversity in our
teaching practices. Nonnative speakers of English and speakers of dialects are at risk for less comprehensive feedback due to the possibility of emphasizing grammar above content and development during assessment, rather than in addition to. Assessment should be an opportunity for a student’s growth as a writer, matching the assignments and pedagogies at play in the classroom. This study examines how teachers understand and assess students’ writing, focusing on usage in relation to development and organization, with the goal of developing heuristics for fostering language diversity through assessments made in the classroom.

Overview of Study

This project uses classroom-observation to examine how instructors can build upon our creation of rubrics, teacher comments, and student self-assessments that accommodate speakers of dialects. I explore heuristics for creating effective classroom-based assessment practices for speakers of dialects in the first-year writing classroom. The questions I address throughout this dissertation are:

• How can writing instructors design assessment practices that recognize varieties of English usage?
• In what ways can instructors use assessment practices to foster our students’ diverse languages?
• How do our assessment strategies account for the dialects present in basic writing courses?
• What does sentence-level “correctness” in college level composition mean to students and instructors?
What are heuristics for designing classroom-based assessment practices for nonnative speakers of English or speakers of dialects?

For this study, I observed two sections of Intensive Introduction to Academic Writing 1100 at Midwestern University during the Fall 2012 academic semester to understand students’ attitudes toward the assessment process in relation to English dialect usage. One of these sections is 1100W, designed for nonnative speakers of English. Typically, students enrolled in 1100W have also taken English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) writing courses. Because nonnative speakers attending American high schools are exempt from ESOL placement testing at this university, 1100W enrolls only international students. The other section is intended for native speakers and is labeled 1100. Both groups of students have been placed into the course after writing a placement essay evaluated by first-year writing instructors. This section is considered the “basic writing” course at the university and students receive no credit for course completion.

My methodology for the project, which I discuss in detail in the following chapter, is influenced by feminist research practices and principles. For example, I strive to lessen the power imbalance between the researcher and the project’s participants and enable an ethical research site by valuing the experiences and contributions of my research participants (Naples 3). I used feminist methodologies to create a sense of community within the research site. Research participants, both students and instructor, placed themselves in a vulnerable position by opening up their community to an outsider observer and by continually sharing my research progress and findings, I enable an ethical research site.
My methods align with my research questions in the following ways:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.</strong> How can writing instructors design assessment practices that recognize varieties of English usage?</td>
<td>Student interviews (to ask students what has been a positive experience throughout the assessment process or what they would like to see changed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.</strong> In what ways can instructors use assessment practices to foster our students’ diverse languages?</td>
<td>Teacher interviews (to see what has been effective from the teacher’s perspective and compare these responses to students’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.</strong> How do our assessment strategies account for the dialects present in basic writing courses?</td>
<td>Teacher interviews (to see how their approaches to assessment align/diverge from other courses they have taught)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. What does sentence-level "correctness" in college level composition mean to students and instructors?  
Textual Analysis (to examine assessment criteria for courses) Student surveys (to better understand student interpretation of correctness)

5. What are some heuristics for designing classroom-based assessment practices, including rubrics, for nonnative speakers of English or speakers of dialects?  
Teacher observation (to examine current practices); Student surveys (to examine the effectiveness of current practices); Textual Analysis (to examine how assignment sheets can prepare students for assessment)

Table 1: Research Questions Table

Participants could view updates, findings, and conclusions on my research blog (personal.bgsu.edu/~aathon/dissertation) throughout the span of the project; the thirty-three participants may post feedback anonymously, as well. Research participants were informed of the site via email, except for students who were informed during the first week.
of class. The research site and blog will be available until Spring 2014, my anticipated graduation date from BGSU.

**Chapter Abstracts**

*Chapter One: Introduction and Review of Scholarship*

*Chapter Two: Methods and Methodologies*

Chapter two outlines the research methods employed in this dissertation including my research methodologies and methods of data collection. I describe how feminist methodology have inspired my desire to create a safe space for research participants to share ideas and feedback. Because I am asking students to share ideas and concerns during the course, rather than after, student participants remain anonymous. I also invite my participants to review materials as they became available, including assisting me in choosing all pseudonyms for this project. Participants will be encouraged to review my results and conclusions throughout the project and this chapter explores how this methodology affected the research process.

*Chapter Three: Agents and Actors*

This chapter describes the research participants in this study and their teaching experiences. In this chapter, I examine the unique local context of the first-year writing program at this institution and any challenges or benefits this setting may provide. I describe the program goals and learning outcomes of the courses as well as a description of current classroom-based assessment practices utilized in each section.
Chapter Four: Results and Analysis

Chapter four provides results from my data collection methods and explores the effect of the local context on the data. I discuss my findings from my classroom observations, student survey results, and instructor interviews. I describe my open coding methods in detail and relevant patterns within the data.

Chapter Five: Implications and Pedagogical Suggestions

The final dissertation chapter provides assessment suggestions for writing instructors to implement in their own classrooms based on this study’s empirical data. I also summarize best practices for writing assessment and varieties of English as established by current scholarship. Finally, I make suggestions for further research in writing assessment studies.
CHAPTER II.
METHODS AND METHODOLOGIES

In this chapter, I describe my research methodologies for this project as well as the methods of data collection and analyses used to provide results and analysis. Feminist methodologies influenced my approach to studying two first-year writing courses, taught by participants "May" and "Kay." I also describe how my methods of data collection provided findings to my research questions. The chapter begins with an overview of feminist scholarship that informs my research by emphasizing the need for collaborative research practices that ensure the well-being of my research participants. By making my data available to all participants, I aimed to better represent feminist approach to research. I then discuss the benefits of classroom observation as a method for research as this allowed me to view a specific community and determine what unique aspects of this setting could assist in establishing heuristics for assessing varieties of English. The chapter concludes with a description of variables and limitations of the study.

Research Methodologies

Just as feminist researcher Nancy Naples asserts in her book *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis, and Activist Research*, I strive to "negotiate the power imbalance between the researcher and researched" (3). By lessening this power imbalance between myself and my research community, I promote an ethical research practice and value the experiences and contributions of my research participants. In both my collection
and coding of the data, I have followed feminist methodologies, which I describe later in this chapter. Feminist methodologies encourage the use of the word “participant” rather than “subject” to adhere to this balance of power and better reflect the participatory nature of feminist research (Naples 191 – 2). Research participants, both students and instructor, have placed themselves in a vulnerable position by opening up their community to an outsider observer, someone who is not a student or their teacher. Feminist methodology “minimizes exploitation of the research subject” (Naples 13) and honors their contributions to the project. I adopted research methods that allowed me to solicit responses and feedback from my participants to involve them in the research process. In her book *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, Shulamit Reinharz argues that there is no single method of feminist research nor is any method inherently feminist, but rather that feminist research is “a perspective on an existing method” (241). While my methods are therefore not inherently feminist, my approaches to this project imply that research participants are a valuable part of the research community with important ideas to share. Even if participants chose not to share ideas or feedback, I presented the opportunity. Gesa Kirsch cautions in *Ethical Dilemmas in Feminist Research* that expecting participants to participate—rather than only encouraging—can instead create a research dynamic which is burdensome to participants who are already juggling multiple demands in their personal lives. I agree with Kirsch’s stance that participants should never feel compelled to review material and researchers should thus develop realistic and perhaps more limited expectations of each participant's time contributions (35 – 7). To adhere to this principle, I did not initiate any out of classroom contact with students, although students were encouraged to email me or contact me about the project via my research blog. I did keep
regular weekly contact with the instructors outside of the classroom to give updates and schedule the next observation session so that instructor participants had final say over when I observed the course and what materials I was permitted to view. For example, one instructor, May, admitted me to the Canvas course page, Midwestern University’s learning management course portal system. Kay, however, chose not to do so. In this way, instructors were able to have me participate in course activities as their time and interest allowed.

My approach to feminist research is through my own understanding of the methodology. In the introduction to her book *Feminism and Methodology*, Sandra Harding acknowledges that there is no set definition for feminist research but that three general guidelines governs feminist research activities: the work values the experience of women as well as those of men, it explores “social phenomenon” in a way that will benefit the participants (who are more likely to be women) and care for participants’ welfare, and it places the researcher on the same level as the participants (7 – 9). According to Harding, the latter is not only in an effort to balance the power involved in a research study, but also serves as a means of acknowledging and understanding the lens through which a researcher studies her or his participants. In developing this research project, I worked with a diverse group of participants—in gender, age, and language background—in order to better align my research to feminist methodologies and develop a richer view of the way that language identity affects an instructor’s assessment of a student’s writing as well as how the student understands his or her writing feedback.

My methodology is also influenced by a feminist recognition of the personal narrative as a valuable contribution to research. By sharing my experiences with
participants through this dissertation and my dissertation website, I was clear about my biases toward the research subject and I created a safer space where participants might also feel comfortable sharing their biases toward language diversity. Reinharz discusses feminist methodology as inherently personal: “In addition to describing the personal origins of the research question, the feminist researcher is likely to describe the actual research process as a lived experience” (258). By beginning this dissertation with a personal experience of how I arrived at my research questions, I have shared my personal experience and motivations for research on the topic with my audience and participants. This included my creation of an online research blog where participants provided feedback and review non-identifying data. My dissertation website and research blog allowed students to review my narrative as a researcher and contribute anonymously to the project, if they chose to do so. My own research narrative and the narratives of the student participants played a large role in my project. In “Narrative Turns in Writing Research,” Debra Journet refers to the use of narrative in composition research as a form of data collection that is sometimes viewed as less rigorous than other research methods, but actually has the capacity to identify the “complexities of individual and social experience” in ways that other data does not (14). Journet argues that the use of narrative in research is “fundamental to how people organize and make sense of their lives” (15). For these reasons, I encouraged my participants to share their own narratives with language, accents, dialects, and assessment as my survey and interview questions are designed to be open-ended and allow for reflection and feedback. The survey responses allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the interactions in the classroom and how student understood the
writing assessment process. I describe these student narratives in greater detail in chapter four.

This act of collaboration with my research participants assisted me in presenting a more unbiased perspective of my research and situating my experiences in my identity, that of a middle-class, white woman. While I argued in chapter one that all speakers of English are speakers of dialects, those speakers of English whose dialects are most divergent from standard academic English tend to be most disadvantaged in the writing classroom (Ball, Kelly-Riley). I am proficient in standard academic English, and my proficiency may have put me in a more privileged position than many of my research participants. In “Beyond the Personal: Theorizing a Politics of Location in Composition Research,” Gesa E. Kirsch and Joy S. Ritchie state, “researchers need to acknowledge the way race (and for most composition scholars this means examining their whiteness), social class, and other circumstances have structured their own thinking and how that, in turn, has shaped their own questions and interpretations” (10). My research questions arrive from my own narrative, shared earlier in this dissertation, as an instructor working with diverse student populations. However, I am careful to avoid allowing my own narrative to overshadow those of my participants. I approached this research project not only as a researcher but as an instructor of English; my experiences are very different than those of many of my participants. In asking research participants to share their thoughts not only on writing assessment but also with language, writing, and education, I encouraged reflection from participants that explored how these factors—different from my own—shaped their views on writing. My collaborative practices are therefore not only to promote ethical data collection but also to prevent my own narrative from overshadowing the
experiences and observations of my participants. My research presents the experience of my participants and how these experiences are shaped by the assessment process.

By making my research findings visible, I was able to provide opportunities for feedback and discussion from participants. In order to “establish rapport through an ethic of care” (Reinharz 265), I have continually met with the instructors to address the comments or concerns of participants, as well as to discuss ways the process could be improved or provide greater benefits for the classroom. Throughout the study and the subsequent months spent writing the dissertation, I revealed my findings and share data on my research blog. As Patricia Sullivan states, “The researcher’s own race, class, culture, and gender assumptions are not neutral positions from which he or she observes the world but lenses that determine how and what the researcher sees” (136 – 137) and sharing my data allowed for any of my biases to be challenged by research participants. In addition to my research blog, I also shared my Human Subjects Review Board application and my research prospectus with my research participants at the beginning of the semester. I encouraged participants to review chapters and offer responses as work become available during the study. Both instructors also allowed students class time at the beginning of the semester to review these documents.

My bridging of scholarship in English to Speakers of Other Languages, English Education, and First-Year Writing also adheres to feminist methodologies’ “openness to being transdisciplinary” (Reinharz 250). In line with this rationale, I have formulated research questions that will best represent “human diversity” and “create social change” (240). The student population I studied has particular needs in the writing classroom; many of them are on student visas with government-imposed time to complete a degree.
For these students, these demands outside of the university may affect their writing habits and their needs in the writing classroom. The academic stakes for many international students are high. While the “no pass” grade may not have a negative effect on students’ GPAs, unlike the native-speaking group, it affects their ability to remain in the country. While I acknowledge that I will never be a direct member of my participant community, having always been a native speaker and often writing in standard academic English, my project aims to assist these students with the challenges of completing their writing coursework through the creation of clear and effective assessment practices. In order to do this, I have consulted research from a variety of related disciplines to better inform my teacher-research.

My approach to this project is further influenced by Marian M. Mohr’s definition of teacher research, in that it is “inquiry that is intentional, systematic, public, voluntary, ethical, and contextual” (Teacher Research for Better Schools 23). With the instructor’s permission, I visited the course frequently throughout the semester (intentional and systematic); students and instructors were invited to choose their own pseudonyms for this prospectus (ethical); participants were encouraged to share their own experiences with the research topic and ongoing data collection (ethical and contextual); and instructors had the ultimate authority over when and how long I visit each class (voluntary). Teacher-research implies change in the classroom can then inspire institutional change. In “Teacher-Research Point of View,” Ruth Ray writes, “The revolutionary nature of teacher-research has to do with its change from inside out—from the classroom to the administration, rather than the other way around,” noting that research by teachers and for teachers bridges any gaps between educational theory and
practice (173). Not only does this act bridge the gap, but as David Nunan writes in “Standards for Teacher-Research: Developing Standards for Teacher-Research in TESOL,” teacher-research aims “to strengthen relationships between research and practice” (366). Research for and by teachers may help to emphasize the valuable work that happens in the classroom and benefit future teachers and classrooms. Due to the time of my research collection, I did not observe my own classroom for this project. Instead, I observed the classrooms of two colleagues. However, because I am a writing instructor engaged in the research and observation of a writing classroom, my study still follows both Ray and Nunan’s definition of any research that aims to benefit one’s classroom (366).

**Data Coding**

While my methodologies are largely feminist, my use of open data coding is informed by elements of grounded theory. I categorized the data according to patterns in order to obtain research conclusions. In *A Handbook for Teacher Research*, Colin Lankshear refers to Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin’s requiring that open coding should not merely repeat findings but analyze them according to relevant categories supporting one’s research question; this data analysis is not complete until it has then been interpreted post-analysis (39). This layering of data review allowed me to find patterns and make observations. As Kathy Carmaz states in “Invitation to Grounded Theory,” this methodology “requires that data be attach labels to segments of data that depict what each segment is about. Coding distills data, sorts them, and gives us a handle for making comparisons with other segments of data.” This data should be compared with additional data from other sources within the research study (5). In this way, I have detected patterns throughout my
data and compared these patterns within my various data collection methods—observation, textual analysis of syllabi and assignment sheets, surveys, and interviews.

Grounded theory presumes that this comparison and analyzing of data precedes the researcher's arrival at a specific conclusion (Lankshear; Strauss and Corbin). Yet, as Harding notes, feminist research values experiences (7) and questions the notion of one specific truth in research (Wuest 126). However, I do not view these two methodologies as opposites; the qualitative data I've collected led me to arrive at research patterns (grounded theory) but with the understanding that these patterns are developed through my own lens as a researcher as well as the lenses of my research participants (feminist methodologies). Grounded theorists who identify as feminist researchers have defended the use of the methodology when coding. In her article “Feminist Grounded Theory: An Explanation of the Congruency and Tensions Between Two Traditions in Knowledge Discovery,” Judith Wuest writes that feminist methodologies and grounded theory are compatible in that they both accept “multiple explanations of reality. Rather than accepting common theoretical perspectives, the grounded theory researcher asks, ‘What is going on here?’ (Glaser, 1978)” (127). Additionally, the coding process of both methodologies requires that “data are closely examined and compared for the influence” (128). In this way, both methodologies served as a lens for my examination of the various factors at play in coding my data. They also assisted me in mediating the experiences of my student participants with those of my instructor participants, as both methodologies ask the researcher to view layers of data in coding.

My data collection methods included observation, interviews, surveys, and textual analysis of assignments sheets, syllabi, and rubrics. I used on-going coding to provide
findings to my research questions. To better understand the context of student responses, I collected the course syllabus and assignment sheets for all writing assignments to be included in the final portfolio in order to analyze how these sheets correspond to student rubrics. Students were surveyed at midterms and finals to provide a balanced perspective and more data than observation alone could provide. The instructor was also interviewed throughout the course, providing valuable feedback and data for my research. I began to work with my data immediately, coding class sessions according to general topics (see bold in fig. below). This allowed me to determine what and how often general writing topics were covered in each session and how many class sessions discussed the assessment process:
Kay's Course

General Topics: Drafting, Revising, Editing

Kay used time before class to give individual feedback to students and listed several grammatical rules on the chalkboard.

[Document handed out: Using Commas from Purdue's Online writing lab]

Kay made a note about visiting the writing center (called “Learning Commons” at this institution).

Kay gave reminders about revising and editing stating that we’re not looking for perfect papers, gave a guideline of no more than 15 errors.

Kay discussed the document which lists steps to find the main idea and topic sentences, as well as paragraph-level support (good discussion of development in addition to rules on grammar), points on argument and audience, as well as coming up with questions for peer-review; students must turn in their marked-up draft with questions to their instructors.

Key features were highlighted in orange:

- Introduction
- Point paragraphs (why is the point important? ARGUE)
- Counter-argument
- Conclusion (consequences, call for action)

Kay allowed time in class for students to work on drafts and went around offering help.

Kay also reminded students about what plagiarism is; she reminded students to avoid writer-based prose and gave an explanation of these features.

Students read each other’s drafts and gave feedback; Kay noted that students didn't have to fix each

Figure 1: Excerpt from Classroom Observations (Appendix A)

In this example, I was able to quickly review my notes to see how the assessment of this particular assignment compared to the specific points of the assignment. I was especially interested in whether or not Kay emphasized grammar instruction as heavily as she assessed grammar (which she did, as I discuss more in chapters three and four). Kay also heavily emphasized the revision process in her classroom and thus the final revisions were the most “high-stakes” of all the writing assignments completed by students.

Classroom Observation as a Method of Research
In “Qualitative Methods in Research on Teaching,” Frederick Erickson writes that participant observation methods are best for understanding the actions and results of a particular setting, rather than a large-scale environment. Because no university writing program is the same as another, I chose to study two classrooms in one specific institution to gain a greater understanding of one location rather than have the possibility of a limited understanding of a larger research sampling. (These classroom sites are described in greater detail in chapter three.) Erickson gives guidelines for the types of questions that can be answered through participant observation:

1. What is happening, specifically, in social action that takes place in this particular setting?
2. What do these actions mean to the actors involved in them, at the moment the actions took place?
3. How are the happenings organized in patterns of social organization and learned cultural principles for the conduct of everyday life—how, in other words, are people in the immediate setting consistently present to each other as environments for one another’s meaningful actions?
4. How is what is happening in this setting as a whole (i.e., the classroom) related to happenings at other system levels outside and inside the setting (e.g., the school building, a child’s family, the school system, federal government mandates regarding mainstreaming)?
5. How do the ways everyday life in this setting compare with other ways of organizing social life in a wide range of settings in other places and at other times? (121).

Along with Harding’s requirement for feminist research to explore experiences of participants in relation to a given social phenomenon, Erickson has also influenced my research project in that his questions explore not only the experiences of participants, but also the other agents involved in the social phenomenon. I not only surveyed the participants, but I also examined how the unique context of the writing program at Midwestern University—namely, the portfolio exit process and standardized rubric—affected how both student and instructor participants understood the assessment process. Erickson’s questions have guided my data coding processes through my viewing the data through the lens of student, instructor, and program. This context, which I will further describe in chapter three, is a university writing program situated in its own department. Students write five argumentative, academic essays and draft revisions of each essay that are graded pass or no pass according to a rubric. These distinct program features likely produce different data than a writing program using grading contracts or housed within an English department. Erickson notes that the above questions must be answered by examining local context and norms in order to make “the familiar strange and interesting” (121 - 2). Erickson’s work complements my own views as a feminist-grounded theorist, in that participant experiences are valuable but are also the result of various social factors, in this case, the writing program, the participants’ language background, and their previous educational experiences.

**Data Collection Methods**
I began collecting data in Fall 2012, having obtained Human Subject Review Board approval in June 2012. The study lasted one academic semester, from August 2012 to December 2012. The course, First-Year Writing 1100, met four times a week, Monday and Wednesday for fifty minutes and Tuesday and Thursday for one hour and fifteen minutes. I rotated my observation between these two class period lengths so that I observed a variety of teaching methods under different time constraints. I visited each section once a week with the exception of finals week, university holidays, and when requested by the instructor to reschedule. I observed each section a total of eleven times, making twenty-two observations total throughout the semester with the visits typically occurring on a Monday or Tuesday. I recorded my notes in Microsoft Word and did ongoing coding of the observations by classifying each day’s observation with key topics and ideas. I also shared these notes periodically with each instructor participant. In chapter three, I describe in greater detail the differences and similarities in my interactions with both classes.

**Student Surveys**

Anonymous online student surveys were my primary means of gathering student input. I chose to create online surveys for ease of student access and so that I could more easily view patterns within responses. These surveys were given at midterms and at finals during the Fall 2012 academic semester. This procedure allowed me to gain valuable information without having students sacrifice their privacy. Ray argues that “students are not merely subjects whom the teacher-researcher instructs and assesses; they are co-researchers, sources of knowledge whose insights help provide new directions for the study” (175). In this sense, student responses helped to shape the course of my study and as a comparison for my personal observations. As a feminist researcher, I view the
experiences and insights of my participants as highly valuable to this study. The literature review in chapter one revealed that for many, language diversity is a sensitive and personal issue. Valuing the experiences of my participants was one way to honor their feelings and experiences. I was able to use student input to better understand what students found helpful throughout the assessment process and what students would like to see improved. I shared a summary of the general themes contained in the surveys with students on my research blog. In chapter four, I describe in greater detail the distribution of the surveys, percentage of responses, and patterns within the data.

Teacher Interviews

I interviewed instructors in a face-to-face setting near midterms and at the end the term, and periodically followed up with emails to see if there were any questions or comments that the instructors wanted to add to my data collection. The interviews ranged from ten minutes to thirty minutes and were conducted in each instructor’s office at Midwestern University. (I describe the findings from these interviews in chapter four.) While I had designed open-ended questions for these surveys, instructors were also encouraged to share any information or questions for contribution to my data collection. Rather than relying on my own observations and experience, I involved instructors in the research process so that my research was more reflective of the class experience and not simply my own observations. Kirsch and Ritchie argue in “Beyond the Personal: Theorizing a Politics of Location in Composition Research” that data collection methods involving personal views and experience have traditionally been a way of “validating experience as a source of knowledge” (7) but that these narratives risk overshadowing those of participants. The authors propose that researchers engage in “reinterpreting their own
experiences through the eyes of others, and by recognizing their own split selves, their multiple and often unknowable identities collaborating with participants in the development of research questions, the interpretation of data at both the descriptive and interpretive levels, and the writing of research report” (7 – 8). By interviewing my instructor participants—rather than solely observing them—I was better able to enact Kirsch and Ritchie’s call to reinterpret my own experiences as situated and instead collaborating with participants to produce knowledge. My approach to the interview process followed what Daniel W. Turner called in his essay “Qualitative Research Design” the “general interview guide approach” (755) in that I developed a set of questions to ask participants but deviated from these questions when I needed further information or when the participant wanted to discuss a related topic. For example, I discussed the revision process more with Kay and discussed students’ reactions to feedback more with May. I used information gained from these basic questions to develop follow-up questions and a follow-up interview. The interview also was a chance for instructor participants to comment on my observations, as each instructor had received a copy of my notes before the interview.

