AFFECTIVE POSSIBILITIES FOR RHETORIC AND WRITING: HOW WE MIGHT SELF-ASSESS POTENTIALITY IN COMPOSITION

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ABSTRACT

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My dissertation, *Affective Possibilities for Rhetoric & Writing: How We Might Self-Assess Potentiality in Composition*, presents a reconceived approach to teaching self-assessment practices to writing students in college writing classrooms by combining practices of reflection with consideration of potentiality. As defined in this project, potentiality is a quality of student writers and of their writing—a capacity for change, growth, and development into the future. These findings are built upon an empirical study of four first-year writing students, who were interviewed about their own assessment practices, both in terms of their writing processes with specific texts and in terms of their own conception of themselves as writers.

I situate my data within contexts of writing assessment, feminist scholarship, affect studies, and liminality. At the crossroads of these varying conversations are concerns about literacy and agency, as well as about capacity and potential. Haswell and Haswell (2010) advocate for writing assessment practices that honor and encourage student writers’ sense of authorship. They conceive of this sense of authorship as being intimately tied to a notion of potentiality. How to define, identify, and attend to potentiality are the questions that I consider through the lenses of feminist scholarship and affect studies. Feminist scholarship promotes literacy as a means to achieve identity and agency in the spaces around us, in education and in practice. In the spaces between texts and agents, feminism finds possibility for change and for access to power that seems
tied to fixed positions. Similarly, affect studies draws attention away from subject positions and subjects to focus on the interactions and expressions that pass between agents. My analysis of the data from my empirical study includes a definition of potentiality informed by these aspects of feminist scholarship and affect studies.

My project demonstrates that potentiality can be defined as a quality in student writers and their writings, and that it is worthwhile to help students identify their own potentiality as a means of developing a sense of authorship that will enhance their use of writing and the impact that they might have on their environments through literate activity. This project also demonstrates that student writers function in liminal space, where their identities and their sense of authorship is neither determined nor fixed, but flexible and open to change and development. In this liminal space, writing students might learn practices that help them in defining and following their own trajectories as interactive and interaffective agents.

As a result of these findings, I call for writing studies scholars to consider new practices of self-assessment for student writers that go beyond reflection on past writing projects, processes, and portfolios. By teaching and practicing self-reflection that attends to future goals and desires, writing instructors can promote a sense of authorship that imbibes student writers with literacy and agency that extends further than the academy, fulfilling feminist and cultural goals for a liberatory education.
For Tom, whose love and patience made this work possible.
And for Finnegann, whose potential inspires me every day.
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CHAPTER 1: POTENTIALITY AND THE ABILITY TO ASSESS THE WRITING SELF

This project began as most projects begin, with just a faint idea and a desire to know more about a term that I learned in a graduate seminar. I had been out of school for many years, but had worked almost unknowingly with matters of agency and literacy as an attorney representing injured and disabled workers. Many of these individuals lacked literacy in very real ways—basic reading skills, knowledge about how to seek a new job, medical and legal language—with very real consequences. But despite being disenfranchised in so many ways, they had a passion for telling their stories, establishing their credibility, and exercising their rights. Realizing the connections between my former work life and this life only later, I came upon the notion of affects in the first course I took in my doctoral program, an introduction to current issues in the field of rhetoric and composition. Here I learned the value of having a framework and vocabulary for structuring knowledge and experience. Affect became a framework for me to begin understanding what I had only been observing in clients, and then, in my students. Regardless of my profession, I had committed to empowering others, and I have come to believe that empowerment is about understanding the forces that impact individuals and then understanding that in spite of, and because of, those forces, change is possible. In the context of writing pedagogy and scholarship, my concern for affect became a means to address complexity, injustice, and literacy along my own trajectory as a developing writer, teacher, and scholar. These reflections then led me to consider what reflection on or, in composition studies, what self-assessment of affects might do for students on their own trajectories as developing writers, students, and agents. In these musings, I happened upon potentiality as a quality of energy, of agency, of empowerment. This project endeavors to define potentiality in ways that
can empower student writers to assess their own work, and their own developing sense of what it is to engage in literacy and to be literate in the narrowest and broadest senses.

In this chapter, I will offer a brief overview of this project and describe the relevant scholarship that informs my work. I briefly situate this dissertation within the bodies of literature on writing assessment, feminist theory and feminist pedagogy, affect studies, and liminality. I then set forth definitions of two key terms in the project: authorship and potentiality. Following the literature review, I provide a description of my research questions as well as an introduction to the site of the empirical study and to the student participants in the study. In closing, I offer concise descriptions of the chapters to come.

Background and Overview of the Project

On June 17, 2013, Edward White posted to the Writing Program Administrators LISTSERV (WPA-L) these words: “For me, the most important pedagogical value of assessment is to help students learn self-assessment. Without the ability to assess, in the largest sense, early drafts, they cannot produce improved later drafts.”

Writing assessment and self-assessment are rich subfields within the discipline of composition that not only have developed practical applications for teachers of writing, but also have endeavored to theorize writing assessment in ways that broaden the discipline’s notion and valuation of writing assessment. Current writing assessment literature emphasizes (1) dynamic interaction of theory and practice, (2) assessment as an essential component of writing teaching and learning, and (3) empowerment of “stakeholders” in the evaluation of writing. (Adler-Kassner & O’Neil, 2010; White, 2007, 2013; Huot, 2002; Yancey, 1998, 2000, 2004, 2012). Presently, much writing self-assessment study has focused on reflection (Yancey, 1998, 2000) and the powerful learning opportunities offered by encouraging students to reflect on what they have learned through a review of their writing projects, as well as the assembly of print and
digital portfolios (Yancey 2004, 2012). This project seeks to engage in the ongoing conversation about best writing assessment practices by exploring the possibility and value of looking not just reflectively at what a writer has accomplished, but in looking forward to future incarnations of writing and writers through the concept of potentiality.

*What Is Potentiality?*

In *Authoring: An Essay for the Profession*, Janis and Richard Haswell (2010) argue for student rights of authorship. To define these rights of authorship, Haswell & Haswell interview and gather data from “real” authors (as opposed to student writers) on what they call the “phenomenology of authoring,” or the inner life of authors (13). Among the traits of authoring that they discover is potentiality, which Haswell & Haswell define as “an ongoing capacity for creative work that needs to be constantly protected and nurtured” (p. 20). This concept of potentiality becomes integral to Haswell & Haswell’s call for teachers of writing to imbue student writers with a sense of authorship. They assert that “student writers are not allowed the full rights of authorship, which include respect for the work they have not yet produced” (p. 33). Explaining that potentiality is present in student writing and teachable, the authors argue that, “A pedagogy of maintained potentiality would say that the only skill a teacher should promote in a student is one that will sustain itself” (p. 43). Sketching out this pedagogy in broad strokes, Haswell & Haswell (2010) write that “the idea of maintained potentiality recommends a pedagogy of patience, nurturance, resistance, and tolerance that is the main plea of this book” (p. 41). And in this pedagogy, authorship and potentiality work reciprocally, hand-in-hand, in the development of the student writer and in the sharing of a single text with a reader: “There is an avatar in authoring. . . . a singular potentiality that leads to unpredictable (because singular) potentialities. Some originary (because singular) power in an act of authoring will manifest itself
later, always in new ways” (p. 258). But Authoring is a first step—a defining and justifying of the concepts of authorship, singularity, and potentiality in the writing classroom—that encourages a second step. If we agree that writing teachers should honor and encourage the uniqueness and capacity for growth and change in writing students, then how do we do it, particularly in the complicated space of assessment? My project is a small step in developing an answer to this question.

In order to consider potentiality, and the means and value of assessing it, I must first develop a definition of the concept that is useful to composition pedagogy. To do so, I turn to feminist pedagogy, feminist theory, and affect studies to explore their intersections for lenses and vocabularies that offer possible means for establishing a definition of potentiality that can be functional for this study and for composition instruction, a definition that attends to the larger project of composition as a discipline, honoring contemporary notions of what writing does. These bodies of literature will be explored fully in the literature review to follow this section, but a brief introduction seems appropriate here. Feminist pedagogy and feminist theory have played a formative role in the development of composition pedagogy, as well as in the development of writing assessment practices. As bell hooks (1994) describes the “engaged pedagogy” that has become the hallmark of feminist teaching practices,

the classroom should be a space where we’re all in power in different ways. That means we professors should be empowered by our interactions with students. . . . Along with them I grow intellectually, developing sharper understandings of how to share knowledge and what to do in my participatory role with students. (p. 152)

This attitude pervades many writing classrooms, where language, writing, and empowerment intermingle.
These same issues have been the concern of cultural studies, which, through forms such as feminism, has seeped into the writing classroom in conversations about discourse, social construction, and agency. In *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*, Lawrence Grossberg (2010) reflects on the development of culture studies as the intellectual work of the academy, noting that in the mid-twentieth century “[t]extual or expressive culture was where the lived experience of historical change was constituted. … [C]ulture had become dominant, the most important domain shaping people’s lives and their understandings of the worlds in which they lived” (p. 175). This was accompanied by “the moment when communication and culture (as human processes and sites of contestation) moved to the center of both intellectual and public life, the moment of the so-called linguistic turn” (p. 175). Contemporaneous with this linguistic turn, and from within the bounds of rhetoric and composition, James Berlin (1996) argued that “we in rhetoric are convinced that our colleagues in theory and cultural studies have as much to learn from us as we have to learn from them, and that the linguistic turn “can be seen as an effort to recover the tools of rhetoric in discussing the material effects of language in the conduct of human affairs” (xvii). In the writing classroom of the twentieth century, a bond would be formed between literacy and agency, as Berlin (1996) describes it: “As I am authorized through active literacy to name the world as I experience it—not as I am told by others I should be experiencing it—I become capable of taking action and assuming control of my environment” (p. 101).

These issues are increasingly complicated and still central to the work of cultural studies and of composition in 2013, and they certainly play a role in concepts of authorship and potentiality as described by Haswell & Haswell.

Relatively new to the cultural studies/composition scene is affect studies, which has concerned itself with understanding how individuals (bodies) experience their environments and.
impact one another, with and without language. In his introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus*, Brian Massumi (1987) defines affect in Spinozian terms: “a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act” (p. xvi). Affect studies has informed composition’s contemporary notions of emotion (Ahmed, Micciche, Micciche & Jacobs) and of social justice (Lindquist, Langstraat), but it might do more particularly in the areas of concern in this project: authorship and potentiality. Haswell & Haswell lament the loss of attention to the “singular” author in a post-modern age of social construction. For them this has meant that teachers of writing have neglected the uniqueness, the internal life, the personal desires of the writer, denying him or her both authorial rights and opportunities to explore their own capacities to grow and develop along their own trajectories. Affect as a “capacity to act” conjures the singularity and potentiality that Haswell & Haswell describe as lost to the writing classroom. Pairing affect with literacy in the teaching and assessing of writing, as well as placing the power of that literacy and assessment in the hands of the student writer/author becomes a means to attending to the discipline’s ongoing struggle with agency and literacy.

*Do Students Assess Potentiality, and If So, How?*

After establishing definitions of authorship and potentiality through an exploration of feminist theory, feminist pedagogy, and affect studies, the next step in the project is to investigate how a small sampling of students in first-year composition classes at a large Midwestern University evaluate their own writing projects and themselves as writers. Contemporary writing assessment literature emphasizes the value of self-assessment, both in the revision process as a text is being developed (White, 2007) and in the assembly of portfolios as in a reflective narrative that explains what students perceive about their writing at the end of a
course (Yancey, 1998, 2000, 2004, 2012). This research study involves a series of interviews over the course of a college semester that asks first-year composition students questions about their writing projects and how they perceive them developing. The interviews will investigate whether students do think in terms of the growth of their writing projects, in terms of a future text, and in terms of their own growth as writers. This data, considered in conjunction with current pedagogies for self-assessment, will help to establish whether or not potentiality is another quality in writing that might be identified by students. I will argue that potentiality is another basis for self-assessment; something that could be helpful to developing writers in the same way as, or perhaps in a more productive way than, current reflective self-assessment practices.

*Is There Value in Assessing Potentiality?*

Haswell & Haswell (2010) make a case for the empowerment of student writers through the encouragement of a sense of authorship. Similarly, feminist pedagogy and feminist theory view teaching and learning as engaged processes, which involve interaction of students and teachers, peers, readers, and texts, also toward the goal of empowerment. Affect studies offers a sharper lens and a new vocabulary, which allow us to see and talk about literacy, agency, and interaction with other bodies in productive and relevant ways. These current conversation share the goal of providing writing students with experiences and opportunities to think critically about their own writing as well as the writing that they encounter, but they also share a sense of students and student writing as *becoming*—student writers becoming professional writers, college students becoming engaged and empowered citizens, or first drafts becoming better revised drafts. The notion of *becoming* is a central concern of my project, which turns to affect studies to help more fully conceive of what it means to be *becoming* in the context of
composition pedagogy.

**Authorship and Potentiality Defined**

Though the development of definitions, particularly for potentiality, is the work of this entire project, an initial explanation of these terms as I begin will be useful. As is clear, these terms are borrowed from the work of Haswell & Haswell (2010); thus it makes sense to define them in their terms. Haswell & Haswell (2010) define authoring as “the inward act that triggers the outward act of writing” and “the internal human process of turning background, experience, and imagination into something written” (p. 2). They did the hard work of interviewing “working authors” to establish the traits of authorship (among these, potentiality and singularity), and argue that student writers deserve the rights of working authors to develop, experience, and experiment with these personal qualities. I rely on their work to begin with the proposition that student writers do deserve the “full rights of authorship.” This description of authorship conjures the ghost of the cognitive process theory of Flower & Hayes (1981), which Haswell & Haswell (2010) note has fallen on hard times over the decades, particularly in the post-modern social constructivist age. Cognitive process theory “introduce[d] a theory of the cognitive process involved in composing in an effort to lay groundwork for more detailed study of thinking processes in writing” (Flower & Hayes 1981, p. 274), demonstrating that writing is a set of hierarchically organized thinking processes. Criticism of cognitive process theory is encapsulated in David Bartolomae’s (1985) critique: “Flower and Hayes show us what happens in the writer’s mind but not what happens to the writer as his motives are located within our language, a language with its own requirements and agendas, a language that limits what we might say and that makes us write and sound, finally, also like someone else” (p. 630). In other
words, there is a focus on the writer’s internal processes that leads to a neglect of the external forces, which affect the writer and the writing. Sensitive to this limitation of cognitive process theory, Haswell & Haswell (2010) seek to reclaim some consideration of the inner workings of the writing subject that accounts for the external forces at play in the student writer’s world, jettisoning the dichotomy that they believe has done serious disservice to student writers. Thus, I employ this notion of authorship as a kind of writer’s agency, born not only of a subject position, but also of the interactions among writers, readers, texts, and contexts. I will explore this further in the literature review to follow.

As for potentiality, Haswell & Haswell (2010) find this to be “a human element of authoring,” a philosophical matter: “an ongoing capacity for creative work” (p. 20). As the working authors that they interview describe it, potentiality is something that they sense in themselves and in their work, as an awareness of something more or something else to write in the future. This is tied intimately to singularity, which is “the sense of themselves and their work as unique” (p. 20). I use potentiality in this project to mean the capacity in first-year writing students to develop new and different writing processes and texts, and, inextricably linked to this, is their sense of themselves as writers, and of having the right to write/speak/affect the spaces in which they write. But this is simply a beginning idea of potentiality that will be further fleshed out with feminist theory, feminist pedagogy, and affect studies in the literature review and empirical study to follow.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

A Feminist Perspective on Writing Assessment
Contemporary writing assessment seeks to theorize its practices toward the end of empowering students to develop successful writing and evaluative skills. In *Rearticulating Writing Assessment for Teaching and Learning*, Brian Huot (2002) writes,

we need to talk about assessment in new ways, to recognize how ubiquitous it is within the process of reading and writing. Since we are constantly making judgments about the texts we read, we need to see how our judgments about texts get articulated into specific assessments or evaluations . . . and how these articulations affect students and the learning environment. (p. 4)

Suggesting that more work needs to be done in both the theory and practice of writing assessment as a significant piece of composition studies, Huot (2002) then writes,

While self-assessment is certainly an important ability for the developing writer and is related to a student’s ability to use assessment to write (Smith and Yancey 2000), it is often focused on how well students measure their progress in a particular class (Beavan 1977) or on how well or how much they have revised (Beach 1976; Beach and Eaton 1984). There is limited amount of research on how students and other writers evaluate writing. (p. 60)

Huot (2002) identifies the practical and ethical need for further consideration of self-assessment, noting that students are “ill-equipped to make the kind of evaluative decisions about writing which our pedagogy expects . . . with strict, text-based notions of how to judge writing” (p. 67). In the particular case of portfolios, Huot (2002) argues that student attention can be refocused from grades to writing, “and the writers they can become” (p. 73). Similarly, in *Assigning, Responding, Evaluating: A Writing Teacher’s Guide*, Edward White (2007) finds
assessment to be integral to the effective teaching of writing, and he pinpoints an affective concern in his promotion of good assessment methods, by teacher and student alike:

One good way to combat these destructive attitudes toward writing, I am convinced, is by way of assessment. Not until students have become able to distinguish good from weak responses will they realize that their work both needs improvement and can be improved with planning. (p. 39-40)

White (2007) further argues that, “regular practice in writing and writing assessment in class are the best means of helping students conceive of writing in this new way” (p. 40). As White (2007) describes it, assessment practices have the capacity to foster a positive attitude toward writing for students who might otherwise dislike the processes of writing and then of revisions. This gets at having a sense of authorship, and it is how students feel about, experience, and perceive their own writing that is at issue here.

This certainly is not to suggest that writing self-assessment has not been considered critically, as much has been written about the value of self-assessment. Kathleen Blake Yancey offers an initial justification for this practice, relatively new in 1998. In *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*, Yancey (1998) argues that self-assessment of student writing “ask[s] students to participate with us, not as objects of our study, but as agents of their own learning, in a process that is product that is becoming known, quite simply, as reflection” (p. 5). In enumerating the things she learned in her use of reflection practices in the writing classroom, Yancey asserts that “[s]tudents can theorize about their own writing in powerful ways. . . . When treated as a rhetorical act, when practiced, it becomes a discipline, a habit of mind. When treated as a rhetorical act, it has ethical implications” (p. 19). The 2000 edited collection, *Self-Assessment and Development in Writing: A Collaborative Inquiry*, includes a number of pieces
which further the critical analysis and exploration of self-assessment. In “Assumptions and Application of Student Self-Assessment,” Rebecca Moore Howard critiques self-assessment on the basis that “subjects do not exert agency but are instead constructed in and by language, [which] would contradict the possibility that writers can exert the agency requisite to assessing themselves” (p. 37), and then on the fact that “higher education acts to reproduce and preserve the power of the dominant group, would suggest that any student self-assessment would merely affirm and reproduce the student’s hierarchical place in the educational establishment” (p. 37). Similarly, Susan Latta and Janice Lauer’s (2000) “Some Issues and Concerns from Postmodern and Feminist Perspectives” raises concerns about the impossibility of students stepping “outside of their social, cultural, and historical communities . . . when engaged in self-assessment” (p. 27). Peggy O’Neil (2002) also has described some of the difficulties presented by reflective writing tasks, likening the process to “the church’s confession: . . . an obligatory act that demands the writer construct herself in the appropriate discourse to someone in a more powerful position.” Nonetheless, O’Neil (2002) advocates for self-assessment through reflective practices despite its negatives, arguing that it “requires that writing teachers learn to see reflection within particular contexts and to teach their students to approach it this way.” Ultimately O’Neil, Latta, Lauer, and Yancey find that reflective self-assessment invite students “to participate with us, not as objects of our study, but as agents of their own learning, in a process that is a product” (Yancey, 2010, p. 5). This agency is akin to Haswell & Haswells’ concept of authorship.

Given both the possibilities and pitfalls of assessment, the overarching trend in writing assessment theory and practice is to see it as an integral though complex element of theory, pedagogy and disciplinary matters within the field of composition. One way to embrace this complexity is the approach of O’Neil, Schendel, and Huot (2002), who have promoted a
research-based conception of assessment: “By approaching assessment as research—as an opportunity to learn more about programs, pedagogy, students, and writing by asking questions—we can make valuable contributions to the field and contribute to the formation of composition as an academic discipline” (p. 15). Thus, the posing of questions about assessment—and specifically in this project, self-assessment—is a process of seeing the potential in assessment, in student writers, and in writing instruction. This work is also concerned with the larger project of assessment and the endeavors underway to support assessment and writing programs on the large scale. In their call to “reframe writing assessment,” Adler-Kassner and O’Neil (2010) support this notion of assessment as research as a means of professionalizing the field in ways that reinforce the real needs of the stakeholders to educate and be educated.

As a contemporary demonstration of assessment as research, digital portfolio applications, uses, and outcomes are being explored by writing assessment specialists, particularly with an eye toward the self-assessment opportunities that both print and digital portfolios offer students. Kathleen Blake Yancey has written extensively on the various modalities of portfolios, but one of her continuing theoretical concerns has been “reflection,” and what she has called “reflection-in-presentation” (1998, 2012). In “Postmodernism, Palimpsest, and Portfolios: Theoretical Issues in the Representation of Student Work,” Yancey (2004) argues that portfolios offer students experiences in reflecting on their writing projects through various processes of creation in both print and digital portfolios:

Through practice, we compose identity, task by rhetorical task, moment by reflective moment. Identity itself is a composition. The relationship between identity and the digital portfolio is reciprocal, hence the importance of both print and digital. Enabling
different arrangements, they permit different inventions, invite different representations.

(p. 757)

Though Yancey’s (2004) terminology suggests a looking back process, there is contained in these “representations” a forward-looking element that students are creating knowledge about themselves and their writing skills as they recombine and reconstitute previous writings into a text that is the portfolio. While she does not employ the term potentiality, Yancey (2004) is researching it herself, in both digital portfolios and in writing students, as she seeks to find methods of representation that advance students’ understanding and use of writing skills beyond the completion of a specific text. This aspect of the writing assessment conversation may have significant implications for theory and practice of self-assessment that incorporates attention to potentiality.