Aligning Questions to Methods

In chapter one, I supplied a chart connecting my method of data collection to my questions. In this section, I’d like to further explore how these methods supplied data:

- How can writing instructors design assessment practices that recognize varieties of English usage?
To answer this question, I conducted two sets of online student surveys per course. The complete list of questions is in Appendix C and Appendix D of this dissertation. These questions were designed to solicit responses on the assessment process, particularly the course rubric used for each of the student essays to determine passing or nonpassing grades, as well as the final portfolio process, which determines whether students moved on to the for-credit sequence, First-Year Writing 1120. These surveys also asked students what has been a positive experience throughout the assessment process or what they would like to see changed so that students could provide suggestions and feedback to benefit future writing courses.

- In what ways can instructors use assessment practices to foster our students’ diverse languages?

While student surveys contributed to my findings for this question, I also heavily relied on teacher interviews to see what has been effective from the teacher’s perspective and compare these responses to students’ responses. This allowed me to understand where these two groups agreed on the assessment process or where any discrepancies or confusion resulted from the classroom assessments. In this way, my conversations with the instructor participants helped me to better understand the types of errors instructors perceived in the classroom and how these errors factored into their assessments while student responses provided information on the type of errors they perceived in their own writing. I also gathered information on instructors’ view of the rubric and how instructors deviated—if at all—from the prescribed methods of assessment (universal rubric, portfolio exit assessment) established by the local context of this program.
• How do our assessment strategies account for the dialects present in basic writing courses?

To answer this question, I relied on my teacher interviews to see how the instructor participants’ approaches to assessment aligned with or diverged from other courses they have taught including the for-credit course of this writing program, 1120, a course which both instructors have taught. I wanted to see if the instructors’ approaches to grading, teacher comments, or student evaluations differed in this basic writing course due to the high percentage of dialects typically present in noncredit, preparatory college writing courses (Bizzell, Bartholomae, Shaughnessy).

• What does sentence-level “correctness” in college level composition mean to students and instructors?

Each of my four methods of data collection—classroom observation, student surveys, instructor interviews, and textual analysis—greatly contributed to my findings for this question. My classroom observation resulted in data that suggested how assessment is determined not only by an instructor’s interpretation of correct writing, but the university writing program’s interpretation as well. I used textual analysis to examine assessment criteria for the courses as listed on student assignments sheets and the guidelines for portfolio evaluation and then compared these to both instructor interviews and student survey responses to better understand both population’s interpretation of correctness.

• What are some heuristics for designing classroom-based assessment practices, including rubrics, for nonnative speakers of English or speakers of dialects?

For the purposes of this study, heuristics refers to a way of exploring ideas or principles for a given topic. Chapter five of this dissertation shares ways that my research
participants accommodated diverse dialects during writing assessment and applies general principles and heuristics that guided these assessment practices. In “Heuristics and Composition,” Janice Lauer writes that heuristics have a role in invention as well as inventing ideas and practices. She states, “The aim of heuristics is to study the methods and rules of discovery and invention” (396). Thomas Lee Hilgers argues a similar view in “Training College Composition Students in the Use of Freewriting and Problem-Solving for Rhetorical Invention,” stating that, “between the trial-and-error and rule-governed approaches are heuristic approaches. Heuristics, often a series of operations or questions, in effect ‘guide’ guessing and provide a systematic way of dealing with problems which are too complex to be solved via the application of rules” (293). As Hilgers points out, no one method or practice will suit every given classroom setting due to the variety of institutional structures, student populations, and classroom settings. A single set of rules is not appropriate for designing assessments. The purpose of establishing heuristics is to give general guidelines that may be adapted according to one’s local context. By gathering data from student surveys, textual analysis, and instructor interviews, I examined specific programmatic practices in this research site and adapt the assessment practices for a wider variety of institutions.

**Establishing Ethical Research Practices**

Throughout this project, I worked to ensure an ethical research site for my participants and respect their anonymity. The Conference on College Composition and Communication offers best practice for the field in its “Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Research in Composition Studies” document, which states that all research should be
voluntary during all phases of research (Conducting Studies Involving Classes) and that research data is only permitted to be collected once given this permission from the participant (Using Videotapes, Audiotapes, and Photographs). All participants involved in this study gave consent to participate in this project (see Appendix E for consent form) with the understanding that participants may choose to withdraw their consent at any time during the project. I made this information known to both student and instructor participants on the first day of classes; I also included this information in my research proposal which was submitted to and approved by Midwestern University’s Human Subjects Review Board. In May’s class, each of the 15 students chose to participate in the study, while in Kay’s class only 13 students chose to participate in this study. I neither intentionally observed nor recorded the activities of those students who chose not to participate.

Ethical research is a broad term but is generally research that respects the well-being of research participants and provides clear motives and principles for the research. In “Digital Spaces, Online Environments, and Human Participant Research: Interfacing with IRBs,” Will Banks and Michelle Eble refer to guidelines established in a study conducted by the government organization National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects called the Belmont Report, which lists the three major principles researchers are to be held accountable for in their research projects: “respect for persons, beneficence, and autonomy” (31). By making my work visible and posting chapters and updates on my research blog, I invited participants to share in the creation of knowledge. I also asked permission in advance of attending any class session and frequently checked with instructors to see if there were any adjustments needed to my observation schedule. I did
not share any student data with instructors until after the course was completed; even then, all data remained anonymous.

**Biases**

The methods and methodologies I employed for this research study are designed to ensure an ethical project for my participants and also to make participants and readers aware of any biases in the results. However, some limitations should be noted. Whether someone is a teacher or an observer, we all have biases that we bring to our research. Ethical researchers acknowledge the bias and analyze how and if it has affected the research process. Sullivan writes, “the concept of dispassionate, disinterested inquiry has itself arisen from patriarchal ideology” (135). I began this dissertation with a description of my own biases toward assessment and language diversity and noting my belief that those who are less familiar with standard academic English are at a disadvantage in the composition classroom. In “Feminist Methods of Research in the History of Rhetoric: What Difference Do They Make?” Patricia Bizzell advocates the “acknowledgement of the multiple functions of emotions and experiences in defining one’s relationship to one’s research” (201) and she champions Jacqueline Royster’s approach to research methodologies: “Royster repeatedly emphasizes the necessity for feminist researchers to ground their work in the collective wisdom of their scholarly community and importantly in the community that they are studying” (202). Due to my feminist approach to this dissertation, I have continually sought ways to make my biases visible, through sharing my research prospectus including my biases toward the subject. I’ve included both instructor and student responses in my data collection to balance my own biases and observations;
these responses have helped me determine why and how patterns arose in data. I have also made my data collection available to both students and instructors by letting participants know when dissertation chapter drafts were completed and posting them online for their review. Research in the classroom community and by the classroom community is not only ethical but provides positive change for both researcher and participant.

**Variables and Limitations**

In addition to my research biases that I described earlier in this chapter, there are additional limitations to this study. Being a graduate student and instructor in the First-Year Writing program at this university, I have already had experiences with this program and its assessment practices. I have taught First-Year Writing 1100, as well as the subsequent courses 1110 and 1120. It is through my own observations of student writing in these courses that I felt this research site would be a suitable setting for the examination of assessment and dialects. I am also a colleague of both instructor participants.

Some variables that should be noted are the different student populations for each course. The students enrolled in the native speaking course were first-year students entering their first semester at Midwestern University. The students enrolled in the nonnative speakers course had prior English to Speakers of Other Language writing courses at MU in addition to their proficiency with writing and speaking in multiple languages. These variables and student profiles will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three.

*Conclusion*
Throughout this chapter, I have described how feminist methodology influenced my methods of data collection and coding. By creating collaborative, open research practices such as the creation of a research blog, making my dissertation chapters available online, and soliciting input from instructors and teachers to balance my own observations, I have worked to ensure an ethical research site and respect for the views of my participants. Classroom observations, student surveys, teacher interviews, and textual analysis are my means of gathering data to answer my research questions. Although there are variable and limitations to this project, such as my position as a graduate student in the department and a colleague of both instructor participants, these factors have limited impact on the data collection. In the next chapter, I continue to describe the research site and the benefits of the local context of the institution.
CHAPTER III.

BASIC WRITING AT MIDWESTERN UNIVERSITY

In this chapter, I provide a definition for basic writing and my rationale for this study of basic writing courses as an effort to better understand how and why instructors assess diverse varieties of English in the writing classroom. Since the teaching of basic writing typically places additional emphasis on sentence-level skills and grammar (Trimmer), and students placed in these courses may display more evidence of nonstandard academic English (Bizzell), the basic writing sequence at Midwestern University, FYW 1100: Intensive Introduction to Academic Writing, was an ideal research site for this study. Following my review of basic writing scholarship and notions of error, I provide a thick description of the research site: the university, its writing program, the instructor participants, and the student participants. While the writing program at Midwestern University uses a universal rubric and other means of course standardization, each instructor uniquely approached the course, with Kay focusing somewhat more on grammar and May focusing more on research skills. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of advantages and disadvantages for using Midwestern University as a research site.
What is Basic Writing and Who are Basic Writers?

While there is no set definition for what constitutes a basic writing course, the term “basic writing” is attributed to Mina Shaughnessy's 1976 discussion of underprepared student writers. In a bibliographic essay on the subject, she defined it as “the teaching of writing to severely unprepared freshmen” and noted that it was “lacking even an agreed upon name” (177). In his 1987 essay “Basic Writing, Basic Skills, Basic Research,” Joseph Trimmer notes that most basic writing courses offered no college credit and focused on grammatical skills (5). Still, the term is somewhat arbitrary since student standards are based on the local context of an institution. One university’s basic writing student may place into a more advanced course at another institution. In this way, while this site-specific observational study has focused on basic writers, its findings are applicable to assessing a broad range of first-year writing students. Additionally, the first-year writing program at Midwestern University is designed so that the non-credit courses (1100 and 1110) are similar to the content practiced in the credit-bearing course, 1120. The sequential nature of the three courses shows that 1100 should be considered a first-year writing course in addition to the basic writing course for underprepared student writers; however, since the majority of the students are designated as underprepared writers due to the “intensive preparatory” nature of the course, it functions as a basic writing course, meeting Shaughnessy’s and Trimmer’s definitions.

In her 1976 essay “Diving In: An Introduction to Basic Writing,” Shaughnessy writes that too often basic writing students are discussed by researchers as “doctors tend to discuss their patients” (234) and not as participants themselves in the conversation. To avoid writing about students without seeking their input, I encouraged my participants to provide feedback to and insights on the research findings as described in chapter two.
Including students in scholarship about teaching is important to understanding the discipline. In her 1999 study published in *The Journal of Basic Writing* titled “Just Writing, Basically,” Linda Adler-Kassner discovered much about basic writers by surveying 16 randomly chosen basic writing students at the University of Michigan-Detroit, inquiring why they felt they were enrolled in basic writing courses. Adler-Kassner found that most of the basic writing students were from working class backgrounds and lived near the university (76). The student participants responded that they struggled with grammar, but also that their ideas did not translate well to the page (79). Adler-Kassner points out that the feature that unites basic writers is error and “not just the sentence level mistakes that students make on their papers, but errors of conceptualization that lead to errors in content and form as well as surface-level error” (78)—an important concept to consider when creating assessment materials for students enrolled in basic writing courses. Students need support not only in sentence-level writing but also with larger-scale features, such as organization and development, as do their peers in for-credit coursework. Thus, the students enrolled in this study need assistance not only with transitioning from their home dialects to standard academic English but also broader features such as paragraph development.

**Basic Writing as a Research Site**

Scholars such as Shaughnessy, Bartholomae, and Andrea Lunsford have noted that basic writers are more likely to write in dialects of English other than standard academic English. Deviations from standard academic English occur in patterns unique to each dialect. Shaughnessy argues, through her study of students enrolled at the City Colleges of
New York, that errors tend to follow a pattern based on a writer’s experience. Shaughnessy refers to basic writers as “those who had been left so far behind the others in their formal education that they appeared to have little chance of catching up, students whose difficulties with the written language seemed of a different order from those of the other groups, as if they had come, you might say, from a different country, or at least through different schools” (2). Central to Shaughnessy’s work was the idea that writers were simply less familiar with academic discourse than other writers who had received better educations. Shaughnessy argues, “Many had spoken other languages or dialects at home and never successfully reconciled the worlds of home and school, a fact which by now had worked its way deep into their feelings about school and about themselves as students” (3). Students enrolled in her courses were proficient in their home languages and dialects but lacked opportunities to write in standard academic discourse.

While many underprepared students need additional grammar instruction, Mike Rose noted in *Lives on the Boundary* that heavy grammar instruction—without the context of writing—failed these students: “…programs instruct students in principles of grammar and usage (‘Use a comma between coordinate adjectives not joined by ‘and’”), distribute workbook exercises that require students to select correct forms (‘Write in ‘who’ or ‘whom’ in the following sentences’), and assign short, undemanding bits of writing” (141). Thus, according to Shaughnessy and Rose, the primary distinction between a “basic” writing student and one enrolled in a for-credit writing course is that the former is more likely to write in a dialect rather than standard academic English. Rose argues that in order to align students’ home dialects with that of the academic writing classroom, basic writing coursework may overemphasize grammar. When students receive this kind of “kill and
drill” education, Rose warns, “Learning is stripped of confusion and discord. It is stripped, as well, of strong human connection.” (235). Rose reminds us that basic writers are an idea and not a student. According to Rose, basic writing coursework should balance instruction of grammar and rhetorical skills. As Adler-Kassner’s survey revealed, most students enrolled in basic writing coursework feel that they need assistance with a variety of writing tasks including both grammar and rhetoric skills. While some time has passed since Alder-Kassner, Shaughnessy, and Rose published these works, it is still true that underprepared students need a balance of rhetorical and grammatical instruction.

**Diverse Varieties of English in First-Year Writing**

Still, as the literature review in chapter one reminds us, dialects are language systems with their own patterns of errors. Patricia Bizzell states in her essay “Cognition, Convention and Certainty: What We Need to Know about Writing” that all of our students’ writing “takes place within a community” (402) and that classroom writing is its own type of discourse with standard academic English as the writing convention. In this way, academic writing is simply another discourse, albeit one that is highly valued and useful in our society. Bizzell notes that what we think of as innate writing ability is inherently influenced by discourse: “Even something as cognitively fundamental as sentence structure takes on meaning from the discourse in which it is deployed” (397). Bizzell discusses a study by Basil Bernstein, who shows that British working-class students are not “cognitively deficient” but that home conventions are different from school conventions. These students were also less likely to interact with a variety of speech partners and thus were less likely to interact with diverse varieties of English that differed from their own (401). Similarly,
David Bartholomae argues in “The Study of Error,” that “for a basic writer the distance between text and convention is greater than it is for the run-of-the-mill freshman writer” (21). Bizzell and Bartholomae both argue that students in basic writing courses are less familiar with academic discourse and need more assistance than those placed directly into for-credit courses. My own data collection—26 years later—confirms this study; the instructor participant Kay noted in her interview that many of her students made patterns of error and that these patterns tended to align with the native speakers’ home dialect (see chapter four for more analysis of this interview). These students had less experience writing in standard academic English utilized in a university setting due to their international educations. While these students had more issues with mechanics and syntax issues, they were less likely than the native speakers to use slang or American colloquialisms in their writing. This suggests that English slang is a trait of native English speakers, or as Bizzell referred to these patterns, an acquired convention of this particular discourse community. This may explain some of the differences in student error patterns noted by my research participants, May and Kay. May, who taught American students, found that colloquialisms were more of an issue than Kay, who taught international students. In Kay’s course, students struggled more with syntax due to language differences from their native tongue to English.

**Grouping Nonnative and Native Speakers**

While the nonnative speakers and basic writing students are similar groups in that they are less familiar with standard academic English, I do not mean to imply, though, that their needs are identical. The latter is especially debated in the scholarship of Teaching
English to Speakers of Other Languages. Paul Kei Matsuda argues that historically, universities have more often than not categorized second-language writers as basic writers regardless of their writing ability (67). He points out that too many nonnative speakers are assumed to be basic writers because they are not "perfect" English speakers. My research aims to look at the unique needs of each groups and how instructors assess varieties of English to help students succeed in the first-year writing course sequence. The goal of this study was to examine how effective classroom-based assessment practices for speakers of dialects other than standard American English are, to understand how sentence-level errors do or do not factor into a writing instructor’s assessment of a student’s writing, and to analyze the relationship between a student’s impression of his or her writing errors and that of the instructor’s; the study assumes that these particular classes, marked as basic writing, are likely to have many speakers of dialects. Grouping the students together was advantageous due to both groups of students enrolling in the same course with the same learning outcomes; I was able to compare how each group reflected on the assessment process to see whether or not it differed.

**Midwestern University**

Midwestern University is located in rural Ohio town with a population of approximately 30,000. Founded in 1910, the campus is relatively large at 1,400 acres (“US News”). The school offers bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees. During the 2011 – 2012 school year, 13,814 undergraduate students were enrolled along with 1,269 graduate students. Nearly 12,000 of the undergraduate students were in-state residents (“Headcount by Campus”). The majority of these students attend full-time (“FTE Enrollment by
Campus”). Approximately 20% of students work in addition to attending the university, although current data only accounts for students who work on campus (“Institutional Research”). The total percentage of students working, including off campus students, is likely much higher. According to a recent college ranking news site, MU has a 75% acceptance rate and cites business, communication, and education as popular majors (“US News”).

_The First-Year Writing Program_

According to its website, one of the missions of the first-year writing program (FYW) at Midwestern University is “to ensure that all students have the ability to communicate effectively” (“First-Year Writing Program”). The FYW program offers a history of its practices, course descriptions, learning outcomes, and assessment methods on its public website, which I have used to collect the program information included in this chapter. I have chosen to include mostly public data since this information represents what information students might have about the program prior to enrolling in a course. The program became a freestanding department—breaking from the English department—in 2003. Each freshman student is required to take FYW or to receive credit through a testing exemption or by transferring credit from a similar course at another institution. In most cases, students entering the university as freshman take an entrance exam to determine placement into one of three courses. The exception to this placement requirement is non-US citizens, who must take the writing exam in-person, the week before the semester begins, through the English to Speakers of Other Languages program. This test determines whether a student would benefit from ESOL coursework before enrolling first-year writing.
The FYW program employs thirty-eight full time instructors with backgrounds mostly in English ("Faculty Directory") as well as graduate assistants who are responsible for teaching FYW 1100, 1110, and 1120. Both full-time instructors and graduate assistants are trained through a mandatory, weekly composition instructors’ workshop held during their first semester of teaching and taught by the WPA. The composition workshop consists of practice grading sessions, discussing scholarship in the field of first-year composition, and reviewing protocol for portfolio assessment. In addition to this workshop, all graduate assistants are required to meet weekly with other returning graduate assistants as part of a peer-mentoring program.

*FYW 1100 as a Research Site*

Every student matriculating at Midwestern University must satisfy the requirements of the writing program in order to graduate with a degree. The summer prior to enrollment, students complete an online writing placement test consisting of an essay response to a prompt. Students have 24-hours to complete this essay and it is then sent to placement evaluators. These evaluators are paid graduate teaching assistants (GTAs), selected by the WPA based on seniority, although the writing program administrator reviews all GTAs placements and makes the final placement decision.

Students are placed into one of three courses: FYW 1100, 1110, or 1120. 1100 and 1110 are designed to have the same learning outcomes, course requirements, and course materials except 1100, which meets for five-hours instead of 1110’s three-hours. This is designed to allow for extra in-class writing time. According to the course descriptions on the program’s website, 1100 is designed to “meet more often and class size is somewhat
smaller to allow for a greater degree of personal assistance from the instructor” (“Course Offerings”). Both sections I observed enrolled the maximum limit of 15 students, while FYW1110 and FYW1120 are typically capped at 23 students. Students are required to bring laptops to all FYW courses, with the exception of the few sections that meet in a computer lab—such as Kay’s course. In the past, FYW1100 has also used a handbook on sentence combining; however, this is the first semester where this requirement has been eliminated. 1120 is the only course in the sequence that grants college credit and is the final course students take in FYW.

The exception to this placement protocol is for those students for whom English is not their first language. These students are tested for placement in the English for Speakers of Other Languages Program, which operates within the English Department. According to the department website, the program’s mission is to provide “English language proficiency testing, placement into supplementary English language courses, supervision of those courses, and informational services provided to students and faculty” (“ESOL”). Undergraduate international students enroll in FYW only after completing ESOL testing and any required ESOL courses. The week prior to enrollment, these students must complete an in-person, timed essay test with one-hour to complete. Undergraduates are placed into ESOL 1000 (intermediate writing), ESOL 1010 (advanced writing), or referred to MU’s first-year writing program for admittance. The students accepted into FYW enroll in 1100W, a special section for nonnative speakers where instructors have additional training in working with nonnative speakers. This course is one of the two courses that I observed for this study, with the other being a section of 1100 enrolling American students.
Assignments

As part of the 1100 course requirements (both 1100 and 1100W), all students are to write five essays, each with a first-draft, with a word count of at least 800-words. The essays should be expository in nature and focus on argumentative writing with sources. Students are also to develop counterargument skills using these sources. Each essay should attempt to fulfill the five categories of the rubric, although only two passing essays are needed for a student’s portfolio to be submitted for review ("Student Portfolio" 15). In May’s course, students wrote the following five essays: Arguing a Position without Sources, Arguing a Position with Sources, Proposing Solutions, Analyzing Visuals, and Justifying Evaluations. In Kay’s course, students wrote the following five essays: Arguing a Position without Sources, Arguing a Position with Sources, Proposing Solutions, Speculating about Causes, and Justifying an Evaluation. Both instructors have utilized assignments from the FYW assignment bank manual. The assignments ranged from 3 – 5 pages in length, double-spaced. In both courses, students wrote first drafts of the essays and engaged in required peer review as a means of revising before submitting final drafts. Both instructors allowed students to revise two “No Pass” or “Almost Pass” essays before the end of the course. This revision policy is set for the entire FYW sequence and all instructors adhere to this.

Exit Criteria

Students who pass two of the five essays are eligible for portfolio review. According to the portfolio handbook, the purpose of the portfolio as exit assessment is that it “determines whether or not (the student’s) writing has achieved the level of proficiency which is necessary for (the student) to exit the course” (23). The number of students
submitted to portfolio review varies widely by course and instructor. The portfolio itself consists of all final drafts—including the rubrics with teacher evaluations—and first or intermediate drafts. The system’s purpose is to “motivate (the student) to put (his or her) best effort into each assignment” and also to guide the student in assessing his or her own writing (24). One to two other current FYW instructors are assigned to evaluate the portfolios over one weekend with an overall grade of “P” or “NP.” If the first instructor passes the portfolio, the portfolio is designated as “P” for passing. If the first instructor does not pass the portfolio, it moves to a second instructor who may or may not pass the portfolio. Students must enroll in FYW1120 after passing the portfolio process (28).

Classroom-based Assessment Practices

Perhaps the most influential means of classroom-based assessment employed in MU’s FYW program is the use of a universal, standardized rubric, seen here:
Figure 2: First-year Writing Rubric at Midwestern University
The rubric has five categories: Audience, Organization/Theme/Structure, Development, Syntax, Word Choice, Usage/Mechanics and lists a breakdown of potential errors within each heading. Sentence-level error is heavily factored into assessment as $2/3$ of the rubric's categories deal explicitly with these issues. These errors also have page numbers listed next to them that correspond to a discussion of each error in the student writing handbook. Students must pass each of the five categories to have a passing essay; students must pass two essays to be submitted for the portfolio exit process. Typically, most students struggle to pass the Development and Organization sections of the rubric. During our interview, May noted that the category her students had the most trouble passing was “Development,” while Kay's students most struggled with “Usage/Mechanics.” However, the rubric lists “ESL difficulties” under Syntax. In the university handbook, the following topics are listed as “special interest” to ESOL students:

“Recognizing language differences (566), Using verbs followed by gerunds or infinitives (567), Matching helping verbs with the appropriate main verbs (569), Using prepositions (583), Using direct objects (586), Putting sentence parts in the correct order for English (589), Including a complete verb (602)” (“Basic Grammar Review, 564”).

While the meaning of “ESL difficulties” is not defined on the rubric, the features indicated in the writing handbook as special interest to multilingual students implies that the errors of these students will mostly correspond to the Usage/Mechanics category of the rubric—not Syntax:
Figure 3: First-year Writing Rubric: Syntax Errors

This is why Kay's students were less likely to pass this section, rather than the Syntax category. Notably, the Conference on College Composition and Communication states that “best assessment practice respects language variety and diversity and assesses writing on the basis of effectiveness for readers” and suggests that “Best assessment practice responds to this call by creating assessments that are sensitive to the language varieties in use among the local population and sensitive to the context-specific outcomes being assessed” (3B). Because of this call for recognizing language variety, the rubric's listing of “slang/regionalism/dialect” (Section V) as universal errors may be problematic and it does not acknowledge situations where it may be appropriate to use such phrasings. However, it is also possible that the list of approved writing assignments in the MU FYW manual are only designed to focus on standard academic English.

The back of the rubric has space for instructor feedback. The program notes that the rubric is to complement an instructor's feedback, stating:

Following the holistic evaluation of an essay, (FYW) instructors use the rubric to evaluate each major element of the essay. By marking the extent to which the essay meets or exceeds these standards of effectiveness, instructors provide detailed analysis in support of the holistic evaluation. The (FYW) rubric is not intended as a
substitute for an instructor’s narrative comments but rather as a complement to them ("Paper Evaluation Rubric").

This blank space allows the instructor to explain the evaluation of Pass (P), Almost Pass (AP), or No Pass (NP) on each assignment. Rubrics are only given for final drafts, and not the “rough” drafts students complete before the final draft. Each student must purchase a portfolio packet that contains rubrics and an overview of the portfolio process. According to the program, the teacher’s feedback is the most important features of classroom-based assessment. However, based on student surveys, students highly internalize the language of the rubric and both student and instructor discuss their writing in these terms.

The program’s exit assessment serves as instructor norming in addition to ensuring that students have met learning outcomes. In 2007, the program began what it describes as a “blind” portfolio review process where student portfolios are graded pass/fail by FYW instructors ("Brief History"). These portfolio evaluators are not the student’s instructor, but fellow instructors teaching in the FYW program. The evaluators write a short, paragraph-long justification of why the evaluation was given. Portfolios deemed “passing” are completed; the student moves onto the next course (for 1100 or 1110, this means that the student moves on to 1120; for 1120, the student has thus fulfilled the FYW requirement). Portfolios determined to be “no pass” are referred to a second evaluator; if the second evaluator determines the portfolio passes then the student has passed the course. The “term” blind may be misleading as the student’s name, student’s instructor, and the name of the evaluator are made available to all involved. Students learn their results by retrieving portfolios from instructors on the last day of exam week.
MU’s FYW program uses several means of self-assessment. The program notes on its website that no measures of validity or reliability of assessment practices have been done once students exit the course, although there are plans for two librarians to complete this measure soon (“Assessment Report”). Previous program-wide assessments noted on the program’s website are a workshop hosted by Kathleen Blake Yancey, a Professor of English at Florida State University, where Dr. Yancey “reviewed our materials and a made a presentation in which she addressed the benefits and disadvantages of online portfolio assessment” (“Assessment Projects”). Among sections, the program uses student evaluations, Pass/Fail Ratios, training materials and blind norming as methods to maintain writing standards consistent. The FYW program does not make public the pass/fail rates for students or course completion rates, although according to instructor participants, the majority of students submitted to portfolio receiving passing results.

Instructor Participants

I observed two instructors during the Fall 2012 academic semester, Kay and May. Both instructors taught FYW1100, although Kay’s section enrolled only multilingual students whose first language is not English. The university titles this section FYW1100W.

Kay

Kay notes in her faculty biography that she is a Developmental Writing Specialist and that she regularly teaches FYW1100W, the basic writing course at MU intended for nonnative speakers. During the classroom sessions that I observed, Kay self-identified as a nonnative speaker of English and that she has lived in several countries. Kay has taught writing since 1990. Through my observations of her course, I learned that Kay values
independent work and also individualized attention for each student. Most class lessons allowed five to fifteen minutes for students to work on their writing and Kay dedicated one full class period for each essay to independent in-class writing. For example, on 10/8, while discussing the Speculating about Causes essay, Kay provided handouts discussing the introduction and “proof” paragraphs—what Kay called the paragraphs providing supporting evidence. Kay spent the first forty-five minutes reviewing the document and examples, while the last half-hour was dedicated to drafting point-paragraphs. Later in the week, students were permitted to spend an entire class session drafting the essay. During these independent writing times, Kay always visited each student to inquire whether the student had any difficulties or questions. Although Kay was very open and flexible regarding my classroom observation schedule, she did feel that my observations would yield more useful data if I did not observe the independent writing sessions but instead observed the more formal lecture and discussion classes.

May

May is a graduate student in the English program at Midwestern University. As part of her assistantship responsibilities, she serves as a graduate mentor to eight new graduate teachers each year. This position allows May to receive a two-course release from the typical 2/1 GTA teaching load. May reviews new instructor’s comments on student essays and meets weekly with these instructors to assist them with acclimating to the First-Year Writing program at MU. Prior to attending MU, May was a lawyer in a nearby city for many years. This was her first time teaching the basic writing section of this course and the third FYW course she has taught at Midwestern University. Through my observations, I learned
that May values student collaboration and peer review. Her teaching style reflects a student-centered classroom in that students have a large role in the discussion process and are encouraged to interact with each other through small-group work. May frequently asks students to share segments of their in-progress writings with the rest of the class. One example of this is on 10/22, while teaching the Analyzing a Visual assignment, when students took turns naming audience expectations for an essay that analyzes a visual. May then referred to the *Wadsworth Handbook* to discuss a model example. Near the end of the class period, students had time to discuss the in-progress essays. The result of this emphasis on student collaboration was that students seemed more relaxed and eager to talk with each other and May. It seemed as if the structure of May’s courses was the opposite of Kay’s in that the students generated ideas first and then May followed up with instruction. This created student-led discussion and emphasized student agency in the writing process.

**Student Participants**

While my interaction with student participants was limited to in-class observation, I gained distinct impressions of students enrolled in each section, which I describe below.

*FYW1100 (Kay- Nonnative Speakers)*

Because of my role as a graduate assistant in the English to Speakers of Other Languages program, I had some interaction with the students enrolled in the nonnative speakers section outside of the classroom. As the program assistant for this department, I reviewed student placement test results and communicated with students’ advisors of their progress in the course. Several of Kay’s students had visited the office to ask questions
about course requirements or to locate an instructor’s office. Other than these brief interactions, I had very little contact one-on-one with any of the students outside of my classroom observations. Some of the students enrolled in FYW1100W (the nonnative speakers section) were still enrolled in ESOL Speaking and Listening courses; since these skills were tested and assessed separately from writing skills. An important feature of this course is that all students had previously completed writing courses in the ESOL program. ESOL writing courses use similar assessment practices, including the use of a rubric. Therefore, the students enrolled in Kay’s course were familiar with the program rubric.

My impression of the nonnative speakers course is that students were much quieter than the other students and less likely to have course discussion; students rarely spoke unless Kay directly asked a question. It’s possible that this was a reflection of cultural attitudes in education; students were from a variety of countries, including China, Saudi Arabia, and Japan. Kay usually asked students questions during independent writing time rather than holding whole-class discussions. There was much more emphasis on individual work, and although peer review was conducted, it appeared less frequently than in May’s class. These students were less likely to respond to my surveys as well; only 4 students from this section responded to my midterm survey. This may be due to Kay asking students to complete the survey outside of class. The final survey, administered in class to students during week 14 of the semester, had a much larger response at 13 students. The students’ hesitancy in speaking in class may be due to educational systems differing in international settings, where students are more likely to experience a traditional lecture-based classroom. In “TESOL and Culture,” Dwight Atkinson notes that a student’s culture is too often neglected and that it can greatly impacts a student’s experience in the classroom.
During our interview, Kay noted that students’ culture did affect their writing; for example, Saudi students were more likely to make gestures such as “In my humble opinion,” or to use the word “please.” May noted during her interview that her students—native speakers, who learned to speak English before they learned to write it—struggled with homophones, or words that sound similar but have different spellings. These possible cultural differences affected the type of feedback each instructor gave her students. Despite the more reserved nature of Kay’s students, I was warmly welcomed into the classroom community as Kay frequently reminded students how important it was to have research that addressed the needs of nonnative speakers. Kay encouraged me to meet with her in office hours and was readily available to respond to my questions and provide follow-up, such as the interview follow-up she provided via email after our interview near the end of the semester. I was impressed and extremely grateful for the value that Kay placed upon this project because it helped stress the importance of the study to students in a way that I might not have been able to as an outside observer. (I will discuss these interactions more in chapter four, where I detail the study’s results.)

Kay’s classroom layout differed from the native speakers course in that the course was held in a computer lab (see image below). Students could only do peer work with immediate neighbors and they were not able to move the desks to face each other as they revised and edited each other’s work. As a result, the students enrolled in the course did not interact with many other students. Students were quiet unless they spoke with Kay. Again, this may be due to cultural issues as well as the classroom layout.
Figure 4: Student Workstations, Kay’s Course
Figure 5: Observation Area, Kay’s Course

The classroom layout also affected my observation. The classroom contained four rows on each side of the aisle and each of these desks had two computer workstations. Students utilized the computers for most of the class sessions, following along to Kay’s lectures by logging onto the course Canvas page (MU’s newly adopted learning management system), where most of the handouts and assignment sheets were linked. The room itself had no windows as it was part of a larger room that had been divided into two separate classrooms—part of the plastic room divider is visible in the upper right-hand side of the “observation area” image. Since all computers were needed for students, I had to sit at the only desk without a computer, which was at the front of the lab underneath the projector screen. The computer monitors prevented me from making direct eye contact
with some of the students in the back of the room. When observing, I tried to monitor student conversations about the assignments, student drafting progress, and questions or comments to the instructor. I also wanted to observe body language to tell if students seemed eager or confused about assignments; however, since I could not see some of the students in the room, this was more difficult in Kay’s course. This physical distance made me feel that I did not have as much interaction with students in this class as I did in May’s class, where the classroom layout allowed me to join small group discussions and more closely observe students. Also, this lab was divided into two rooms and it shared an entrance to the other room, an open computer lab for all students. Space was limited in both classrooms. Students could not move chairs to an area without computers or else they would block the entrance to the open-lab. There was also some computer noise (typing and clicking) that could be overhead from the open lab.

FYW1100 (May- Native Speakers)

I had no prior interaction with the students enrolled in the native speakers course. Overall, my impression was that the students enrolled in this course were more talkative and interacted with each other more frequently than the FYW1100W students. These students often engaged in peer workshop and peer review. I observed that May encouraged this interaction as a way of discovery and frequently asked students to review answers and findings to course assignments, such as the activity on 9/10 when students shared their essay sources with a partner or small group. In one group, I observed that one student had trouble coming up with an idea for writing. When asked by his fellow group members for his writing topic, he revealed that he actually did have an idea for the argumentative essay,
but he didn’t feel that it was “good.” His group members helped him by encouraging him to continue with the topic and he decided that he would do so. In this way, students commonly felt comfortable sharing ideas and provided encouraging feedback. Since the students were interacting with each other more often, it may be the reason that these students felt more comfortable sharing ideas and also with my presence. While students in Kay’s course seemed to view me as another instructor, May’s students paid little attention to me and would discuss non-school related topics, such as movies or sporting events, as I observed. In this course, 12 students responded to my mid-term survey and 9 responded to the final survey. Like Kay, May also welcomed me into the classroom community by introducing me at the beginning of the semester and allowing me to give an overview of the project. May also added a section about my survey to the class canvas page and added me to the page with Instructor status. For this reason, I had more access to course materials and announcements than as a “Guest” viewer.

On October 8th, I had the opportunity to substitute teach a class meeting for May. This is another way that my interaction with this group of students increased. I followed a lesson plan designed by May and during this class period, I assisted students with peer review and answered questions about drafts. After this session, students would occasionally ask me questions about assignments, such as the time on November 11th when a student asked me how to cite a visual. In order to keep my own teaching philosophy or pedagogy from influencing the course or my observations, I strictly followed May’s lesson plan. However, my substitute teaching likely encouraged students to see me a source of knowledge in the writing classroom and enabled them to feel more comfortable sharing
and providing feedback. Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to substitute teach Kay’s course.

The classroom was a traditional room with movable desks (see image below). It was a bright, open space with one side of the room having floor to ceiling windows. Students had laptops but May would occasionally ask students to close their laptops for activities. For peer review sessions, students could move chairs and arrange the layout so that working with multiple partners was possible. During the class meeting, students worked with a variety of other students, both at their own choice and May’s assignment. Perhaps due to this interaction, the course seemed more collegial and students often made small talk about course assignments and non-school related topics before and after class, whereas Kay’s course was generally quiet.

Figure 6: Student Desks, May’s Course (“Capitol Planning”)
May's instructor station was just outside of this photograph, at the front of the room (near the bottom left of this image). The room was near the top of the stairwell, so there was some outside noise from students walking up and down the stairs or from the nearby classrooms. Because May usually closed the classroom door at the beginning of the class session, outside noise was limited.

MU's website shows a map diagram of this classroom:

**Figure 7: Classroom Map, Education 206**
Site Advantages

The Midwestern, rural university provides a unique advantage. While some may think that this study will only apply to urban student populations with high percentages of Generation 1.5 students, the university has a growing international student population—the university has even made a commitment to double the 2.1% international student population within the next year (“GSS Minutes 2/13”). The university also has a sizable basic writing population. This high percentage of multilingual students shows that all universities should give attention to creating effective assessment practices for student writers with diverse language backgrounds. The program also features two unique sections of the same course, FYW1100: one intended for native speakers of English and one designed for nonnative speakers. These distinct sections allowed me to study many diverse varieties of English and how two instructors with such diverse teaching backgrounds assessed these students. The program’s basic writing course is also unique in that it allows students to place directly into the for-credit course, 1120, skipping 1110. Due to the sequential learning outcomes of each course, 1100 is very much a part of the first-year writing curriculum.

Site Disadvantages

As with all studies, the site has some drawbacks in addition to its advantages. The program’s set classroom-based assessment policies, including universal rubrics, prevents instructors from engaging in assignment- or classroom-specific assessments such as grading contracts or rubrics with criteria that change based on the assignment. The nonnative speakers are largely international students, rather than “Generation 1.5.”
students who are born in America but speak multiple languages at home (at MU, these students are directed to the native speakers course). These students may have been instructed in academic English in their home countries, unlike most Generation 1.5 students. However, although I have labeled this section “site disadvantages” to clarify its opposition to the previously described site advantages, the features that I have described in this paragraph are not necessarily disadvantages; they merely prevent looking at other aspects of writing assessment such as individualized rubrics.

**Conclusion**

In many ways, the site represents a typical four-year rural university in that it has a mostly working-class student population with a wide range of academic abilities and interests. The writing program is unique in that it uses a standardized, universal rubric in conjunction with instructor feedback to determine whether or not students have passed an essay; the number of passing essays determines whether or not a student is submitted to the portfolio review process.

Student and instructor participants were mostly eager to provide feedback for this project, with the exceptions being the limited FYW 1100W responses for the midterm survey and some initial hesitation of these students to submit consent forms for the project. These hesitations may have been due to cultural considerations, where in some educational systems it is less appropriate for students to voice their opinions and provide critique of an instructor. My physical presence in the course may have also created this initial hesitation amongst students, since my observation area was more secluded than my observation area in the native speakers course and I had less opportunity for direct
interaction with students. While these factors may have limited my early observations, students eventually became comfortable with my presence and were more likely to share thoughts and ideas by the end of the class. The student participants represent a diverse range of language backgrounds—including English, Arabic, Farsi, Japanese, and Mandarin; they also represent a variety of prior writing experiences and assessment experiences due to cultural attitudes toward education in their home countries. Both student populations valued the teaching of grammar, although students largely felt that their weakest writing skills were development and organization. In the following chapter, I build on the observations I’ve described in this chapter to detail the results gathered from my data collection.
CHAPTER IV.

ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANTS’ REFLECTIONS ON WRITING, ASSESSMENT, AND LANGUAGE: ALIGNING STUDENT EXPECTATIONS AND TEACHER PRACTICE

In this chapter, I describe findings from my various data collection methods. I begin with a description of my data coding processes, and I then provide the results of my study and the various patterns revealed through the data. Through the use of feminist grounded theory practices, I examine the initial data and then I observe how my own interpretations of patterns and findings corresponded with the opinions’ of my participants. In this way, I portray the events of the classroom study while balancing my own narrative of events with those of the students and instructors. This analysis of data led to several code patterns that allowed me to develop a better understanding of how participants valued writing and the assessment process. While it was tempting to code the data into patterns that directly aligned with my research questions, I followed the guidance of Joseph Maxwell and allowed codes and patterns to more naturally emerge based on participant responses (95), which happened to closely align with the language of the program’s learning outcomes and assessment practices. This led to codes such as development, organization, grammar, and audience, mirroring the categories of Midwestern University’s assessment rubric. Finally, after I discuss each method of observation and the coded results of those observations, I describe how I worked to ensure validity of my findings through the use of data triangulation.
Classroom Observations and Textual Analysis

In his book *Qualitative Research Design*, Joseph A. Maxwell points out that coding involves the creation of categories that make the distinctions between data clear. Maxwell cites Strauss’s notion that coding “fractures” the raw data (96 – 97) to make themes and patterns apparent. He argues that one way to do this is to organize data by themes and topics (96) as I have done with my classroom observations. This type of coding, which he dubs “substantive coding,” utilizes Strauss and Corbin’s concept of open coding to develop an understanding of “participants’ concepts and beliefs” (97) rather than only those of the observer. Additionally, when a researcher uses observation as a method, Maxwell notes, it is important to provide “rich data,” or detailed notes that allow a researcher to code the data while reflecting accurately the events of the observation (95). In this chapter, I review the coded data and provide analysis of my classroom observations (see Appendix A for complete observation notes.)

I chose my classroom observation codes not necessarily based on how they related to my research questions, but rather how well they interpreted the classroom interactions at play. Johnny Saldaña writes in his book *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* that codes are “salient” and “essence-capturing” to best represent data (3). He cites the research of Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw when he gives a list of important questions for researchers to consider when coding observations and field notes:

- What are people doing? What are they trying to accomplish?
- How, exactly, do they do this? What specific means and/or strategies do
they use?

• How do members talk about, characterize, and understand what is going on?

• What assumptions are they making?

• What do I see going on here? What did I learn from these notes?

• Why did I include them? (146) (18)

I coded the weekly classroom observations according to reoccurring topics and themes: “Drafting, Revising, Editing, Modeling, and Assessment”. These codes emerged from naturally occurring patterns within the data. For each course, I discuss the frequency of each topic during the observation period and I then provide further analysis by summarizing my thoughts on the above questions, noting how each classroom interacted.

Due to my feminist methodological approach to the research project, I used feminist grounded theory (rather than grounded theory alone) to analyze the data. Judith Wuest calls feminist grounded theory an approach to coding that acknowledges participants’ “experience is a legitimate source of knowledge” (128) in addition to the researcher’s observations. To make grounded theory feminist, it should involve a “collaborative analysis of data” (Wuest 135). I encouraged my participants to share how their reflections on my research aligned or differed with my own. For example, I sent Kay my classroom observation notes at midterms, she replied with an email that clarified one of my observations on cultural issues in writing. She gave specific examples of how students deferred to her knowledge in their writing by using phrases such as “in my humble opinion” (see Appendix B). 
Drafting

When coding the classroom observations, I grouped class activities as drafting sessions if students or instructor discussed any writing skill related to development or organization, making this category the most frequently occurring in the class sessions. This category also includes issues of audience. May covered drafting in six class sessions (55%). Like Kay, May focused drafting sessions into smaller segments. For example, on 10/1, May had students brainstorm answers to the following questions in order to beginning drafting "Proposing a Solution":

- How do I know the problem exists and that it is serious?
- What could cause a problem like this?
- Who suffers from the problem? What evidence of it have I seen or experienced myself?
- What if anyone would benefit from not changing the way things work now?

(Appendix A)

May heavily valued peer review in the drafting process (which I will discuss more in the "Assessment" section) as she had students share and discuss their drafts in progress with small groups. May also discussed audience during the drafting process; on 11/6 May asked students to compare audience expectations for the “Analyzing a Visual” essay and compare the class-generated list with how these expectations did or did not appear in their own essay. Again, students worked in pairs or small groups to discuss their drafting progress. Unlike Kay, May often discussed research and specific research strategies during the
drafting process, including ways to incorporate source-research or developing supporting paragraphs through outside research. Kay chose not to do this, perhaps because the next course in the sequence focused intensely on research practices and no outside sources were required for the 1100 portfolios. During my observations, May discussed research strategies four times (36%). Due to this additional emphasis on research strategies, May’s students were more likely to feel that source citation was a strength as noted in their written survey responses.

Kay covered drafting in nine class sessions (82%). Kay taught drafting as specific points and broke the essay assignments down into smaller, more manageable segments. For example, on 9/4, Kay introduced the idea of “point paragraphs,” an idea that she returned to throughout the semester. Point paragraphs are supporting paragraphs that make an example or argument clear. Due to the shorter length of the essays—both Kay and May did not assign essays of more than six pages—students were instructed to make one point per paragraph. Kay also gave drafting guidelines to students for each essay; for example, on 9/10; these guidelines established writing steps for students with sample writing topics where students could fill in spaces to provide evidence for point paragraphs.

The document reminds students to answer the following questions as they draft an essay for “Proposing a Solution”:

What is the problem?

What are the main causes of the problem itself?

Who or what causes it?
Who does it affect? (Think about different groups of people who are affected.)

How long has it been in existence?

What will happen if the problem isn’t eliminated?

What information from outside sources can you utilize to support the seriousness of the problem? (“Proposing a Solution: Drafting Guidelines #1”)

These guidelines assisted students with developing point paragraphs in support of thesis statements. Both May and Kay structured their drafting sessions to include five “first” drafts and five “final drafts,” with the option of revising two of these essays for the final portfolio of writing.