Curiously, writing assessment literature is scant with regard to a feminist perspective on assessment, and particularly on the use of self-assessment and reflection. But as the previous discussion suggests, self-assessment seems to be fertile ground for feminist pedagogy and theory. Stacey Gray Akyea and Pamela Sandoval’s (2004) “A Feminist Perspective on Student Assessment: An Epistemology of Caring and Concern” explains that, “Too few feminist scholars discuss how they assess students’ knowledge and products. Without a clear discussion of how feminist scholars assess students, their suggestion to share power with students leads to confusion.” Akyea and Sandoval (2004) highlight the ways in which feminist pedagogy can lead to uncritical and unhelpful assessments that “inadvertently reinforce stereotypes, because their interpretations assume middle-class experiences that less privileged students may not have.” But these authors also encourage feminist pedagogues to go beyond a challenge to the unfairness of assessment practices as exercises of power and oppression, and discuss openly with students
assessment criteria and the belief that “different contexts require different criteria for assessment.” To do so, Akyea & Sandoval (2004) invoke Nel Nodding’s (1984) ethic of care as a means of recognizing that teachers do exercise power, but that it need not be in destructive ways: “[caring] means as much as respecting and engaging students in search for truths, even when it may be uncomfortable” and “provid[ing] constructive criticism to enable students to understand expectations.” This feminist perspective on assessment echoes the sentiments of Yancey and Adler-Kassner, as well as White and Huot, all of whom advocate for critical analysis and engagement of the tools and stakeholders involved in assessment, in an implicit acknowledgement of the power structures involved in writing assessment. Similarly, portfolio and reflective writing scholarship focuses on literacy as a means of empowerment, and particularly of empowerment of student writers, who gain agency from these metacognitive activities. Feminist theory and feminist pedagogy have much in common with the endeavors of the writing assessment community, and can assist in the reframing of writing assessment that Adler-Kassner & O’Neil (2010) call for, as well as with the work of this dissertation in developing a feminist perspective on assessment that identifies and empowers writing students through attention to authorship and potentiality.

Feminist Theory and Feminist Pedagogy

Feminist pedagogy and feminist theory have played a formative role in the development of composition pedagogy, as well as in the development of writing assessment practices. Providing a framework for exploring how language works, how language connects to power structures, and how language impacts the individual within the larger society, feminist theory has expanded the connections between Composition Studies and culture, opening the field to women participants, alternative ways of knowing, and pedagogical methods toward the end of achieving
liberatory education. Akin to writing assessment literature, feminist pedagogy seeks to engage theory and practice reciprocally, and to foreground the need to provide student writers with experiences and skills that will empower them to participate in a variety of discourses. Feminist pedagogy and feminist theory provide frameworks that might help to define potentiality and authorship in ways that will explore whether or not self-assessment of potentiality can help to imbue student writers with a sense of authorship.

Écriture féminine challenged and radicalized feminism and its relationship to writing. Lynn Worsham’s 1991 essay, “Writing Against Writing: The Predicament of Écriture Féminine in Composition Studies,” explores the ways in which écriture féminine has affected Composition Studies. As Worsham (1991) explains, “écriture féminine is one of the most dramatic developments in recent writing theory and pedagogy, not only because it may reformulate our notion of literacy and consequences but also because it could produce a crisis in composition’s self-understanding” (p. 103-4). Worsham (1991) also argues that Luce Irigaray’s (1985) take on écriture féminine is that “[i]t allows departures, breaks, partings, separations in meaning, the effect of which is to make meaning infinite and, like desire, nontotalizable” (p. 110). And, Worsham describes Kristeva’s (1986) contribution to composition: “Kristeva names that which is heterogeneous to meaning ‘desire’ or ‘emotion’ and thus suggests that our deepest relation to language and to the world is not epistemic but emotional and material” (p. 111). But, Worsham’s argument is that, ultimately, feminist radicalism (as embodied in écriture féminine) threatens to be “neutralized” by being made the norm in composition, “by mass producing methods in its name, commodifying it, classifying, absorbing it into the conventions of composition teaching” (p. 118). In order to avoid this calamity, Worsham argues that “The purpose of refashioning composition as cultural criticism, however, is not to stay within an
epistemological justification, but to liberate a different way of feeling, another sensibility” (p. 120).

Jacqueline Rhodes (2005) fears that Worsham’s prediction of the neutralization of radical feminism has come to pass in composition, arguing that,

We need to rethink our histories of composition studies and feminism to examine how the overtly agonistic discourse of the women’s liberation movement has been silenced in favor of the more contained discourse of the women’s rights movement. We need, as well, to open wide the ideological rifts between feminist and cultural studies approaches to composition if for no other reason than to develop our own critical consciousness about who, precisely, it is that we want to liberate in our classrooms. (p. 3)

In Radical Feminism, Writing, and Critical Agency from Manifesto to Modern, Rhodes (2005) endeavors to demonstrate “the unique textual and discursive action that was part and parcel of the movement” (p. 23) historically, as well as to see the potential of digital space for feminists in the present and the future. Rhodes writes that,

the negotiation of the spaces between individual texts and collective networks, in the case of radical feminists and feminists online, creates a temporary stability of purpose and identification. In the case of feminist texts online, this negotiation is made eminently possible through the fluidity of hypertext as medium. That is, the Internet makes visible the interplay of fixity and fluidity that is part of radical feminist textuality; likewise the emphasis on a personal, persuasive text within an ambiguously public structure parallels the textual subjectivity of the radical feminists. (p. 54)
A significant element of Rhodes’s project is to consider liminal spaces—the spaces between persons, meaning, binaries—which, she argues, create “a key component of radical feminist textuality” (p. 54).

Like the feminist project overall, Rhodes’ (2005) work acknowledges the inseparability of theory and practice, and she encourages composition teachers “to enact a performative pedagogy that takes into account the discourses of the classroom at the same time as it values a radical negotiation of spaces between binaries” (p. 77). For Rhodes (2005), this means attending to the “network,” which is both material and abstract, and the “textual subjectivity” of student writers, which she describes as depending on a “fictionalized stability in order to negotiate the power relations undergirding a writing classroom” (p. 80). In the end, Rhodes argues for a pedagogy that takes “a historically situated and textually oriented approach to a consciousness of the ‘personal’ and thus to collective networked action” (83). And she proposes that “[c]ultural studies provides at the very least, then, a means by which to reclaim the radical feminists in all their singularity” (83). The radical nature of feminism is a significant element in its ability to transform spaces such as composition classrooms. Feminist theory’s project of “negotiation” of boundaries, binaries, and subjectivities informs present day composition classrooms and pedagogies, and provides dimension to a developing concept of authorship as well as to a student writer’s sense of his or her own authorship, as described by Haswell & Haswell (2010).

This sense of authorship is the goal of assessing potentiality, and both authorship and potentiality (though perhaps by other names) are at play in the work of feminist writing scholars and teachers. All feminist pedagogy draws momentum from the work of bell hooks (1994, 2000). Rhodes (2005) describes her “performative pedagogy” in terms of hooks’ “engaged pedagogy,” which “depends upon a view of students and teachers as real people who are
cognizant of their situatedness” (Rhodes, 2005, p. 81). In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, hooks (1994) develops her engaged pedagogy as an homage to the work of Paolo Freire (1970) and as a response to the failings of feminism and multiculturalism in higher education. As she explains, “teachers thought it would be an easy melting pot, didn’t have tools to deal with ‘antagonism’ and clash of cultures, so backed off the project” (hooks 1984, p. 31). hooks’ engaged pedagogy is saturated with affect. Excitement is the impetus for her work: “To enter classroom settings in colleges and universities with the will to share the desire to encourage excitement, was to transgress” (p. 7). And fear drives teachers and students alike away from the transformative classroom: “The unwillingness to approach teaching from a standpoint that includes awareness of race, sex, and class is often rooted in the fear that classrooms will be uncontrollable, that emotions and passions will not be contained” (p. 39).

The “engaged-ness” of hooks pedagogy, and of those pedagogical concepts that flow from her work, is ultimately an acceptance and willingness to dive in and explore the material realities and abstractions of real interaction despite conflict and contradiction. In illustrating her pedagogy, hooks writes, “On another day, I might ask students to ponder what we want to make happen in the class, to name what we hope to know, what might be most useful. I ask them what standpoint is a personal experience” (p. 92). While personal experience (and its attendant intellectual and emotional components) is key to hooks’ pedagogy, it is personal experience situated within the larger social and cultural moment, and it is tied to desire and hope, to the affects that form the connectivity between personal and social/cultural. It is tied to spatial relations, but it is also tied to temporal relations as hooks (1994) prompts her students to consider “what we hope to know.” hooks (1994) goes on to write,
And sometimes the mountaintop is difficult to reach with all our resources, factual and confessional, so we are just there collectively grasping, feeling the limitations of knowledge, longing together, yearning for a way to reach the highest point. Even this yearning is a way to know. (p. 92)

Yearning as a way to know speaks to potentiality as a quality of writing and of writers. Yearning is a capacity, reflective and forward-looking simultaneously, and it is trained on the future, on becoming, on a potential to be different.

The yearning that hooks describes in *Teaching to Transgress*, is more than a desire to know and do well in the classroom, and, as she explains in *Feminism Is for Everybody*, feminist pedagogy must have a more radical agenda that reaches beyond the university, where feminisms’ “insights rarely reach many people” (p. 22). For hooks, feminist work must be radical, changeable, transforming, and transformative in order to impact multiple aspects of one’s life at very personal and very social levels. hooks (1987, 2000) finds in feminism the mutuality of personal experience and social justice, intellect and emotion, love and respect, teaching and learning. Always she emphasizes that, “Radical visionary feminism encourages all of us to courageously examine our lives from the standpoint of gender, race, and class so that we can accurately understand our position within the imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (p. 116). This is a self-assessment of sorts that calls for a critical awareness of one’s individual self as positioned within a larger context and empowered to create change within that context—a sense of authorship, perhaps. These concepts lay the groundwork for a practice of student self-assessment that is aware of potentiality and values the potential of students to become something that they seek, or yearn, to become.
I see feminist pedagogy and feminist theory as serving this project in two different but interrelated ways. On the one hand, feminist pedagogy has already begun to define and explore potentiality in terms of classroom practices and attitudes that promote the development and growth of the student writer. Though the feminist works cited here do not explicitly refer to potentiality, there is a consistent connection between writing pedagogy that can explore the complex and conflicted spaces that exist in-between and the potential for agency and change that exists between the personal and the political, between self and world. In short, feminisms are already exploring the in-between spaces where potential exists. This suggests that feminist scholarly work is a good starting place for developing a definition of potentiality, considering how it can be identified and then assessed, and, ultimately, determining if it is a quality that might be valuable for students to assess in their own writing(s).

On the other hand, feminist theory has opened a door to culture studies and the use of language to theorize experience, bringing to light not only the in-between spaces where change might occur, but also always placing agents and agency within cultural contexts. Feminist pedagogy has demanded that students and teachers interact through deeply personal exchanges, but with an awareness of the social impacts on what is personal and on those interactions. In this sense, feminist pedagogy invites a more involved exploration of affect (presently the domain of cultural studies) within the context of composition theory and pedagogy. Thus, I see feminist scholarly work not only offering a vocabulary for developing notions of potentiality and authorship in this project, but also offering affect studies a space to advance and flesh out ways that might advance the project of radical feminist theory within the context of writing instruction.
A firm definition of affect is difficult to establish. Common to all definitions of affect, though, is that affect is about the impacts that actors (some human, some not perhaps) have on others, and that others have on them. It is pre-conscious, real yet incorporeal, and very much a matter of potential. And it is tied to expression. Affect studies, as I will employ it in this project, stems from the work of Deleuze (1990), Deleuze and Guattari (1987), and Massumi (1985, 2002). Its very current manifestations in the work of Sara Ahmed (2004), Laura Micciche (2005, 2007), and Megan Watkins (2010, 2013) will form the contours of the concept of affect that informs this project.

Though critical of postmodernist and posthumanist notions of discourse as everything, Deleuze (1969) writes in *The Logic of Sense*, “It is language which fixes the limits (the moment, for example, at which the excess begins), but it is language as well which transcends the limits and restores them to the infinite equivalence of an unlimited becoming” (p. 1-2). It is this attention to a notion of potential, or of possibility, in language that suggests affect studies (derived from the work of Deleuze (1969) and of Deleuze & Guattari (1987)) is of some utility to Composition Studies in both theoretical and practical dimensions. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze & Guattari (1987) develop their philosophy further, exploring the marks of psychoanalysis and capitalism as superstructures which purposefully obfuscate a reality that their own work endeavors to illuminate: a rhizomatic network that does not operate in dualisms nor in stability, but is in a constant state of flux, of becoming, of not-yetness in which any change is possible. In this text, Deleuze & Guattari (1987) declare, “Writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come” (p. 5). In this map, which “is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real” (p. 12), the
incorporeal and the material mingle without care, multiplicities (as opposed to duplicities) abound, and things operate with “acentered systems, finite networks of automata in which communication runs from any neighbor to any other, the stems and channels do not preexist, and all individuals are interchangeable, defined only by their state at a given moment” (p. 17). This is a map consistent with the liberatory and engaged classrooms of hooks (1984) and Rhodes (2005). This alternative impression of the milieu in which people exist and write offers opportunities for defining, exploring, and, ultimately, assessing potentiality for purposes of this project.

Brian Massumi (1985, 2002) has done much to advance the conversation prompted by Deleuze & Guattari (1987). As Massumi (2002) explains in the introduction to A Shock to Thought, for Deleuze & Guattari, expression exists beyond the individual, and is more like a stream, which flows around and through individuals, who can take energy from the stream and/or enhance the energy of the stream and pass it along (p. xxi). In Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation, Massumi (2002) asks of the postmodern world without agency,

Where has the potential for change gone? How does a body perform its way out of a definitional framework that is not only responsible for its very “construction,” but seems to prescript every possible signifying and countersignifying move as a selection from a repertoire of possible permutations on a limited set of predetermined terms? (p. 3)

For Massumi (2002), the answer lies in-between material bodies and incorporeal dimensions of the body. He argues that “[o]ne way to get a grasp on the real-material-but-incorporeal is to say it is to the body, as a positioned thing, as energy is to matter” (p. 5). Massumi (2002) is attracted to affect as a matter of potential, writing,
Potential is unprescribed. It only feeds forward, unfolding toward the registering of an event: bull’s-eye. Possibility is a variation implicit in what a thing can be said to be when it is on target. Potential is the immanence of a thing to its still indeterminate variation, under way. (p. 9)

This project employs this description of potential as a starting point for consideration of how writing instructors might help students to understand, feel empowered by, and assess their own work for its potentiality and its capacity for change. These philosophical treatments of affect by Deleuze & Guattari (1987), and Massumi (1985, 2002) identify some of the basic elements of affect studies. I see these texts as serving this project by offering a rich, new way of conceiving the social nature of writing and the assessment of writing through the reading of expressions that are momentarily captured in a text, or in a reading of a text.

From a psychological and neuroscientific perspective, Teresa Brennan (2004) explains affects as having

an energetic dimension. This is why they can enhance or deplete. . . . All this means, indeed the transmission of affect means, that we are not self-contained in terms of our energies. There is no secure distinction between the “individual” and the “environment.” (p. 6)

In *The Transmission of Affect*, Teresa Brennan (2004) establishes affect as material, finding an intelligence of the body, which means that “[t]here are also the subjective, affective, and driven paths embedded in flesh and blood, as well as the living logic that presses our subject to follow paths that preserve live around and beyond it” (p. 146). Again, the emphasis in affect is on process and dynamic exchange. Brennan’s (2004) theory of affects directly challenges prevailing notions of mental well-being and Freudian notions of the solidified and autonomous
ego. She theorizes that affects originate around us, not from us, and that we pass them along or turn them inward to the detriment of others and ourselves. Discerning and then resisting negative affects becomes essential to our emotional well-being, the maintenance of our life energy. As Brennan (2004) explains, “What kindness is, I suggest, is the refusal to pass on or transmit negative affects and the attempt to prevent the pain they cause others—to really prevent it, not just be seen to do so” (p. 124). This notion of kindness, and of “love,” which Brennan (2004) also identifies as an element of transforming negative affects received and passed on (p. 135), comports with “ethics of care” literature that lies under many of our notions of teaching and of social justice as it manifests in the classroom. Brennan’s (2004) theory does not deny agency nor responsibility in how agents interact through the transmission of affects. The dynamic interplay of affects that Brennan describes further informs a developing definition of potentiality for student writers, and for considering potentiality as a means to imbuing student writers with a sense of authorship.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed (2004) advances the work of affect studies, providing an exploration of affect and a cataloging of some affects in ways that inform how composition has deployed affect toward its own ends and how affect can offer a theoretical lens for conceiving of potentiality as a trait of student writers. Ahmed’s (2004) work does much to honor the complexity of “the very public nature of emotions, and the emotive nature of publics” (p. 14), and does so by considering how emotions, embodiment, and language interact, “showing how fear, disgust, shame and love work as different kinds of orientations towards objects and others, which shape individual as well as collective bodies” (p. 15). Ahmed (2004) explains that, “life experience involves multiple collisions with objects and others. It is through
such collisions that I form a sense of myself as (more or less) apart from others, as well as sense of the surfaces of my body” (p. 26).

Affect is trending as I write this, as evidenced by two recent collections: The Affect Theory Reader (2010) and Ecologies of Affect: Placing Nostalgia, Desire, and Hope (2011). The production of these collections demonstrates that affect has a particular appeal to the work of cultural studies, particularly where it shares a common border with Composition Studies, and that affect has networked (as its nature would predict) into a “stable-for-now” concept that has particular utility both as an abstraction and a material reality for the further development of the discipline of composition. For these same reasons, affect studies is a worthwhile lens for determining if and how potentiality can be defined, identified, and evaluated by student writers as part of their process of developing their own sense of authorship.

In The Affect Theory Reader, Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (2010) collect a variety of pieces grounded in notions of affect, a variety that demonstrates the elusiveness of complicated theorizing and the incredible utility of the concept of affect in challenging our modern beliefs about subject/object, self/world, thinking/feeling. They define affect as “an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relations as well as the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities” (p. 1). And, importantly for this project, Gregg & Seigworth (2010) explain that “affect is persistent proof of a body’s never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world’s obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations” (p. 1). Their introduction to the collection of varying uses of and engagements with affect study does provide some evidence of a stable-for-now concept of affect that includes “casting illumination upon the ‘not yet’ of a body’s doing, casting a line along the
hopeful (though also fearful) cusp of an emergent futurity, casting its lot with the infinitely connectable, impersonal, and contagious belongings to this world” (p. 4).

By way of example, Sara Ahmed (2010), in “Happy Objects,” defines affect here as “what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects” (p. 30). She also explains that “[t]o be affected by something is to evaluate that thing. Evaluations are expressed in how bodies turn toward things. To give value to things is to shape what is near us” (p. 31). Using happiness as the affect under scrutiny, Ahmed (2010) demonstrates how it is both personal and social, experienced and constructed, simultaneously in complicated ways, but that, nevertheless, it is “sticky” (incorporeal, but immanent) in that it is one of many affects that binds the material person to his or her abstract notions of the self and world. Acknowledging the multiplicitous nature of affect and its “stickiness” in “After Affect: Sympathy, Synchrony, and Mimetic Communication,” Anna Gibbs (2010) asks, “How might we, then, learn to think across the plurality of domains in which we are (and need to be) organized as subjects but in which the very process of subjectivation also produces potential that may open unsuspected possibilities for new ways of thinking, being and acting?” (p. 187). This project explores how we might learn to think across these domains and their potential within the context of writing pedagogy and student self-assessment.

A second collection of affect-related explorations which also suggests that affect is an idea that has captured the momentary attention of a variety of cultural studies endeavors is *Ecologies of Affect: Placing Nostalgia, Desire, and Hope* (2011). This collection contributes both to a dynamic and evolving definition of affect and to the nature of its applications to matters of language, identity, and potentiality. Linking three affects to time—nostalgia to the past, desire to the present, and hope to the future—these authors gathered their pieces around studies of place
and the relationships that people and affects have in spatio-temporal ways. This is significant to
the concept and application of affect in this particular project as it attends to a sense of
potentiality, of futurity, of becoming, and it is significant to encourage a notion of affect that
emphasizes its temporal and spatial dimensions as inseparable and significant when writing
teachers “teach” and writing students “learn” to assess the potential of a writer or a text.

Space for these authors is really a matter of ecology, which itself has spatial and temporal
aspects. These collected authors also share a notion of affect that attends to “ethical synthesis,”
acknowledging, “Infused with power, grounded in place and located bodies, affect is viscerally
political” (p. 5). Among the collected pieces contained in Ecologies of Affect: Placing
Nostalgia, Desire, and Hope, and of particular import for this project is the work of Matthew
Tiessen (2011), titled “(In)Human Desiring and Extended Agency.” In this piece, Tiessen rejects
a philosophy grounded in individual objects and people and instead sets forth an epistemology of
relationships, in which “things become products of the relationships that bring them into being”
(p. 127). Tiessen (2011) introduces the notion of “desire lines,” as “the paths we trace through
the dirt [which] are or were willed into being by our all-too-human desires” (p. 129). Building
on the work of Deleuze & Guattari (1987), and their notion of assemblage, Tiessen (2011) argues
that the mutuality revealed by the desire line is evidence of agency that is not possessed merely
by the human. These desire lines (concretely for Tiessen, mountain bike trails carved into the
dirt by mountain bikers but with accordance for elements of the terrain—trees, rocks—toward
the end of an exhilarating, challenging, pleasurable ride) are dynamically formed relations,
moving along a trajectory, actualizing the capacities of the landscape, the bicycle, and the rider.
The benefit of Tiessen’s (2011) notion of desire lines is that “[r]eframing our desires and hopes
as expressions not of ourselves alone, but of relationships, intertwinings, and interdependent
becomings has the potential to alter significantly our understanding of the world around us” (p. 131). This project seeks to attempt such a reframing for composition pedagogy, for writing students being taught to express their own desires and hopes through their texts and as writers. Tiessen’s (2011) work inspires my own nascent definitions of potentiality and trajectory, and the possibility of reconceiving expression as a matter not of the individual, but of the individual’s interrelatedness with others.

Some of these concepts of affect have already seeped into the realm of Composition Studies, largely in explorations of the role and value of emotions in our work as teachers and scholars, with hopeful and critical explorations. Affect theory in the classroom manifests in Christa Albrecht-Crane’s “An Affirmative Theory of Desire in the Classroom” (2003), in which she argues that through the lens of affect theory, we might “understand the whole picture of teaching and student/teacher interaction better and to what happens in the teaching moment when we meet other people, other bodies” (p. 580). Through the lens of affect and desire, “teacher and student create something together through their desire for a connection, an affective call-and-response game that produces a particularly positive and generative bond” (p. 584). The role of desire (as an affect) in teaching and learning is the concern of Megan Watkins’s (2010, 2013) work in “Desiring Recognition, Accumulating Affects” and in her recent book, *Discipline and Learn: Bodies, Pedagogy and Writing*, which demonstrates the historical neglect of a unified concept of mind/body and its relationship to learning/teaching and proposes a “pedagogy of the body.” Watkins (2010) explores the desires of teachers, and the ways in which desire can transmit and accumulate in the classroom to the benefit of teachers and students. Her application of affect studies challenges notions of the teacher as facilitator, as somewhat removed from the emotional and educational development of students. Taking a next step and demonstrating a
pedagogical value of affect in her more recent work, Watkins (2013) argues that Foucault’s
notion of “[d]isciplinary power can be pedagogically productive . . . because . . . its panoptic
quality gives it the potential to function as a form of embodied social conscience or corrective
mediating behavior” (p. 25). She explains that student’s “bodies become infused with an
understanding that effective social participation generally depends on a disciplining of their own
bodies in terms of how they affect others. This discipline, therefore, has a broader social good
beyond a delimiting form of governance” (p. 25). Specific to the writing classroom, Watkins
(2013) considers “[t]he bodily dimensions of writing,” which, she argues, are “generally taken
for granted” (p. 26). Importantly, Watkins (2013) argues, “Bodies need to be attuned to the
dynamics of writing which requires a certain bodily discipline that curbs other desires . . . . This
discipline eventually attains the status of a disposition generating an ongoing desire to write” (p.
26). This “desire to write” and the connected “desire to teach” are dynamics that have been
largely untreated in pedagogical scholarship, yet they are at the very root of what Haswell &
Haswell (2010) describe as the author’s sense of having something to say, of sensing that there is
more and better work to be done, of (in a word) potentiality.