**Revising**

For my coding purposes, revision and revising refers to discussion of completed intermediate drafts in preparation of turning in a final draft. Midwestern University’s writing program requires students to turn in a first draft of all essays for teacher feedback—no rubric is assigned at this stage—and also a final draft, which is commented on by the instructor and includes a rubric. In “Conducting Writing Assignments,” Richard Leahy refers to the revision stage of writing as a crucial component to process-based writing, stating:

> Revision is the stage at which many writers finally find focus and shape for what they want to say. It might be considered the most important stage in the whole writing process, the stage where raw material is turned into coherent,
readable communication. It is also the stage that many student writers misunderstand (confusing it with making surface corrections) or just don’t allow time for. (52)

As Leahy states, revision is an important step for basic writers—and all writers—still adjusting to the goals of the college writing classroom. Like Kay, May discussed specific revision strategies based on the criteria for each assignment, focusing on a specific part of the text (9%). On 9/10, May distributed a worksheet compiled of thesis statements taken directly from the student’s drafts. Students selected and revised one of the thesis statements and shared how they felt they had improved each statement. May clarified that an effective thesis statement does the following:

Identifies a debatable or arguable issue

Clearly identifies the author’s position on the issue

Has an anti thesis (an opposing statement that one could make)

Uses words that are clearly understandable by the reader

Suggestions how or why the author takes his/her position (Appendix A)

May asked them to discuss certain thesis statements and how the statements did or did not embody the above criteria. In addition to these small-scale revision activities, May also encouraged whole essay feedback. On 11/6, students took turns reading their essays aloud to another person. On this session, May encouraged students to share how they felt about this activity as well as feedback for their partners. May noted in her interview that she found this type of revision strategy assisted students in finding errors that they may not
have otherwise noticed. May repeatedly assigned peer review as a means of revision and assessment; she mentions the importance of this in her instructor interviews. According to May, group work and peer work is a way for students to become more independent writers.

Kay discussed revision in three class sessions (27%). As she did with drafting, Kay listed specific rules and guidelines for revision. On 9/4, she listed several grammatical rules on the chalkboard and instructed that students should compose essay drafts with no more than 15 errors, inferring through the use of a model that these errors were most likely to be grammatical. This was one of the few times during the observation that Kay taught grammar on a whole-class scale. More often, she individualized grammar instruction, working with students as they drafted essays at their computer workstations or through the use of teacher feedback. In addition to her intensive instruction on point-paragraphs, Kay encouraged her students to focus on sentence-level concerns when revising. This may be due to what Kay noted in her instructor interview, that students were more likely to not pass an essay based on word choice rather than organization or development.

Editing

For the purposes of this study, I refer to editing as writing work at the sentence-level. Although many of the out of class conference sessions may have included editing, I coded such sessions only if I heard or saw these actions. Likely, though, the percentage of editing instruction in each course is higher due to peer review or teacher conferences.

May discussed editing skills in four class sessions (36%), while Kay discussed editing in two class sessions (18%). May’s editing sessions focused more on style and
arrangement than rule-based grammatical instruction. On 11/6, May wrote a series of sentences, which were taken from student essays, on the board. Students worked in small groups to edit the sentences. May encouraged students not to simply correct the sentences, but also to experiment with style by adding or removing conjunctions or punctuation. Students then discussed the effects of the edits on the author’s arguments. Kay, however, mostly chose to talk about more traditional grammatical concepts. That she only discussed grammar issues twice during the observation period is surprising given that Kay’s students struggled most with grammar, according to Kay’s interview and the student’s own survey responses. However, Kay noted that she focused much of her grammar instruction in feedback and individual conferences, and she felt that grammatical issues varied widely based on a student’s home language. Based on survey responses, Kay’s students were highly aware of their issues with grammar and noted specific syntax and grammar issues that they struggled with, often noting verb tense as one of these issues. Kay’s whole class grammar instruction focused on issues that would be most helpful to all students. On 9/4, she distributed a handout taken from Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab (OWL) tilted “Using Commas.” This document listed a series of rules that students could follow when editing their writing. As she noted in her instructor interview, Kay also referred students to the textbook for additional grammar support. Some students expressed desire for even more grammatical instruction.

*Modeling*

Modeling refers to any time that an instructor used a writing model to teach a concept. These may have been from a student or from a professional author; they may have
been in the textbook or from a "real-world" writing sample, such as a blog or newspaper. Shirley Wilson Logan writes that models are an important way of encouraging diverse varieties of English in the writing classroom (183). Models were used in four of May's classes (36%) and four of Kay's classes (36%). May used models not only as examples for writing but as possible sources, given her instructional emphasis on source research. She used a mix of student and professional models, such as her assigning the essay “Buzzworm” to teach the essay assignment “Justifying an Evaluation,” or the various student models she used to teach revision. Kay’s models were mostly professional with the exception of student models in the textbook. She suggested students use online sources, not to perform research, but as a way to brainstorm topic ideas, so students may have found writing models on their own. On 10/1, Kay assigned “The Gorge Yourself Environment” from St. Martin’s Guide to Writing to assist students with the “Speculating about Causes” essay assignment. Kay discussed the essay using vocabulary from their own essays, having students describe the reasoning in each point-paragraph and how the author developed a counterargument. With the exception of the final essay, which asked students to analyze a restaurant menu, the model essays came from the textbook. In both May and Kay’s courses, student models were used for revision purposes, while professional models were examined more as an approach to writing about a topic.

Assessment

When coding my data, I used assessment to describe any class session which discusses or enforces assessment practices for the course, including self-assessment, peer review, rubrics, or the portfolio process. This also includes in-class conferencing time.
Classroom-based assessment strategies for both courses were largely regulated by the program-wide assessment policies, including the use of a universal rubric and a process-based, portfolio system of writing. In both course, students completed five drafts and five final essays, with the option of revising two of the essays to a passing grade. Students received written feedback alone on the first draft, while final drafts received a grade of “Almost Pass,” “No Pass,” or “Pass.” Two passing essays were required for portfolio submission, although students could still receive a final grade of no pass if the two portfolio evaluators did not pass the portfolio. Both instructors combined the use of the rubric and teacher feedback with other assessments, mostly various forms of peer review and conferencing. Coincidentally, both instructors covered assessment in class six times (55%) during the total observation period. In both cases, exit assessment (such as portfolio review) was discussed at the beginning at the end of the semester, while individual essay assessment was discussed the rest of the time, largely through peer review. Both instructors tended to focus assessment their discussion of assessment criteria near the due date of the final essay drafts.

All instructors in the Midwestern University FYW program use a master course syllabus and achievement requirements, modifying the documents for their own course. The course assessments policies are similar in both May and Kay’s courses. May lists assessment criteria on pages 8 – 11 of her course syllabus. She summarizes the requirements for passing the course:
SUMMARY: REQUIREMENTS FOR PASSING GSW 1100

In summary, to pass [MU] 1100 and go on to [MU] 1120, you must meet the following requirements:

- Write at least two clearly **Passing** (not **Almost Passing**) expository essays.
- Turn in all five fully-developed and revised essays, including all drafts and prewriting, on time.
- Turn in all other written assignments (blog entries, daily homework, Values Exploration Sheets, completed Rubrics, etc.) on time.
- Attend classes. (Excessive absences will result in your portfolio's ineligibility for the assessment process.)
- Complete assigned readings and actively participate in class discussion and group work.
- Attend a minimum of two required conferences.
- Complete the self-guided library tour on time.
- Pass the portfolio assessment at the [MU] 1100/1110 level.

Figure 8: Syllabus Excerpt: Assessment Criteria

May frequently uses informal, small-group peer assessment in addition to program-mandated approaches such as the course rubric. Each time a lesson or principle was introduced, students would organize into small groups to talk about how the approach
could apply to their own writing. For example, on 10/8, students did peer review sessions to assess each other’s counterargument. On 10/9, the entire class session was devoted to peer review at the whole-essay level. During these peer review sessions, students would sometimes read part or all of their essays aloud. May stated in her instructor interview that this was a way for students to become better at self-assessment. In the survey responses, her students were more likely to say that May’s assessments made them feel good about their writing.

Kay lists assessment policies and criteria in pages 7 – 9 of her course syllabus. There are sections titled Essay Grades, the Portfolio Assessment Process, Course Grades, and Policy for Portfolio Appeals. Kay describes the criteria for a passing essay as follows:

• A **Passing (P)** essay shows good control in all of the categories of the rubric. Although there may be 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 quite passing but it is close to being a passing essay.

• A **No-Passing (NP)** essay shows a serious weakness in at least one category of the rubric, and most of the other categories need considerable attention too. The overall quality of the essay is significantly hindered because of these weaknesses. (Appendix A)
During the semester, Kay’s assessment strategies mostly consisted on teacher feedback and the rubric. Students did some peer review, but mostly did independent work. Kay greatly valued conferences as part of the assessment process and included both out of class individual conferences and during class conferences, such as on 10/8 when she provided individual conferences during class time for students who wanted extra help. Students did not participate in peer review during my observations but frequently had conferences with Kay during class. Kay also encouraged students to become better at self-assessment, and many of her students showed great awareness of their writing skills and areas for improvement. Four of her students requested not to be submitted for final portfolio so that they could have more time to work on the writing skills.

Although it was mentioned in the course syllabi, neither instructor utilized the rubric criteria in their assignment sheets. However, based on their survey responses, students still felt that the rubric was helpful to them when revising or starting a new essay.

**Student Surveys**

Anonymous online student surveys were another means of gathering student input. I chose to create online surveys for ease of student access and so that I could more easily view patterns within responses. These surveys were given at midterms and at finals during the Fall 2012 academic semester. This procedure allowed me to gain valuable information without having students sacrifice their privacy. In this sense, student responses helped to shape the course of my study and served as a comparison for my personal observations. (See Appendix C and Appendix D for midterm and final survey questions and responses.)

*Midterm Survey*
Seventeen students responded to the online ten-question midterm survey during the two-week response period, beginning when I introduced the survey on October 8th until I closed the survey on October 22nd. May’s students took the survey in class while Kay’s students completed the survey at home. Four respondents were from Kay’s course (24%) and thirteen were from May’s course (76%). Since there were 30 students enrolled in the course, the total response rate was 57%.

Questions one through three asked students to provide background information, including to identify their race or ethnicity—noting that this was optional—and also to respond with any previous writing courses taken at this institution. From May’s class, three students identified as African American, nine students identified as Caucasian, and one student identified as African-Nigerian. Of these students, all reported that English was their home language with the exception of the student identifying as Nigerian, who reported Yoruba as his home language. This is significant because it shows that even though this student had the option to enroll in a class for nonnative speaking students, he chose to enroll in the native-speaking course. The program allows students with a degree from an American high school to opt out of ESOL course work and placement; this likely was the cause of his enrolling in this section. Of the FYW1100W respondents, one identified as Japanese, with Japanese as her native language, one student identified as Saudi Arabian, with Arabic as his home language, and two students identified as Chinese, with Chinese being their native language.

None of May’s students had any prior coursework at MU or other college-level writing coursework. All of the students enrolled in FYW1100W had previously completed
ESOL writing coursework at MU. Two of these students had taken two prior courses while the remaining two had taken one writing course. This means that this group of students had prior experience with academic English, college-level writing, and the assessment policies of the university. The students were familiar with the language of assessment, which is why there is less variance between their survey responses at the beginning of the semester and the end of the semester. The students enrolled in May’s course, FYW1100, had the most noticeable change in their survey responses, and by the end of the semester, had begun to talk about their writing using terms specific to the program rubric. I will discuss these responses in detail now.

Question four asked students to discuss their greatest strengths as a writer. I wanted to understand how students felt about their writing and what “good” writing meant to them as indicated by the features they considered writing strengths. I then compared these by course. Since students could mention multiple features as strengths, the response totals are greater than 100%. Some students mentioned several features as perceived writing strengths, while two students (15%) felt that they had no writing strengths. Both of these students were native English speakers enrolled in FYW1100, with one student identifying as African American and the other identifying as Caucasian. Seven students (54%) felt that organization was a strength, while the majority of students, 8 (62%), listed some type of development as a strength, with thesis statements, counterarguments, introductions, or idea generation being reoccurring responses. Four students (31%) listed creativity as a writing strength. These students were enrolled in FYW1100 and had not taken prior writing courses. Additionally, these students were most likely to list “ideas” as a strength (which I categorized as “development”). Neither of these features is listed as a
writing feature on the program rubric, with which these students were just becoming familiar. Thus, these earlier student responses were less likely to contain the language of the program rubric when describing their writing. I will discuss this more in detail in the section describing the final survey.

**Figure 9: Perceived Student Strengths (Midterm)**

Question five asked students to discuss what they would like to improve on in their writing. Again, students were invited to select multiple features. The two students (15%) who had listed “no strengths” in question four commented that they would like to improve “everything.” The most commonly noted writing weakness was at the sentence-level. Six students (46%) noted grammar or syntax as something that they needed to improve. This is significant because it varies from the instructor response, where May noted that most of her students did not pass the “Development” and “Organization” features—which most students had listed as strengths. Three of the four FYW1100W students noted that their grammar needed improvement, but also noted other features such as transitions. These
students seemed to have a greater awareness of their writing, as their responses aligned with what their instructor, Kay, felt was their greatest struggle with writing: grammar and syntax. The remaining weaknesses were noted only sporadically: two students (15%) listed organization, three students (23%) listed development, three noted clarity (23%), one mentioned source citation (7%), and one student (7%) mentioned audience.

**Figure 10: Perceived Student Weaknesses (Midterm)**

I wanted to understand how students were beginning to think about assessment practices in the course, so the next set of questions inquired about the program rubric and instructor feedback. Question six asked students to discuss how the universal rubric helped them improve their writing, while question seven asked students to consider how, if at all, the rubric might be improved. Four students (30%) felt that the rubric improved organization in their essays (noting no specific ways), and another four students (30%) responded that the rubric helped them write future essays. This implies that the rubric is
perceived as final assessment and that it’s intended not for revision but for future writing projects. Students might have had a different view if rubrics were given for first drafts and not only final drafts. Another four students (30%) commented that the rubric made it easy to see specific areas for improvement. One student (7%) felt that the rubric helped with development; this is the section FYW1100 students were most likely to fail so ideally, a higher percentage of students should feel that the rubric assists them with this writing feature. One student (7%) felt that the rubric helped them get a better grade and another (7%) felt that it assisted him with grammar. Overall, students seemed to appreciate that the rubric makes the criteria necessary for a passing grade clearer to them. As far as ways the rubric could be improved, eight students (80%) either weren’t sure or had no suggestions, while two students (15%) felt that there was too much detail on the rubric and its categories should be simplified. Two students (15%) felt that there was not enough explanation on the rubric itself and one (7%) felt that that the program should not require students to pass all sections. At Midwestern University, students are required to pass all sections of the writing rubric in order to have a passing essay; two passing essays out of five are required to be submitted to portfolio review. There were no patterns regarding participants’ course enrollment or home language in these responses.
The course rubric is paired with instructor feedback. Midwestern University’s writing program emphasizes that instructor feedback—when paired with the rubric—is
the most important part of the assessment process, stating in its portfolio guidebook that, “The (FYW) rubric is not intended as a substitute for an instructor’s narrative comments but rather as a complement to them ("Paper Evaluation Rubric"). For this reason, questions eight and nine ask student to describe how the instructor’s feedback has helped them to improve their writing and how the instructor’s might improve her feedback. Similarly to the rubric, five students (38%), viewed feedback as something that was most helpful to future essays. Students knew what they needed to work on in future essays and not necessarily what they needed to improve in the essay with the actual instructor feedback. Since students receive instructor feedback even on intermediate drafts, it seems that they view revision as the creation of a new essay. Four students (30%) felt that instructor comments helped them improve essay development. This is the area that May felt her students were less likely to pass. Two students (15%) felt that feedback helped them with editing current essays (rather than—or perhaps in addition to—drafting new essays), while only one student (7%) felt that the feedback assisted with grammar. This student was enrolled in Kay’s course. Ideally, this percentage should have been higher since Kay’s students were least likely to pass the grammar and syntax section of the rubrics. Two students (15%), both in May’s course, felt that their teacher’s feedback made them feel good about their writing. Students in both sections were hesitant to provide feedback about what could be improved in their instructor’s comments. 15 students, or 88% of students, were happy with their instructors’ comments or were not sure what she could improve upon. One student (7%) wanted more instructor feedback, while one of Kay’s students (7%) requested more feedback on grammar issues.
The final question of the midterm survey, question ten, asked students “How do you think instructors can help students ease the transition between the type of English you use at home to the academic English we use in [MU]?” I had anticipated that thinking of language in terms of home language and academic language would be a new idea to students and that students might be hesitant or unable to respond. However, the participant responses were thoughtful and detailed, proving that this is something students had considered and have strong opinions about. Only one student (7%) felt that this kind of pedagogy was not needed in the writing classroom. Four students (30%) felt that a greater variety of writing assignments was needed, while another four students (30%) noted that the course needed more diverse reading and writing models. Two students (7%) felt that simply talking about home language vs. academic language would be helpful, while one

**Figure 12: Thoughts on Teacher Feedback (Midterm)**
student (7%) wanted to talk about vocabulary and another student (7%) wanted more writing conferences to assist him with the transition to academic writing. 

*Final Survey*

My goals for the final survey were to see not only how students changed the way they thought and talked about writing, but also to see how students considered the assessment process now that they were familiar with it and were ready to submit their writing portfolios for instructor review. I was concerned that this survey might have a lower response rate, due to its coinciding with the busy end of the semester time period. However, since Kay allowed her students to complete the survey in class, there was a much higher response rate for FYW1100W students at 13 respondents compared to the midterm survey’s four respondents. For this survey, 22 students total responded to the final survey, out of 30 total participants, giving this survey a response rate of 73%. Of the respondents, 13 were from Kay’s class (60%) and 9 were from May’s class (40%). Students completed the survey from the day it was introduced, on 11/26, until 12/4.

In an attempt to improve the response rate for this final survey, I did not ask students to provide race, nationality, or home language as I posited that these identifying factors may have contributed to students lower response rates for the midterm survey. Students may have been hesitant that their responses would be able to be linked back to them rather than remain anonymous. I did not share any student responses with the instructors until after the course was completed. While it is impossible to know the exact cause of the boost in response rate, it may also be likely that students were more familiar with the course and its assessment process and had more insights to contribute.
I introduced the survey to students during the last week of classes; the survey remained open until one week after final exams were completed. My rationale for this is that students may wish to provide new insights once the portfolio process was complete; however, none chose this option. I also chose not to send a reminder about this survey as I did not want to take more class time than necessary; however, Kay reminder her students via email at the end of the week.

For questions one and two, I again wanted to see what students viewed as their greatest writing strengths and what they would like to improve in their writing. Responses were much more detailed and specific than the responses to the same questions at midterms. Students were also more likely to talk about writing as a process using keywords such as “revision,” “editing,” and “drafting.” Students overwhelmingly listed features of development and organization as strengths. Nine students (41%) listed development as a strength, noting specific examples from the rubric language, such as thesis statements, counterarguments, and introductions. Eight students (36%) listed organization as a strength and one student (5%) listed grammar as his strength (this student was enrolled in Kay’s course). May’s class emphasized source research more; these students were more likely to think of sources as a strength. This is likely due to May teaching source research as part of the drafting process. Three of her students (17% of total respondents) felt that source citation was a writing strength. Two students (9%) felt that they composed strong first drafts. Only one student (5%) felt that he had no writing strengths at all. This percentage was down from 15% in the midterm responses. Interestingly, no students listed creativity as a writing strength, despite 31% stating this was a strength in the midterm survey response. This shows that students were thinking
and talking about writing in the terms of assessment practices. Since neither instructor nor the rubric mentioned creativity, students likely stopped considering it a strength in writing. None of Kay’s students had listed creativity, as they had more familiarity with assessment and the writing values at this university. Half of May’s students had listed creativity, showing that they were not yet familiar with assessment at this institution, where creativity may be valued but is not listed as a criterion for assessment.
Figure 13: Perceived Strengths and Weaknesses (Final)

Question three asks students whether or not the rubric had helped them improve their writing and invited them to explain why or why not. 17 students (77%) felt that the rubric had helped them, nothing that it “made revision easier” and that it gave concrete “ways to improve” writing. Students seemed to agree that the rubric made revision—if not the actual assessment—clearer, frequently mentioning variations of “specificity” in their responses. Only four students (18%) did not find the rubric helpful, with one of these students noting that instructor conference and teacher feedback were more helpful. One participant found the rubric helpful but did not use it, writing, “The rubric would have
definitely helped me improve my writing. It told me exactly what I needed to do. But I never bothered to look at it.”

![Figure 14: Rubric Helpfulness (Final)](image)

Since so much of language variety and dialects focuses on sentence-level issues, I wanted to know how students felt about grammar and writing. This question also explored issues of validity in Midwestern University’s writing rubric, from a student’s perspective, to determine if students felt that the instructor accurately assessed perceived student weaknesses via the rubric. Question four asks students how important grammar is to them and whether or not they feel grammar helps them to improve their writing. 19 students (86%) felt that grammar was very important or important, while only two students felt that it was not. These students were native English speakers enrolled in May’s course. One student responded that grammar makes one sound “educated,” writing, “It does in the way of making your paper sound as though your educated and know what your talking about.”
Another participant replied that, “Grammar taught me to express my thought in different ways based on what level of audience that I am writing for.” The international respondents all felt that grammar was very important or important, with one student stating that, “Grammar is probably the biggest problem for international students.” Thus, although sentence-level concerns consisted of $3/5$ of the rubric’s error categories (Syntax, Word Choice, and Grammar/Usage/Mechanics categories) when paired with instructor feedback, students felt that if they needed grammar assessment they received it. Overall, students had little to say about the rubric, implying that they did not interact with it much. Students seemed to value their instructor’s written feedback more than the rubric, based on their interaction with that feedback and their more lengthy responses regarding teacher feedback.

![Figure 15: Thoughts on Grammar (Final)]
Question five asks students to share any concerns about the portfolio process and whether or not they anticipate passing to the next course in the section, 1120. 19 students (86%) anticipated passing, which seems to correlate with the instructors’ observation that most students pass. Two students, both international, did not anticipate passing. Kay had stated that a few of her students had requested to not be submitted to portfolio so that they have more time in the non-credit writing courses before moving on to the credit-bearing writing courses. Students were hesitant to express any concerns about the portfolio process, or they did not have any concerns about the writing process. One student commented that he wished the instructor evaluated portfolios, as having two other instructors decide the final grade was “unfair.” Students seemed more confident in their writing and their ability to write a passing essay than they did in the midterm survey, when two students felt that they had no writing strengths. The assessment processes did not seem to discourage students regarding their writing abilities and in the case of Kay’s course, it seemed to motivate them to want more feedback on the issues they struggled with the most.
Students appeared hesitant to respond to the final question, where they were asked to provide any other insights or feedback that they’d like to share. This lack of response may be due to the question appearing last on a survey given during a busy time of the semester but due to the rich responses in earlier questions it’s likely that students had little feedback to give. 19 students (86%) left this question blank, while one student commented that the grading process felt too subjective, and three students commented that they did not like the “Pass,” “Almost Pass,” or “No Pass,” grading system, and they preferred a more traditional grading system. In her comments, one student who found the rubric helpful noted that, “the most important part is student can find and correct errors by themselves.”

**Instructor Interviews**

In *Basic Interviewing Skills*, Raymond Gorden writes that coding and analyzing interviews is similar to coding other qualitative sets of data, in that the researcher should
establish categories for coding and then determine patterns for these categories within the data set (5). Thus, similarly to how I coded the other two methods of data collection, I organized participant responses according to theme. I used what Saldaña called “descriptive codes,” a system of coding that “summarizes the primary topic of the excerpt” and serves to condense data (3 – 5). I coded responses based on the four general categories that we discussed, “Error Patterns,” “Assessment Strategies,” “Grammar and Writing,” and “Dialects and Varieties of Writing.” Both interviews occurred near the end of the semester, in November 2012, and lasted approximately thirty minutes. I interviewed May in an empty classroom, while Kay and I spoke in her office. (See Appendix B for complete interview transcripts.)

*Error Patterns*

I asked both instructor participants to describe the reoccurring errors present in student writing. Both instructors referred to sentence-level issues. May noted that students frequently wrote words phonetically rather than how they are actually spelled, referring Geoffrey Pullum’s use of the phrase “eggcorn” to describe these writing features. Pullum defines eggcorns as “a particular kind of error that results from having a wrong idea of what the parts of a word or the origins of words might be that’s only revealed when you write it down. When you speak it people don’t normally notice” (1). May was surprised by how often students used these features in student writing. She noticed that even her own teenage son was using these eggcorns. May said:
Maybe because I wasn’t attuned to it, more so that it’s more prevalent now.

But for instance, I notice a lot of students say “rather.” They write “rather” when they mean “whether.” (Appendix B)

May noted that features such as this are students’ way of incorporating their conversational language into written discourse. She also stated that students were likely to use conversational transitions in their writing, using phrases such as “Okay, now,” to use what may described as “verbal transitions,” rather than “written ones.”

Similarly to May, Kay also noted sentence-level errors when referring to student error patterns. She responded that the largest problem with international student writing is verb usages, although she noted that this varies based on a student’s home country. She stated:

Especially with students from Asian countries and I think it’s because of the interruption from their first language...because in their first language the verb usage is so diverse. There are so many circumstances that ask for a different verb usage and the students are still trying to figure out which types of verbs are appropriate for different situations. It’s not just as simple as ‘is this a paste tense or is this a present tense?’ (Appendix B)

Kay noted that about half of her students still greatly struggled with verb usage and many of these students had chosen not to have their portfolios submitted for the chance to enter the credit-bearing course. These varied sentence-level error patterns may relate to May’s students being more likely to learn English through speaking it, while Kay’s students had
more practice writing it, since they studied academic English and not conversational English.

Assessment Strategies

Although both instructors must use the assessment practices designed by the writing program, I wanted to know what other, if any, strategies the instructors used to assist students acclimating to standard academic English. May responded that she had a difficult time gauging how well her students understood the rubric, perhaps due to their not yet discussing in detail the final portfolio process. She also noted that she’s more likely to mark errors in the writing itself or in conference rather than to use the corresponding rubric categories. Within each of the five categories of the rubric, there is a breakdown of the errors that might fall within that section. She responded:

I tend not to mark a lot of stuff in those sections via the rubric. I do more of that by highlighting stuff in the paper and in conferencing with them. Because I think that part of the rubric is misleading to them. There’s so much of it that it gives the impression that that’s the key stuff when really, I’m more concerned about development and thesis statements, stuff like that.

(Appendix B)

This corresponds with May’s student survey response, where one student noted that instructor conferences and teacher feedback were more helpful than feedback from the rubric itself. This lack of interaction with the rubric may seem puzzling since students wrote in their written surveys that they had no suggestions or improvements for the
rubric; it may also indicate that students had not thought much about how the rubric corresponded to their writing.

Kay responded that her students had an awareness of their writing and their writing progress. This aligns with the student survey responses, where students largely agreed with Kay that their major areas where revision was needed was “Usage/Mechanics” or “Word Choice.” To help students with this during the assessment process, Kay asks students to show their work during the assessment process, noting what they have changed since the previous draft. She also asks to see these changes during in-class conferences. Sometimes, she said, students were hesitant to share drafts and pieces of writing unless it was a graded essay, while others appreciated the immediate feedback. Although Kay used peer review less than May, her interview responses reflect the large number of student-teacher conferences that took place during the semester, both in and out of the classroom. Kay also responded that she used the handbook a great deal to assist students with their writing issues, especially with the concepts of verb auxiliary forms and prepositions.

*Grammar and Writing*

Because students who write in varieties of English most often struggle with grammatical patterns, and because this is a contributing factor to their placement in basic writing courses (Bizzell), I wanted to know how instructors taught grammar in the writing classroom, if at all. As the classroom observations showed, both instructors did teach it—while Kay focused more on rule-based grammar instruction and May taught it more as stylistics—but I wanted to understand each instructors rationale and how students reacted
to their practices. May discussed some of the strategies she used when teaching grammar, noting that she used the university’s “Common Read” book—a book that must be read by all first-year students the summer before enrollment—as a way to teach grammar and style. She examined various sentences and passages in the book to teach how grammar created certain effects. Similarly to her previous responses on error patterns, she notes that the grammar errors she finds her students most struggle with are incorporating slang or conversational English, something that is listed as an error on the rubric under “Word Choice.” May did not express any significant concerns about her students’ grammatical issues and student survey responses indicate that her students do not feel grammar is a weakness for them.

Both Kay and her students expressed that grammar is a significant issue for international student writers who are adjusting to writing in standard academic English. In their surveys, students felt that this was a struggle for them and one student wanted even more grammatical feedback on his writing. Kay notes that her students are very self-aware of their writing struggles and as a result, she focuses her grammatical instruction on individual issues of transference from a students’ home language. She noted the importance of giving models to students acclimating to writing in standard academic English, especially her own students:

The verb usage and grammar usage with international students are more complex. I really have to give them lots of examples. For example, if you were to say it this way... I would have to show the contrast. Whereas with American students, I often times don’t even need to show an example, I’ll just
point and say, 'Is this what you're trying to say?’ And they’ll say, ‘Oh, no, no, no I was trying to say…’ You know, present the different meaning. It’s so much harder to try to help international students understand why their writing is not clear. I have to use different examples to show context...And I have to think about now just sentences, but the context in terms of content. Because often times they might not be familiar with a specific content.”

(Appendix B)

It’s important, Kay noted, for students to read and write in a wide variety of styles to become a stronger writer. In addition to these strategies, she also encourages students to read and write a variety of materials at home because she feels that she is not able to give as many models in class as students need.

*Dialects and Varieties of English*

Since my study is in part an examination of how dialects and varieties of English are assessed in the writing classroom, I hoped to understand how instructors approached these ideas and whether or not students exhibited varieties of English other than standard academic English.

May did not notice specific dialect patterns in student essays but notes that the error patterns that she sees related to diverse varieties of English. She feels that her students consistently use informal, conversational language in academic writing. She responded:
I don't notice anything 'labeled' African-American English or anything like that. I do notice what we would probably say are informalities that I think have to do with the way students talk outside of class with friends and family. Things are in short bursts. They use a lot of verbal cues for transitions and introducing things...And it’s the stuff you want them to do. Which is what’s fascinating about that. They know what to do; they hear things in sentences that they don’t see. They put pauses where you’re supposed to put pauses...but they haven’t mastered doing that in writing. (Appendix B)

To work with these issues, May has her students read drafts aloud to each other. She finds this very successful and students have become more independent writers because they are noticing their own error patterns.

Kay felt that she most frequently saw evidence of dialects at the sentence-level, again referring to the unique syntax problems that occur based on a students’ home language. She responded:

I think verb usage is their biggest problem. Mostly, I would say with the Asian students. The two Middle Eastern students are doing quite well. One is doing extremely well. I shared with you information about his use of transition about how he is very modest and sharing his own opinion. The phrase he constantly used was “in my honest opinion,” “in my humble opinion,” you know. I think it’s because this is a cultural thing. They are just not used to giving rebuttal and speaking up on their own opinions. So that’s kind of interesting. (Appendix B)
In addition to individualized assessment through conferences and teacher feedback, Kay felt that students should have the opportunity to write in a variety of styles. She noted that students already struggled writing the five required essays and drafts, and that it might be better if the course incorporated more informal styles of writing, such as blogs or journals, that might help students acclimate to standard academic English.

**Validity**

Maxwell points out that qualitative researchers have the difficult task of determining what may be a threat to their project’s validity and addressing any issues that may arise (90 – 96). He states that the two main threats to validity are bias and reactivity, adding that any researcher will have bias but that it should not influence a project. Maxwell defines reactivity as a researcher influencing the results of a qualitative project and having too much control over variables (91 – 93) and he recommends that researchers solicit feedback from participants and allow them to review data in order to avoid researcher bias or reactivity (94). To ensure validity and to avoid issues of bias and reactivity, I created a research blog and website (seen below) to share updates on my research process and provided completed chapter drafts to all participants in order to limit my own bias over the
research results:

**Figure 17: Research Website Screenshot**

While sharing my data does not inherently create validity for this project, it did allow me to gain a variety of perspectives and feedback from participants so that I could compare my findings with other's findings. In addition to comparing my own classroom observations and data analysis with the reflections of my participants, I triangulated my data to ensure that the themes and patterns within these data collection methods have some sense of correlation; the coding patterns present in my classroom observations, for example, are similar to the patterns I used to code my student surveys, although not exact. While my questions focused on sentence-level usage in relation to varieties of English, my patterns and codes focus more on issues of development and organization. Triangulation also assisted me in narrowing my data patterns; for example, the theme of research present in my classroom observations suggested the use of source citation as a code in my student
survey responses. Data from each method helps to further illuminate patterns and ideas present in the other methods. In *Composition Research: Empirical Designs*, Janice M. Lauer and J. William Asher write that data triangulation involves a “continual reciprocity between developing hypotheses about the nature and patterns of the environment under study and the regrounding of these hypotheses in repeated observation” (40). The classroom observations allowed me to observe interactions between instructor and student, while the student surveys allowed me to better understand classroom interactions from a student’s point of view, and the instructor interviews allowed me to gain more information from the instructor’s point of view. Comparing the data gathered from each method presented a fuller, clearer picture of the classrooms. These findings represent only one possible set of outcomes for this research study. If I had chosen to interview individual students I might have gained even more insight and learned more about students reflections and ideas on writing assessment and varieties of English. Yet, this method, like all methods, would have had its own set of drawbacks, such as the limitation of having only a limited set of student viewpoints, rather than the larger sampling of responses gained through the anonymous surveys I administered. Still, this particular lens allowed me to view student and instructor thoughts on writing assessment and language diversity within a program’s specific assessment practices.

By triangulating data from observations of classroom activities and artifacts, student surveys, and instructor interviews, I worked with and gathered data that explores how instructors assess varieties of English in the basic writing classroom. May’s students, who had less experience with college-level writing, had the largest shifts between mid and end semester surveys regarding what they felt were their writing strengths and weaknesses.
Kay’s students, perhaps due to their prior experience with college-level writing in MU’s ESOL program, were more likely to exhibit self-awareness of their writing strengths and weaknesses. This group of students struggled with grammar as they acclimated to standard academic English. In my final chapter, I will discuss how this data provides answers to my research questions as well as overall conclusions from the project.
CHAPTER V.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS OF STUDY

In this chapter, I use the findings from chapter four to respond to the research questions originally presented in chapter one of this dissertation. I also discuss how my definitions of heuristics for this project have influenced my data analysis. By establishing codes and then examining these patterns through analysis, I discuss conclusions that provide suggestions, implications, and guidelines for instructors developing assessment practices at the classroom-level. I return to my research questions in order to explore and respond to the ideas raised in my first chapter regarding the need for language diversity in the writing classroom, situating my findings within contemporary rhetoric and composition scholarship. Finally, I discuss possible future studies based on these results and how these studies may provide further answers to the research questions presented in this dissertation.

Exploring Heuristics

Janice Lauer refers to heuristics as an act of “discovery and invention” (“Heuristics and Composition”) within a rhetorical framework. I have relied on heuristics in order to create knowledge from my data collection at Midwestern University and to provide suggestions for instructors who may wish for additional strategies to attend to issues of language diversity in their classrooms, specifically regarding writing assessment practices at the classroom-level. In “Solving Heuristics for Rhetorical Invention,” Thomas Hilgers
notes that heuristics “guide” us through uncertain situations and concepts that are “too complex to be solved via the application of rules” (293). Heuristics can evolve from qualitative data collection once the data is coded and analyzed. Saldaña writes that codes discovered in data can be used to establish heuristics for problem-solving:

Coding is a heuristic (from the Greek, meaning “to discover”) – an exploratory problem-solving technique without specific formulas to follow. Coding is only the initial step toward an even more rigorous and evocative analysis and interpretation for a report (137).

Although I have attempted to make these heuristics a general approach applicable to a variety of institutions, the heuristics are developed from my data collected at a single university influenced by its own setting, practices, and protocol. Assessment practices are effective only if they consider the assessor’s institution and classroom environment. For example, the use of grading contracts would not be effective in a university writing program with a universal rubric system, such as Midwestern University. Therefore, the heuristics following in the proceeding sections should be considered the unique circumstances of any given instructional context.

Revisiting and Responding to Research Questions

As I stated in chapter one, the following methods were intended to align with my research questions:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How can writing instructors design assessment practices that recognize varieties of English usage?</td>
<td>Student interviews (to ask students what has been a positive experience throughout the assessment process or what they would like to see changed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. In what ways can instructors use assessment practices to foster our students' diverse languages?</td>
<td>Teacher interviews (to see what has been effective from the teacher's perspective and compare these responses to students')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How do our assessment strategies account for the dialects present in basic writing courses?</td>
<td>Teacher interviews (to see how their approaches to assessment align/diverge from other courses they have taught)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What does sentence-level “correctness” in college level composition mean to students and instructors</td>
<td>Textual Analysis (to examine assessment criteria for courses) Student surveys (to better understand student interpretation of correctness)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Research Questions Revisited
I incorporated textual analysis into my classroom observation, as I reviewed documents such as assignment sheets, lesson guidelines, and writing activities in “real time” to discover how and why May and Kay assigned various writing tasks. The student and instructor interviews were especially helpful in providing and assisted me in triangulating my own observations about the course so that I could compare my reflections with those of the students. These results, detailed in chapter four, have produced findings that begin to answer my research questions.

*How do our assessment strategies account for the dialects present in basic writing courses?*

Bob Broad’s *What We Really Value* discusses the affect that sentence-level errors—including the presence, or rather absence, of nonstandard American English—have on a rater’s assessment of student writing. Broad noted that issues with “Mechanics” were judged more harshly than other factors in writing, perhaps due to the ease of noticing mechanical errors and the prevailing view that mechanical issues are foundational writing issues with which a student should already have developed proficiency (65). Broad’s theory that mechanics are valued highly because of their disruptive nature may be why both May and Kay noted sentence-level issues as the most severe error pattern rather than development, organization, or another feature, with May noting homophones and Kay selecting verb usage as the most frequent error pattern. Yet, only Kay felt that sentence-level concerns were prevalent enough to keep students from passing the course. Kay’s students agreed with this concern regarding sentence-level errors, and five of them elected to not have their portfolios submitted for review and possible passing to the for-credit course so that they could work more on these sentence-level issues. May’s students,
however, disagreed that their most significant writing error was grammatical; they most frequently noted a feature of development or organization. This may not mean that students and their instructor had different views on their writing progress. It may only mean that when we talk about “error” as a feature of writing, we tend to evoke images of grammatical concerns and easily identifiable writing traits, as Broad posited, rather than other concerns such as errors in logic or argumentation.

One concern regarding dialects and varieties of English voiced in rhetoric and composition scholarship is that instructors may more harshly penalize student writing displaying evidence of English varieties other than standard academic English, despite the presence of other writing strengths. In their 2005 study of writing assessment practices at University of Maryland and Fayetteville State University, “Evaluating Essays Across Institutional Boundaries: Teacher Attitudes Toward Dialect, Race, and Writing,” Judy Fowler and Robert Oschner examined how instructors assessed student essays displaying a wide variety of dialects and how reliable these assessments were across the two institutions. Fowler and Oschner found that instructors more critically assessed student dialects with which they were not familiar. The raters at FSU, for example, were more likely to mark errors in Hispanic students’ writing than in African American students’ writing, since a large population of their student body was African American but not Hispanic and they were more familiar with evidence of African American dialects (118). Additionally, when these dialects were removed from the essays, the raters at the University of Maryland were more likely to give attention to development and organization features than when dialects were present (119). Since basic writers struggle with a variety of writing skills—
not just mechanics—it’s important for students to receive feedback on “higher” rhetorical elements in addition to grammar and usage.

However, while neither Kay nor May specifically addressed the concept of dialect or dialect diversity by name, both instructors incorporated diverse models of English into their teaching practices. Kay discussed with students how their native language differed structurally from English in order to assist them in acclimating to writing in academic English. May had students experiment with style and phrasing by having them replace sentences in their own essays, sharing these new versions with small groups. Students, especially in Kay’s course, noted in their surveys that this was a helpful lesson. This may be that Kay’s multilingual students had spent more time thinking about language difference in their writing; students in this course were more likely to want grammar instruction. Activities such as this, which incorporate Bizzell’s “mixed discourses” approach to language diversity, assist students with understanding the purpose of a variety of appropriate usages due to a given context. This attention to varieties of English may be why students came to the final survey with plenty of suggestions for discussing standard academic English as just one possible language variety, with students mostly suggesting models as a way to show the variety of language available to writers. Interestingly, this is an approach that both May and Kay used in the classroom, again showing how students’ writing values can reflect that of their instructors. Both instructors used a variety of student and professional models, both from the textbook and outside sources.

What does sentence-level “correctness” in college level composition mean to students and instructors?
Seemingly, correctness means the absence of error, but understanding what that looks like in a piece of writing is more challenging to writers and readers. Scholars such as Patricia Bizzell have argued that because our notion of academic discourse is changing, so should our notion of correctness, moving away from notions of one standardized academic writing, as this could portray other types of writing as “lacking,” even though they are contextually appropriate in certain situations. Bizzell discusses in her 2000 essay “Basic Writing and the Issue of Correctness, or, What To Do With ‘Mixed’ Forms Of Academic Discourse” that basic writers are grouped into coursework largely due to their not yet having mastered standard American English (5). She writes:

Moreover, research by Michelle Hall Kells among English-Spanish bilinguals shows why it is dangerous to imply that academic discourse has not changed much over time. Such a presentation tends to give academic discourse an air of superiority that all too readily plays into linguistic minority students’ tendency to see the academy's formal language as "more logical" or "purer" than their born dialects "dialect misconceptions" that lead to "linguistic shame," as Kells describes it, which impedes learning and school success (137). It might be more accurate to say that what has remained constant is the privileged social position of whatever currently counts as academic discourse. Teachers use their own preferred linguistic standards in functioning as gatekeepers to higher education, limiting access along already established lines of class, race, and gender privilege. (5)
Bizzell’s argument that standard academic English serves as a type of “gatekeeping” to keep students in basic writing courses puts these students at risk for attrition, since students enrolled in basic writing courses have lower retention rates; Bizzell suggests that instructors might shift the classroom focus from “correctness” and that this does not necessarily lessen the focus on student skill and writing abilities. Rather, students might learn about audience expectations and contest. Following up on her 1999 essay “Hybrid Academic Discourses: What, Why, How,” she again advocates a type of mixed discourse where students write and analyze both traditional and non-traditional academic texts to deviate from the notion of a single idea of correctness, although Bizzell cautions that unlike in her 1999 piece, the idea of “hybrid” may evoke notions of one superior discourse or dialect being merged with another, something that is inappropriate for such as culturally and linguistically diverse society (9).

Additionally, teaching dialects such as African American English or Southern Midland dialects may unfairly and incorrectly presume that people who identify as a particular race or ethnicity speak in a certain dialect. The problem, as noted by Bizzell, is that instructors need to figure out how to empower those who wish to identify with a particular dialect while avoiding disparaging or stereotyping those who do not. Through the teaching of mixed modes of writing or diverse varieties of English, we may continue to foster diverse languages in our teaching.

Grammar and correctness are often linked, since correctness is typically thought of as the absence of sentence-level grammatical concerns, as shown by the instructor
responses and their discussion of sentence-level issues as the most prevalent error patterns in student essays. Both instructors noted sentence-level issues when asked about the most prevalent issue in their students writing and both instructors taught grammar in the classroom, with May focusing on style and usage and Kay focusing more on mechanics. While May’s students revealed in their survey responses that they felt they did not need grammatical instruction, Kay’s students welcomed it, with one student wishing that there had been more in the class. Likely, Kay’s students had learned English language writing skills as rule-based and were used to thinking and talking about writing in these terms. Grammatical instruction can also help multilingual students learn about language differences between home and second languages. Scholars in rhetoric and composition have debated the usefulness of teaching grammar in first-year writing throughout the field’s existence with many author’s citing Richard Braddock, Richard Lloyd-Jones, and Lowell Schoer’s 1963 NCTE report Research in Written Composition as the birth of the debate, with the authors finding that the formal teaching of grammar has a “negligible or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practice of actual composition, even a harmful effect on the improvement of writing” (37 – 38). Patrick Hartwell complicates the notion of grammar instruction as being ineffective in his 1985 essay “Grammar, Grammars, and the Teaching of Grammar,” pointing out that formal grammar instruction does not always align with real-world usage, citing Mina Shaughnessy’s findings in Errors and Expectations that struggling writers often have grammar mistakes as “performance” errors rather than “conceptual” errors (120), citing Janice Emig’s phrase “magical thinking” as a criticism of instructors who think that students will only learn about writing what an instructor teachers and nothing else (105). Hartwell also points out the effectiveness of
having students read essays aloud to self-correct their own errors, something that I found participant May also did with her students. My findings seems to support Hartwell’s conclusion that “skill and drill” type grammar is largely ineffective and that grammar should be taught within the context of a student’s writing, as both May and Kay did. Student participants, especially Kay’s, had much more positive reactions to the teaching of grammar than I had anticipated, likely due to Kay individualizing her grammar instruction based on a student’s writing and home language. Much of this instruction took place with individuals rather than classroom-level—in the margins of student papers and through student conferences.

*How can writing instructors design assessment practices that recognize varieties of English usage and use these assessment practices to foster our students’ diverse languages?*

**Rubrics**

At Midwestern University, the universal program rubric greatly impacted how students understood and valued their writing. Assessments leave a lasting impact on student attitudes toward writing during the course but also the way that students think about writing in their future experiences. Likely, because both students and instructors had little to say about how or why the rubric was valuable to them, the rubric as an assessment tool was not used to its full potential. This particular rubric was dense with many repetitive categories and instructor participants had conflicting ideas about what categories most corresponded to the errors present in student writing. For example, Kay commented in her interview that students were most likely to not pass the category “Usage/Mechanics,” and noted that her students struggled the most with issues of verb conjugation, explaining that
often for international student writers English verb forms do not match those present in other languages. However, the program rubric lists “ESL difficulties” (which would seemingly refer to Kay’s students) as an issue underneath the “Syntax” category:

**Figure 18: Sentence-level Error Assessment in MU Rubric**

Similarly, May noted that her students were least likely to pass the “Development” or “Organization” sections of the rubric. The error pattern she noted that occurred most frequently—the “eggcorn” or homophones—fell underneath the category of “Word Choice,” under the section “Misuse of Words,” which neither teacher felt was a major category of the rubric that prevented students from passing an essay or moving on to the next sequence of courses. If the instructors could have designed their own rubrics, they may have simplified the detailed sub-categories of the rubric to more clearly reflect students’ writing concerns.
or perhaps in Kay's case, remove the "ESL difficulties" language to refer to the more specific usage errors she encountered in her students' writing.