Revealing a similar mode of inquiry based in the neglect of bodily and affective concerns
in classrooms, Julie Lindquist (2004) asks,

If critical inquiry can’t supply mechanisms for uncovering truths about social structures,
power, and class identity, then what resources are available to teachers in this effort? The
short answer is that these resources lie within the domain of the emotional: they include
students’ affective experiences of class and teachers’ affective responses to these
experiences. (p. 188)
But, Lindquist (2004) acknowledges that her project is just a beginning: “to begin an inquiry into how teachers might perform emotional engagements that students find authentic and valuable within scenes of literacy instruction” (p. 188). Linking pedagogy and larger issues of social justice, Lisa Langstraat and Melody Bowdon (2012) demonstrate “Critical Emotion Studies” in their piece, “Service-Learning and Critical Emotion Studies: On the Perils of Empathy and the Politics of Compassion,” in which they explore the pedagogy of service-learning and emotional politics. Langstraat & Bowdon (2012) argue that unless we work toward pedagogies that denaturalize emotionality, we risk reaffirming forms of emotional hegemony that reproduce a rational/emotional split, that reaffirm the entitlement politics so closely associated with empathy, that student compassionate action through the studied inattention to the interconnectedness of feeling/thinking/doing. (p. 13)

The concerns of Lindquist (2004) and Langstraat & Bowdon (2012) speak back to hooks’ engaged pedagogy and her insistence that deeply personal experiences and social justice are reciprocal and mutual, as are emotions, cognitions, and actions. All of these scholars emphasize the political nature of pedagogical practices, and particularly the political nature of they ways in which teachers engage with students when identities of teacher and student are developing. Likewise, this work demonstrates an awareness of potentiality, of the energy of a space that can be used to impact others, to influence environments, and to create change. Thus, this literature complicates and challenges a simplistic notion of affect as it intertwines with existing theories and practices in writing classrooms.

In addition to exploring pedagogy and social justice, affect has entered Composition Studies by way of concerns about emotion and the rhetorical concept of pathos. Laura Micciche

this study challenges longstanding views of emotion as unreasonable, as a mark of feminine excess, and as exclusively personal. Tendencies to think of emotions as only personally experienced and felt are simply not adequate to describe how emotions take form and are coded as appropriate or inappropriate within communities. (p. 6-7)

In these words, she identifies the between-ness of affects, existing as connectivity between personal experience and environmental reality.

Significantly, for this project, Micciche (2007) explains “why emotion, why now,” in Composition Studies by identifying four reasons why she believes this is appropriate study for the discipline at this point: the presence of “feminist thinking,” renewed interest/understanding of classic rhetoric, an emphasis on interdisciplinarity, and “the increasing presence of bodies in composition scholarship” (p. 17). Micciche (2007), however, shies away from using the term affect, instead explicitly choosing the term emotion, and though she offers suggestions for
pedagogical practices that are attendant to emotion, her concept of emotion is clearly couched in the notion of emotion as a (rhetorical) skill to be studied, recognized, and deployed by writing students. This project takes a “next step” from the work of Micciche, with much gratitude for her thoughtful initial analysis and description of emotion as a rhetorical concept, by pushing the exploration of emotion into the realm of affect, and the realm of how it operates in our daily interactions to create a sense of identity, of authorship. Affect, as demonstrated in the review of its various incarnations in cultural studies, has more dimensions to it than the concept of emotion that Micciche develops. This project explores affect as pre-conscious, pre-personal, and bodily—as a connectivity between bodies and selves that exists in and around language.

These applications and explorations of affect demonstrate that a theory of affect might provide this project with the language to discuss and explore the relationships among selves (subjectivities) and environments, the becoming of those relationships, and the potential of our interactions. Not only does affect theory offer words to describe the dynamics of expressions at multiple levels from the personal to the political, it moves us away from the limitations of binaries that persist despite clear evidence to the contrary of their existence, such as subjective and objective, thought and feeling, self and other. Having been freed from these constructs, composition scholarship and teaching might be better able to engage in the work of studying, concretely and with the care of our students in mind, issues of writing, agency, engagement, and assessment. One thing that seems to emerge from the momentum of the “affect conversation” is a developing concept of potentiality that can be equally useful to pedagogical theory and to classroom practices.

*How the Literature Intersects: Agency, Literacy and Liminality*
Jacqueline Rhodes (2005) describes radical feminism as working in the spaces in between—liminal spaces where change is possible, and where traditions of oppression can be broken and power redistributed. This space is also the concern of cultural studies, and what Lawrence Grossberg (2010) describes as mediation. For Grossberg (2010), “Reality is constantly producing itself (humans are, of course, part of reality) as the articulation and separation of expression and content” (p. 190). Grossberg’s mediation is “the (not necessarily anthropocentric) trajectory of effectivity or becoming. . . . a non-linear causality; it maps the flows, interruptions, and breaks that describe the becoming or self-production of reality or, better, reality-always-configured” (p. 91). Grossberg’s mediation demonstrates that agency is not singularly the possession of the (human) agent, but a dynamic that exists in the interrelation of subjects, in their capacity to affect, to impact and be impacted by others. It is the energy of the spaces in between, a space where expression travels like a stream (Massumi, 2002), deconstructed and reconstructed as it passes through subjects, who might borrow its intensity temporarily as it travels to increase or lessen their own impacts on the reality around them.

In The Logic of Sense, Deleuze (1969) identifies this liminal space as Alice’s experience when she first slips through the rabbit hole into Wonderland: caught between being big enough to lift the key and small enough to fit through the door, Alice is always not as big as she will be, nor as small as she was—and vice versa. Her state is one of perpetual not-yetness, of becoming, of in-betweenness. And in this state, Alice has the potential to become, in this particular circumstance, very large or very small, qualities which ultimately enable her to do very different things (lift the key, exit through the door). The image of Alice in this liminal space illustrates the momentariness of being, the perpetual construction of what we perceive as the “self,” and the relationality of that perception of self to the environment (the territory) and the passage of time.
Liminal space is not new terrain. In “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage,” anthropologist Victor Turner (1964) explored rites of passage as transformations between states of social, physical, mental and emotional states, ranging from graduations to wars. In the liminal state, individuals are “no longer classified and not yet classified,” and “[t]heir condition is one of ambiguity and paradox, a confusion of all the customary categories” (p. 48). Turner (1964) describes “neophytes” as having “physical but not social ‘reality’” and as being “invisible because they cannot be classified by the usual social order” (p. 49). They “may be regarded as a kind of human prima materia—an undifferentiated raw material” (p. 49).

Despite the instability of the liminal state, there is a positive aspect to this state of in-betweenness that bears on the project at hand: “disengaged from social structures, neophytes are alternately forced and encouraged to think about their society, their cosmos, and the powers that generate and sustain them. Liminality may be partly described as a stage of reflection” (p. 53).

It is not a far stretch to think of the student writer in liminal space, both in terms of the inner processes of composing and in terms of her presence in the writing classroom, not to mention in the reflective practices of self-assessment. The singular process of authoring that Haswell & Haswell (2010) describe through their interviews with professional writers is a state between idea and text, between writer and reader, between cognition/emotion and expression. As a suspended state of becoming, liminality is a concept that informs the notion of potentiality as an identifiable and valuable quality in writing students and their writing projects. Liminality in this sense is similar to Flower & Hayes’s (1981) cognitive process theory in which writers operate between abstract ideas and written words, employing cognitive processes to identify goals and solve problems through a series of mental routines. These cognitive processes of writing occur in a space suspended, even if only momentarily, from the external realities of the
final text. In a different but related sense, the first-year composition classroom is a modern day rite of passage, particularly in large universities where most first-year students are required to take the course in order to leave behind their high school notions of effective written work and to gain admission to the world of academic writing. These classrooms have the quality of invisibility that Turner (1964) describes, where students are not yet “writers” but not still high school students. In the reflective practices of the first-year composition classroom, students are asked to describe their progress, create portfolios of their written work that demonstrate their gained skills, and justify their admission to the academy. Liminal space is a fruitful way of conceiving the complexity of the first-year composition student’s state—and of that student’s potential to grow and develop a written text as well as to grow and develop as a writer. Free of the constraints of social roles and obligations, a developing writer can attend to reflection on her work and development, the potential of literacy to enhance her sense of authorship, and affect as a form of agency that can be shared, borrowed, and passed along for another’s opportunity to impact the world. This project argues that a new theory of self-assessment can enhance both the writing process and a sense of authorship through attention not only to reflection, and what has been learned, but also to potentiality, and what capacity exists within and around the writer for future learning.

The Study

Haswell & Haswell (2010) are highly critical of the ways writing teachers neglect their students’ sense of authorship. And one of the most egregious acts committed against writing students, as Haswell & Haswell (2010) argue, is “treating the act of reading as if it were only a teacher–prescribed act of translation, and not a student-sponsored act of creativity” (p. 247). While their suggestion that we
[n]ever forget that the texts we read, research, and teach involve real people who may walk into our lives and hold us accountable. Never forget that the classroom texts we require our students to author run the same risks as those shouldered by any other author in any other real world,” (p. 257)

is inspirational as a call to action, it leaves a writing teacher struggling to conceive of ways to enact this idea within the complicated matrix of university writing programs, social and cultural considerations, and the modern confusion over self and world. The movement of assessment in the direction of electronic portfolios, self-reflection, and revision, suggests a possible means by which authorship and potentiality can be fostered in and by the writing student: self-assessment. Self-assessment puts the consideration of the inner life of the author in the hands of the student—insightful and empowering at the intersection of literacy and agency. But self-assessment in the writing classroom must be taught and learned, and so it make sense to consider what students are already doing in their self-assessment practices, either naturally or in response to the ways writing teachers facilitate self-assessment now. It seems that there are two components to self-assessment that might lead to meaningful contemplation of authorship and potentiality, particularly in light of current assessment scholars’ advocacy of reflection and revision as acts of self-evaluation. The first would be assessment of a specific text or writing project—where am I in the process of this current writing project, where do I see it going, what do I envision for the project as I revise or prepare a final draft, what will I do to change this text to reach my goal? The second would be assessment of the self as a writer—what kind of writer am I now? what kind of writer do I want to be in the future? what do I need to learn or know or experience in order to be the writer I want to be in the future? But given the preceding
discussion of agency, literacy, and liminality, this project argues that these two types of self-
assessment are indelibly intertwined.

Thus, the empirical research of this project is a beginning inquiry into the self-assessment practices of four student writers enrolled in a first-year composition course at a large midwestern university. The specific questions that formed the impetus for this study were

1. How do first-year composition students assess their own writing?
2. How do first-year composition students think about their own writing in terms of future writing projects or writing skills?
3. How do first-year composition students assess writing projects that are in process?
4. What kinds of assessments do first-year composition students make about themselves as a certain kind of writer?

In order to address these four questions, I developed a study that would involve interviewing four first-year college writing students at a large Midwestern University about their self-assessment practices. The goal of these interviews was to determine if, and how, these students thought about their writing projects in terms of the future writing that they might do or in terms of what their writing projects might become in the future, and about their own capacity for growth and development as writers—their potentiality. This study was approved by HSRB (389660-3) on November 20, 2012, and I recruited students at the end of the Fall semester, 2012.

Following HSRB approval, I conducted a series of four interviews with four first-year college students who completed First-Year Composition (FYC) 1100, the “basic” writing course provided to incoming students at Midwestern University, in the Fall of 2012, and who were enrolled in FYC 1120, the “required” writing course for all students attending Midwestern in the
Spring of 2013. I offer more details about the student participants, the courses, and the writing program in Chapter 2. I conducted the interviews on a monthly basis (with some exceptions due to student availability) during the Spring of 2013. Each interview lasted approximately twenty (20) to thirty (30) minutes. The interviews were comprised of one series of questions that were asked at each interview, with some minor variations and follow up questions prompted by certain responses to planned questions. I took detailed notes during these interviews, and audio-recorded the interviews. They were then transcribed for coding and analysis. I treated these interviews as textual data, applying discourse analysis to the descriptions that student participants provided of their self-assessments and self-assessment strategies. Not only did I study how students described producing and thinking/feeling about their own writing practices, I also considered their interview discussions as writing processes themselves, seeking to understand on both levels the dynamism of textual analysis within the particular setting of the Midwestern’s FYC Program.

Consistent with the theories informing this project—writing assessment, feminism, and affect studies—I employed a feminist methodology that provided me opportunity to listen, imagine, and creatively envision the potentiality of this project as it developed. The overarching methodology and goal of this project—as a research study and as a pedagogical inquiry—was to employ an “ethic of care,” as described in the work of Nel Noddings (1984), and which I will explore more fully in Chapter 2. The use of feminist methods and methodologies to explore the assessment practices of these four student writers enhanced my insights into the role that self-assessment of potentiality might play in fostering a sense of authorship in writing students, and, thereby, advancing the knowledge and practices that are employed in composition pedagogy.

Chapter Summaries
Chapter 1: Potentiality and the Ability to Assess the Writing Self. In this chapter, I have introduced the project by explaining the need for this work in Composition Studies and I have reviewed the scholarship that is relevant both to the background of the project as well as to the theoretical framework that I built for the project. I have very briefly previewed the empirical research portion of the project in terms of the setting, the participants, as well as the methods and methodologies, all of which will be explored more fully in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

Chapter 2: Exploring Student Self-Assessment Practices with Feminist Methods and Methodologies. In Chapter 2, I provide a detailed description of the methodologies that inform my research practices, as well as a thorough explanation of the methods used to collect data and to analyze data gathered from student research participants.

Chapter 3: First-Year Writing Programs as Potential Sites for Research. In the third chapter, I provide a more detailed discussion of the student participants and the university setting in which the empirical research is conducted. This discussion helps to situate the study in its local environment and to define terms of self-assessment, reflection, authorship, and potentiality within the confines of this project.

Chapter 4: How First-Year Writing Students Assess Themselves as Writers, Their Writing, and their First-Year Writing Program. In this chapter, I set forth the findings of my research, analyzing the data collected by way of the theoretical framework that I have developed. This involves the application of writing assessment scholarship, feminist pedagogy, and affect studies.
Chapter 5: Analysis and Pedagogical Implications: How Awareness of Potentiality in Self-Assessment Practices Might Empower Student Writers Through Affect, Authorship, and Agency. In the final chapter, I discuss the pedagogical implications of this project. This involves suggestions for further study and research as well as humble proposals for a feminist approach to practicing student self-assessment of writing and for an affect studies approach to authorship and potentiality.

Conclusion

In summary, this project first considers whether attention to capacity and potentiality are important and valuable to ethical and useful writing (instruction), and then wonders if affect studies can provide a radical but real sensory engagement with the abstractions and affordances that exist in the classroom, the discipline, and the assemblages in which writing students participate. In the course of this work, I (1) define potentiality using resources in the current literature about writing assessment, feminist pedagogy and theory, and affect studies, (2) explore if and how student writers might assess the potentiality in their own writing and in themselves as developing writers through an empirical study that involves interviews and textual analysis of student reflective essays, and (3) consider, in light of the literature and the results of my empirical study, whether potentiality is a quality in student writing that might be assessed by writing students as they write and revise toward the goal of developing useful practices for composition teachers and students. I foresee valuable implications for the discipline which include advancement of theories and practices for writing assessment (self-assessment) that add to the work of scholars who see writing assessment as research (O’Neil, Schendel & Huot, 2002) and as having a significant role to play in the development of effective composition pedagogy.
(Huot, 2002; Yancey, 1998, 2000, 2004 2012). This work also contributes to the writing, thinking, experiencing, and practicing of feminist pedagogy, participating in the momentum that it has created in Composition Studies for the dynamic interaction of theory and practice, personal and public, caring and social justice. This project also seeks to offer further exploration of affect studies as it might apply to and advance the work of compositionists, students, teachers, and scholars alike. Affect studies finds power in fluctuation and instability—in the spaces in-between, composed of relations and interactions. For developing writers, this might be a source of power, of authorship, which seems to be a key element in the long-term success of writing and writers.
CHAPTER 2: EXPLORING STUDENT SELF-ASSESSMENT PRACTICES WITH FEMINIST METHODS AND METHODOLOGIES

Given my use of feminist theory and feminist pedagogy in Chapter 1, it should come as no surprise that my research employs feminist rhetorical practices for conducting writing research, best described by Royster and Kirsch (2012) in *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies*. Like feminist pedagogy as described previously in this document, feminist research is aligned with the project of affect studies. Though Royster & Kirsch (2012) do not employ the term affect in their text, their project and their description of feminist rhetorical practices in research employs the language of affect. In the first chapter each author writes her own “story of professional identity.” “Jackie’s Story” tells that she began “to see that dynamic rather than static, analyses add value, analyses that have a more multidimensional scope and more-generative power in accounting for a deeper and fuller range of human endeavors and accomplishments” (p. 10). My project is about viewing the complexity of research, of the relationality of researchers and participants, and of the interconnections across space and time that can both be discovered and created through rhetorical study and practice. Royster’s use of the phrase “human endeavors” conjures not simply the intellectual work of textual production and recovery, but the embodied and emotional exertion of writing as interactive, social, and laden with affect.

Feminist rhetorical practices serve as the overarching methodological framework in which I situate myself as researcher, my student participants, and my methods of data collection and analysis. However, this chapter also describes my use of concepts of ethics of care, teacher research, discourse analysis and narrative inquiry in the course of this empirical research project. I detail the methods that I use to discover answers to my research questions, to respect and honor
my research participants and their contributions to this dissertation. I then acknowledge the
biases and limitations of my empirical research, while also explaining how the project may be
worthwhile for composition studies, teachers, and students in spite of—or because of—the
localized scope of this initial empirical study of self-assessment practices and the quality of
potentiality in student writers and their writings. The chapter then offers a brief introductory
profile of the research setting and the research participants, which will be more fully described in
Chapter 3.

Research Methodologies

Feminist Rhetorical Practices

Royster & Kirsch’s (2012) project is an act of establishing feminist rhetorical practice as
legitimate (“excellent” in their own words) methodology for research, and it largely describes
processes of research that engage researchers with female persons in history. But it offers
something more than this, with a forward-looking agenda and an invitation to collaborate in their
project, wondering “whether we can identify elements and processes that we might envision
more holistically and articulate more forthrightly in creating a well-deliberated set of tools that is
both affirming for current work and generative for ongoing agenda” (p. 17). The authors offer
the terms

- critical imagination,
- strategic contemplation,
- social circulation, and
- globalization


to make “sense of the sets of tectonic shifts that we see to be taking place and
reconstituting the terrain of our work,” (p. 19), but these terms go beyond a summation of the
recovery work of feminist research, and they are easily applied to the type of research performed in my project as meaningful methodologies that comport with the theoretical and pedagogical tendencies already outlined. I see the first three of these as highly relevant to my project.

**Critical imagination** is “a term for a commitment to making connections and seeing possibility” (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 19). Seeing possibility is the very crux of this project, and it is a central concern as a subject of study and analysis in student self-assessment as well as a practice that I employed in the course of conducting and evaluating my research. This methodology engages researcher and participants in mutually constituted conversation about what potential lies in writing, writing instruction, and self-assessment. It required that I be open to what might be. Throughout this project, I creatively imagined different ways of teaching and doing self-assessment, as well as allowing for different findings than I might have anticipated.

**Strategic Contemplation** is a “meditative dimension of scholarly productivity,” which employs a complex notion of listening as ethical behavior. “It is our contention that such inquiry strategies allow us to engender an ethos of humility, respect, and care—an ethos we consider critical to achieving qualities of excellence” (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 21). I employed strategic contemplation in listening to my research participants, and to the theorists and scholars whom I studied, to hear their voices as valuable contributions to the study, and as having something to say for themselves as writers and individuals, not just for the purposes of this project.

**Social circulation** “invokes connections among past, present, and future in the sense that the overlapping social circles . . . can lead to changed rhetorical practices” (Royster & Kirsch 2012, p. 23). Though not separated by history or geography, my research participants and I had shared experiences as well as differences that informed the interrelation of our textual
representations of our own texts (used broadly) and of each others’ texts. We each brought our own histories to the study. In this study, I was cognizant of my research participants’ relations to me, to their own writing, to the university writing program. Importantly, I conceived of these relations as the dynamic interplay of “overlapping social circles” which impacted each other in ways that were evolutionary for the individual research participants, for myself as a researcher and developing scholar, and for the ways in which the discipline attends to writing assessment. I saw all of these elements of the project as developing and as momentary, but significant within this complicated web of connections, both personal and social.

These three concepts trained my attention as a researcher, a student, and a teacher on key elements of what I aimed to achieve with this work. Like the conceptions of literacy and agency advanced by affect theory, feminist rhetorical practices in writing research are dynamic and multidimensional. Royster & Kirsch (2012) “call for greater attention to lived, embodied experience because we consider it to be a powerful yet often neglected source of insight, inspiration, and passion” (p. 22). This is the language of affect and of a new concept of self-assessment that encourages awareness and valuation of the multiplicity of our personal processes (intellectual, sensory, emotional) and our social construction (ongoing, reciprocal).

**Ethics of Care**

The overarching methodology and goal of this project is to employ an “ethic of care,” as described in the work of Nel Noddings (1984). In *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, Noddings (1984) illuminates an ethic of care as a practice that informs the teacher-student relationship, in which the “one-caring” and the “one cared-for” mutually respect
and maintain each other’s needs and behaviors. The relationship is reciprocal. Significantly, Noddings (1984) explains that

[when we see the other’s reality as a possibility for us, we must act to eliminate the intolerable, to reduce the pain, to fill the need, to actualize the dream. When I am in this sort of relationship with another, when the other’s reality becomes a real possibility for me, I care.” (p. 14)

In these words, Noddings (1984) identifies the affective nature of caring: “It is a procreative mode characterized by our outer quietude and inner voices and images, by absorption and sensory concentration. The one so engrossed is listening, looking, feeling” (p. 34). She argues that caring is a model of interrelation appropriate for the teacher-student relationship, an ethical relationship, and I would argue that it is applicable in feminist rhetorical practices. Attention to an ethic of care in our pedagogical and research endeavors opens our eyes to the senses, expressions, and practices that can enhance the larger project of composition in complex political, social, and cultural spaces without limiting or oversimplifying our engagement—a project well-aligned with the work of affect studies and a potential concept of writing self-assessment attentive to the process of becoming, of potentiality, and of authorship. As an example of how ethics of care manifested in my own research, I would often stray from the structure of interviews to follow students’ conversation about their writing practices and their other activities, allowing their desires to lead our discussions. At different points in the interview sequences, student participants would be more or less interested in talking about their writing projects. When I sensed that they were animated about a certain topic in the interview, I would follow that topic, offering them opportunity to talk about and, hopefully, think about their writing selves and their writing projects. One student participant always took the opportunity at
the end of each interview to offer me his advice on how the FYC Program (the overarching system in which he and I both taught and learned, and the physical space where our interviews were conducted) might be improved. He expressed a strong desire to speak to these issues, and though it was somewhat off course from my intention when I asked, “Do you have anything to add that would be helpful to this study?” I learned much about him and about his perception of the program, and its impact on his ability and capacity to develop writing self-assessment practices. Because I cared for him, I listened and respected his interpretation of my closing question. We learned from each other by caring for each other simply in showing up for the interviews and exchanging our knowledges.

Composition Teacher Researcher

In “Revisiting Teacher Research,” Lee Nickoson (2012) acknowledges variations of teacher research methodologies in composition studies, but finds similarity in that teacher research is “a form of action research, the goal of which is improved teaching effectiveness that in turn, leads to the development of the teacher-researcher as pedagogue and investigator” (p. 104). Teacher-researchers believe that “research is an important part of what they do at work; it’s a central part of their day-to-day professional activity. The direct and firsthand information they gain by doing research, whether it comes from the students they teach or the users of their written documents, is invaluable to them” (Blakeslee & Fleischer, 2007, p. 7). Consequently, teacher research values studies that are focused instead on settings right in front of us, places where we can reflect carefully and methodically on issues of concern in our own work or for our own personal or professional curiosity and growth” (p. 7). My own research project grew out of similar desires: an interest in the work that I had done teaching developing writers in first-year
composition courses, a fascination with the theoretical implications of culture studies on composition’s own notions of literacy and agency, and a personal commitment to developing and growing my own scholarship and contribution to the profession in the classroom and in the discipline’s conversations. Though my empirical research was not conducted within the four walls of a classroom, it was a matter of me, as a teacher, interviewing and conversing with my participants, as students. In my review of the audio recordings of our interviews it was undeniably clear that both my participants and I had been cast in our roles as students and teacher long before the first conversations began. I asked about their writing projects, interjecting on occasion things I knew from teaching the course they were taking, and they answered those questions and volunteered information about their writing projects in the words that I had taught them when I had them in class the previous semester. The interviews were steeped in our teacher-student relationship, just as they were steeped in our researcher-participant relationship. My desire to teach, and to know how to teach more effectively, compelled the project in the first place. Then, as the project unfolded, my desire to be a more productive and contributing scholar joined in and moved the work forward through data analysis. And in the end, as I was reaching for conclusions in the form of pedagogical implications of the project, I felt those desires mingle to the point where they were inseparable from my own experience of this element of teacher research: “the mutually informing relationship between scholarship and pedagogy” (Nickoson, 2012, p. 107).

I would argue that teacher research has an affective dimension in its interplay of selfishness and collaboration—a dynamic of self and others that occurs at the surface of the researcher’s experience. On one hand, teacher research is motivated by the personal desire to teach and to be an effective teacher, while on the other hand it is an inherently social endeavor in
which what fulfills the individual teacher researcher’s desire is the interaction with the student participants. I say this is affective because it is unquestionably a matter of impacts—teacher valuing and seeking the impact of students on her, and students being impacted in return by the experience of participation in the moment, and by the lessons learned and shared by the teacher in the future. As Nickoson (2012) observes of her own experience as a teacher researcher, “Teacher research has offered ways for me to unify my teacherly and researcherly selves . . . . Specifically, rather than happening in isolation or as discrete phenomena, my scholarly wonderings happen precisely at the point where my teacherly and scholarly selves intersect” (p. 105). When “wonderings” happen at this intersection, they serve personal desires as well as the desire for work to be meaningful to others, particularly to students. These impacts result in what teacher research scholar Ruth E. Ray (1996) refers to as “the co-creation of events by all participants” (p. 294). Ray’s (1992, 1996) advocacy for teacher research challenges the binaries which divide teachers and researchers, and teachers and students. As she describes the underlying assumptions of teacher research, it is clear that this is an appropriate methodology for my project:

“that research should account for context (of the classroom, school, and community) in all its complexity; that researchers are active participants in this context; that research should be conducted primarily to inform and improve practice as well as to advance theory; that some research can profitably focus on the detailed and the particular—on one classroom, even one student—in the search for insights into specific learning environments; and that knowledge and truth in education are not so much found through objective inquiry as socially constructed through collaboration” (p. 175).
The complex dynamics of teacher research require critical assessment, which is born out in the practice of self-reflexivity, itself a powerful feminist and affective endeavor. As Patricia Sullivan explains in “Ethnography and the Problem of the ‘Other’” (1996) in composition, we undertake field work in university classrooms and teachers’ lunchrooms, and our informants are often students or other teachers. When studying literacy or pedagogy in such contexts, it is easy to forget that our own status as researchers, as academics, is itself a social location invested with diverse and contestable meanings (p. 106).

Nancy Naples (2003), also through discussion of ethnography, describes using “self-reflection about power as a tool to deepen ethnographic analysis and to highlight the dilemmas of fieldwork” (p. 41). She “use[s] the term to indicate both individual self-assessment and collective assessment of research strategies” (p. 41). Through this attention to her own subjectivity in the research process, Naples (2003) argues that “the process of critical reflection informed by theoretical insights of feminist standpoint epistemologies can help uncover the complex dynamics involved in the production of everyday life” (p. 44). In the spirit of being a feminist researcher and a teacher researcher, I, too, must be aware of the effect of my own position and values as interpreted by the student participants in my study, as well as in my interpretation of their answers to interview questions. To my student participants, I was an extension of the university’s writing program, and though I was no longer their teacher of record, they still spoke to me and interacted with me in the manner that we had become accustomed to during the previous semester when we were teacher and students.

Critical reflection on my status as teacher in my project gave me insight into how student participants described self-assessment in the terms that I myself had taught them in previous semester. It also made me aware of the significance of the “social location” of the university’s
FYC Program in which I and my student participants worked and wrote. This was most evident to me as I transcribed interviews and heard the common language of FYC that we shared effortlessly in our conversations, words like thesis, counterargument, and synthesis. At times, I struggled to pose interview questions to students in language that I thought they would understand, but when it came to these loaded FYC Program terms, the flow of our conversation was surprisingly smooth and clear. We acknowledged the shared experience of the FYC Program in those moments. But in stepping back to analyze our exchanges, I had to reflect carefully upon the role that the social situation played in our discourse, and the effect it had on the data. In coding, for example, it became quickly apparent that student participants assessed their writing projects, in part, through the use of FYC terms that they had been taught. These terms became a category of coding all their own. The impact of the social location of my project was a material complication of my work that required attention, but it was also a material complication of the daily interactions of teachers and students (of people) at any university. Thus, it was not to be ignored, but rather to be attended to and featured in my analysis of self-assessment practices. The goal of this project ultimately is to enhance a writer’s ability to assess his or her own writing in ways that promote growth and development. Providing students with the opportunity to voice their assessments of their writing projects is not only research but practice, entirely compatible with this larger project and the project’s involvement of affect studies. Practice occurs in, around, and through social situations; it is only with consideration of those impacts on behaviors and writing practices that a teacher researcher can develop meaningful scholarship.
Discourse Analysis and Narrative Inquiry

It was my intention to treat the oral descriptions that research participants provided about their writing projects and self-perceptions as textual data in that I engaged discourse analysis to explore and develop conclusions about how students self-assess their writing and whether they assess with an eye toward their own growth and development (potentiality) as writers. As Bazerman & Prior (2004) explain the nature and value of discourse analysis, “we need to explore the practices that people engage in to produce texts as well as the ways that writing practices gain their meanings and functions as dynamic elements of specific cultural settings” (p. 2). In further support of this method, they write,

Whether you are a writing teacher trying to find better ways of telling your students what they did well and what they didn't do well or a researcher interested in understanding how texts and textual practices in some social arena reflect and create certain social relations, discourse analysis can offer a valuable toolkit, prompting careful examination of the details of language and its basic modes—of representation, production, reception, and distribution. (p. 4)

Analyzing interviews as discourse was a complicated process because it required that I was simultaneously attuned to what was being said and how it was being said. But the complexity of the process served to honor the reality of writing research and of writing assessment as pedagogical practice, and, thus, generated meaningful conclusions about how and why composition scholars and teachers might define, value, and employ a notion of potentiality.

Traditionally, writing assessment research methods have involved protocol analysis, designed to avoid the hazards of retrospection. As Prior (2004) warns,
Retrospective accounts of writing rely on people's memory, and it appears clear that people remember relatively little of the moment-to-moment thinking and action they have engaged in. Retrospective accounts must also be considered as reflections and constructions tuned to the social situation and time in which they are produced. (p. 184-5)

The current incarnation of this project did not offer the opportunity to study self-assessment by student writers through think-aloud protocols, and there is sufficient criticism of think-aloud protocols to raise questions about the value of data gathered by way of their use. That being said, I continually acknowledged the “inaccuracies” of retrospection while I analyzed and drew conclusions from the data that I gathered from interviews with research participants. Student participants were asked about projects that had already been drafted and completed in classroom spaces far removed from their thoughts at the time of our interviews. And they were prompted by my questions to think back over time and space. There was little question that the present, and somewhat artificial, moment of the interview might generate a different assessment of their writing projects than they would have at another time, in a less constrained circumstance. Nonetheless, reflection and retrospection remain the primary tools by which students and writers self-assess their writing projects, so its flaws and limitations were a real part of the activity under examination in this research.

Applying feminist principles to “exceed the bounds of the interview,” Cynthia L. Selfe and Gail E. Hawisher (2012) highlight different aspects of the interview process to create “relationships forged within these conversations [that] construct a participatory model of research that challenges more conventional understandings of investigations and the power relations between researcher and researched subjects” (p. 37). Selfe and Hawisher (2012) describe how their early work to collect digital literacy narratives through conventional
structured interviews ultimately yielded way to dialogues and conversations in which interviewees “were engaging with us in making sense of their own digital media practices, even as we, too, were trying to do so” (p. 38). This transformation occurred as the researchers paid attention to the interviews as “self-performance” rather than simply a recounting of personal information or the answering of targeted questions (p. 38). Selfe & Hawisher’s (2012) interviews occurred on a much greater scale—over much more time and space—than my project, but I, too, experienced the positive effects of moving from structured interviews to more conversational dialogues with interviewees and of seeing student participants as collaborators in knowledge-making about self-assessment practices. The “more loosely structured dialogic exchange” of Selfe & Hawisher’s (2012) research occurred over “multiple and continuing conversations” as well as through video and audio recording (p. 45). These reconceived methods gave the researchers access to “the realities of peoples’ literate practices and their understandings about these practices” (p. 45). Selfe & Hawisher (2012) describe accessing precisely what I sought in my project: how students conceived of, practiced, and understood self-assessment as a matter of their own literacies. In my own work, feminist principles as applied to interviewing attended to my ethical concerns as well as my practical concerns for gathering data that would be useful and meaningful for myself, my student participants, and composition teachers and students.

In a similar call to think critically about traditional composition research methods, Debra Journet (2012) critiques “the conflation of narrative and the personal,” arguing that narrative is not necessarily a “transparent window onto individual subjectivity” (p. 14), but is “constructed out of the shared theoretical, methodological, and rhetorical commitments held by researchers and the community of readers and writers in which this work occurs” (p. 15). In so far as my
project assumed that students revealed something authentic and personal about their self-assessment practices during our interviews, I was cognizant of Journet’s (2012) caution that “[s]ince for many, one of the virtues of first-person narratives is that they dismantle or deconstruct the notion of accuracy or truth embedded in other more supposedly ‘objective’ or impersonal’ accounts, the issue of veracity becomes complicated [emphasis added]” (p. 19).

Not only was this a consideration for how I “read” my student participants’ personal narratives as told in our interviews, but it was also a matter of how I then translated and narrated that information in the story of my project. One of Journet’s questions figured prominently in the collection and analysis of the narrative inquiry at the heart of my work: “What ethical obligations do we have to the people whose lives we narrate and the readers whom we are addressing?” (p. 21).

The “narrative turn” that Journet describes in composition studies research has a companion trajectory in the subfield of writing assessment, which moves away from objective and standardized testing and data and toward a more dynamic, subjective approach to evaluating student writing and to encouraging students to perform self-assessment during the writing process (as in revision) and after the writing process (as in self-reflective essays after writing projects and in writing portfolios). Thus, it made sense that my research embraced the subjective nature of reflection and student self-assessment as part of my methods and methodologies. To this end, I did not solely codify the data collected from interviews and self-reflective essays, but I attempted to preserve and represent the uniqueness of each research participant’s assessment of his or her own writing projects by presenting data in the student participant’s own words as much as possible. This was not an effort toward an all-encompassing subjectivity and individuality, but rather a continued awareness of and attention to the effects of myself (my research
participants’ perceptions of me), the social situation (in particular the university’s FYC Program within which I and my participants worked), and the larger cultural situation upon the representations that research participants made about their writing projects and themselves as writers. My research was, and is, an ongoing endeavor to balance these disparate elements of the data that I collected, analyzed, and experienced; but this endeavor was entirely consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of the larger project.

Collecting Data in Response to Research Questions

Data Collection Methods

Though I described my data collection methods in Chapter 1, I will provide some additional information here as to my methods and the reasons why I chose them. Following HSRB approval, I recruited five students from my FYC course (FYC 1100). I had worked with these students as an instructor for the Fall Semester of 2012, and met with them after the semester was closed and grades were submitted in order to return their writing portfolios to them. Students came to my office in no particular order to obtain their evaluated portfolios. At that time, I provided them with a description of my proposed study and asked if they would be interested in participating. The first five students who came to my office that day agreed to participate. They were provided consent documents and time to review, sign, and return them to me. In January 2013, I began a series of interviews with four of the students. I was unable to reach the fifth student to schedule an initial interview. With respect for their contact preferences and schedules, I began a series of monthly interviews with each student that were conducted over the course of five months. These interviews were conducted in my office privately. Though I had a prepared list of questions for the interviews, we would often go “off script” as the conversation led to
interesting insights and discussion of students’ written work, their writing assignments, and their experiences in Midwestern University’s FYC Program. The interviews lasted approximately one half hour each time. I made audio recordings of each interview and typed notes during the interviews. I also made notes periodically over the semester as ideas and questions were raised in my mind from interaction with students during the interviews. These interviews were later transcribed, after all of the interviews had been completed. Below is an excerpt from an early interview transcription.

Transcript: ES 1/15/13

Q: So tell me what projects are you currently working on in your [FYC] course?
A: Well, um, our teacher jumped kind of in rather fast. I was surprised. We got an article and had to read it for the next day. That’s how we met and then she set a rough draft due the next day tomorrow. I was just surprised how quick we jumped in.

Q: What’s the assignment?
A: Analyzing an article. We were given an article with like opinions on social pressures. So.

Q: You said you have a first draft due tomorrow?
A: Yeah.

Q: Where are you in terms of having that ready for tomorrow?
A: I have it finished. I have it finished. I finished it yesterday.

Q: Did you, this is a first draft, so is do you have it done beginning to end, or just a chunk of it?
A: She doesn’t accept half, like half, she wants it all the way done cause she said she will spend a lot of time putting work into it helping you develop it and if you don’t have the work into that how can she help you so she didn’t even accept like half done. She wants it all done.

Q: How do you think this writing project is going for you?
A: Pretty good. I, well you know, I was a student, I kind of prolonged doing it. But once I actually started it, it wasn’t so bad. Its more, we aren’t allowed to use outside sources so I don’t have to worry about trying to put stuff in. Its just kind of what I think and what I have gathered from the article. And if I think its accurate and can be used as a credible source. So its mostly just my opinions and stuff.
During transcription, I developed codes for analysis, initially transcribing entire interviews and later transcribing only selected parts of interviews. The transcription process led me to create coding categories as well as to reconsider expectations and ideas that I had about student self-assessment practices and the possibilities for a definition of potentiality, as well as for what role the idea of potentiality might play in student self-assessment practices. The transcription process also led me to ask new questions about the relationship between my original research questions, the data I had gathered, and the theoretical implications of the two.

In their description of qualitative research methods, Corbin & Strauss (1990) explain that “data collection and data analysis are tightly interwoven processes, and must occur alternately because the analysis directs the sampling of data” (p. 59). This was certainly my experience during this project, as my ongoing data collection interacted in complicated but illuminating ways with my continued review of literature, and my analysis of the data through reflection, note taking, listening, and transcribing. Early in the process I became aware that there were multiple terms and ways which students used to describe their writing projects and themselves as writers. And those terms sounded different to me in the various stages of interviewing face-to-face, listening to audio recordings, and comparing notes from interviews with transcript notes. I became more aware of the ways student participants used particular terms through repeated return to the audio recordings. As an example of this dynamic interplay and its revelations, I recognized while listening to Susan’s first interview that her responses to my questions about her FYC writing projects were halted, hesitant, and peppered with verbal tics. But as the interview progressed and became more conversational, and as she began describing a writing project that she was doing outside of the FYC Program, for another class, the interruptions went away and her description
of her writing “flowed,” a term she herself had used in describing one criteria she employed to assess her own writing.

An additional aspect of my interview methods worth discussing is the series of interviews over the course of a semester, and the interviewing of several different students over that same period of time. Kevin Roozen (2010) explains that "data collection needs to address the temporal distance separating performances, either by extending inquiry for longer spans of time and/or by collecting data from different periods in participants' lives" (p. 347). Roozen’s (2010) own work is conducted over much longer spans of time than my project would allow, but the notion of “temporal distance” and its effect on active and on-going phenomena is a significant concern of my research into first-year writing students’ self-assessment practices. Given the theoretical concepts of potentiality and authorship that inform this study, one element of my inquiry is how students develop over time, as writers and as assessors of their own writing and of their writing selves. By meeting monthly with my student participants over the course of a semester, during which they were enrolled in the university’s required FYC course as well as in several other college courses that engaged them in writing processes, I was not only able to see how they assessed their writing at one point in time, but over the course of time during which they were learning writing processes and assessment practices as taught in the university’s FYC Program. And by meeting concurrently with four students enrolled in the program’s required writing course for the semester, I also gathered data that I compared and contrasted to demonstrate differences and similarities in how these students self-assessed. One notable difference was that some of the student research participants began their interviews with more confidence than others, while some ended with more confidence than others. Thus I chose this interviewing process for the richness of the data and possible relationships that would be
revealed about the complex process of self-assessment, both as a tool in the writing process and as a measure of one’s self as a writer.

Research Questions

As Corbin & Strauss (1990) explain, research problems and research questions dictate the kind of research that one conducts. Thus, qualitative research is appropriate for my research questions as it seeks to “uncover the nature of person’s experiences with a phenomenon”—in this specific case, how writing students experienced the phenomenon of self-assessment of their writing (Corbin & Strauss, 1990 p. 19). The four research questions that guided this project were

1. How do first-year composition students assess their own writing?
2. How do first-year composition students think about their own writing in terms of future writing projects or writing skills?
3. How do first-year composition students assess writing projects that are in process?
4. What kinds of assessments do first-year composition students make about themselves as a certain kind of writer?

Corbin & Strauss (1990) recommend the use of research questions that “will give us flexibility and freedom to explore a phenomenon in depth” (p. 37), and they note that qualitative research questions “tend to be oriented toward action and process” (p. 38). Each of these four questions inquired of students the kinds of processes, terms, descriptions, and ideas that they engaged with when asked directly to self-assess writing projects, but also when they were simply talking about their writing projects and themselves as writers. Indeed my research questions for
this project were not only to inquire of students about self-assessment practices and assessments themselves, but also to observe students practicing self-assessment in the course of our interview sessions. My interview questions were also developed to prompt students to use reflection on writing projects as a self-assessment practice, as well as to prompt them to offer verbal, in the moment assessments at the time of the interviews. This method design gave me opportunity to explore the phenomenon of self-assessment for these students without oversimplifying the process. I considered my work to be what Corbin & Strauss (1990) refer to as “hear and report” (p. 21), in which the “task is to gather data and present them in such a manner that ‘the informants speak for themselves’” (p. 21). I hoped to preserve the voices of the students with whom I worked as I believed that their self-assessments would be intimately tied to the language and words they use to describe both their assessment practices and the assessments themselves. In light of the project’s goal, interviews over the course of the semester seemed to be the most likely method to provide me with useful answers to what I sought to know about writing FYC student writers’ self-assessment practices.

But in addition to hearing and reporting, I was “concerned with building theory,” which ultimately engaged the use of grounded theory in my research project (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p.21). In grounded theory, “data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationships with each other. One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 23). In this explanation of grounded theory, Corbin & Strauss (1990) identify two elements of grounded theory that are crucial to my research project: reciprocal relationships and allowing theory to emerge. The reciprocity of theory and practice is significant for my project because it honors the dynamic nature of writing research and of writing pedagogy. Research and pedagogy
inform one another and do not realize full potential without one another. Similarly, the notion of research as a means of allowing theory to emerge honored the interactive nature of my project and opened the project to the discovery of details about self-assessment practices that would be invisible to a search that had a specific finding in mind. I set out to prove nothing, but rather to gather data that was relevant to both myself as a writing instructor and my student participants as writing students, and to find there the basis for a notion of how self-assessment happened for writing students. The value of theory lies in its portability—the language of theory can lace these details together in ways that allow further conversation about what happens in self-assessment processes.

The concepts of grounded theory are reminiscent of Royster & Kirsch’s (2012) feminist rhetorical practices, in which listening, reflecting, and imagining become important activities in the research of how and why individuals use discourse in different times and different contexts. There are reciprocities between researcher and participant, between data and analysis, between practice and theory, and even between the present and the past. And it is through these feminist practices that I endeavored to “form a theoretical rendition of reality” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 21). Grounded theory, however, is not just theory making, for its secondary goal is for “the theory’s implications [to] have useful application” (p. 24). As a teacher-researcher and a feminist researcher, and in the interest of ethics of care, the practical application of the theory that grew from this project was two-fold. First, the interviews themselves were conversations that facilitated students in making their own self-assessments of their writing project, processes, and personas. Just as Selfe & Hawisher (2012) sought to do in their conversations about digital literacy narratives, I used an “interview-based project to learn more from and with the participants we studied rather than just about them” (p. 41). The research itself was the practice
of encouraging students to self-assess, which composition teachers already know is helpful to
developing writers. Though my goal was to develop a theory that identified, defined, and
translated potentiality into a quality to be assessed by student writers, I also endeavored to
provide opportunities for students to talk about their writing and to self-assess in ways that
would help them to develop their own sense of authorship over the course of the project. In a
second type of practical application, the analysis of the data that I collected was ultimately
performed in service of a feminist pedagogy of self-assessment that might be utilized for the
empowerment of writing teachers and FYC students, and provided them with tools with which
they might evaluate and exercise their own literacies and agencies.