In her 2012 essay, “How Writing Rubrics Fail,” Valerie Balester examines the portrayal of standard academic English in writing rubrics. She examines 13 writing rubrics from high school and college to understand how mechanics and usage factor into notions of error. Balester found that rubrics tend to fall into three categories: acculturationism, those which count errors to determine correctness, such as electronic tests; accommodationism, which are similar to acculturationism rubrics but make some attempt to accommodate second-language writers (Midwestern University's rubric would fall under this category), and multiculturalism, which are rubrics that incorporate principles of the CCCC position statement on language diversity through the emphasis of “writerly agency” (72). These rubrics do this not only through showing the contextual nature of language and audience appropriateness, but through use of terminology that eschews correct or not correct attitudes toward assessment. One example rubric that Balester points out describes mechanical errors as “beginning, developing, competent, or advanced” (72). Balester also adds that these rubrics discuss grammar as effective or ineffective rather than correct or incorrect. The author explains that, “rubrics announce forcefully how we define ‘good’ writing. Unfortunately, rather than opening a dialog about culturally specific notions of ‘good writing,’ rubrics have become a means for defining a standard in the service of inter-rater reliability...efficiency trumps dialog” (Balester 64). Balester points out that standardization is too often established by creating “otherness” or a deviation from a norm. Rubrics that portray writing as either correct or incorrect have the potential to focus on what not to do rather than what to do.
According to Balester’s criteria, Midwestern University’s rubric would fall under an accommodationism approach since it does acknowledge “ESL difficulties,” but lists this item only as a potential error in student writing and does not define what the phrase means. Based on Balester’s description of a multicultural rubric as an assessment that establishes agency and acknowledges the various levels of writing proficiency, Midwestern University may wish to adapt its rubric to more accurately acknowledge the process-based nature of writing instruction and change from “Pass,” “Almost Pass,” and “No Pass,” to categories such as “beginning, intermediate, and advanced” with no one single category passing or failing a student but rather assessing the essay holistically. Framing assessment as process-based may integrate the process further into the teaching of writing as also process-based; Brian Huot called for this melding of assessment and pedagogy in (Re)articulating Writing Assessment in order to demystify the assessment process for students and to “involve the student in all phases of the assessment of her work” (77).

Although scholarship supporting the use of writing rubrics is mixed—with supporters arguing that rubrics provide needed assessment norming and critics believing that rubrics oversimplify the complex act of writing assessment—a recent 2013 study published in the Journal of Writing Assessment by Joe Moxley supports the use of rubrics as a means of assessment norming. Moxley used a self-designed software program called My Reviewers to collect and categorize information on 100,000 student essays over a three-year period, scored with the University of South Florida’s community rubric—a term reflective of the rubric’s “crowdsourced” designed, created with instructor and staff feedback (3). He found that the rubrics did provide assessment norming and were reliable tools for scoring student writing. Notably, unlike Midwestern University, USF’s rubrics
would likely fall under Balester’s category of multiculturalism as they did not directly tie a passing or failing grade to any one rubric category. The USF rubric also notes the importance of “rhetorically sound” syntax (4) instead of assuming standard academic English as the norm. The rubric dedicates only one of its five categories to sentence-level error, with the others focusing on “Focus,” “Evidence,” “Organization,” and “Format” (4). Instead of awarding full or no credit to any one section, the rater scores a piece of writing at “Emerging,” “Developing,” or “Mastering” level (4). This emphasis on reflecting the process-based nature of writing in instructor feedback supports findings from student surveys for this study, where students desired to see how their writing has progressed. Moxley’s study shows that assessment tools that foster a sense of language diversity and rhetorically-situated notions of “correctness,” still provide solid norming and useful feedback to students; the author notes that the success of this rubric in comparison to others is that the community rubric reflects the “real-world” writing situations in which students might find themselves. For purposes of language diversity, where scholarship discussed in chapter one shows that students with diverse language backgrounds may be at risk for less feedback on rhetorical features of writing and are generally less likely to pass a writing course (Ball; Kelly-Riley), rubrics such as those at the University of South Florida have the potential to provide a sense of multiculturalism while still championing “good” writing:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Emerging</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Mastering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Basics</td>
<td>Does not meet assignment requirements</td>
<td>Partially meets assignment requirements</td>
<td>Meets assignment requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>Absent or weak thesis; ideas are underdeveloped, vague or unrelated to thesis; poor analysis of ideas relevant to thesis</td>
<td>Predictable or unoriginal thesis; ideas are partially developed and related to thesis; inconsistent analysis of subject relevant to thesis</td>
<td>Insightful/intriguing thesis; ideas are convincing and compelling; cogent analysis of subject relevant to thesis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>Sources and supporting details lack credibility; poor synthesis of primary and secondary sources/evidence relevant to thesis; poor synthesis of visuals/personal experience/anecdotes relevant to thesis</td>
<td>Fair selection of credible sources and supporting details; unclear relationship between thesis and primary and secondary sources/evidence; ineffective synthesis of sources/evidence relevant to thesis; occasionally effective synthesis of visuals/personal experience/anecdotes relevant to thesis; inconsistently distinguishes between writer’s ideas and source’s ideas</td>
<td>Credible and useful sources and supporting details; cogent synthesis of primary and secondary sources/evidence relevant to thesis; clever synthesis of visuals/personal experience/anecdotes relevant to thesis; distinguishes between writer’s ideas and source’s ideas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Basics</td>
<td>Confusing opening; absent, incoherent, or non-relevant topic sentences; few transitions and absent or unsatisfying conclusion</td>
<td>Uninteresting or somewhat trite introduction, inconsistent use of topic sentences, segues, transitions, and mediocre conclusion</td>
<td>Engaging introduction, relevant topic sentences, good segues, appropriate transitions, and compelling conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>Illogical progression of supporting points; lacks cohesiveness</td>
<td>Supporting points follow somewhat logical progression; occasional wandering of ideas; some interruption of cohesiveness</td>
<td>Logical progression of supporting points; very cohesive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style</td>
<td>Basics</td>
<td>Frequent grammar, punctuation errors; inconsistent point of view</td>
<td>Some grammar/punctuation errors occur in some places; somewhat consistent point of view</td>
<td>Correct grammar and punctuation; consistent point of view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>Significant problems with syntax, diction, word choice, and vocabulary</td>
<td>Occasional problems with syntax, diction, word choice, and vocabulary</td>
<td>Rhetically-sound syntax, diction, word choice, and vocabulary; effective use of figurative language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format</td>
<td>Basics</td>
<td>Little compliance with accepted documentation style (i.e., MLA, APA) for paper formatting, in-text citations, annotated bibliographies, and works cited; minimal attention to document design</td>
<td>Inconsistent compliance with accepted documentation style (i.e., MLA, APA) for paper formatting, in-text citations, annotated bibliographies, and works cited; some attention to document design</td>
<td>Consistent compliance with accepted documentation style (i.e., MLA, APA) for paper formatting, in-text citations, annotated bibliographies, and works cited; strong attention to document design</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 19: University of South Florida Community Rubric (Moxley 4)
In order to make Midwestern University’s rubric more in line with Balester’s definition of a multicultural assessment tool, the program would need to reduce the focus on sentence-level error and show levels of progress, from beginning to advanced writing skills.

Rubrics might acknowledge the diverse writing situations in which students find themselves by changing assessment criteria based upon an assignment. Instructors or program administrators might consider factoring in the code-switching or code-meshing that occurs in the writing space. In *Code-meshing as World English*, Vershawn Ashanti Young writes that code-meshing, rather than code-switching, “allows minoritized people to become more effective communicators by doing what we all do best, what comes naturally: blending, merging, meshing dialects” (Jordan 100). For example, May’s and Kay’s courses may have included additional discussion on audience and context to discuss how students vary their language varieties from one situation to the next. Modeling is another way to show how writers code-mesh, which I will discuss below.

**Modeling Variety**

Both instructors noted the importance of showing writing models to their students with the goal of exploring purpose and audience. Scholarship in the field of language diversity notes this is an important step to showing students the diverse real-world applications of effective writing. As Staci Perryman-Clark notes in “Toward a Pedagogy of Linguistic Diversity,” students should “learn something about writing when using diversity-related topics and must be able to execute particular writing practices while also engaging those topics” (231). Perryman-Clark situates her argument for a diverse linguistic
pedagogy somewhere between the writing studies model proposed by Downs and Wardle, where any topic is fit for a writing community, and previous fields of thought as expressed by Maxine Hairston, where writing courses focusing on social issues were not appropriate because they left little time for writing instruction, according to Hairston (233). Perryman-Clark’s proposes that students discuss social issues in relation to writing, such as having students discuss and respond to CCC’s Students Rights to Their Own Language. While this pedagogy may not work in universities with rigid curriculums, approaching language diversity issues through modeling of diverse writing and writers is a useful approach.

Self-assessment as a Means to Increase Writer Agency

Rubric language had a great impact on how students understood their writing as indicated by the language students used in their survey responses when discussing their strengths and weaknesses. This is most evident in May’s class, as these students—unfamiliar with college-level writing or Midwestern University’s assessment language until this course—drastically shifted the way they talked about writing by the end of the semester in order to mirror the language of the program rubric and to focus on the goals of development, organization, and mechanics. Kay’s students talked about writing in a way that echoed the categories of the rubric from the beginning, although these students participated in other writing courses in the ESOL program at Midwestern University using the same rubric and similar learning outcomes. This finding suggests that assessments implemented by the administrator affected assessment practices and understanding of writing assessment more so than other practices implemented at only the classroom-level by an instructor. However, both instructors did supplement the required assessments with
their own approaches. One of the ways instructors approached the development of writer agency was through student self-assessment. May had students read their essays aloud in the drafting stages in order to “self-correct” (May's language) their work and to develop writer agency. Kay also had students assess their own writing, albeit in another way. Kay also felt it was important to point out the unique writing challenges of each student, since each student's error patterns depended on that student's home language. She had her students write about what they changed from one essay to the next. These approaches to self-correction developing the writerly agency that the CCC's position statement recommends in order to foster an environment of language diversity.

**Future Studies**

This study focused on classroom-based practices rather than assessment technologies implemented at the program-level. While Midwestern University did have a universal rubric and portfolio exit assessment governing classroom-based practices, I only studied the attitudes and expectations of individual classrooms that I had anticipated would enroll students with a wide variety of language backgrounds. Further studies might examine the effects of programmatic assessments on a broader level or even university-wide level. For example, at Midwestern University, it is worth studying if the attitudes of student writers regarding assessment continued into their writing assignments completed as part of other courses. It may also be useful to study, at other institutions with a diverse range of assessments such as grading contracts or individualized rubrics rather than program-wide, the attitudes of students regarding writing assessment and varieties of English. There is still much to be discovered about student and teacher practices in a
variety of settings. This study does, however, provide insight on how students with a
variety of language backgrounds understood writing assessment within a particular
context, especially in regards to notions of correctness and what academic writing should
“look like” at the classroom-level.

Project Conclusions

The results presented in chapter four revealed key findings about how students
with diverse language backgrounds experience the assessment process. The course rubric
listed sentence level issues as 3/5 of potential errors, despite students and instructor
feeling that organization and development were more significant issues. The rubric also
listed "ESL difficulties" as a potential error under syntax, despite Kay feeling that her
students were more likely to exhibit specific issues in the "Mechanics" section. This focus
on sentence-level error may relate to what instructors and students think about when
discussing the notion of error in student writing: instructors and students both discussed
sentence-level issues when asked about patterns of error in student writing. Thoughts on
grammar and sentence-level errors varied amongst the two groups of students;
international students desired much more help with grammar than American students and
all students replied that grammar was at least somewhat important to them. May taught
grammar in terms of style, while Kay focused largely on issues with verb tense because
many of her students from Asia and Saudi Arabia had home languages that did not align to
our usage of verbs.

Students in Kay’s course had a greater awareness of their writing strengths and
weaknesses due to their prior enrollment in ESOL writing courses, which used the same
portfolio system and assessment language. By the end of May’s course, students had developed a greater awareness of strengths/weaknesses. This reveals that students develop a sense of writer agency throughout the semester. This is likely due to instructor feedback. Both students and instructor found teacher feedback to be the most helpful part of assessment, although students closely aligned their discussion of writing strengths and weaknesses to the language of the course rubric. This shows how influential rubrics are to student’s values on writing and assessment. Heuristics for rubrics that consider issues of language diversity might consider the multiple audiences and purposes for writing. According to survey results, both groups of students desired diverse writing models and assignments. This may help students recognize their own varieties of academic English as well as acclimate to standard academic English.

The students enrolled in Midwestern University’s basic writing courses came to their first-year writing classes with a wide variety of writing experiences and language backgrounds. Their instructors also were equipped with diverse teaching experiences and preparation. And yet, the program represents a typical Midwestern university setting with its large student body, rural setting, and the majority of students residing on campus. MU’s writing program is a well-established unit operating as a department separate from the university’s English department and its major driving force in assessment is the program’s rubric and portfolio system that requires students to pass two of five essays in order to receive course credit upon completion of the writing sequence.

Data for this study suggests that, despite what may seem like an institution with little need for attention to language diversity, its students are not only linguistically
diverse—with both American students and international students listing a language other than English as their native tongue—but have much to say about diverse languages in the writing classroom. In his essay “Inventing the University,” David Bartholomae writes, “I am continually impressed by the patience and goodwill of our students” and this is clear at Midwestern University. Students worked to shape their own views of good writing and correct writing along with the assessment language used by the writing program, most notably in its universal rubric. This shift in thinking, from writing as a creative act of invention to writing as an act that can be measured in terms of organization and mechanics, shows that the assessment values we uphold in our writing classrooms have a great impact on students views of writing and writing activities and if we wish to change possible notions of “correct” vs. “incorrect” writing rather than writing that is more or less effective depending on a given context, our writing assessments will play a large role in this.

Data collected revealed that both students and instructor tend to think of error as something that happens at the sentence-level; this sentence-level error is often the cause of a student’s placement into a basic writing course (Bizzell). However, students feel a variety of issues keep them from succeeding in writing, with most of them noting issues of development and organization, a finding that repeats a conclusion made in Linda Adler-Kassner’s survey of basic writers at the University of Michigan-Dearborn (“Just Writing, Basically”). Therefore, assessment efforts should work to show where students have progressed in their writing, noting where improvement as needed as well as a writer’s strengths. In order to attend to the diverse varieties of English with which our students communicate, assessments might move away from notions of “correct” vs. “incorrect”
through the use of language that indicates progress as a linear path rather complete or incomplete, as noted by Valerie Balester in her discussion of course rubrics. Individualized assessment, through the use of student self-assessments, showing writing edits through the use of highlighting or track-changes, and reading papers aloud were successful approaches used to supplement assessment practices in a way that allow students to develop agency and focus on their progresses rather than focus on weaknesses alone.

The findings resulting from this study reveal the need for further research in the area of language diversity, particularly with writing assessment. Some specific questions for future research are: How does the writing vocabulary gained in first-year writing courses transfer to their thinking about writing in other courses? How do issues of language diversity reveal themselves in workplace or professional writing? Further studies could continue to benefit the field of language diversity and writing assessment. Both student and instructor participants shared a great deal of information regarding the writing and assessment processes, something for which I’m thankful. Their narratives reveal the way that writing assessment and its scholarship has direct ties to personal experience. Thinking of my participants and also of my students in that first course, who inspired the guiding questions for this research project, I realize how fortunate I was for the opportunity to learn from each of them.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Gilyard, Keith. “Holdin It Down: Students’ Right and the Struggle over Language Diversity.”


Ortmeier-Hooper, Christina. “English May Be My Second Language, but I’m Not ‘ESL.’” *College Composition and Communication* 59.3 (Feb 2008): 389-419.


---. “Diving In: An Introduction to Basic Writing.” *College Composition and Communication* 27.3 (Oct 1976): 234-239. JSTOR.


APPENDIX A: CLASSROOM OBSERVATION NOTES

Total Observations: 22 [11 (Kay), 11 (May)]

8/22: Kay's Course

General Topics: Overview of Project and Course

At the beginning of the class, I introduced myself and reviewed my recruiting script. I handed out consent forms to students and answered questions; one student asked if he would receive money for participating and I answered that he would not. Student were much more hesitant in Kay's course to sign the forms, despite Kay enthusiastically stressing the importance of writing assessment studies for nonnative speaker of English. About 1/3 of the class signed the consent form at this time.

8/22: May's Course

General Topics: Overview of Project and Course

Like in Kay's course, at the beginning of class I introduced myself and reviewed my recruiting script. Students asked no questions but 14 of the class signed the consent form.

9/4: Kay's Course

General Topics: Drafting, Revising, Editing

Kay used time before class to give individual feedback to students and listed several grammatical rules on the chalkboard.

[Document handed out: Using Commas from Purdue's Online writing lab]

Kay made a note about visiting the writing center (called “Learning Commons” at this institution).

Kay gave reminders about revising and editing stating that we're not looking for perfect papers, gave a guideline of no more than 15 errors
Kay discussed document which lists steps to find the main idea and topic sentences, as well as paragraph-level support (good discussion of development in addition to rules on grammar), points on argument and audience as well as coming up with questions for peer-review; students must turn in their marked-up draft with questions to their instructors.

Key features were highlighted in orange:

Introduction
Point paragraphs (why is the point important? ARGUE)
Counter-argument
Conclusion (consequences, call for action)

Kay allowed time in class for students to work on drafts and went around offering help.

Kay also reminded students about what plagiarism is; she reminded students to avoid writer-based prose and gave an explanation of these features.

Students read each other’s drafts and gave feedback; Kay noted that students didn’t have to fix each other’s errors but they should try to note what was confusing or what was helpful. Students turned questions into comments and are to be encouraging.

9/4: May's Class

General Topics: Research in Support of Writing

May began by giving an overview of the class's activities including library activity tomorrow. Students viewed the library guides listed on the library's website, created by librarians exclusively for 1110/1100 students. Students spent part of the class sessions looking for sources to look for points that either agree or disagree with their points. May showed the class how to search for articles, narrow searches, and evaluate relevant search
results. May permitted students to use web searches for sources but clarified why that the library provides more suitable academic sources. Students were given time to do some research on their own.

9/10: Kay’s Class

General Topics: Essay #1 Arguing a Position turn-in, Discussing Essay #2 Arguing a Position with Sources; Brainstorm Sample Topics for Essay #2

Kay gave her students some background information on her; She is Chinese but grew up in Malaysia; she has family in Dubai, France, and Burma. Students then turned in their Essay #1 Final Drafts, compiling packets including rubrics, audience and values sheets, and topic brainstorming sheets. Kay pointed out the relevant pages for Chapter 2 (Ch. 6 in St Martins Guide to Writing).

Students reviewed the assignment sheet for Essay #2: Arguing a Position with Sources. The assignment sheet was similar to the first essay but had a new section on finding sources. Kay gave possible topics on the assignment sheet and left blank spaces for the student to fill-in during class. The class then needed to come up with a “does” or “should” question to use as a guiding topic for their essay drafts. Kay requested that students do not use web searches for research, however, she did point them to CNN.com and the student newspaper, BG News, as a way to brainstorm topics. Students were mostly quiet and asked no questions about the assignment.

9/10: May’s Class

General topic of today’s class: Source Citation, Paraphrasing and Summarizing, for Essay #2 Arguing a Position with Sources.

May discussed the difference between summarizing a source, quoting a source, and paraphrasing a source. Students were responsive and interacted with May by responding to questions she asked about source research. For homework, the class had completed a source worksheet where they had located sources for their essay. Students then needed to summarize one of the sources they had located to use in their next essay; a volunteers then shared source summaries.

May passed out a handout compiling students' thesis statements from their audience and values homework. They discussed the five “hallmarks” of a good thesis statement:
“identifies a debatable or arguable issue, clearly identifies the author’s position on the issue, has an antithesis (opposing statement), uses words that are clearly understandable by the reader, suggestions how or why the author takes his/her position.” Students then answered questions on the thesis statement they chose from the list, including how to improve it. Students also compared the effectiveness of different thesis statements and shared examples.

[Handout: Thesis Workshop: Essay #2]

9/24: Kay’s Class

General Topics: Drafting Session/Counterargument

Students wrapped up discussion of Essay #2 by discussing the counterargument and conclusion paragraphs of the essay assignment. The homework was to complete Essay #2 in its entirety. Students must bring a hard copy of the completed draft to class next Wednesday; Kay explained a complete draft as doing everything you know how to do up to the rough draft stage and that it should be a finished, complete draft. Students will use these drafts to meet with Kay for conferences. Kay reminded students to be organized and compile their essay packets at the turn in date for essay. She also reminded students to look at the samples for transitions, introductions, MLA style. She then pulled up a counterargument example before allowing students time to work on “point paragraphs”, the body paragraphs for each essay assignment. Kay frequently walked around and offered assistance when students requested it.

9/24: May’s Class

General Topics: In text Citations

May announced that the course would focus on in text citations. She wrote examples of in text citations on the board for students while students followed along. Volunteers read quotes from their paper and the class worked together to look at how to use citations in their examples. Students then looked for quotes in the paper and practiced introducing these quotes with author names and the publication name. Students then looked at examples that May put on the board.

“Example: Quotation with Identifying Tag in Middle” Students were then introduced to a list of verbs and then used one of these verbs in their citations. Essays are due tomorrow (the same date as Kay’s class). Students then shared their titles.
10/1: Kay's Class

General Topics: Essay #2 Turn in Date, Packets for Final Essays, Library Quiz, SMG Essay #3

Students compiled and turned in their second essay; then, students looked at the third partial syllabus to begin discussion of Essay #3: Speculating about Causes. Kay mentioned that she wants students to become more independent writers; for the first two essays she holds students hands more while transitioning to being more independent for the later essays. Students will have their third draft due the day before the final draft. Students were assigned “The Gorge Yourself Environment” (SMG) to discuss tomorrow in class during online discussion. Students were then given the Essay #3 Assignment sheet to read and discuss. Kay then led the class in a discussion of trend vs. phenomenon. Kay points to where she has discussed this in the syllabus, noting that trends are recent. It’s not a fad but something that increases over time. A phenomenon is about the social order. The causes will be the point paragraphs. Causes should go from weakest to strongest. Kay reminded students that they are not taking a position. Kay also handed out a “speculating about causes” possible topics and questions and pointed out a list of “why” questions in SMG.

10/1: May's Class

General Topics: Essay #3, Audiences, Academic Writing, Partner Work

May began the class by asking how the drafting was going for the next essay. May then transitioned into audience and values. Students listed various audiences on the board (“schoolboard” “students” “teachers” “president of BGSU”) and how students responded with the types of expectations and thoughts the students had on each subject. Students then split into groups and discussed their problems.

They had to answer the following questions:

“How do I know the problem exists and that it is serious?

What could cause a problem like this?

Who suffers from the problem? What evidence of it have I seen or experienced myself?
Who if anyone would benefit from not changing the way things work now?"

Students then spent four minutes writing about their problem by introducing their problem to any given audience; then had some time to think about their best solution and “tested” it with their group members. This would help students as they drafted their counterargument and a response to it.

One students asked if Wikipedia could be a source “in college”; May mentioned that it shouldn't be used in papers. Another student asked if the problem had to be “real”; May mentioned that it did.

10/8: Kay’s Class

General Topics: Drafting, Essay #3

There will be no conferences for this essay; however, Kay will spend time in class for mini-conferences to provide feedback. Essays are due Tuesday.

Kay gave out two handouts: “Speculating about Causes Drafting Guidelines” and “Writing the Opening Paragraph.” This first document discussed in detail each feature of the essay. The second document gave guidelines on the introduction of the essay and transitions into the proof paragraphs.

Kay pointed the chalkboard to describe the format of the essay, with the paragraphs of “Probable” “More Probable” and “Primary” as the list of causes. The class discussed the example of teen smoking and peer pressure to illustrate these points.