In closing this section, I feel that it is also significant to note how I worked, and will
continue to work, to develop what Corbin & Strauss (1990) call “theoretical sensitivity” (p. 41).
This is a relatively complex issue, but rather significant in the larger scheme of this project and
its context within feminist theory, feminist pedagogy, and affect studies. This was admittedly
my first research project and my first lengthy publication, so it was important that I learned from
the work that I did at this stage in my own development as a composition studies scholar and
teacher. To that end, I believe that my theoretical sensitivity was something that required
continual attention and nurturing. Theoretical sensitivity is “insight, ability to give meaning to
data, to understand, to separate pertinent from not pertinent” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 41) and
my relative capacity for doing so needed to be supported by literature from within the field and
without, the personal experience of being a researcher, and interaction with my research
participants and my data. Throughout this project, I continually read relevant literature from
writing assessment scholars, feminist theory and pedagogy, cultural and affect studies (for
example, Huot, Yancey, White, hooks, Rhodes, Grossberg, Deleuze & Guattari, Ahmed, and
Micciche) in every phase of the project. I also read and reread relevant literature about qualitative research methods, grounded theory, teacher researcher, and feminist methodologies (Saldana, Corbin & Strauss, Noddings, Ray, Nickoson, Naples, Selfe & Hawisher, Royster & Kirsch). In a recursive process I moved forward and backward through my notes, my readings, my data, and my analyses so that the experiences informed each other to make the project rich and useful, and to support meaningful reflection on my own limitations at this point in my career and my capacities for future work. In other words, I approached theoretical sensitivity as an attentiveness to and self-reflection on my own potentiality and sense of authorship as a Composition Studies’ teacher and scholar.

Data Coding

Saldana (2013) describes qualitative research as “demand[ing] meticulous attention to language and deep reflection on the emergent patterns and meaning of human experience” (p. 10). The coding procedure that he recommends is one of cycles, in which recoding, recategorization, and reflection are performed repetitively with ever closer approximation to the reality that the researcher seeks to represent. I remained open to changing my data coding as I became more involved with my data and as I reconsidered my codes and analyses. An initial list of codes developed as I transcribed interviews and reviewed the notes that I had taken during interviews. This list was long and included codes that described the things that the student writers were assessing:

- Self-assessment of writing projects
  - writing process
  - final text
  - relationship to assignment
  - teacher perceptions/instructions
  - content
• Self-assessment of person as writer
  o ways of describing self as writer
  o ways of describing self as not writer
  o intelligence
• Looking back
• Looking forward
• Versions of capacity
• Use of FYC terminology (issues of transfer)
• Different types of reflection:
  o Reflection on writing activities (ES 2/12)
• Distinction between talking and writing
• Grammar
  o Negative
  o Positive
• Preparation for writing
  o Reading
  o Researching
  o Prewriting/brainstorming/outlining
• Expressions of pride/confidence/ agency
• Efficiency/ease
• Purposes of writing projects
  o Grades
  o Writing to learn (self)
  o To appear smart (audience)

With further analysis, comparison of interviews over time, and comparison among different student writers’ interviews, these codes changed and patterns were revealed to generate three larger categories: assessment of writing projects, assessment of self as writer, and assessment of the FYC Program. Through analysis over time, I also developed an intersecting set of categories that reflected not the content of the assessments, but the way in which these assessments were performed: reflections on past writing experiences, contemporaneous assessments of present writing projects, and future-looking plans and expectations for self as a writer and for writing projects yet unknown.

In addition to describing a cyclical pattern of coding, Saldana (2013) also presents a “codes-to-theory model” for qualitative research, in which codes are developed into categories,
categories broken into subcategories, categories developed into themes and concepts, and then into assertions and theories (p. 13). Similarly, Corbin & Strauss (1990) describe an interactive process of open coding, in which “data are broken down into discreet parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences” (p. 62), axial coding, in which relationships and connections are made among data and categories to generate more questions and illuminate new data as well as to verify relationships against data, and selective coding, in which the researcher “explicat[es] the story line” (p. 117) by writing a descriptive, analytical, and then hypothetical narrative about the phenomenon under scrutiny.

Following my data collection over the course of the Spring Semester of 2013, I transcribed all of the recorded student interviews, and compared the audio recordings against notes that I had taken directly onto an interview script at the time of the interview. Below is a comparison of some notes that I took during the interviews with the corresponding transcript with notes.

**ES Interview Notes 1/15/13**

1. What writing projects are you currently working on in your [FYC] course? Teacher jumped in fast, article to read for next day, rough draft due wed. analyzing an article—opinions and social pressures.

2. Where in the process of the assignments are you? Prewriting, drafting, revising, for example? First draft tomorrow, I have it finished. Beginning to end—doesn’t accept half done

3. How do you think the writing project is going? Pretty good; I prolonged doing it but once I started it isn’t too bad. No outside sources, just kind of what I think and gathered and if I think it can be a credible source.

4. What do you think is successful about the writing project at this point in time? I think it is well put together. Intro and conclusion, main points, fully developed, supported with article, do a review of article pretty well put together. Before printed it, read over for grammar errors. Rather happy about it.
5. What are you struggling with, or what is not successful about the writing project at this point in time? Having strong points, two are pretty strong, third is just there because I needed another point. Maybe find another or strengthen that one.

**Transcript: ES 1/15/13**

Q: So tell me what projects are you currently working on in your [FYC] course?
A: Well, um, our teacher jumped kind of in rather fast. I was surprised. We got an article and had to read it for the next day. That’s how we met and then she set a rough draft due the next day tomorrow. I was just surprised how quick we jumped in.

Q: What’s the assignment?
A: Analyzing an article. We were given an article with like opinions on social pressures. So.

Q: You said you have a first draft due tomorrow?
A: Yeah.

Q: Where are you in terms of having that ready for tomorrow?
A: I have it finished. I have it finished. I finished it yesterday.

Q: Did you, this is a first draft, so is do you have it done beginning to end, or just a chunk of it?
A: She doesn’t accept half, like half, she wants it all the way done cause she said she will spend a lot of time putting work into it helping you develop it and if you don’t have the work into that how can she help you so she didn’t even accept like half done. She wants it all done.

Q: How do you think this writing project is going for you?
A: Pretty good. I, well you know, I was a student, I kind of prolonged doing it. But once I actually started it, it wasn’t so bad. Its more, we aren’t allowed to use outside sources so I don’t have to worry about trying to put stuff in. Its just kind of what I think and what I have gathered from the article. And if I think its accurate and can be used as a credible source. So its mostly just my opinions and stuff.

The transcription process was done in earnest during November and December, 2013. I performed “pre-coding,” as Saldana (2013) defines it by highlighting words, phrases, and passages in the transcripts and in my written notes. From these highlights, I began noting preliminary codes, including in vivo codes. Saldana (2013) recommends in vivo coding for novice researchers as a way of learning to code data, and for studies involving youth as “child
and adolescent voices are often marginalized, and coding with their actual words enhances and
depthens an adult’s understanding of their cultures and worldviews” (p. 91). While I did not
perceive my students to be adolescents (they were all over the age of eighteen), I did observe that
my student participants were given a vocabulary of the first-year writing program’s design to
describe and assess their writing, and that this marginalized their own voices in the self-
assessment of their work. Thus, a key piece of this project was to “prioritize and honor the
participant’s voice” not only as a matter of ethics, feminist rhetorical practices, and respect, but
as a matter of data to be considered and analyzed (Saldana, 2013, p. 91). Thus, in vivo coding
played a central role in my initial coding work.

Saldana defines a variety of different coding methods, among which is “affective
coding,” which “investigate[s] subjective qualities of human experience (e.g. emotions, values,
conflicts, judgments) by directly acknowledging and naming those experiences” (p. 105). This
type of coding is extremely relevant to this project, which is informed by my assertion that
affects require our attention. By employing affective coding and, more specifically, “values
coding” (Saldana, 2013, p. 110), I sought to code students participants’ descriptions of their own
identities as writers, their attitudes about their writing and themselves as writers, their beliefs
about successful writing, and the values that they placed on different writing practices and
processes employed within the FYC Program as well as in their other writing projects. As
Saldana (2013) warns, “Values Coding is values laden” (p. 114), and what research participants
represent as their affects or their attitudes, beliefs, and values, may not actually be what they are.
This coding method required an on-going awareness of my own attitudes, beliefs, and values
about writing assessment and of the momentariness of student participants’ expressions of their
own values. Comparing these across participants and across time became a significant part of my categorizing and conceptualizing.

With initial interview transcripts and notes for each of the series of student interviews, I coded words and phrases, but as I moved further into the coding process and into the later interview transcripts, I coded more along the lines of full passages. At all points I sought to code what Saldana (2013) calls “slices of social life recorded in the data—participant activities, perceptions, and the tangible documents and artifacts produced by them” (p. 17). Some of the most enjoyable and enlightening conversations that I had during interviews involved student writers describing their non-FYC writing projects. Students were excited to explain these projects to me, perhaps because I was unfamiliar with them and perhaps because they were so engaged in their production. Walter, for example, described a project for his tourism, leadership and event planning class in which he observed another teacher teaching students how to play a new game. He explained how he critiqued the teacher’s performance to gain knowledge that he could use in the second part of the project, which was to develop a new game and teach it to the other members of his class. Susan enthusiastically shared the details of a child development assignment in which she would observe two elementary school students, craft developmental profiles of each student, and then compare the two profiles. She even offered the details of how she made arrangements to go into the school to observe the students. These examples from Walter and Susan’s interviews offered me a glimpse into their educational lives outside the space of the FYC Program in which we interacted with each other. It not only provided some perspective on FYC writing projects and their assessments of writing projects in general, but it made their writing experiences very real and helped me to see that they were narrating their learning process overall through the course of self-assessment during our interviews. And it was
through these conversations that I developed a second set of codes to describe what they were assessing when they were assessing themselves and their writing projects:

- content
- form
- process (time & activity)
- judgments
- affects
- terms of art
- teacher attitudes
- self as writer
- value/use of writing

In addition to employing the coding cycles described above, I also made use of analytic memos in order to keep track of and reflect on codes, categories, concepts, and theories, as well as to create opportunities to re-see the data and to re-code as seemed necessary as more data was analyzed. In my “Research Notebook,” I began with a schema of provisional codes simply to begin envisioning what I would first seek in the data, and then I continually returned to those codes and altered those codes as I adopted in vivo codes from student participants’ own words and described practices of self-assessment. Additionally, I sketched out categories, organized and diagrammed connections, and wrote memos to myself about emerging concepts and questions. A sample page from my notebook is set out below.
Biases and Limitations

In *Becoming a Writing Researcher*, Blakeslee & Fleischer (2007) state, “No research is perfectly objective, and it doesn’t need to be” (p. 29). Particularly in qualitative research, where constructs and meanings are developed by the researcher through the process of research itself, and in grounded theory, where sensitivities and knowledges affect how data is developed into a theory, subjectivity is not damaging to the products of empirical work. In fact, creativity is essential to deep, rich coding, interpretation, and analysis of data. Creativity seems to be a very subjective endeavor. As Lauer and Asher (1988) explain, “The creation of a new theory shares the features of any creative act . . . an interaction between the context, heuristics, intuition, and the constraints for the person and the field” (p. 5). While objectivity is the assumed goal of other types of research, qualitative writing studies research is steeped in methods that are biased, but, more significantly, are reflective about that bias. “[B]ias isn’t always bad, but if it goes
unacknowledged it can limit how you think about and approach your research, which may have ethical implications” (Blakeslees & Fleischer, 2007, p. 33). Continual reflection enhances and illuminates not only bias, but the relationships and connections that assist one in building a theory through qualitative research.

There are a variety of biases and limitations that required my attention throughout the course of this project in order for me to respond to two questions in the forefront of my mind as I collected and coded data: **who will my research affect and how will my research affect those individuals?** For example, in the case of my interviews I had to be cognizant of my own beliefs about students’ self-assessments of their writing, of my own desires to see students thinking in terms of their future growth and development, as well as my own knowledge about the value and significance of self-assessment practices. Clearly, approaching this project, I studied various areas of relevant literature in depth, and became committed to my own lenses of feminist theory, feminist pedagogy, writing assessment concepts, and affect studies. I also had to keep in mind that my participants might not find our interview sessions to be beneficial to them in the ways that I had intended for them to use these sessions as opportunities to reflect and think critically about their own writing processes and their goals for their writing projects. My interview data demonstrated that student participants did not easily make connections between the writing skills that they were taught in their first-year writing courses and the writing tasks assigned to them in other classes, or in the writing that they undertook on their own. Julie, for example, described frustration with a bad grade on a writing assignment in her education class because the teacher expected her to have a “thesis,” and the student thought that a “thesis” was for her “FYC class.” (personal communication, April 12, 2013). Transfer of writing skills from one writing context to another is of ongoing concern in Composition Studies, and the lack of transfer was demonstrated
by some of the students in this project. Thus, I suspected that they would not easily connect the interviews we did and the questions asking them to describe self-assessments of their writing with their own evaluations of writing projects and themselves as writers outside of the interview scenario. If they did not make that connection, would the self-assessments that they performed during our interviews be worthwhile to them?

I also had to be aware of my desire to teach. Though my research was not conducted in the classroom nor while I was the student participants’ teacher of record, they clearly perceived me as “their teacher.” In “Ethics and Representation in Teacher Research,” Ruth E. Ray (1996) discusses the complications of “the power dynamics [which] are between teacher and student,” acknowledging the concern “whether it is ever really possible to understand students on their own terms when the role of teacher is to evaluate and change students” (p. 291). This very concern is an argument for the development of more informed and robust self-assessment practices in writing instruction. The student research participants were, after all, previously “my” students, and I wanted them to be successful in their FYC course. When they divulged frustration with their instructors, assignments, and the program overall, I had to silence the voice in me that wanted to defend their teachers’ methods or to join in the criticism, or to commiserate with them. I sought them out as participants because they had inspired me to begin this project and their needs were an impetus for me to consider different ways of approaching writing instruction and assessment procedures. I was invested in them even before this project began. In some ways, this enhanced my work, my commitment, and my rigor, but in other ways this was a struggle during the interviewing process, the coding phase, and the analytic moments of the project. When I began transcribing interviews, I realized that my own voice was that of a teacher at many points in my discussions with students. I found myself rephrasing things for them as I
sought to clarify and repeat their statements, and I did so as a teacher, as someone who wanted them to have the correct language and the correct understanding of the writing project that they were working on in their first-year writing course. I could hear in my voice my own desire for them to be successful, and I could hear myself straining to not insert myself into their own evaluations of the work as it was assigned to them. Occasionally, I gave into the strain, such as in a moment when I explained a critique assignment to one student who was not explaining it to me as I knew it to have been assigned. The ethic of care with which I conducted my research was a complicated approach to work with students, which always involved a power differential regardless of my strong desire to be egalitarian. It required constant negotiation between the needs and desires of participants and researcher, between our perceptions of each other, and between our words and interpretations. One very basic effort that I made during interviews was to allow my student participants to speak without interrupting them. I tried to wait until I was sure that they were done speaking before I would pose a follow up or next question. I continually reminded myself that what mattered most were their words, their ways of assessing their work—whether those comported with my expectations and theories or not. To address my own biases, I worked diligently in my thinking and my writing to remind myself to be respectful and ethical in my interactions with my student research participants. And, in spite—or perhaps because of—these complexities, ultimately, I believe the project has greater potential for impact. Writing research that is grounded in the real expressions of student writers offers a realistic and dynamic picture of the work that student writers do in self-assessment, and from this data evolve new practices for self-assessment and for the ways in which writing instructors use and teach self-assessment that are consistent with feminist aims.
It is immediately apparent that this study is small in the number of participants, and very local to the university, the program, and the course work of these particular students. Thus, it is impossible to claim that their approaches to self-assessment are representative of any larger population of student writers in other situations. While this limits the replicability of results and interpretations, it also provides opportunity to engage with the local issues of these particular research participants and this particular scenario in a way that large scale research would not allow. As teacher-researcher pioneer Marilyn Mohr has said, “[Teacher-researchers] know from past attempts to adopt someone else’s methods that their findings will not transfer directly into another teacher’s classroom. They don’t expect research to be that kind of knowledge”

Additionally, locality has advantages in Composition Studies research. In particular, writing assessment scholarship emphasizes the significant value of localizing research, procedures, and assessments of writing programs in order to attend to the various needs of the stakeholders and of the writing community (Huot, 2002, O’Neil, 2002). Writing assessment experts do not believe in universal solutions and systems for a specific population’s concerns about successful writing programs; rather they believe in localization. While my study does not offer generalizable methods of teaching self-assessment in universities and colleges across the country, it does provide a rich exploration of self-assessment methods used by these particular writing students in this writing program at this university, which yields beneficial experiences for myself, the student research participants, and, perhaps, the program in which we operate. In this project, I took to heart Marilyn Mohr’s (1994) words of advice to teacher-researchers: to “recognize the tug between an allegiance to the question being studied and the background and bias of the researcher” and to “listen for the ‘curves,’ the unexpected pieces of data that do not necessarily fit with their assumptions” (p. 20).
Introduction to the Research Site and Participants

Research Site: Midwestern University’s First-Year Composition Program

My research site was a large, midwestern university with an undergraduate population of approximately 19,000 students. The university’s FYC Program was comprised of three courses: two preliminary courses and a required course. Students took placement tests over the summer prior to entering their first year at the university, and a team of assessors comprised of administrators and graduate teaching assistants in the FYC Program reviewed those students and placed them according to demonstrated skills. The mandatory course (for students who had not placed out of the program by virtue of a four or five score on an Advance Placement English test or having taken an equivalent course at another university or college), FYC 1120, required students to write argumentative essays, work with academic sources, and complete a researched essay. The program offered two preparatory courses, however, if students did not seem to be ready for FYC 1120. FYC 1100 was the equivalent of a “basic” writing course for students who demonstrated a need for more intensive writing instruction before entering the required writing course, FYC 1120. These students would meet for five hours a week in classes of no more than eighteen (18) students. FYC 1110 was a less time intense course for students that needed some preparation for FYC 1120, meeting three hours a week with no more than twenty-two (22) students. The textbook, the assignments, and the final portfolio submissions were identical for FYC 1100 and 1110, and students from both classes would enter FYC 1120 upon passing FYC 1100 or 1110.
Research Participants: FYC Student Writers

I recruited five students who had successfully completed FYC 1100 in the Fall semester, and were enrolled to begin FYC 1120 in the Spring semester. I had worked with these students in FYC 1100, and after the course had ended, I asked five students if they would be willing to participate in this study with me. I presented the study as an opportunity for both of us to learn more about our writing and teaching processes in first-year composition. Five students agreed to participate, but when we resumed classes in January, 2013, I was only able to contact four of the five to begin interviews. I met with these four students monthly for interviews over the course of the Spring semester. All four of the students were taking FYC 1120 as well as other courses that had writing assignments. The students willingly shared information about all of their writing projects, demonstrating more enthusiasm about some more than others. All but one of the four students passed the FYC 1120 course in May, 2013.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the empirical research that I employed for this project sought to consider what value potentiality might bring to composition pedagogy by exploring first how writing student participants thought in terms of potentiality, of the growth and development of their own writing projects, and of themselves as becoming writers. I first explored the data collected from interviews for demonstrations of how they engaged in assessment of their future texts and selves by collecting interview data, and then I analyzed the ways in which student participants performed self-assessment (and described performing it) by examining the language and terminology that they used in our conversations. Consistent with the theories informing this project—writing assessment, feminism, and affect studies—I employed a feminist methodology.
that provided me with opportunity to listen, imagine, and creatively envision the potentiality of this project as it developed. Ultimately, by foregrounding an ethic of care, I strove to enact empirical research that was useful to myself and student participants, and which respected and valued the complexity and interrelatedness of composition theory and pedagogy. By using feminist methods and methodologies to explore the assessment practices of these four student writers, I gained insight into the role that self-assessment of potentiality might play in fostering a sense of authorship in writing students, and, thereby, advancing the knowledge and practices that are employed in composition pedagogy. In my next chapter, I will describe in detail the setting and the participants of the research project, and demonstrate how my methodologies and methods intersected with the self-assessment practices of student participants.
In this chapter, I will first explore how first-year writing programs and the students who operate within them offer valuable information about how student self-assessment occurs for student participants and how it might be more effective in terms of achieving sometimes disparate program and student goals. To begin, the chapter describes the shared goals of first-year writing programs as set forth in the Council of Writing Program Administrators’ Outcomes Statement. Additionally, this chapter considers the difficult relationship between writing program assessment and self-assessment by writing students. Much of writing assessment literature focuses on the former of these (Broad, 2003, 2009, Huot, 2002, Haswell, 2001), and it does so, in part, to generate proof of efficacy, standardization, and social capital to the university. It is often through first-year writing programs that Composition Studies demonstrates its financial and social worth to the larger university, and to the larger society. Writing programs must be able to justify their existence to a variety of stakeholders—not the least of whom are first-year writing students—by demonstrating “objective” evidence of achieving goals that the university and society deem appropriate. But writing programs must also attend to composition scholars and teachers’ beliefs about what good writing is, how good writing is taught, and why writing matters. As O’Neil, Schendel, and Huot (2002) explain in their argument for reconceiving of writing assessment as research,

assessment needs to be considered a central concern of WPA work because the effects of writing assessments on students, teachers, and curriculum are far-reaching: assessments define good and bad writing; they promote certain pedagogies and discourage others; they have real-world consequences for students and teachers; they function to endorse
certain positions or sites with authority; they define our values—whether accurately or not—to others. (p. 13)

These authors characterize assessment as “social action,” (2002, p. 14), and as such our understanding of its functions and effects needs also to attend to the individual and unique needs of a writing student, which, I argue, can happen through processes of self-assessment and the empowerment that writers experience in having a sense of authorship.

Attending to the needs of first-year writing students is a political and ontological enterprise then, with a host of stakeholders whose interests intersect at some points and clash at other points. One potential site of this clash is where programmatic assessment meets self-assessment. The hallmarks of good writing assessment, from a programmatic perspective, are replicability and reliability (Huot, 2002, Moss, 2009). Contemporary program assessment tempers traditional assessment methods and methodologies by tempering them with considerations of the local and the subjective as legitimate and important ways of understanding evaluation of writing skill, but this is still very different than the concerns raised in self-assessment by writing students (Haswell, 2009, Huot, 2002). Compared to programmatic assessments, self-assessment might seem more subjective, more difficult, even bordering on the unknowable. Portfolio work is a fascinating nexus between these two types of assessment that demonstrates the conflicts and the possibilities for understanding writing students and their needs as writers within a program. After exploring the more esoteric issues that surround writing assessment, this chapter offers detailed background information about the writing program and the writing students that make up the research site and participants for this specific project. In this discussion, I describe the site, the participants, and larger issues surrounding the assessment of first-year writing students.
Writing Programs as a Site for Writing Assessment Research

In his introduction to *Research on Composition: Multiple Perspectives on Two Decades of Change*, Peter Smagorinsky (2006) explains how composition research developed between 1984 and 2003, as part of a larger effort on behalf of the discipline to justify its value and rigor. He summarizes the effect of this period on composition research by writing:

Guided by the general premise of the decentering of the subject and the idea that meaning cannot be fixed in language, many researchers have moved from the search for universals (e.g., best practices for teaching regardless of setting and participants) and generated new questions about the situated nature of teaching and learning as they are enacted amid competing political agendas, constructed subjectivities, social goals and structures, discourse and value systems. (p. 12)

This can also be said of writing assessment research, which also expanded its influence over the same period of time (Yancey, 1999, Huot, 2002, 2009, Haswell, 2003, Broad, 2002, 2006). Growing out of Smagorinsky’s (2006) observation and writing assessment scholarship is a valuing of research in composition as a key component of the development of theories and practices that focus on local sites of teaching and learning as well as on the particular stakeholders, or members, of these communities. Teacher research is one such example of this work. As Bob Fecho, JoBeth Allen, Claudia Mazaros, and Hellen Inyega (2006) explain in “Teacher Research in Writing Classrooms,” within Smagorinsky’s edited collection,

Teacher research is inevitable because teachers are professionals who know more about their practice than anyone else, who ask the most critical questions in the education of their students, and who have the highest investment—after the students themselves—in learning from research. (p. 110)
This is particularly true in first-year writing programs, where students and teachers share a communal space in which social, university, and program goals must be continually balanced against personal development of students, professional desires of teachers, and the dynamics of classroom interactions and affects. Though this study is not traditional teacher research as it is conducted beyond the bounds of the classroom, it does embody the same principles of studying student writers in their communities.

Writing program administration entails a variety of different types of assessment. At the program level, this work involves justification of a large number of individuals and a large number of courses, connected through differing beliefs about what makes for good writing and for good writing instruction. At the instruction level, assessment is both about evaluating a teacher’s effectiveness as well as a student’s engagement and participation with the course material. And then at the student level, this work involves attention to assessment of individual texts written by individual students—some constructive and some summative evaluation, also complicated by differing beliefs about what good writing is. In 2000, the Council of Writing Program Administrators developed the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition, with the hope of establishing some common criteria for the administration of first-year writing courses.

In her introduction to this Outcomes Statement, Kathleen Blake Yancey (2001) describes how the document came to be: a “collaborative authoring of a common set of outcomes [which] drew on theory as well as practice, on a keen sense of language as well as an appreciation for difference, on a willingness to foreground possibility and to take a risk” (p. 322). Yancey (2001) explains “why anyone outside of Composition Studies might be interested in this document,” by noting “the ubiquity of first-year comp,” the historical significance of seeking to “define and
articulate what it is that we expect from students who complete first-year composition,” and the political implications of “mak[ing] visible what we do” (p. 322-323). Significantly, this list of reasons is also a list of desired consequences—of expectations, in every sense of the word. Part of Yancey’s (2001) expectation is that “in articulating those expectations and locating them more generally, we help students meet them, and we help assure that the conditions required for meeting them are realized” (p. 323). The Outcomes Statement, as amended in July 2008, sets forth these categories:

- Rhetorical Knowledge
- Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing
- Processes
- Knowledge of Conventions
- Composing in Electronic Environments

As will be apparent later in this chapter, Midwestern University’s writing program has adopted these outcomes. The outcomes set forth not only what students should be able to do at the end of a first-year composition course, but also what teachers of these and other courses can do to help students acquire these particular knowledges and skills. As Yancey (2001) notes with the original incarnation of the WPA Outcomes Statement, these words carry great import and address writing program administration as an educational endeavor, a writing project, a collaboration, a service, a political stance, and a social system. In answer to Bob Broad’s (2003) inquiry into “what we really value” in the assessment of writing, the Outcomes Statement says, “This is what we value.”

Though the WPA Outcomes Statement does not provide particulars for how assessment should be done, its recommendation for what should be assessed demonstrates a belief that assessment is an essential component to the development, implementation, and further consideration of these expectations. And assessment occurs at various levels within a writing
program. First, the practical reality of developing courses through syllabi, assignments, activities, and texts must be compared against these outcomes in order to determine if, in fact, these expectations are understandable and achievable for students and teachers. Secondly, measurements must be made of the program, the teachers, and the students to determine if the expectations are met—do students really know how to do these things at the end of a first-year composition course? And, do the methods used by teachers facilitate students being able to do so? Finally, students and teachers must be able to assess their own development during the process of reaching these expectations. This is an ongoing, recursive process, much like writing itself.

Edward White (2007) argues in Assigning, Responding, Evaluating: A Writing Teacher’s Guide that writing assessment is part of what writing teachers do through the process of creating assignments, responding to students’ efforts to meet assignments, and evaluating student writing in the classroom. Similar to the process that he describes for student writers, White (2007) advocates a process approach to assessment that begins with an assignment that allows students to “internalize and own the underlying purpose of the assignment” (p. 6), as well as a “scoring guide” that helps students begin to assess their own work and sample papers demonstrating what a successful paper looks like (for both teacher and students).

It is in this last manner of assessing outcomes that potential complications arise between the goals of programmatic assessment and a writer’s self-assessment. If student writers are truly to be empowered to assess their own writing, this suggests that they also would have the power to set their own goals and work toward outcomes that they value and seek. Within a writing program, however, it is important for administrators to be able to say each student is prepared by each teacher in each course to know and do certain things having to do with writing—such as
organizing and developing ideas, addressing the audience appropriately, demonstrating familiarity with writing conventions of academic discourse, and engaging in critical analysis—or argumentation specifically, as in the case of Midwestern’s writing program. In order to justify the writing program by demonstrating its effectiveness, the outcomes desired by the student must be those desired by the program. While the program level of outcomes and assessment has constraints, it seems that there is space for a notion of assessment that can empower, rather than disempower, student writers in their quest for authorship.

White (2007) offers a glimpse of this space in-between in his meticulous advice for responding to student writing, which he separates from grading their writing. His take on teacher assessment is both affective and student-centered, with the goal of empowering students with a sense of their own potentiality and rights of authorship. The feedback for which White advocates is encouraging commentary on students’ drafts: “We should always be friendly, even when we are feeling overburdened and crabby, and we should always find something to praise and encourage” (p. 56). We should offer options and alternatives, but we should “refrain from taking over the paper” (p. 56-7). In this intermediary step, White (2007) also advocates collaboration and opportunities for students to experiment with ideas and writing by presenting them to different audiences as a way of “fostering self-assessment” (p. 67). Here he demonstrates how self-assessment, instructor assessment, and program assessment can align with each other in attending to the larger goals of teaching writing, and with disciplinary convictions about what promotes student growth. As the Council of Writing Administrators declares, “Learning to write is a complex process, both individual and social, that takes place over time with continued practice and informed guidance” (WPA Outcomes Statement). Just as Midwestern University’s writing program has adopted the WPA Outcomes as its own, it has also
assumed this basic belief as demonstrated in the sequencing of writing courses over the first-year of study, the building of writing projects that require drafting and revision after peer and teacher feedback, as well as in its use of material and content which engage students personally and which have social implications for students to consider.

Description of the Research Site

Midwestern University

Midwestern University is a large public university, located in a small town in northwest Ohio. The student body numbers almost 19,000, including students from 50 states and 70 countries. The university’s mission reads as follows:

[Midwestern] university provides educational experiences inside and outside the classroom that enhance the lives of students, faculty and staff. Students are prepared for lifelong career growth, lives of engaged citizenship and leadership in a global society. Within our learning community, we build a welcoming, safe and diverse environment where the creative ideas and achievements of all can benefit others throughout Ohio, the nation and the world. (Mission)

In addition to this mission statement, the university also identifies numerous university learning outcomes, including this expectation for writing: “Writing – communicate clearly and effectively to an identified audience. To be effective, written communication should be informed by audience analysis, demonstrate reflection, employ critical thinking, and make appropriate use of supporting argument and citation” (Learning Outcomes).
The FYC Program is the cornerstone of the university’s learning outcomes with regard to written communication. The program focuses on college-level academic writing. The website for the program explains that FYC is “[d]esigned around a set of nationally-approved learning outcomes” (a reference to the WPA Outcomes Statement) and “consists of a number of important parts which work together to produce a comprehensive, competency-based writing program grounded in current theory and practice” (First-Year Composition Program Welcome). The program offers three different courses: FYC 1100, which is an intensive writing course which introduces students to academic writing; FYC 1100, which is an introductory course in academic writing; and FYC 1120, which is a “required” academic writing course in which students develop writing skills that focus on inquiry-based research essays. These courses are taught by a full-time instructors, adjuncts, and graduate student teaching assistants. The director of the program and two assistant directors provide support and education to the instructors in the program by developing syllabi, writing exercises, seminars and workshops, and portfolio training sessions. Though individual teachers choose their own textbooks and develop their own syllabi, there are standard requirements for the program. All of the FYC Program instructors must prepare students to write argumentative essays for an academic audience and must provide students with standard learning objectives. Following is an abbreviated list of these Learning Objectives as it is presented to students in the FYC Sample Syllabus document:

1. Demonstrate rhetorical knowledge through writing in a variety of academic genres and to a variety of academic audiences.

2. Develop critical thinking, reading, and writing skills through approaching academic writing assignments as a series of cognitive tasks, engaging in multiple modes of inquiry, synthesizing multiple points of view, critiquing student and professional writing, and assessing source materials.
3. Understand the processes entailed in academic writing including recursive processes for drafting texts, collaborative activities, the development of personalized strategies, and strategies for identifying and locating source materials.

4. Demonstrate knowledge of the conventions of academic writing including format and documentation systems, coherence devices, conventional syntax, and control over surface features such as grammar, punctuation, mechanics, and spelling.

5. Engage in the electronic research and composing processes by locating, evaluating, disseminating, using and acknowledging research, both textual and visual, from popular and scholarly electronic databases.

6. Understand the importance of values systems in academic writing including the abilities to write effectively to audiences with opposing viewpoints, to participate in an active learning community which values academic honesty, and to value the place of writing within learning processes. (Appendix A)

The coursepack referenced in the excerpt above is a student portfolio that is prepared specifically for FYC students by the Program. This coursepack contains descriptions of the program, its objectives, learning objectives of the university and the program, as well as numerous rubrics, worksheets, and instructions for assembling the portfolio. The portfolio also contains pockets into which students place the essays that they have written over the semester, along with any worksheets and paperwork completed with those drafts. The portfolio is then submitted to the FYC office for assessment at the end of the semester, which I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

Placement

During the summer before they begin their first year at Midwestern University, students take an online writing placement test, which is assessed by experienced administrators, instructors, and graduate teaching assistants in the FYC Program. Incoming students are provided a brief article to read, followed by several writing prompts. Students are required to choose one prompt and write a persuasive essay in response to it. They have twenty-four hours
to submit their essays, and they are instructed to think, draft, revise, and proofread before submitting the writing samples—“to employ a process-based approach” to the writing (First-Year Composition Program Writing Placement). A small percentage of students can establish that they are exempt from the required writing course (FYC 1120) by virtue of an Advanced Placement English test score or documented proof that they have successfully completed an equivalent course at another institution. Otherwise, the assessments result in placement of students in one of three courses: FYC 1100 (Intensive Introduction to Academic Writing), FYC 1110 (Introduction to Academic Writing), or FYC 1120 (Academic Writing). FYC 1120 is “the only academic class required of all students” at Midwestern University (First-Year Composition Program Exemption from FYC 1120).

The majority of incoming students, however, place into FYC 1110, a three-hour course where they “are introduced to the important skills entailed in prewriting, drafting, and revising, as they write papers that argue a position, papers that persuade, and papers that evaluate a written text” (FYC 1110). These students must successfully complete FYC 1110 before they can enter the required course, FYC 1120. Likewise, a small percentage of students place into FYC 1100, which is an “intensive” course designed to deliver the same content as FYC 1110, but to do so with more class time and with increased one-on-one instruction. These classes meet four days a week for a total of five hours and have a lower teacher-student ratio. The focus in this course is on conventions of academic writing. Students placed in FYC 1100 must successfully complete this course before they can enter the required course, FYC 1120. Finally, some students place directly into FYC 1120, the required course. FYC 1120 presumes that students have some familiarity with academic writing conventions, including persuasive or argumentative writing, and builds on that base to teach students writing processes and skills that will be relevant in other
academic writing projects, such as drafting, revising, researching, citing and integrating sources, and appealing to various academic audiences.

**FYC Program Courses and Assignments**

As I have noted, all three FYC Program courses (and all sections of those courses) employ the same Learning Objectives, and these are tied to the university’s Learning Outcomes. The thrust of these three courses, however, is on argumentative writing—writing that takes a position on a debatable issue and presents support or evidence for that position in a persuasive manner. Argumentative writing is taught from various perspectives: audience-awareness, rhetorical devices and techniques, and use of academic conventions. Secondarily, FYC courses attend to research techniques and the incorporation of sources into written arguments. As an overarching philosophy for the program, writing is taught as process, with opportunities for drafting, reviewing, revising, editing, and reflecting on writing projects. All FYC courses offer students the opportunity to submit first, final, and revised drafts of essays. At each stage of the process, they receive written feedback from their instructors. The program encourages teachers to offer constructive commentary on each of the drafts, with feedback on early drafts posing questions about content and development of ideas, and feedback on final drafts and revisions more focused on how the text meets the requirements of the rubric. Typically, instructor feedback should help students meet the rubric’s objectives through revision their writing projects with specific, content-oriented suggestions, while respecting the student’s own expression of ideas, analyses, and writing style. In addition to class time, which focuses on work that is directly related to their current writing projects, instructors make conference times available for students to meet and discuss their essays one-on-one or in small groups. Students are also encouraged to make use of writing tutoring at the university’s Learning Commons, where they
can meet with a peer writing tutor to discuss their essays. The Learning Commons works closely with the FYC Program to be familiar with assignments, learning objectives, and instructor and students needs.

FYC 1100 and 1110 begin with an ungraded essay that allows instructors to see how individual students and the class as a whole understand essay production at the beginning of the semester. This ungraded essay is followed by a series of four additional essays, all graded. Students submit first drafts for instructor commentary and feedback, as well as drafts for peer review. They also receive instructor feedback on their final drafts of each writing project, typically with the opportunity to revise the final draft for a new evaluation. At the end of the semester, all of the students’ essays are included in their portfolios, from first drafts to revised drafts. Among these assignments, students are required to argue a position on a debatable issue without, and then with, sources, to propose solutions to a controversial problem, to analyze a visual image, and to justify an evaluation of another visual or text. In the development of these writing projects, students complete “Audience & Values Exploration” worksheets from their coursepacks, which ask them to develop a tentative thesis statement from an exploration of their audience’s values and their own values. (Appendix B). When they submit the first draft of each essay, students complete a “Student Process Analysis,” which prompts them to reflect upon and evaluate the time and work that they have invested in the current draft of the essay. (Appendix C). These reflective processes are consistent with self-assessment as “reflection-in-action,” a concept of assessment promoted by Smith and Yancey (2000) in their edited collection, *Self-Assessment and Development in Writing: A Collaborative Inquiry*. In this collection, Hilgers, Hussey and Stitt-Bergh (2000), explain that self-assessment is likely to work for students where it is engaged systematically, in a facilitating context, with criteria and guidance that break larger
tasks into smaller units and interrupts “typical behavior at points where assessment will make a
difference” (p. 6). These authors assert that, “Students must be able to describe the social and
rhetorical context of the writing assignment in order to assess their own writing—be able to
describe their content goals, goals for the audience, and rhetorical strategies” (p. 15).

In FYC 1120, students begin the course with a critique of an academic essay, usually
selected from a writing textbook. They then write “multiple source essays,” in which they are
asked to synthesize sources into their own argument. Finally, FYC 1120 students develop a
researched essay, which moves through several iterations as a proposal, an outline, and several
drafts.

FYC Program Assessment Practices

While FYC instructors set forth lengthy Achievement Requirements at the outset of the
semester, detailing policies for completion of homework, class attendance, and class
participation, FYC students are ultimately assessed on their written essays and the demonstrated
growth of their writing competency over time, through the process of multiple drafts and
multiple essays. And while instructors can refuse to submit a portfolio for review by the FYC
Program if a student does not comply with these requirements, students who are not eligible for
portfolio submission are typically thus because homework assignments, regular class attendance,
and participation in class discussions and activities are integral to producing the requisite number
of passing essays for the course. Grades, however, are assigned for written essays only.

In FYC 1100 and 1110, students do not receive traditional letter grades, but rather “P” for
pass, “AP” for almost pass, or “NP” for no pass, for each of five categories on each essay. A
sample achievement requirement document for FYC 1100 describes these grades as follows:
Essay Grades

Throughout the term, I will collect and comment upon first drafts (and perhaps on some intermediate drafts) of every essay you write, and I will give them back to you within a week’s time so that you can use my comments as guidelines for revision. Your first drafts will not receive a grade.

However, when you submit final drafts of your essays I will provide you with both written comments and a grade. As well, I will fill out an evaluation sheet (called a “rubric”) for each final draft to indicate the paper’s strengths and weaknesses; like commentary on early drafts, your evaluated final drafts will be returned to you within a week’s time. The grade for each essay will be a Pass, Almost-Pass, or No-Pass.

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

In FYC 1120, students receive traditional letter grades on each essay—A, B, C, and NP. These are also set forth in the Achievement Requirements document provided to students at the beginning of the course. (Appendix E). An “A essay” is described as “the work of a writer who is able to deal comfortably with complex material and can present that material effectively for others.” (Appendix E). “A” essays in this course demonstrate clear organization, appeal to the audience, sophisticated style, clear connections between ideas, and integration of source material into the writer’s own argument. Rather than showing a “superior command” as an “A” essay does, a “B” essay is well-developed, logically organized, shows use of transitions and connections, and has few errors in grammar and mechanics. A “C” essay shows “average knowledge of the subject matter,” and though it does employ transitions and connections, these are “superficial” and the essay is passing, but not “enlightening or engaging” (Appendix E). All
three of these grades require that the essay pass all categories of the rubric. They are degrees in demonstrated competency and command of the rubric categories. An “NP” essay does not pass the rubric in one or more categories, demonstrating “serious flaws” in one or more areas. (Appendix E).

_Instructor and Peer Feedback_

As these excerpts describe, students receive both “grades” and written commentary or feedback on final drafts of their essays. This feedback is typically provided in handwriting or in typed text through a word processing program’s comment feature. Commentary on these drafts is focused on prompting students to achieve their own goals in their writing projects, but this is tempered with instructor knowledge of the rubric and the expectations for passing paper and passing portfolios. And, importantly, students receive written commentary on their first drafts as well as their revised drafts. Instructors also provide verbal commentary to students during individual and small-group conferences over the course of the semester. Though the writing program rubric and portfolio function to achieve some standardization of the individual writing courses, there are variations among instructors in assignments, readings, and weighing of specific learning outcomes. Similarly, the nature of teacher commentary is affected by personality and individual instructors’ goals. Teachers vary in the quantity, directedness, and tone of their feedback, but do so with an awareness of the need for the students’ portfolios to “pass” in the eyes of their colleagues, one of whom will ultimately review their students’ portfolios and make that determination.

FYC courses also promote peer review as an activity that assists student writers as writers and as readers. Peer review empowers students as readers of others’ writing and provides opportunities for students to see how their own writing impacts a real reader. Peer review takes
various forms in FYC, but generally it is conducted as an in-class or online activity in which students exchange drafts of essays and are given specific assessment tasks to perform in providing constructive feedback to each other. In follow up, students are encouraged to consider the feedback that they receive from peers as they continue to work with developing drafts.

**Self-Assessment Practices**

The FYC Student Learning Outcomes do not specifically set forth any outcomes that identify self-assessment or evaluation of one’s own writing as an anticipated knowledge or skill that will be developed in the courses. There are, however, goals set forth that imply an element of self-assessment, such as

- “demonstrate critical thinking, reading, and writing strategies when grafting arguments”
- “employ a recursive process in crafting successful texts”
- “employ personalized strategies for generative, revising, editing, and proofreading that serve their individual needs as a writer” (First-Year Composition Program Student Learning Outcomes).

These objectives are all notably attached to the Program’s emphasis on writing as a process. In other words, FYC conceives of self-assessment as part of the writing process. In (Re)Articulating Writing Assessment, Huot (2002) argues that, “Unless we teach students how to assess, we fail to provide them with the authority inherent in assessment, continuing the disjuncture between the competing roles of student and writer” (p. 67). Huot’s theory of assessment is grounded in a belief that assessment is an integral part of reading and writing, and that “developing a pedagogy for assessment with our students that focuses on their writing and the choices writers make” (p. 69) should be the goal. This is reflected in the coursepack
worksheets that are provided students to help them assess their audience’s and their own values in the beginning stages of developing a thesis statement and initial points for their argumentative essays. It is reflected in the “Student Process Analysis” worksheet, also contained in the coursepack and also designed to have students reflect on the work that they have done on a current draft of a developing essay. (Appendix C). Finally, the program’s appreciation of the value of self-assessment is demonstrated by the “Narrative Self-Reflection Essay,” which students complete as a final step in assembling their portfolios at the end of the course. (Appendix F). Students prepare this “Narrative Self-Reflection Essay” in response to a prompt contained in their coursepacks. (Appendix F). This prompt instructs students to develop a narrative essay that addresses how they have developed writing skills and processes that attend to the major categories on the rubric, which include audience awareness, organization/theme/structure, development, syntax, and word choice. Students are provided some class time at the end of the semester, after all of their formal essays are complete, to review the prompt and ask questions about the assignment, and even to begin writing a response, but they are encouraged to complete the narrative on their own, and to offer a persuasive demonstration of their acquired writing skills. (Appendix F). These essays are included in the final portfolio that is submitted for review and portfolio readers typically review this in conjunction with the instructor’s written evaluation of the student’s portfolio.

Rubrics

Midwestern’s FYC Program employs the same rubric for all three of its courses. (Appendix G). This rubric identifies six main categories of writing assessment and corresponds to specific pages and topics in the common FYC writing handbook, The Brief Wadsworth
In addition to physically using it as the primary assessment tool for the course, instructors present the rubric at the beginning of the semester and refer to it throughout the semester, using the terminology from the rubric when referencing assignments and activities. When evaluating each final draft and each revision, instructors complete a rubric by assigning a “grade” for each of the six main categories on the rubric and then giving specific feedback within the category by marking one of the items detailed there. Each of these detailed items has a page number next to it, prompting students to refer to their handbook for more information on the issue. (Appendix G). For example, within the category of Development, there are specific items such as “introduction,” “body paragraphs,” and “conclusion.” “Body paragraphs” is further broken down into “unity,” “topic sentences,” “detailed support,” “rhetorical strategy,” and “conciseness/unnecessary repetition” (Appendix G). Each category and subcategory sets forth various elements of successful and effective academic writing.