Students then examined a sample point paragraph on Facebook. The text was color coded according to the rhetorical move made in the paragraph. There was some discussion about being a credible writer and introducing sources. Students then viewed a list of templates that they might use for introducing sources. Finally, Kay walked around and gave each student individual assistance with thesis statements and point paragraphs.
10/8: May's Class

General Topics: Research, Drafting, Peer Review

I substitute taught May's class for these two sessions. Students did research to examine scholarship of those who disagree with them in order to provide sources for counterargument, examining a corresponding section of St. Martins Guide that described these features.

Students did web research after being given a list of sites such as Google Scholar and BGSU's library web page. Then, students had time to draft their essay and peer review with a neighbor.

10/9: Kay's Class

General Topics: Drafting, Point Paragraphs, Supporting Evidence

Students continued to work on point paragraphs for their Speculating about Causes essay. They were given time in class to work on drafts and Kay was available to answer questions and give feedback to all students.

10/9: May's Class

General Topics: Peer Review

I substitute taught May’s class for these two sessions. Students had peer review forms to complete while reviewing their neighbor’s essays. Students did whole peer review of the essays and commented on the strength of the neighbor’s logic and development, as well as sentence-level issues.

10/22: Kay’s Class

General Topics: Essay #4 Drafting, Topic Approval
Kay began by discussing the fourth essay for “Proposing Solutions,” where student must locate a problem and provide plausible solutions, weighing the benefits and drawbacks of each solution. Students looked at a sample essay assignment and referred to a document “Drafting Guidelines” to determine how these guidelines are evident in the sample introduction. The introduction was written by a former student, a non-traditional returning student. The student’s essay described the problem of a lack of interaction between students and town residents, with the solution being block parties and pot-lucks to get to know each other. Kay showed another sample essay, also written by a former student, which discussed the problem of student athletes and stress levels. Kay clarified that “solutions” mean specific, practical things that can be done to address a problem, using voter apathy as an example. Students then spent the remaining about of class time drafting the introduction.

10/22: May’s Class

General Topics: Essay #4: Analyzing a Visual, Audience Expectations

May began the class by discussing the deadline of Essay #4 with students. Students and instructor collectively decided that the deadline should be pushed back for a few days. Students looked at a The Wadsworth Handbook to discuss audience values, or how these values shape our writing practices. Students then went around the classroom to discuss the audience values of their own individual audiences. One student mentioned that an audience will expect a thesis statement in the essay; another noted that the audience will expect a description of the ad; another student mentioned that an audience will want an introduction to the writing topic; another student noted that an audience will expect source work. May agreed and noted that an audience also wants to hear a plausible explanation. Students then turned in their audience and values sheets for the assignment. May pulled up a website with an article on food photography and elements of photography to explain elements of a visual: lines, shapes, form, composition, framing, background, and texture (“How to Read a Photo”). The class returned to the Wadsworth Handbook to examine an annotated ad (for a mini-cooper) to note what is significant or persuasive to see how they could annotate their own ad. May suggested that they discuss 3 or 4 elements that really stand out to make their argument. Students worked in pairs to analyze and annotate images; after looking at their own visuals, they helped to annotate a partner’s visual. May assisted the class by going around the room and offering suggestions and feedback to students as needed.

11/6: Kay’s Class

General Topics: Essay #5: Justifying an Evaluation, Modeling, Introductions, Criteria for Justifying an Evaluation
Kay began the class by distributing an essay called “Buzzworm: The Superior Magazine” by Illene Wolf. This piece serves as a professional model for the student’s fifth essay on justifying an evaluation. The essay assignment is for students to evaluate a restaurant menu based on a set of criteria. Students must give a summary of the essay first and then evaluate it based on criteria such as size, theme, and layout. Working together, the class created additional criteria and ideas for writing, such as layout and organization; Kay pointed to places in the model essay where the author addressed these criteria. Kay then listed audience expectations on the board, such as the menu-viewers being busy people or families. The class then listed on the board the elements and outline of the essay, such as thesis, body paragraphs and examples, counterarguments, and conclusions. Kay used several menu examples to explore these criteria such as a Qdoba take-out menu and a Subway menu. Then, Kay distributed a proposal form for students to submit their topics for approval. Finally, Kay referred to a handout from the Canvas site that listed all possible criteria for evaluation, echoing the criteria students and Kay had just discussed. Kay spent the remaining class time working with individual students and collecting essay revisions.

11/6: May’s Class


May gave an overview of the course content and asked students how the essay revisions were going. She then reminded students that the final drafts are due tomorrow and that students should bring their packet of materials with them to class tomorrow. May had assigned students to read their essays aloud to another person; students responded with their experiences with this. Students seemed to find this activity very helpful based on their responses. Then, May pulled up excerpts from students’ essays on the overhead projected. The class worked together to correct these sentences. May also encouraged students to not just “correct” the sentences but also to experiment with style by adding or removing conjunctions or punctuation. Once students finished the activity, May wrote examples on the board from volunteers. Then talked about the style and arrangement of the sentences and how this impacted meaning. The class decided to mix up short and long sentences for the most impact on readers. The class then asked questions about citing images; May shared information on this topic referencing the course handbook (The Brief Wadsworth Handbook) and students cited their images.

Finally, May went over the criteria for proofreading and how it was different than revising, focusing not just on grammar but other issues as well. The students listed “grammar, spelling, punctuation, MLA formatting, works cited pages, and quotations.”
11/13: Kay's Class

General Topics: Drafting, Teacher Feedback

Kay began the class by discussing the American holiday Thanksgiving, since some of the students were not already familiar. Students had the option to sign up with host families if they wanted to experience an American Thanksgiving.

Kay then had students open the course syllabus/schedule to talk about the last few class sessions. There will be no teacher-student conferences about this essay, unlike the last essays. Next Monday, students will bring their rough drafts to class to peer review essays and begin editing.

Students then had the opportunity to continue drafting essay 5 (Analyzing a Visual) in class. Kay was available to give assistance to students as necessary. Kay made a note about point paragraphs for this essay, the body paragraphs. Students are working on the essay paragraph by paragraph in class.

No revisions of Essay #5 will be accepted. Essay #4 will be returned next Monday.

11/13: May's Class

General Topics: Essay #5 Proposals, Evaluation

May began by pulling up a proposal form on the course canvass page and reminded students that these were due today. Students are evaluating a nonprofit website (although the site must be a local organization rather than a national one). The proposal form asked students to describe the website that they would evaluate, the purpose of the website, and the positive/negative elements that students would discuss in their essay. May then reminded students that the proposal serves as an outline for the rest of the essay and that drafts of the essay are due on Thursday.

Since some students did not have a proposal form completed, May organized the class into two groups: those that had completed the proposal form and those that had not. Those who
had proposals spent most of the class period workshopping their support and evidence for their essay. This group also created an outline that the entire class could use when drafting their essay. Those who did not turn in a proposal completed it in class. May worked individually with students to assist them in evaluating their chosen websites and what criteria they might choose.

At the end of the course, May reviewed the outline with students. The class listed the following elements should go into the introduction: “Introduce what makes a good website” “Thesis” “3 main points” and the next paragraph should list “Describe what the website is about” and “Purpose of the website.” Students decided that facts, criteria, and the elements of the website should go into the body paragraphs followed by counterargument and conclusion.

May reminded students that they would review and comment on each other's thesis statements in class tomorrow.

11/26: Kay's Class

General Topics: Course Survey, Portfolio Evaluation, Revisions

Revisions of Essay #4 were due in class today.

Students reviewed the portfolio packet and began completing various documents required for submission. Kay reviewed the instructor handout, where the instructor provides summative feedback on the student's progress throughout the course as well as a final decision about whether or not the instructor will submit the final portfolio for evaluation. Students also had time in class to complete the self-reflection and a handout for the first evaluator. Student portfolios are evaluated by another GSW instructor and if the portfolio passes the student passes 1100 and enters 1120. If the student does not pass the first evaluation, it is submitted to a second evaluator who then determines ultimately whether students pass to 1120. All students who are submitted to portfolio in 1100 at least move on to 1110.

Students were able to ask questions about the portfolio process during this class time. Notably, some students had requested to go to 1110 rather than 1120. Kay also reminded students that they may have their portfolios mailed to them if they cannot attend the portfolio pick up session during final exam week.
11/26: May's Class

General Topics: Student Conferences

Students were given time to meet with May for one-on-one conferences, with regular classes resuming on Tuesday.
APPENDIX B: INSTRUCTOR INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Interview with Instructor May

November 12, 2012

1:00pm – 1:30pm

Athon: I was wondering if, just as far as assessment, if you're noticing any error patterns in assessment, things that students are continually doing.

May: Yes, I have noticed a whole series of words that they hear one way and are not writing correctly. We just read an article about this in Sue’s class over the summer and they called them “acorns,” these turns of phrase that we hear all of the time. In fact, I just had this with my son the other day. He came in and he said “what are you saying when you say ‘in and of itself’”? And I said you’re saying—he said “No, no, I know what it means, but what are you literally writing?” Like, he didn’t know it was in-and-of-itself. He didn’t know it was four separate words because he’s never seen it written; he’s only heard it.

Athon: Oh, that’s interesting.

May: And I’ve noticed there’s a lot of that across the board that I didn’t really notice last year. Maybe because I wasn’t attuned to it, more so that it’s more prevalent now. But for instance, I notice a lot of students say “rather”—they write “rather” when they mean “whether.”

Athon: Really?

May: So they're just like little turns of phrase that they hear; they're reproducing what they hear—

Athon: Mm-hmm.
May: Because they've never seen it written out.

Athon: Mm-hmm. That’s really interesting.

May: So it terms of like a dialect. I don’t know if that's on point for what you're looking at, like a dialect, but it seems it has to do with that. It seems like it has to do with how we speak in our normal everyday lives and how we try to input that into what we’re doing in schools, so.

Athon: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

May: So, I have noticed that.

Athon: Yeah. I knew someone that used the phrase “it’s a doggy dog world.”

May: Well, that’s a perfect example because when do you see that written down ever? You don’t.

Athon: That’s funny.

May: So, I read an interesting article about that and how you can work with students to do that. So I plan to do that. And I actually have more grammar-ish stuff built into this unit because I have some stuff for them to do with the Common Read book, where we will look at how the author has used certain grammatical effects to achieve certain effects.

Athon: Oh, that’s cool. I’m just writing notes in case anything happens with the recording.

May: And I see, also, I think a sign of them talking rather than writing. They use transitions, but they use the kind of transitions we use when we talk. Like, “Okay, now...”
Athon: Oh...

May: Things like that, I see are pretty prevalent. And we’ve talked about that—though, largely, I talk about that one on one. I say that’s what you want to do here. They know—they sense that’s where you want to put the transition. But they’re using a verbal transition rather than written transition.

Athon: Yeah. I see that a lot, too. Um, how are students responding to the rubrics? I mean, are they responding to them at all?

May: It’s hard to tell at this point. I’ll be better able to answer that maybe later for you. I am going to have them sign up to do grammar presentations to break down the last sections of the rubric so that they kind of get into there. And maybe see that that’s not as cumbersome as it looks on paper.

Athon: Mm-hmm.

May: I tend not to mark a lot of stuff in those sections via the rubric. I do more of that by highlighting stuff in the paper and in conferencing with them. Because I think that part of the rubric is misleading to them. There’s so much of it that it gives the impression that that’s the key stuff when really, I’m more concerned about development and thesis statements, stuff like that. So. I don’t know. I don’t know if they are overwhelmed by the rubric, or if they even get the rubric. At this point, I don’t know.

Athon: Mm-hmm. Um, what methods of assessment have been most useful to you in the classroom? Is there anything—and maybe it’s just teacher feedback—but is there anything else that you use?

May: Hmm. I guess I kinda try to get feedback from them depending on how they respond to things we’re working on. Other than that—during the hour and fifteen minutes that I’m in here... I don’t know. I just try to gauge it by how interesting they are in the discussion and whether or not they are participating. Or if they are shopping for shoes on the internet.
Athon: (Laughs) Mm-hmm. I, and again, my focus for this project is dialects and assessment, but really primarily I want to know about assessment. So please don’t worry about dialects and what you are or aren’t doing. I just want to be a fly on the wall. Um, but that said, I do have a question. I’m just curious if you have noticed any kind of nonstandard dialects in students’ writing?

May: I notice, um, I don’t notice anything “labeled” African-American English or anything like that. I do notice what we would probably say are informalities that I think have to do with the way students talk outside of class with friends and family. Things are in short bursts. They use a lot of verbal cues for transitions and introducing things. It’s like they know the moves but they are using something other than academic conventions for writing.

Athon: Yeah, that’s interesting. I see that a lot, too.

May: And it’s the stuff you want them to do. Which is what’s fascinating about that. They know what to do; they hear things in sentences that they don’t see. They put pauses in where you’re supposed to put pauses; verbally, they do all of those things. But—

Athon: Mm-hmm.

May: they haven’t mastered doing that in writing.

Athon: Have you ever had them read drafts aloud?

May: Mm-hmm.

Athon: I’ve always wanted to do that.

May: It works really well. It’s amazing. I’ve been doing it in conferences with students, mostly. And they will pick up on the errors and a lot of times there’s a pattern to them with run-ons, or introducing parentheticals—sort of, like at the beginning of asides they’ll be missing their commas. They will say it the way they want it to read.
Athon: Mm-hmm. And I think you kind of already talked about this. But I’m just wondering if, you know, that dialects or error patterns have affected your assessment. Is there anything special that you’ve done for this? You mentioned reading drafts aloud.

May: Um, yeah, I do that. We worked with sentences. Some students volunteered sentences and I wrote them on the board and we worked to fix them on the board. And I also gave them the words from sentences completely out of order. They really loved that. And we talked about, what it was that they knew what it was about connecting words that they knew to ultimately put the sentences together. They seemed to enjoy doing it; I think most of them struggled with it because they were pretty complicated sentences. But, I think that they started to make connections about how to put information together.

Athon: Hmm.

May: I’ve been doing more so than last year, how to integrate sources, and we put a list on the board of words you can use—verbs you can use to introduce sources—

Athon: Yeah. I like doing that a lot.

May: And I had them swap out you know, find a source in your paper that you’d introduced.

Athon: Mm-hmm.

May: And let’s try this. Or find one that you haven’t introduced and put in an introduction to the source in. So, I’ve been trying to do more of that kind of here’s alternatives to what you’ve been doing now that might work better than what you’re doing and having them work in their own paper in little pieces

Athon: Cool.
May: For revisions.

Athon: Thanks. And then the last question is just, is there anything else you want me to know or?

May: I don’t think so. I found it fascinating the other day when you said that students that have grammar difficulties get less commenting on their content.

Athon: Mm-hmm.

May: So, I’ve been trying to see if I’m doing that when I’m reviewing these essays that I've got. And I’ve been trying to see if the GAs that I review, if they’ve been doing that in their papers.

Athon: Oh, really?

May: If they get fixated on the grammatical stuff, if there’s a lot of that do they ignore the content. And I see some people do it, and some people don’t.

Athon: Mm-hmm. And I’m sure it’s so based on context. Because, you know, we have this, standardized rubric, so it kind of forces you to look at other areas. Whereas if we didn’t, maybe it would... I don’t know....

May: Mm-hmm.

Athon: Thank you so much. Not just for letting me interview you but for letting me observe you. I feel like I am learning so much.

May: It’s really taxing on me. (Laughs)
Athon: (Laughs) Thank you so much.
Interview with Instructor Kay

November 13, 2012
3:30 pm – 3: 50 pm

Athon: I was wondering if you could talk about um, what you've been seeing throughout the course as far as patterns of errors.

Kay: The biggest problem with international students are the verb usages.

Athon: Mm-hmm.

Kay: Especially with students from Asian countries and I think it's because of the interruption from their first language—

Athon: Mm-hmm.

Kay: Because in their first language the verb usage is so diverse. There are so many circumstances that ask for a different verb usage and the students are still trying to figure out um, which type of verbs are appropriate for different situations. It's not just as simple as “is this a past tense or is this a present tense?” Even with the verbs that I use in present and future tenses are very confusing for the students. Some, most... I would say about half the students are really getting the grasp of the verb usage at this time of the semester. But the other half are still struggling. And quite a few students are actually telling me that they would rather, you know, even knowing their own writing skills they are choosing to take another semester of the 1110 before moving up to 1120.

Athon: Oh.

Kay: I had this talk with them the week before Thanksgiving Break. And I said to each one of them as they are finishing their drafts, I would just get an idea of how they felt about their progress this semester. And they are very honest. You know. I know some students really wanted to get into 1120 because they paid for this course; but many of them are very honest and tell me they are not ready, you know. So I was very pleased with their honesty
about where they are in terms of improving their writing. I think verb usage is their biggest problem. Mostly, I would say with the Asian students. The two Middle Eastern students are doing quite well. One is doing extremely well. I shared with you information about his use of transition about how he is very modest and sharing his own opinion. The phrase he constantly used was “in my honest opinion,” “in my humble opinion,” you know. I think it’s because this is a cultural thing. They are just not used to giving rebuttal and speaking up on their own opinions. So that’s kind of interesting.

Athon: That is. And another thing that I’m really interested in and I think it’s a great idea is that you have students show their work in between drafts and I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about that and how you have students show their work.

Kay: You mean, show their work to me?

Athon: Mm-hmm. How they show what they’ve changed since earlier drafts.

Kay: Oh, yes. Um, one of the things I work into the syllabus is—you know, obviously I cannot make them do this. I say next time we meet is you must have completed at least one of your points. And I said that it’s really important that you show me what you can and cannot do so that during the class period I can see you know, what changes you’ve made, what you are not able to do, and I would show them and explain to them you know, why is this vocabulary not fitting for the sentence and why this word is not appropriate.

Athon: Okay.

Kay: So they are very willing to show me. There were a couple of students who are not very good about sharing. Most of them are. So it’s just a handful of students who are not very willing to share with me most of the time. Most of the time when I do see their work it’s when the rough draft is due. These few students, I wish that they would show me their works in progress. So, I would say maybe about four of them whose work I would not see until the rough draft stage. But most of them I would see as they drafted each paragraph. That has been really helpful. And I think what seems to encourage them more is I would pull up a chair next to them and I would highlight to them, “Take a look at this sentence. Tell me what’s wrong.” I want them to—I want to see if they can recognize their problems. They say, some will be able to tell me I think the verb is wrong. Some are not able to so then I would tell them. Actually, in grammatical English you would do this way and not so then I’m right there explaining to them how to use the uh, word or vocabulary or how they’ve
phrased different things, you know where to put the modifiers for example. So they get immediate feedback. And I think many of them after awhile really wanted immediate feedback. Once they get a hang of this and “Oh, I’m getting this immediate feedback in class,” then they would continue to share more.

Athon: Mm-hmm.

Kay: It took a few weeks, uh, into the semester to feel comfortable with that. But once they saw that that—many of them did that.

Athon: I like that idea a lot.

Kay: And, uh, that is I found that that is only possible if I teach a class in a computer lab or if they have laptops.

Athon: Mm-hmm.

Kay: If they do it, you know, in on paper then it’s very difficult.

Athon: Mm-hmm.

Kay: Yeah. So I’ve always requested either a computer lap or a laptop section. Mostly, computer lap.

Athon: That is really, nice having the computers in the classroom.

Kay: Yeah.
Athon: I was wondering if you could talk a little bit—and I think this relates to the patterns of errors you discussed—how do you teach grammar in the class and do you feel that it’s any different teaching grammar to international students rather than American students?

Kay: Yes, um, the... The verb usage and grammar usage with international students are more complex. I really have to give them lots of examples. For example, if you were to say it this way... I would have to show the contrast. Whereas with American students, I often times don’t even need to show an example, I’ll just point and say “Is this what you’re trying to say?” And they’ll say “Oh, no, no, I was trying to say...” You know, present the different meaning. It’s so much harder to try to help international students understand why their writing is not clear. I have to use different examples to show contrast. I’ll say “What your writing is saying is this. But what you’re really wanting to say is this.”

Athon: That’s interesting.

Kay: Yeah. So I have to be on my toes giving them examples. Yeah. Where I don’t have to do that as much with Americans.

Athon: So it’s... would you say it’s a bigger part of this class?

Kay: Yeah. Really the examples and contrasting the different examples is one of the techniques I use. And I have to think about not just sentences, but the context in terms of content. Because often times they might not be familiar with a specific content. So the content of what examples I use might be important.

Athon: Wow, I’ve never even thought of that but I can see...

Kay: Yeah.

Athon: Um, and according to the rubric, what areas are students not passing for the most part?

Kay: It’s mostly syntax with these students.
Athon: Hmm. And how...how do you incorporate that into your teaching or assessment?

Kay: There is a section on the handbook that deals with prepositions and I've directed my students to this page. Students are having issues with verb auxiliary forms... yeah...International students like to use electronic gadgets, too. They will say okay, I will use this word but they are actually using it out of context. Yeah, it's similar, but you wouldn't actually use it... I would have to explain that you use this word, when... yeah...

Athon: Okay.

Kay: One of the things that encourage students to do is grab their hands on any kinds of reading materials, newspapers, magazines, the more familiar you will be with prepositions and verb usages. You just have to familiarize yourself with these kinds of words. I don’t think the reading samples I give in class are enough... they need to read on their own leisure time. It’s always hard to read textbooks to improve their language use.

Athon: How many students do you anticipate passing to 1120?

Kay: I would say out of 16... 1, 2, 3, 4, maybe 5 students are not going to 1120. Because they have told me so. And then there are borderline cases. It depends on how they do on their fifth essay.

Athon: In your opinion, what can instructors do to help students learn to write academic English?

Kay: Um....I have this in mind... the writing that they do are all formal essays. I wish I could work in more informal writing, not on any topic in particular, short writing of maybe just a page where they can share their interests, maybe a journal entry every two weeks so students get practice using verbs and prepositions. But the thing is they are already spending so much time trying to write the five essays that are required in the course. I did have a couple of journals before they were bogged down with reading and research. It’s very hard to work in more journals once they start the source based writing with essay 2 so I was only able to do it the first three of four weeks.
Athon: Yeah.

Kay: Maybe if they were only required to write four essays. More of those journal type writings might be helpful. I don't think that's even done in ESOL; it's still the four or five essays that are assigned. I try to get them to express their ideas through online discussion.

Athon: Mm-hmm.

Kay: Because that is so informal it's hard to get students to work in proper prepositions or grammar so you can't have that requirement with online discussion. But they have been expressing their ideas which is good.

Kay: One thing I've noticed is that the few students through self assessment who are not going to 1120 their grammar usage is quite severe. And I'm looking back to see how they've passed ESOL to [First-Year Writing] because Donna and I were also evaluators and we make through they have a good handle of verb usage and before they take a [Midwestern University First-Year Writing] class and the only explanation I can think of is they got too much help so Donna and I could not see those errors. Either the instructor or the tutors. By the time they got to my class those weaknesses were still occurring. Even up to this point the later papers.. this cannot be this student passed the portfolio and now this student is making these errors. Even with the portfolio assessment in ESOL 1010, it's difficult to catch students who get too much help.

Athon: It's always interesting...

Kay: Yeah. Many of the students visit the learning commons but they have a limit of two visits per week. I think some of the tutors are catching on the tutors are not there to edit your paper and that's true they can help you improve your grammar but not do it for you.

Athon: Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me today.
APPENDIX C: MIDTERM SURVEY RESULTS

[13 total respondents to each question.]

Questions 1 – 3 elicit identifying information on language background.

Question 4: What do you think are your greatest strengths as a writer?

No strengths 2, 15%
Organization 7, 54%
Development/Support (Thesis, Counterargument (2), Introductions (3), Ideas (4)) 8, 62%
Creativity 4, 31%

Question 5: What would you like to improve in your writing?

Everything 2, 15%
Grammar/Syntax (Verb Usage (1), Punctuation (1), Spelling (2), Diction (2)) 6, 46%
Organization 2, 15%
Development (Counterarguments (1), Thesis (1), Transitions (2)) 3, 23%
Clarity/Flow 3, 23%
Sources 1, 7%
Audience 1, 7%

Note: 100% of ESOL respondents replied with a grammar related issue.
Question 6: In what ways, if any, has the rubric helped you to improve your writing? Explain.

None 3, 23%
Makes Areas for Improvement Clear 4, 30%
Assists with Development 1, 7%
Assists with Organization 4, 30%
Assists with Grammar 1, 7%
Helps with Future Essays 4, 30%
Helps Respondent Get a Better Grade 1, 7%

Question 7: In what ways, if any, could the rubric be improved?

Too detailed 2, 15%
No suggestions/Not sure 4, 30%
No need for improvement 4, 30%
Not require all sections to be “Pass” 1, 7%
More explanation/examples of sections 2, 15%

Note: No statistically significant variance in responses based on respondents home language.

Questions 8 and 9: How has your teacher’s feedback helped your writing and how could it be improved?

Helped:
Improved Development (Counterarguments (1), Introductions (1)): 4, 30%
Improves Organization: 2, 15%
Improves Grammar: 1, 7%
Improves Future Essays: 5, 38%
Assists with Editing: 2, 15%
Length of Essays: 1, 7%
Makes Respondent Feel Positive About Writing: 2

Needs Improvement:

Unsure 5, 38%
No improvement 10, 77%
Provide more feedback 1, 7%
Increased attention to grammar 1 (ESOL student), 7%

Note: 88% of students were happy with their instructors’ comments or were not sure what she could improve upon. Students were relatively happy with their feedback.

Question 10: How do you think instructors can help students ease the transition between the type of English you use at home to the academic English we use in GSW?

Not sure 1, 7%
Not needed 1, 7%
More types of writing assignments 4, 30%
More writing/reading models 4, 30%
Slower instructional pace 1, 7%
Talk about this difference in class 2, 15%
More writing conference 1, 7%
Teach vocabulary 1, 7%
APPENDIX D: FINAL SURVEY RESULTS

Questions 1 and 2 (asked as one): What are your greatest strengths as a writer? What do you feel you need to improve?

Strength
No strengths 1, 5%
Organization 8, 36%
Development/Support (Thesis (2), Counterargument (1), Introductions (2), Ideas (2), Outlines (1)) 9, 41%
Grammar 1, 5%
Sources 3, 17%
Drafting 2, 9%

Weakness
Everything 1, 5%
Grammar/Syntax (Verb Agreement (1), Punctuation (1), Diction (1)) 8, 36%
Organization 1, 5%
Development (Counterarguments (0), Thesis (0), Transitions (2), Body Paragraphs (1)) 3, 17%
Sources 1, 5%
Motivation/Time Management 2, 9%
Revision 1, 5%

Note: Responses were much more detailed and specific than the responses to the same questions at midterms. Students were also more likely to talk about writing as a process using keywords such as “revision,” “editing,” and “drafting.”

May’s class emphasized source research more; these students were more likely to think of sources as a strength.
Interestingly, no students felt that creativity was a strength, although half of May’s respondents had previously claimed this as a strength. These students had no prior interaction with the rubric. Students talk about their writing in terms of the rubric’s features.

*Question 3: Has the rubric helped you to improve your writing? If no, why not? If yes, how?*

Yes: 17 (Specific ways to improve writing (2), Simplified Revision (1), Points out Grammar (4)), 77%

No: 4 (Conferences/feedback were more helpful (1)), 18%

Somewhat: 1, 5%

Students seemed to agree that the rubric made revision—if not the actual assessment—more clear, frequently mentioning variations of “specificity” in their responses.

Notable responses:

“The rubric would have definitely helped me improve my writing. It told me exactly what I needed to do. But I never bothered to look at it.”

*Question 4: How important is grammar to you? Does grammar help you to improve your writing?*

Very important 9, 41%

Important or somewhat important 11, 50%

Not important 2, 9%
Notable response: “It does in the way of making your paper sound as though your educated and know what your talking about.”

“Grammar is probably the biggest problem for international students.”

“Grammar taught me to express my thought in different ways based on what level of audience that I am writing for.”

*Question 5: Do you have any concerns about the portfolio process? Do you anticipate passing to 1120?*

Anticipate Passing: 19, 86%
Do Not Anticipate Passing: 2, 9%
No Response: 1

Concerns:
Teacher should grade portfolios: 1

Note: Students were either hesitant to share concerns or did not have them.

*Question 6: Are there any other concerns that you’d like to share?*

Desire for letter grades 3, 14%
Subjective grading process 1, 5%
No response: 19, 86%

Great point from a student, “The most important part is student can find and correct errors by themselves.”
APPENDIX E: HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL DOCUMENTS

DATE: June 27, 2012
TO: Amanda Athon
FROM: Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board
PROJECT TITLE: [336016-4] A Study of Best Pedagogical Practices for Assessing the Writing of Diverse Student Populations
SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision
ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: June 25, 2012
EXPIRATION DATE: May 10, 2013
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review
REVIEW CATEGORY: Exempt review category # 2

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is available as a published Board Document in the Review Details page. You must use the approved version of the consent document when obtaining consent from participants. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that you are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, those modifications must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the modification request form for this procedure.

You have been approved to enroll 32 participants. If you wish to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must also be reported promptly to this office.

This approval expires on May 10, 2013. You will receive a continuing review notice before your project expires. If you wish to continue your work after the expiration date, your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Good luck with your work. If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence regarding this project.
Hello,

My name is Amanda Athon, and I am a PhD student at Bowling Green State University in the English Department. This semester I am conducting a research project that examines how college writing instructors can best meet the needs of multilingual students and students who speak and write in dialects. I would like to know how instructors can better design classroom-based assessment practices, such as rubrics, self-assessment, and reflections, for these groups of students. This research project will be for my dissertation, and I am interested in working with you as a college teacher of writing.

This study will take place throughout the fall 2012 academic semester (approximately August 2012-December 2012) and is completely voluntary.

If you wish to participate, I hope to observe your course once a week for fifteen weeks during the semester. During these visits, I will observe the various writing assignments that you give to students. Twice during the semester, at midterms and near the end of the course, I will provide written surveys to your students to observe how they understand your feedback to the writing they produce in your course. Each of these surveys will take approximately ten minutes of class time. Finally, at the end of the course, I will provide you with a written survey to understand how you feel the course went as well as the strengths and weaknesses of your student writers. This survey will take approximately ten minutes to complete. The data from my observations and analysis will be used as a way to understand how our current methods of writing assessment do or do not meet the needs of diverse student populations.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study; any risks are no greater than that experienced in daily life. Participation is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. Declining to participate or deciding to withdraw participation by not completing the survey will have no consequences or impact your relationship with me, the researcher, or Bowling Green State University, in any way.

Although this research may not impact you directly, the possible benefits of this study include understanding how college writing teachers can instruct students with diverse language backgrounds. Instructors will understand how to produce clear, effective assessment of student writing. The information collected may also benefit future students, first-year writing instructors, as well as Writing Programs in training instructors to work with diverse student populations.

Although absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed with this research study, but confidentiality will be protected to the extent permitted by law. Pseudonyms will be used to refer to instructors, student participants, and the institution. Only members of the
research team will have access to the information you provide, and your identity will not be revealed in any published results unless you specifically request identification.

If you have questions about the survey, please contact me. You may contact me through email aathon@bgsu.edu or phone at 419 806-4744. You may also contact my research advisor on this project, Dr. Lee Nickoson, at leenick@bgsu.edu, or phone at 419 372-7556. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University, (419) 372-7716 (hsrb@bgsu.edu), if any problems or concerns arise during the course of the study. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Amanda Athon
Informed Consent for Writing Instructors:

“A Study of Best Pedagogical Practices for Assessing the Writing of Diverse Student Populations”

Introduction and Background Information

You are invited to participate in a research study. The study is being conducted by Amanda Athon from Bowling Green State University, Department of English, as part of her dissertation. This study will last one academic semester and is voluntary.

Purpose

The purpose of this research study is to examine how college writing teachers assess the writing of diverse student populations. I hope to learn how college writing teachers understand the needs of multicultural students as well as any barriers teachers may experience when teaching a diverse classroom. I would like to know how we can best assess the writing of nonnative speakers of English and speakers of dialects. This study will consist of a classroom observation lasting one academic semester, two ten-minute student surveys, as well as a final teacher interview lasting approximately ten minutes. This research project will be for my dissertation, and I am interested in working with you as a college teacher of writing.

Procedures

During the beginning of fall 2012 semester (August 2012 – December 2012) I will attend your class once a week. During this time, I will collect data through written notes regarding
the types of writing assignments given to students. The observations will be used as a way to understand how pedagogy is influenced by diverse student populations. Twice during the semester, I will survey your students to gather information on how they understand your writing feedback. Additionally, I would like to survey you at the end of the course to discuss the writing assignments and students’ overall progress in the course. To this end, I will provide you with a written set of survey questions to complete after the course is completed. This survey will take approximately ten minutes. We may also meet throughout the semester if you wish to discuss my research.

I will post updates on my research to a blog, so that participants will know what dates I am planning to visit the classroom and what dates I plan to pass out surveys.

By signing the consent form, you agree to participate in this study. You will not be contacted again after completing the study.

Potential Risks

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study. Any risk of participation is no greater

than that experienced in daily life.

Benefits

The possible benefits of this study include a better understanding of how writing instructors should assess the writing of diverse student populations and how these instructors can accommodate language diversity in the classroom. The information collected may not directly benefit you; however, the information learned will benefit future students, writing instructors, as well as Writing Programs in training instructors to teach writing.

Confidentiality
Although absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, confidentiality will be protected to the extent permitted by law. Participants must be 18 years of age or older. Signing of the consent form indicates consent to participate. The survey data will be password-protected to keep your responses secure; however, there is risk that confidentiality could be breached. Pseudonyms will be used to refer to instructors and students. Only members of the research team will have access to the information you provide, and your identity will not be revealed in any published results unless you specifically request identification.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. Your participation will have no impact on your relationship to me, the researcher, or Bowling Green State University in any way.

Research Subject’s rights and Contact Persons

You acknowledge that all your present questions have been answered in language you can understand and all future questions will be treated in the same manner. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Amanda Athon at 419 806-4744 or (email): aathon@bgsu.edu. You can also contact Dr. Lee Nickoson, my project advisor, at leenick@bgsu.edu or (419)372-7556.

If you have questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of Bowling Green State University’s Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716 (hsrb@bgsu.edu).

Consent

By signing and submitting your consent form, you indicate that you have read and have been informed of the above information and hereby consent to voluntarily participate in this study. You also agree that you have been given a copy of the consent.
Informed Consent for Instructor:

Date

Signed

___ I agree to respond to the teacher survey.

___ If chosen, I agree to have my classroom observed.
Hello,

My name is Amanda Athon, and I am a PhD student at Bowling Green State University in the English Department. This semester I am conducting a research project that examines how college writing instructors can best meet the needs of multilingual students and students who speak and write in dialects. I would like to know how instructors can better provide feedback to students through rubrics, self-assessment, and reflections. This research project will be for my dissertation, and I am interested in working with you as a student in General Studies Writing. This study will take place throughout the fall 2012 academic semester (approximately August 2012 - December 2012) and is completely voluntary. This means that you do not have to participate if you do not wish.

If you wish to participate, I will provide a written survey to you, during class, at midterms and at the end of the course. Each survey consists of ten questions and asks you to describe how you understand your teacher’s feedback and grading practices throughout the course. The data from my observations and these surveys will be used as a way to understand how our current methods of writing assessment do or do not meet the needs of students.

Each survey will take ten minutes to complete. Participants must be 18 years of age or older. Signing the consent form indicates consent to participate in these surveys. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study; any risks are no greater than that experienced in daily life. Participation is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. Declining to participate or deciding to withdraw participation by not completing the survey will have no consequences or impact your relationship with me, your teacher, or Bowling Green State University, in any way.

Although this research may not impact you directly, the possible benefits of this study include helping college writing teachers provide more helpful feedback to students. The information collected may also benefit future writing instructors, as well as Writing Programs in training instructors to work with diverse student populations.

I have passed out consent documents to the class. As the consent form implies, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed with this research study, but confidentiality will be protected to the extent permitted by law. Pseudonyms will be used to refer to instructors, student participants, and the institution. Only members of the research team will have access to the information you provide, and your identity will not be revealed in any published results unless you specifically request identification.

If you have questions about the survey, please contact me. You may contact me through
email aathon@bgsu.edu or phone at 419 806-4744. You may also contact my research advisor on this project, Dr. Lee Nickoson, at leenick@bgsu.edu, or phone at 419 372-7556. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University, (419) 372-7716 (hsrb@bgsu.edu), if any problems or concerns arise during the course of the study. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Amanda Athon
Introduction and Background Information

You are invited to participate in a research study. The study is being conducted by Amanda Athon from Bowling Green State University, Department of English, as part of her dissertation. This study will last one academic semester and is voluntary.

Purpose

The purpose of this research study is to examine how college writing teachers provide writing feedback to diverse student populations. I hope to learn how college writing teachers understand the needs of multicultural students as well as how we can best assess the writing of nonnative speakers of English and speakers of dialects. As part of this study, I will visit your classroom approximately once a week. Your participation in this study will consist of taking two surveys, one given at midterms and one near the end of the course, during class. This research project will be for my dissertation, and I am interested in working with you as a student enrolled in General Studies Writing.

Procedures

During the beginning of fall 2012 semester (August 2012 – December 2012) I will attend your class approximately once a week. At midterms and at the end of the course, I would like to provide written surveys to students who give their consent to participate. Each survey consist of ten questions and will take approximately ten minutes to complete. These
surveys ask you to describe the feedback you've received throughout the course and to summarize your writing strengths and weaknesses as a writer. The purpose of these student surveys is to see how teachers can provide more helpful feedback to students.

I will post updates on my research to a www.wordpress.com blog, so that participants will know what dates I am planning to visit the classroom and what dates I plan to pass out surveys.

By signing the consent form, you agree to participate in this study. You will not be contacted again after completing the study.

**Potential Risks**

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study. Any risk of participation is no greater than that experienced in daily life.

**Benefits**

The possible benefits of this study include a better understanding of how writing instructors should assess the writing of diverse student populations and how these instructors can accommodate language diversity in the classroom. The information collected may not directly benefit you; however, the information learned will benefit future students, writing instructors, as well as Writing Programs in training instructors to teach writing.

**Confidentiality**

Although absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, confidentiality will be protected to the extent permitted by law. Participants must be 18 years of age or older. Signing of the consent form indicates consent to participate. The survey data will be password-protected to keep your responses secure; however, there is risk that confidentiality could be breached. Pseudonyms will be used to refer to instructors and students. Only members of
the research team will have access to the information you provide, and your identity will not be revealed in any published results unless you specifically request identification.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. Your participation will have no impact on your relationship to me, the researcher, your teacher, or Bowling Green State University in any way.

Research Subject’s rights and Contact Persons

You acknowledge that all your present questions have been answered in language you can understand and all future questions will be treated in the same manner. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Amanda Athon at 419 806-4744 or (email): aathon@bgsu.edu. You can also contact Dr. Lee Nickoson, my project advisor, at leenick@bgsu.edu or (419)372-7556.

If you have questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of Bowling Green State University’s Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716 (hsrb@bgsu.edu).

Consent

By signing and submitting your consent form, you indicate that you have read and have been informed of the above information and hereby consent to voluntarily participate in this study. You also agree that you have been given a copy of the consent.

-----------------------------------------------------

Informed Consent for Student:

Date
Signed
___ I agree to respond to the surveys.
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD

Application for Approval of Research Involving Human Subjects – As of January 2012

Please answer all applicable questions and provide the material identified.
Please complete electronically and use current form.

- Applications judged to be incomplete, or vague will be returned to the Principal Investigator (PI) for revision.
- All boxes are expandable so be sure to include complete information.
- 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 5 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 15 – 21 business days from the date of receipt of the application by the Office of Research Compliance.

la. General Information:

Name of applicant (Principal Investigator): Amanda Athon

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 Campus Phone: (419)372-6864

E-mail: aathon@bgsu.edu Fax:

Have You Completed BGSU Human Subjects Training?

☐ Yes (Office of Research Compliance will confirm training date)

☐ No (This application will not be reviewed. See HSRB website for training information.)

Title of the Proposed Research Project:

“A Study of Best Pedagogical Practices for Assessing the Writing of Diverse Student Populations”

Names of Other Students or Staff Associated with the Project (Student PIs note – Do not include your advisor for this research project here): None

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

☐ yes ☑ no

If yes, external Funding Agency or Source:

(Note: 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)
lb. If you are a BGSU student, please provide the following information:

This research is for:  □ Thesis  □ Dissertation  □ Class Project  □ Other

Advisor's Name (This is the advisor for this research project):  Lee Nickolson

Department or Division:  English  Phone:  Fax:  E-mail:

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):

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.
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

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

Please describe in the box below, the provisions in place that will not allow you to ascertain identities (e.g., key to decipher the code/identifier has been destroyed, agreement between researcher and key holder prohibiting the release of the key).

(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 VIIa, VIIb 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 an email from the relevant authority.

☐ Yes ☐ No

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), VIIa, VIIb, 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,” this application will go to the full Board for review).
- [ ] Yes  [ ] No  b. Shock or other forms of punishment
  (If “yes,” this application will go to the full Board for review).
- [ ] Yes  [ ] No  c. Sexually explicit materials or questions
- [ ] Yes  [ ] No  d. Handling of money or other valuable commodities
- [ ] Yes  [ ] No  e. Extraction of blood or other bodily fluids
- [ ] Yes  [ ] No  f. Questions about drug and/or alcohol use
- [ ] Yes  [ ] No  g. Questions about sexual orientation, sexual experience, or sexual abuse
- [ ] Yes  [ ] No  h. Purposeful creation of anxiety
- [ ] Yes  [ ] No  i. Any procedure that might be viewed as an invasion of privacy
- [ ] Yes  [ ] No  j. Physical exercise or stress
- [ ] Yes  [ ] No  k. Administration of substances (food, drugs, etc.) to subjects
- [ ] Yes  [ ] No  l. Any procedure that might place subjects at risk (e.g., disclosure of criminal activity).
- [ ] Yes  [ ] No  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).

- [ ] 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)?
- [ ] Yes  [ ] No  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.)

- [ ] Yes  [ ] No  Does the research involve subjects from any of the following categories?
  a. Under 18 years of age included in the target population
     (If “yes” signed, active parental consent is required for those individuals who are under 18 unless a waiver is granted by the HSRB. If you are requesting a waiver of parental consent, this application will go to the full Board for review.)
  b. Over 65 years of age as the target population
  c. Persons with a physical or mental disability as the target population
     (If “yes” this application will go to the full Board for review.)
208

- d. Economically or educationally disadvantaged as the target population.
- e. Unable to provide their own legal informed consent
  (If "yes" and the subjects are not children, this application will go to the full Board for review).
- f. Pregnant females as the target population
  (If "yes" this application will go to the full Board for review).
- g. Victims of crimes or other traumatic experiences as the target population
- h. Individuals in institutions (e.g., prisons, nursing homes, halfway houses)
  (If "yes" this application will go to the full Board for review).

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

Yes  No

Please answer the following questions about the research.

- a. In your opinion, does the research involve more than minimal risk to subjects?
  ("Minimal risk" means that "the risks of harm anticipated in the proposed research are
  not greater, considering probability and magnitude, than those ordinarily encountered
  in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological
  examinations or tests.") If the answer is "yes," explain in the box below and provide
  an explanation of the benefits of the research to the subjects and to society.

- b. Are any emergencies or adverse reactions (physical, psychological, social, legal,
   or emotional) probable as a result of the research? (If "yes," then explain the
   measures to be taken in case of emergency in the box below.)

- c. Will participation in this research result in any appreciable negative change in the
   subject's emotional state? (If "yes," explain the nature of the change and the process
   for assisting subjects in the box provided.)

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

a. What are you going to study? What is (are) the research question(s) to be answered /
hypotheses to be tested?

I will study one section of General Studies Writing 1100W, for nonnative speakers of English,
and one section of General Studies Writing 1100, for native speakers of English during the Fall
2012 academic semester at Bowling Green State University. I will observe each instructor and
the students enrolled in the two sections who voluntarily give their consent to be research
participants. I would like to answer the questions: How can we develop pedagogical approaches
to writing assessment that best meet the needs of diverse student populations? How can we
respect students' native languages and personal identities when teaching academic English?
How do students value academic English?

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.

University student populations are becoming increasingly multilingual and our teaching practices
should better accommodate these students. Even native speakers of English do not naturally
speak academic English. This study will help instructors and teachers develop teaching
Pedagogies that better accommodate nonnative speakers and speakers of diverse dialects, such as African American English or Appalachian English. Scholarship claims that we unknowingly enforce policies of "English Only" in our writing classrooms because we do not design activities and assessments for these student populations. The benefits of this study are greater knowledge of how we can develop writing assessment practices for both students and teachers to better accommodate language diversity.

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

The risk of participation is no greater than that experienced in daily life.

d. Who will be your subjects?

I send direct emails to General Studies Writing instructors seeking research participants for this study. I plan to study one section of General Studies Writing 1100W, which enrolls nonnative speaker of English, and one section of General Studies Writing 1100, which enrolls native speakers of English. During the course, I will ask students to consider participating in a short survey at midterms and near the end of the semester. The instructor and students who voluntarily provide consent will be my research participants.

e. List the maximum number of subjects you hope to enroll. (Recruiting is not enrollment – you will likely recruit more individuals than will be enrolled in the project. Also, 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 must request Board approval for the increase.)

I wish to study two GSW 1100 courses at BGSU. Each course has 15 students and one instructor, resulting in a maximum of 32 research participants.

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 will send direct emails to Bowling Green State University General Studies Writing instructors to recruit participants. I will then ask students during classtime to consider participating in a short survey at midterms and near the end of the semester. Students who wish to participate must sign consent forms.

g. Describe the process you will use to seek informed consent from the subjects (Example – provide consent document 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 document). (See IRBNet library for consent document skeleton.)

I will send documentation explaining my informed consent process via email and have participants sign paper copies. Participants will contact me via email if they are interested in participating. I will provide copies of the informed consent process to interested participants' campus mailboxes.

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

- [ ] That the only record linking the subject and the research would be the consent document and the principal risk would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality.

- [ ] That the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context.

Please indicate how you will document consent in the box below.
*(For example, in an electronic survey, clicking the next button indicates consent to participate.)*

---

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 include a copy of all debriefing materials, if applicable.

Debriefing form:  
- [ ] Yes  
- [x] 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.)*

This survey is confidential but not anonymous. I will keep the data from my research participants in this study on a password-protected computer in my home. Only my research team will have access to this data. I will not record data from students who do not give their consent to participate.

---

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.

Research participants will be sent an email that explains the project including any potential risks and benefits. This email will include a copy of a consent form. If research participants would like to participate, I will give them a hard copy of the consent form to sign. I will attend the instructor's course approximately once a week throughout the semester to write observations of students' reactions to the assignments. I will interview the instructor at the beginning, mid-term, and end of the course to gain his or her insights into the course and writing assessment process. I will also survey students, if they give their written consent, to understand how these students assess their own writing and how they understand their teacher's feedback. Their responses will be confidential and I will not provide these students interviews or surveys to the instructor. The study will conclude at the end of the semester.