Course Grades

FYC 1100 and 1110 are ungraded with the intention that a student’s performance in the courses will not impact her grade point average in any way. The consequence of not passing the introductory FYC course is that the student must retake the course. It is, after all, the prerequisite to the required course, FYC 1120. Instead of a letter grade, students in FYC 1100
and 1110 receive a “pass,” “almost pass,” or “no pass” on each paper, corresponding to the rubric as described above. They must pass two of the five essays that are assigned in order to submit a portfolio and then the portfolio must pass the review of another FYC instructor. If they do not pass the course, they receive a “no credit” on their transcript and must take the course again, with the exception of a no credit in FYC 1100 after which an instructor can recommend that they take FYC 1110. The courses are designed to be pass or “no credit” to align with the program’s intention to allow students the time and instruction that they need to develop their academic writing skills, and, for some students, that means more than one course of 1100 and/or 1110, without the punishment of a failing grade that would negatively impact their grade point average. At the same time, though, 1100 and/or 1110 must be passed in order to enter 1120 and 1120 must be passed in order to meet graduation requirements of the university.

In FYC 1120, however, students receive credit for successfully completing the course with an “A,” “B,” or “C” letter grade that does figure into their grade point average. A FYC 1120 student, however, cannot fail the course on merit. Students who do not pass this course receive a “no credit,” like FYC 1100 and 1110 students. Again, students cannot graduate from the university without having passed FYC 1120 (or having been exempted from the requirement as noted above), so there are students who take FYC 1120 multiple times in order to successfully complete this university requirement before graduating.

**Portfolios**

In order to pass a FYC course, students must complete the series of essays (first, final, and revised drafts where appropriate), pass two of them (one of which must be the researched essay in FYC 1120), and submit a portfolio for review by the FYC Program. This is a description of the requirements for passing FYC 1100.
• 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 FYC 1100/1110 level.

If you have not satisfied the Achievement Requirements for this class, your work will not be eligible for a portfolio assessment. This means that I will not be able to submit your portfolio for assessment, and you will be required to enroll in FYC 1110. (Appendix H)

The FYC instructor for the course determines if students are eligible to submit their portfolios at the end of the semester based on these criteria. While all sections of the course must have completed all five of the required essays and must have passed two essays based upon the instructors assessment of the essays, the other criteria listed in the Achievement Requirements allow for some instructor discretion in the submission of the portfolio for review. Completed assignments, regular attendance, and active participation in class are assessed entirely by the instructor, and instructors reserve the right to deny a student portfolio submission based upon a lack in any of these additional areas. The Program’s goal is ultimately to have students assessed on the merit of their writing projects, and their growth and development as an academic writer over the course of the semester, with a demonstration of competency in the categories of the rubric. But, the Program defers to instructors to decide if a student’s classroom performance is a contributing factor either to her lack of success on individual papers or her readiness to move further in the program.
If students are eligible, they compile their essays from the semester, with all drafts and comments from the instructor, along with the various worksheets that were completed, and the rubrics. Instructors complete written assessments of each student portfolio, explaining why they believe students have successfully met the objectives of the current course. Students complete the “Narrative Self-Reflection Essay,” in which they advocate for themselves by responding to a series of prompts which ask them to demonstrate how they developed as writers over the course of the semester and how they developed the skills set forth in the learning objectives for the course. (Appendix F). This essay is the only programmatic self-assessment practice in Midwestern’s FYC Program. Complete portfolios are submitted to the FYC Program office and redistributed to other instructors and teaching assistants, who review the entire portfolio with an eye toward development and growth in writing skill from the first essay to the last. Huot (2002) supports the use of portfolios in writing program assessment practices as they can “provid[e] students with a more representative and realistic concept of writing evaluation and helping them acquire the types of assessment skills,” but he also cautions that they must not be “just another way of testing, grading or even teaching writing” (p. 71). Consistent with his work to theorize writing assessment, Huot (2002) argues that portfolio processes must be theorized as well.

If the portfolio reviewer agrees with the instructor’s indication that a student should pass the course, the student passes. If the reviewer does not agree with the instructor’s assessment, the portfolio is reviewed by a second reader, typically an administrator or experienced instructor in the FYC Program. If the second reader determines that the portfolio passes, the student passes the course. Students have appeal rights if their instructor does not permit the submission of their portfolio, or if the portfolio is submitted but does not pass upon review. Student appeals include a complete portfolio along with a written explanation as to why the student believes the portfolio
demonstrates that they have met the requirements of the course. These appeals are reviewed by
the program director and assistant directors. At the end of the process, the portfolios are returned
to instructors, who schedule meeting times for students to pick up their portfolios. Students who
are leaving campus for the semester before portfolios are available provide their instructors with
self-addressed stamped envelopes and the program office will mail them. The majority of
students collect their portfolios in person or by mail, with some even coming in at the beginning
of the next semester to see their results. Students who pass the portfolio process for FYC 1100
and/or 1110 move onto FYC 1120. Students who pass the portfolio process for FYC 1120 have
satisfied the requirement for the university and are not required to take any additional writing
courses (unless such a course is a requirement for their major). Students who do not pass the
portfolio process for any of the FYC courses, must reenroll in that course, with the exception of
those who do not pass FYC 1100. These students can be recommended to take FYC 1110 rather
than FYC 1100 (the intensive introductory course) again.

The portfolio process at Midwestern reflects some of the contemporary notions about
writing assessment as a complicated practice that requires attention to local issues and persons
affected most directly by assessment procedures. Consistent with its notion of writing as a
process, and a learning process that occurs over time with numerous opportunities for writing
and revising, the portfolio as envisioned by Midwestern’s FYC Program offers students the
experience of collecting and reflecting upon their growth and development during the FYC
course, and of being evaluated by both an invested and known teacher as well as by an unknown,
academic reader representing the program’s learning objectives and goals. It is a dynamic
process that begins early in the semester with efforts to create a safe writing space in a classroom
that exists within the larger system of the program, to generate unique content and material about
which to write while generating texts that conform to the program’s rubric, and to promote writing as a personal tool for critical analysis and communication while demonstrating the particular conventions of academic and argumentative discourse. Midwestern’s portfolio process arises from more general notions that writing assessment practices must be home grown to truly honor the complex and dynamic nature of a writing program community (Haswell, 2001, Broad, 2002, 2009).

In response to Huot’s (2002) call for new writing assessment practices and to his own perception of the limitations of rubrics and scoring guides, Broad (2003) enacted a method that he coined “dynamic criteria mapping,” in an effort to determine what writing teachers and programs really valued in student writing (as opposed to what they said they valued). Dynamic criteria mapping takes into account the practices and the theories of assessment scenarios and demands that the two reflect and inform one another. Broad (2003) asserts that dynamic criteria mapping was “a streamlined form of qualitative inquiry that yields a detailed, complex, and useful portrait of any writing program’s evaluative dynamics” (p. 11)—a combination of writing research and writing assessment previously envisioned by Yancey (2000) and others. In his introduction to Organic Writing Assessment, Broad explains that dynamic criteria mapping was his call to writing instructors and program administrators to “move beyond traditional assessment practices that over-simplify learning, teaching, and assessment, and to ‘embrace the life of things’” (p. 5). Broad’s methods include exploration of the oral and textual descriptions of evaluations made by instructors and administrators as they evaluate, assess, and judge the writing of their students. And key to the process of dynamic criteria mapping is honoring the dynamic nature of the writing program situation. The writing program at Midwestern University is not unlike Broad’s institutions, nor those who employed dynamic criteria mapping and shared their
discoveries in *Organic Writing Assessment*. Just like these other programs, Midwestern’s FYC program involved shared writing assessment procedures, various stakeholders within the local context, and complex and varied types of evaluation among the stakeholders—peers, teachers, students, and program. Such an active and multifaceted community requires continual attention to the shifting needs of its members and to the larger cultural changes that impact what those members value in writing teaching, learning, and practicing. The focus of this study is the needs of the student members of this community.

**Student Research Participants**

*First-Year Writing Students*

The four student research participants in this project successfully completed FYC 1100 (Intensive Introduction to Academic Writing) in their first semester at Midwestern University. When our interviews began in January 2013, they were all in the second semester of their first year of college, enrolled in different FYC 1120 courses with different instructors. They were familiar with the FYC Program’s Learning Outcomes and terminology through their exposure to them in FYC 1100. They were new to various elements of FYC 1120, and their developing understanding of these elements is reflected in our conversations over time. These students were also enrolled in three or four other courses during the Spring semester of 2013. Some of these courses included writing projects, which students were typically very willing to discuss with me during our interviews—in fact, they were enthusiastic when talking about these non-FYC writing projects. At the end of the Spring semester, all but one of the four student participants passed FYC 1120.
Individual Descriptions of the Four Student Research Participants

I offer the following descriptions in part to create a clear image of these four individual student writers that can help to make the upcoming analysis of data easier to consider and sufficiently personal to each of them. But I also offer these descriptions in anticipation of data analysis regarding the self-assessment practices of these four writers. My descriptions purposefully highlight the students’ descriptions of themselves as writers (technically with regard to mechanics and production of final texts and more philosophically with regard to how a writing self is part of their self-perception), their anticipated majors and career choices, as well as their expectations about writing in the first-year courses, in other classes, and in their lives beyond school. As will be evident in Chapter 4, these factors played a significant role in the ways in which these four students described thinking about their developing writing projects and themselves as writers now and in the future. These factors also played a significant role what is described in the literature of Haswell and Haswell (2012) and Yancey (2009) as an essential element to successful growth and development of student writers: agency, or a sense of authorship. My analysis demonstrates that acknowledgment and assessment of potentiality within the context of the factors that I highlight here can empower student writers to seek and acquire a sense of authorship through a reciprocal process of self-reflection and self-direction.

Elizabeth was a white, female, middle-class in-state student from a rural area. She was conscientious about her writing assignments when I taught her in FYC 1100 in the semester before the study. She came to writing conferences with me regularly, always with her laptop in hand, with notes and highlighted sections of her papers to discuss. She ran those conferences with me, but often her questions were about conventions and grammar—sentence-level queries. Even during our interviews, while Elizabeth was taking the second of the sequenced first-year
writing courses, she referred regularly to her difficulty with commas and other punctuation. Elizabeth’s coursework included photography and computer design courses as her major was Visual Communications and Technology. She was insightful and reflective about her writing without much prompting, and she even articulated a new writing process that she had developed for herself over the course of the semester. Beyond her academic writing, Elizabeth also told me that she was a scrapbooker, and that she maintained a large scrapbook of her life, working on it extensively at the end of the school year when she had time.

Susan was a white, female, middle class student from a suburban area in-state. She did not demonstrate grammatical or mechanical difficulties in FYC 1100, and her content was well-developed and organized in her essays throughout the semester. She was anxious and very busy during her first year in college, but she was conscientious in her work and contributed regularly in class. Susan was an elementary education major and her coursework focused on preparation for her career as a teacher. Though she did not seem interested in writing for its own sake, she used writing as a tool in her education courses and viewed it as a way of learning. She was very practical in her approach to both FYC 1100 and 1120, but I lost touch with her at the end of the Spring semester and was unable to complete her last interview. I would suspect that she passed FYC 1120, but I do not know that for a fact.

Walter was a black, male student from a large city in-state. In the first week of class, he told me he was a creative writer and shared rap lyrics that he had written, but by the time we began interviews in January, he had changed his major to Communications with a focus in Promotions and Advertising. In the class we shared before the study, his essay assignments were creative: when asked to propose solutions to a problem, Walter wrote a script for a speech, imploring parents to march on MTV and BET studio headquarters to demand better
programming for teens. In our interviews, he argued that writing in required FYC courses could not be interesting or entertaining—the hallmarks of good writing according to Walter. And he denied that anything he had written in FYC was of any interest. When I was his instructor, he was quietly resistant to the conventions taught in FYC, often asking me, “But why?” He was smart, insightful, and reflective despite his visceral disgust with the FYC Program. At the end of each interview, when I asked, “Do you have anything else to add that would be helpful to the study?” he answered with lengthy explanations of why FYC was not a good program for students, and hoped that I would take his concerns to the administrator of the program.

Julie was a black, female dancer from an in-state metropolitan area. She struggled with the conventions of the FYC Program, but she was actively engaged in her struggle even in her last two interviews in April and May, when she realized that she would not pass FYC 1120. In class, both Julie and I observed that she had difficulty with sentence-level mechanical issues and with developing her ideas. Throughout the time we worked together in class and in interview sessions, she expressed a desire for others to think she was smart and educated based upon her writing skills. She anticipated a career as a social worker, and acknowledged that she would need to be able to write not only clearly, but persuasively in order to have others accept and follow her advice. She completed and passed FYC 1100, but did not pass FYC 1120 in the Spring during our interview period. She expressed frustration with the FYC 1120 course, and toward the end of the semester explained to me that her friends had told her to “just write what the teacher wants” and she hadn’t taken their advice, but now she knew they were right. This, she said, was what she learned from the FYC Program. In late April, Julie knew that she had not passed enough essays to submit her portfolio for review, that she would not pass FYC 1120, and that she would have to take it again.
Advantages & Disadvantages of the Research Site

As the work of writing assessment scholars such as Broad (2003, 2009), Haswell (2001, 2009), Huot (2002), and Yancey (1999, 2001, 2012) demonstrates, first-year writing programs are complex, dynamic, and rich sites for the advancement of our understanding of assessment practices, theories, and values. Their work as a body insists that insofar as these complexities are the reality of these spaces and communities, continued study here must foreground an awareness of the difficulties of working with, teaching, and researching first-year writing students in order to honor and respect the participants, as well as to generate usable knowledge that integrates theory and practice. Otherwise, one might lose sight of an essential piece of the puzzle that is the teaching of writing, and, perhaps, the discipline of Composition Studies—assessment. The description of the research site in this chapter reveals a very elaborate and intentional process for teaching first-year college students to write “academically.” My research clearly occurred within this site, and there was no separating from it, as I have already discussed in the previous chapter on methodologies and methods. The site impacted all of my conversations with student participants and my analysis of the data that I gathered, but I continued to struggle to be aware of these student participants as individuals, as people, as agents with their own lives and their own desires, and their own needs. Even within the context of a writing course, those individual expectations may not comport with the expectations of the larger culture (here, Midwestern’s FYC Program). In some respects this added difficulty to my project because it made it seemingly impossible to know what motivated student participants’ responses to my interview questions: Were they telling me what they thought I wanted to hear? Were they (is anyone) able to distinguish between what they wanted and what they were instructed to want? Did reflecting
on their writing practices and skills seem valuable to them? But, it also made me sensitive to the distinctions between programmatic assessment and individual writers’ self-assessments as distinctions between societal expectations and personal expectations. A first-year writing program research site is a rich but dense space in which to explore potentiality as a concept for self-assessment practices of first-year writing students because it is an active and dynamic space in which students are becoming—and it is happening through unseen psychological and social changes, but it is also happening through conscious and reflective thought. It is a space where writing is taught and learned in spite of and because of the affective exchanges of teachers and students.

First-year writing programs are not representative of all writers, and, if writing assessment scholarship asserts anything, it is that programs are local and should be local. Among his “guiding principles,” Huot (2002) advocates that writing assessment practices be “site-based,” “locally controlled,” “research based,” and built around questions and responses developed by the community of writing teachers and administrators (p. 178). Each institution has its own special needs and a writing program should attend to those. Despite calls for outcomes and expectations that suggest best practices for first-year writing courses, such as those advanced by the Council of Writing Program Administrators and the NCTE, writing programs are intensely, purposefully, and effectively unique. Midwestern University is no exception, and its terminology, its methods, and its impacts are uniquely its own to the point where the research that I did from within this program offered little in the way of universal claims about the self-assessment practices of first-year writing students.

However, the unique details of Midwestern University’s FYC Program, and my familiarity with those details, and student research participants’ familiarity with those details
added a dimension to this project that would have otherwise been missing. Because me and my participants shared the common experience of the FYC Program at Midwestern University, I was able to analyze the data within those terms and to develop theories and conclusions about how the Program itself impacted self-assessment practices employed by students within the program. Similarly, student participants were able to converse with me in the terms of the program with a shared understanding of the Program’s expectations. Though we played different roles (teacher, researcher, student, participant), we had a shared experience in the first-year writing classroom and in the culture of the writing program. Because of this, student participants seemed to perceive me not as an outsider and not entirely as an administrator or teacher, but as a member of the first-year writing program community. As an example, students used the terms common in the courses, such as thesis, synthesis, counterargument, without ever offering an explanation of the words. They assumed that we shared this vocabulary. Likewise, they almost invariably referred to their writing instructors as if I knew them, or at least knew them in the context of our conversation because I had played that role in their previous class. They spoke as if they had been welcomed into the community by way of the first writing course that they had taken with me, and now had the right to use the terms (even when they did not fully understand them). There was confidence and pride in their use of the lingo of the first-year writing course, which suggested that shared experience might be a source of agency and a sense of authorship for student writers. This opened my eyes as a teacher and researcher to the possibilities for empowerment of student writers created by this awareness of a shared experience, an affect which fed trust and collaboration in the overall project.
Conclusion

First-year writing programs are common sites for research such as this study, and the literature is abundant with how writing might be taught in first-year programs as well as how it might be studied in first-year programs, as evidenced by the work cited in this chapter and in the description of the very elaborate writing program practices at Midwestern University. In addition to the external need for writing programs to justify their existence to university administration, to the public and to parents and students, through the establishment of learning objectives that comport with university and cultural expectations for college graduates, first-year writing has a variety of internal assessment needs. These range from instructor evaluations to student evaluations, and they occur at the system level, the peer level, and the individual level. Just as instructors battle with their own agency to teach writing as they see fit and to express their own personalities and ideas in their individual classrooms within the program’s requirements, student writers struggle to develop a sense of authorship, of writing about what they find interesting and valuable within the strictures of the FYC rubric and learning objectives. As this chapter demonstrates, assessment occurs in a multitude of ways in first-year writing programs, making the space complicated but rich with possibilities for better understanding and better utilizing assessment as a method of teaching writing and empowering student writers. Huot’s (2002) call for a theory of writing assessment not only emphasizes that assessment should be site-based and locally developed, but also that assessment is perpetually happening in writing instruction: “I believe writing assessment theory is inextricably linked to its practice. Assessment is also linked to teaching, since it’s impossible to teach writing or learn to write without constantly engaging in assessment” (p.163). In this sense, Midwestern University’s FYC Program is a generous research site which offers the opportunity for student participants to
work and reflect and assess themselves within the context of these varying assessment practices through the course of the study, and which offers a teacher researcher a glimpse into what it means for these four writing students to assess themselves as writers within this community.

As Composition Studies works to construct a theory of writing assessment that is local and site-based, it cannot forget to gather the input of its key stakeholders: the writing students. In follow up to Broad’s (2003) question, “what do we really value,” this study inquires of writing students what do they really value when they assess their writing projects, assignments, our writing instruction, program rubrics and learning outcomes, and themselves as writers. Huot’s (2002) quote above divides writing instruction into two acts—one by the teacher who teaches writing and another by the student who learns writing. At the level of self-assessment, the initial focus must be on the second of these, the learning. This study first seeks to discover how and what students learn through the process of self-assessment—which is largely a function of reflection and analysis of what they have done in the past— and what students do to assess their own writing within the context of a writing program, a major plan of study, and a university. As the analysis of the data gathered from this research site and these student participants will demonstrate in the next chapter, students self-assess their writing projects and their writing selves not only through reflection on their own writing processes and written texts, but also through the way assignments, objectives, and teaching strategies impact them as individuals.

This chapter acknowledges that FYC programs have their own assessment needs, which, at times, can conflict with or overwrite important elements of self-assessment. Ultimately, however, this project asserts that there is space for student writer self-assessment to happen in meaningful and productive ways in the writing classroom, where students can learn to reflect upon their writing and themselves as writers in order to shape future projects and goals that align
with the ultimate goal of writing programs—to generate writing persons who can contribute to
the larger society. In exploring the intricacies of the FYC Program, the self-assessment practices
of the research participants, and the outcomes and expectations that writing studies scholars
value in first-year writing courses, this study illuminates the possibilities for interplay of
programmatic assessment needs and writing student self-assessment practices which might offer
writing students a glimpse of their own potentiality and provide them real opportunities to claim
the agency that will make their work meaningful to themselves and to others they hope to
impact.
In their calls for the discipline to conceive of writing assessment as research, scholars such as Huot (2002), Broad (2003, 2009), and Haswell (2001) involve the local stakeholders or community members in the creation of assessment theories and practices. The design and application of methods such as dynamic criteria mapping incorporate disparate elements of a writing program community, including values, beliefs, and needs of its participants. Writing assessment research does much to consider the needs of its first-year writing students, but more insight into those needs can be gained from inquiring of students what they need, why they need it, and in what ways those needs can be met. As the student participants in this research study demonstrated, they had ideas about whether or not the writing program’s prescription for their instructional needs actually attended to the needs they perceived having. The intention of this project was to tap into the student participants of the FYC Program community at Midwestern University and explore their descriptions of how they assess their own writing and themselves as writers, and to discover their interpretations of self-assessment practices that they are being taught.

In this chapter, I review the data collected from the student research participants within the context of the FYC Program at Midwestern University. As I analyzed the data, it became immediately apparent that each participant had his or her own trajectory of development as a writer. In order to capture the uniqueness of each of these trajectories, I first offer a description of the series of interviews for each student in relation to the research questions that I set forth in Chapter 2. In an effort to preserve the integrity of how these students assessed their writing projects and their writing personas, I detail their observations and descriptions largely in their
own words, noting that much of the language they used for self-assessment purposes is the
language of the writing community in which we were operating—Midwestern University’s FYC
Program. In the second part of this chapter, I discuss intersections, differences, and
commonalities of these various trajectories and what they signify for writing self-assessment by
this group of first-year student writers, and for a notion of potentiality in their development as
writers over the course of the semester during which I interviewed them. In coding and
analyzing the data to develop findings relevant to my research questions, I discovered the
following types of assessments made by the four student research participants:

- Form and content in writing projects
- Writing processes and writing as learning
- Self as a writer: past, present, and future
- Writer and reader interaction
- Interest level and choice
- Reflections on reflection
- Teacher feedback and program practices and expectations

Self-Assessment Practices of Each Writing Student Participant

*Elizabeth: The Interplay of Form and Content, Letting Go of Perfection, and Reflection on Reflection*

Elizabeth’s first interview focused on practical matters of FYC, with an emphasis on
form and structure over content and ideas as she described her writing projects and her
assessment of them. This was typical of all four students’ descriptions of writing projects in
their FYC classes over the course of the semester of interviews. But over the course of the
semester, Elizabeth’s responses to interview questions became increasingly introspective about
the role of writing in her own education and the intentions and purposes of the FYC Program as a
system of writing instruction. Elizabeth seemed interested in accepting and affirming the
methods of the Program, describing to me the positive feedback she received from an instructor.
outside the FYC Program and her own increasingly positive opinion of her abilities as a writer. Elizabeth’s series of interviews demonstrated a process not only of learning the writing skills that were central to her FYC course, but of learning how and why these skills would be helpful to her in her education and her life. In her first interview, Elizabeth was vague about her FYC writing projects, but notably told me that her goal for her current paper was to be “perfect.”

Q: What do you hope to achieve with this project? How do you see it changing from where it is right now or what do you want it to be like when you are finished with it? How would you describe what you want the finished product to look like?
A: I guess it’s just my personality to go for perfection. I guess I want the paper to be perfect.
Q: And how would you describe it being perfect? What elements would make it perfect?
A: I guess, well, flawless, I guess. Having all the elements that are essential to a good paper. And all the points are fully developed. They have like the MEAL policy she was talking about. The main point, . . . the MEAL: main point, explain, analyze and link. Like so I wanna make sure each body paragraph has each of those points and then.

(personal communication, January 15, 2013)

At this point, Elizabeth’s concept of perfection was a matter of “elements that are essential to a good paper,” or, in other words, form and structural matters as expected by the teacher (personal communication, January 15, 2013). Even in later interviews, Elizabeth’s response to what would make a paper “good” was a matter of form and structure, and the assessment by the instructor as to the text’s approximation of the assignment:

Q: So where do you see it going? What's your goal for that paper?
A: To get an A on it, I guess.

Q: What's that mean, if you get an A on it?
A: I get an A in the class. I have an A right now, but its 40% of our grade, so, I mean, it would be kind of nice.

Q: What would be nice about an A?
A: I don't know. It means your good.

Q: Is there anything about the paper that you want to achieve? When you think about the paper, set aside your A and just think about the paper--what do you want it to be when you are done with it and turn it in?
A: Good.
Q: That's fine, but tell me what you mean by good.
A: I guess just all the things that need to be present -- in a good paper: sources, and just free of grammar and flow and word choice and stuff like that. (personal communication, April 12, 2013)

As Elizabeth said, an “A” grade was a goal because “It means your good,” but her clarification returned to mechanical issues—grammar, flow, word choice. Elizabeth’s concept of herself as a writer was similarly described in terms of teacher expectations at the outset. In response to my question asking why feedback from her teacher was important to her, she said, “I feel like you can’t grow if you don’t know what you need to do. I’ve never really taken a writing class besides last semester. So I am not anywhere near being a good writer. Well, you know what I mean” (personal communication, January 15, 2013). Elizabeth perceived FYC writing class as the experience that would make her a good writer. In her final interview, she offered a more favorable description of herself as a writer, along with some commentary about the value of writing to her (a concept that she had in our first interview and which she elaborated on in each successive interview):

Q: Well let me ask you this: what have you learned about yourself as a writer?
A: Um, that I'm not really that bad of a writer as I thought. Um, I feel like the only thing I really struggle with is grammar and spelling but that's just because I feel like I've never really spent the time to actually do it, honestly, or really been actually like sat down and like read through and been taught how to do it besides like in second or third grade when they teach grammar and then its kinda not really brought back up until you are being taken off for it and your like, "What's wrong?" [laughs].

Q: And why do you think that's going to be important to you in the future?
A: I mean, grammar is really important because you write all the time and you communicate all the time, so I mean its just essential I think to know how to act, have proper grammar, even though I still don't. I think I am in the process. I don't think people ever have completely perfect grammar because I feel like commas, its such like a debatable thing. Like I go to the one the Learning Commons and they're like commas go after this and this and this," and I go the next time and they're like "that's not necessary" and I'm just like, I don't know what to do. (personal communication, April 19, 2013)
In looking back and looking forward, Elizabeth characterizes herself as “in the process” of learning effective writing strategies and being an effective writer. Though she maintains her attention to form and function (grammar, spelling, commas) in this excerpt, at the end of the semester, she also connects these mechanical concepts to a larger sense of what writing will mean to her. In a sense, she is describing her awareness of a capacity to develop as a writer, and she speaks confidently about this capacity in her description of grammar (a continuing source of struggle in her previous descriptions of writing projects) as debatable, and in her observation that no one is ever really perfect (a term she herself had used to describe her goal for her first paper of the semester) in their grammar. In leaving behind the notion of a “perfect” paper or writer, Elizabeth changed her thinking about writing from a series of rules and standards to a consideration of the possibility that there were variations in writing. This perception, coupled with her astute observations about what she was learning and why it was valuable to her, signaled Elizabeth’s growing awareness of her own potentiality as a writer.

Elizabeth began the interview series with some larger ideas about writing that evolved into more personal discoveries in her assessment of her writing skills and herself as a writer. Elizabeth commented “Writing is a form of communication, and communication is like essential to everyday life. So I feel it not only would it be helpful to the rest of my college experience, but for a job” (personal communication, January 15, 2013). A month later, with her first FYC paper completed and graded and with instruction underway on a new kind of essay that would involve integration of multiple sources, Elizabeth offered more in the way of detail about what her FYC instructor was teaching her about writing. She was able to discuss the concept of “synthesis” in accurate and specific detail. This term, as employed by the FYC Program, describes the integration of source material into an argumentative academic essay, or, as Elizabeth explained
“Have like two sources that like agree with each other, not just throwing sources in with a quote, like having it back up my reasoning instead of just a source” (personal communication, February 12, 2013). In addition to explaining the concept, Elizabeth also explained the technical method by which synthesis could be achieved to the teacher’s satisfaction, and she did so by describing her own paper’s topic and the source material that she was using. She made an important connection between content and form or structure in doing so. Elizabeth also described activities her teacher facilitated in class to build essays in a series of steps:

after you did it all you kind of just had to copy and paste everything together and it was your paragraph and it was actually a really good paragraph and I don't know how. It was like you were writing and you didn't even know about it. (personal communication, February 12, 2013)

In reflecting on this activity, Elizabeth said, “It was interesting the way of learning something. I never really thought of doing it that way” (personal communication, February 12, 2013). This assessment of the teacher and her classroom activities continued throughout Elizabeth’s interviews, and her description of her own work was often intertwined with her observations about the context of the assignment, its purpose, and its relation to larger educational and personal development. In her second interview, Elizabeth also described a future assignment in her FYC class, about which she was confused. She did not fully understand what was expected of her in an upcoming writing project, but she had already developed ideas and sources for a topic that was based in her own personal experience. Her cousin and her boyfriend attended a high school at which the freshman students had been given iPads for educational purposes. Elizabeth had observed, however, that both her cousin and boyfriend were using technology in the classroom in other than educational ways, and she was formulating an opinion about this, even though she suspected her research might support an opposing view:
A: … She's talking something about a FIRE paper. She has a grant to do something different so we are just writing a paper about a topic. I am kind of confused what we're doing yet. But I think my topic is going to be like tech in the classroom for younger kids ages. I strongly think it’s a distracting thing, but I don't really have any sources that back it up. I think there is probably more positive features to it than negative, but I feel like its more of a negative aspect, so I don't know where I am going to stand on it for the paper, but like what I feel about it is I don't like it.

Q: When you say for younger kids, do you mean like high school or do you mean like freshman?
A: At my cousin's school, they were given iPads like all of them as freshman and I still feel like most of the time they just play on it and then its exception that like everyone can just play. Like my boyfriend goes to that school and he's like, oh well, he just texts me all the time. And I’m like aren't you not supposed to have your phone on, and he says since the freshman got iPads they don't really care anymore. Cause, I'm just like that just makes no sense. So.

Q: Are these college freshmen?
A: No.

Q: High school freshmen?
A: Yeah, it’s a really small school and they were all given iPads. The parents have to pay for it over the four years. I just think it’s more of a distraction than beneficial, I don't know. (personal communication, February 12, 2013)

In follow up responses, Elizabeth noted that her work going forward would be “more just trying to find my sources and get my ideas together and find where I stand on this topic cause I know where I stand but I don't know where I want to stand in terms of the writing of the paper” (personal communication, February 12, 2013)—making a significant distinction between her position and the position she would take in the paper. In contrast to her content-focused discussion of a paper yet to be written, when I asked Elizabeth about a paper that had been written, she was less focused on content and more focused on form, describing her teacher’s feedback as follows:

when I had the conference with her she was like well your paper is pretty flawless of development and stuff its just going through and editing and cleaning up so I am pretty good at getting all my ideas together on my first draft and like just having a pretty solid knowing of what I want in the first paper the rough draft and its just cleaning up. (personal communication, February 12, 2013)
Despite Elizabeth’s claim that “my major doesn’t really require me to write,” (personal communication, February 12, 2013), she described a variety of other writing projects in her other classes during the semester: a blog for her women’s studies class, reflective essays on each of her visual communications projects, a self-designed scrapbook project, a persuasive speech in her communications class, a multimodal photography project about a day in the life of a glassblower, and reflections on readings for a class preparing her for her new position as a residence advisor. Elizabeth’s descriptions of these other projects were consistently more content-focused than her discussion of her FYC essays. Furthermore, Elizabeth shared insight into her characterization of these other projects as not being what she and other student research participants perceived as “required writing.” Even though all of her writing projects, with the exception of her scrapbook, were related to coursework, to success in her classes, and to grades with proscribed parameters from her instructors, Elizabeth perceived her non-FYC writing projects as being assessed by her teacher for completion and ideas, rather than on grammar and mechanics. And in describing her scrapbook as writing that she looked forward to, Elizabeth said, “Its just very care free and no one really reads it so its just for me to look back on so its not very stressful” (personal communication, February 12, 2013). Elizabeth, unlike the other three research participants, was more interested or more able to discuss the content and ideas in her writing from her first interview. She was more focused on form and structure (grammar, particularly) after a paper had been submitted to her FYC instructor for feedback and she was in the process of revision. And she described her other instructors as not being concerned with grammar, spelling, and mechanics. But it was her personal scrapbook project that she looked forward to in her own estimation, for its lack of a reader. For Elizabeth, a reader seemed to mean that the writing was stressful. Elizabeth’s perception of the FYC reader was as one who was
interested in form and function—grammar, spelling and mechanics—all of which she lacked confidence in. Her perception of her other course instructors as readers was as ones who were interested more in content than in form, but in content of a particular nature. When she had no reader, she was not judged and was not stressed by the writing. Or, perhaps more accurately, when Elizabeth herself was the only reader, she read herself more kindly and generously than she perceived others reading her in academic contexts.

In addition to discussing her ideas and essay content, Elizabeth reflected on the purposes of her writing assignments and her teachers’ methods. She consistently described what would be helpful to her in the future about the writing projects and skills that she was working on at present. Interestingly, her coursework beyond FYC required her to write reflections on readings and on visual communication projects. Thus, Elizabeth had more experience with reflective writing practices than the other three research participants. Not only did Elizabeth reflect on her writing projects and processes, she reflected on reflection:

Q: . . . Do you see any similarities in reflecting on your [FYC] paper, reflecting on your VC projects, reflecting on articles that you've read?
A: Like, similarities?

Q: Mm-hmm.
A: I guess they're all just trying to find like a situations that will help us in the future and like be more beneficial to build on not just end it and end it there.

Q: Do you think it helps you to do that?
A: Yeah, I mean in a way. To an extent, but-- I feel like in my RA class every freaking week we have to reflect and I think it’s just absurd. (personal communication, April 19, 2013)

In spite of her frustration with reflecting so much in her resident advisor training, Elizabeth was able to make important connections among the reflective practices in her various classes, between those practices and her teachers’ intentions, and between her present state of learning
and the forward momentum of her education. This excerpt from her final interview was framed by a larger discussion about a new writing process that Elizabeth had developed for herself over the course of the semester.

A: . . . And um, I've kind of a found like a new writing process. It's really weird. So.

Q: What is it?
A: Well, I was telling you earlier how I just kind of fill like almost like a chart out and, then, well I do my research and do my synthesis paragraphs first and then I just kind of go from there.

Q: So, you do the chart you do the research--so is the chart to get your ideas down?
A: I kinda just do like intro, background, synthesis, 1 synthesis, 2 synthesis, 3 synthesis, counterargument, rebuttal, conclusion. And then like I do like all my research first and then I compile like my synthesis paragraphs and if I feel like they are effective enough I use them. From that I build my introduction and like my thesis statement cause I know I have like that material throughout and then I go through and revise those paragraphs to make sure it like relates to my thesis and I write my conclusion, counterargument, and rebuttal.

Q: Cool. So you don't write it from beginning to end?
A: No.

Q: And you did before?
A: Yeah, I used to always start out with like my thesis statement, which I mean, it makes sense to kinda have an idea first, but now I don't have a thesis statement compiled before I actually start writing. (personal communication, April 19, 2013)

Not only did Elizabeth describe “finding” this new writing process on her own by combining knowledge and experience that she gained in FYC (research, synthesis) and by considering what she has observed about pre-writing and preparation work with the format of a written text, but she also built into this new process a personal assessment of the “effectiveness” of her paragraphs before she placed them into the overall essay. And importantly, she perceived this process—though probably exactly what her FYC teacher had promoted as a “good” process for writing—to be her own discovery—a mark of a developing sense of authorship. In the pedagogy of potentiality that Haswell & Haswell (2010) advocate in *Authoring: An Essay for the
Profession, writing instruction would focus on promoting in students practices and behaviors that would “sustain” themselves (p. 43). Practices such as the one Elizabeth’s teacher promoted here seem to fall within that description. Elizabeth acquired a new skill in learning to assemble her essay in this way, and it became “her” process. Her ownership of that process translated into confidence in her abilities to write essays, and then into confidence in herself as a writer. Her ability to connect this in-class writing exercise to her writing process and then to herself as a writer through self-assessment practices demonstrates the sustainability of writing practices that empower student writers. Self-assessment is an element of the sustainability of Haswell & Haswell’s (2010) pedagogy of potentiality—it is a self-sustaining skill that helps students to see their own capacity for learning and becoming something different than they are in the present moment.

Susan: FYC Terminology and Application, Writing as Learning, and the Importance of Choice

Similar to Elizabeth, Susan began her interviews with a focus on the form and structure of her essays. The shared language of Midwestern University’s FYC Program, rooted in the Program’s rubric, offered students a series of terms related to structural and rhetorical features of writing. (Appendix G). Instructors and teachers alike employed this vocabulary regularly to talk about writing projects and building essays. Though Susan demonstrated familiarity and understanding of terms such as thesis, counterargument, synthesis, and transitions, she had difficulty throughout our interviews in articulating what her FYC papers were about. When asked about her current FYC writing project during our first interview, she explained that she was awaiting comments on a first draft, and while waiting was revising “for stuff I know that I have to improve on”:
Q: Ok. So, you said, you are, you turned in your rough draft last week and then you will get that back Friday. What are you doing on the writing project in between while you are waiting for the rough draft?
A: I'm revising my rough draft for stuff I know that I have to improve on. So that's basically all I'm doing right now and I am going back and rereading the essay cause I didn't know this until he pointed it out that the essay was written um a while ago so obviously its not as up to date as it claims to be.

Q: Okay, and you said you're revising stuff you know needs revising. So can you tell me specifically what that stuff is?
A: Like I need a better, a stronger thesis statement and I need to elaborate more on my argument rather than just saying like what's wrong like with the essay. (personal communication, January 23, 2013)

Rather than waiting for her teacher’s instructions, Susan was already working to improve her draft in structural ways—a stronger thesis statement, and in terms of content, elaborating on her argument. Susan felt confident in self-initiated revisions that would improve her paper and make it successful. She also described “rereading” as a means of reflecting or reviewing her first draft of the paper, and incorporating information that she had received about a source that she had used. Susan also noted that she and her roommate had already planned to take their first drafts to the university’s writing center when they received them back from their teachers (personal communication, January 23, 2013).

Early on, Susan also described the application of writing skills that she had learned in her previous FYC class. In just the first few weeks of her new class she observed this about her development of writing skills and processes:

Q: Do you see a difference in your writing skills or process on this project as compared to on your previous writing projects?
A: I think I am taking what I learned from [FYC], the first [FYC] to this [FYC] course.

Q: Ok, can you be more specific?
A: Um, like the whole counterargument in the beginning of [FYC] last semester that was one of the hardest things and now I feel like its really easy for me to do that and like the structure, my essay is more organized than it was in the beginning of [FYC] last semester.
Q: Ok. Any other differences that you see maybe in terms of how you are, how you go about your own writing process?
A: Yeah, I take a lot more, I annotate the reading as I am going now cause it helps me like when I go back and like have to process and start writing and before I didn't really do that as much.

Q: Do you see yourself using that in other classes too?
A: Mmm-hmm.

...  
A: Um, I found that I use what I learned from [FYC] in writing other papers. Like I just had a paper due for my education class and I did all the steps that we had worked on in class to write that paper.

Q: And what are those steps? How would you describe those steps?
A: I did an outline first and then like the subject was on why do you want to be a teacher and so it was mainly like your own opinion but they also wanted you to cite from the book so I took what we learned in class from like quoting the book and like referencing the book and stuff like that which before I wasn't really sure on how to do until [FYC]. (personal communication, January 23, 2013)

Susan seemed comfortable using FYC Program terms and concepts such as counterargument and annotate. In fact, annotating was a skill that she was learning in her second FYC course, in the weeks just prior to our first interview. She also had used the process of outlining and incorporating sources in an education class and perceived it to have value in that other context.

Susan also made a connection between her previous experience and attitude toward research papers with an upcoming assignment to write a research essay in her FYC class. When asked what writing projects she was looking forward to, Susan explained, “I don't really know what is next. I mean I know the research paper but I don't know the topics or anything. But I usually enjoy research papers if we have like an option of what to write on—“ (personal communication, January 23, 2013). She connected her past enjoyment of writing research papers to an expectation that she would enjoy an upcoming research paper assignment, even though she did not know the topic or details of the assignment yet. When I asked her what she enjoyed about research papers specifically, she answered “Like learning new things that I didn't know before,
like especially if its a topic you think you are familiar on and then you learn more stuff like you're like, oh, okay” (personal communication, January 23, 2013). Not only did Susan’s assessment of her writing projects demonstrate reflection and forward thinking, but it also revealed her perception of writing as a way of learning—a notion that she presented in all of her interviews.

Susan’s interviews also demonstrated her preference for assignments that gave her opportunity to choose what she was writing about—a common expression of all four of the research participants. In her second interview, she explained what she was excited about in her second FYC writing project—choice:

Q: So, what do you think's going well with the project so far, or what are you excited about or--?
A: I know like the last essay we had to do was very like narrow and we had to write about a certain thing and this one is more like open to like what you want to do, so like that we kinda like get to choose. (personal communication, February 27, 2013)

Susan was adept at succinctly describing writing assignments in FYC and in other courses, but she spoke extensively and enthusiastically about a writing project in her human development course—a “developmental profile” of two elementary school-aged children from different grades. In her first description of the project, her focus was on the preparation for the assignment, rather than on the writing (personal communication, February 27, 2013). She explained how she made arrangements to observe the students, how she obtained consent, what notes she would make during the observation (personal communication, February 27, 2013). She seemed to perceive the writing of the profile as secondary to the experience of performing the observation. Even in her third interview, Susan spoke briefly and offhandedly about the writing portion of the assignment:

Q: So where are you on your developmental profile?
A: Um, It's pretty much done. I have the outline and all the information written down. I just have to put it in paper form.

Q: Okay, and what do you think is successful about that paper right now? What do you like about it?
A: Um, we kind just have to list what we did and stuff but I think I organized it well with the rubric we had to go off of.

Q: Oh, on the developmental profile, what are you struggling with in that project?
A: Um, nothing really. I mean I kind of already have everything I need and I know what I need to write about so I don't think I am struggling with anything. (personal communication, February 27, 2013)

Susan spoke with confidence about this writing project and about other writing projects, noting that she “just” had the writing of the paper left to do. Susan was able to articulate things that she had learned to do differently in her writing preparations, and things that she still felt that she needed to work on in her writing:

Q: Do you see a difference in your writing skills on this project . . .?
A: I think I am doing a lot more organizing and like when I am finding sources, I like write down the key points. And like I research more, like I try to find the best site instead of finding, using the one I find first.

Q: And given all of these writing projects that you are doing right now, what are you learning about your writing skills and yourself as a writer?
A: That I need to take more time when I'm writing cause sometimes I look back and I'm like "what was I trying to say." And that I'm, I think I'm good at organizing a paper. (personal communication, April 3, 2013)

Her assessment of her writing skills and processes involved both reflection and review as well as an acknowledgement of the utility of certain skills going forward into developing writing projects. Susan described her FYC papers in terms of her opportunities to revise drafts. She was able to identify what was successful in a first draft along with what she needed to do in a second or final draft to “pass” the paper, even without instructor feedback. This awareness of her own capacity to assess and revise one paper for the better translated into an awareness of her capacity
to develop further in her overall writing skills—an awareness of her potentiality, as demonstrated in the excerpt from her final interview above.

Susan’s trajectory over the course of the semester also revealed a transformation of her goals. In her first interview, she described this future goal for her first FYC paper, a critique of an academic article assigned by the instructor:

Q: Given where you are in the process of this current writing project, the critique, where do you see it going and what do you envision for the project over the next several weeks. You already said what your concrete plans are . . . but in terms of the content and what you want to achieve with the paper, what do think is going to happen with it?
A: Well, I hope to get an A. I don't know. After I get my rough draft back, hopefully he gives me like helpful comments and stuff and if not you know talk to him about it. Cause I know that my rough draft was really rough so I just want to get it to the point where I know its going to be passing even though its just the first essay. (personal communication, January 23, 2013)

Her goal was a system goal—a specific letter grade of “A,” and she described “hoping” to get an “A” based on her instructor’s perception of the paper and his feedback to her on her first draft. When asked what would make it passing, she identified Midwestern’s FYC terms and rhetorical techniques—counterargument and summarization—as the elements that would make the paper passing. In contrast, during Susan’s last interview, she described this future goal for her human development paper (the developmental profile explained above):

A: Um, I have to add a few more details, like um of the different attributes like the social and cognitive like differences between the two children. But other than that, I don't really have much to change besides like proofreading and just basic like mechanical stuff like that. (personal communication, April 3, 2013)

Susan’s plans for the final draft of this paper were not focused entirely on the grade, and she was considering a future plan for changes in both content and form (“mechanical stuff”).

Despite her insights about her own writing skills and processes, her expressed perception that she was learning valuable and useful skills, and her understanding of FYC writing concepts
even in other contexts, Susan did not envision herself as a writer. In her typical succinct, matter
of fact manner, Susan ended her third and final interview with this:

Q: Do you see yourself as a writer?
A: Uhh, I don’t think so.

Q: So like as of right now, you would say no?
A: Yeah.

Q: Do you see yourself becoming a writer at some point later?
A: I don’t think so.

Q: Why not?
A: I don’t know. It’s not my thing. (personal communication, April 3, 2013)

Susan’s own developmental profile was limited in terms of potentiality as a writer over the long
term. Susan envisioned herself as a teacher, and her enthusiasm was for projects such as the
human development profile that seemed directly relevant to her educational and professional
goal of being a teacher. She engaged very briefly in reflection and in looking forward to a future
self, and she was adept at writing, but, as she said, it was not “her thing.”

In *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*, Kathleen Black Yancey (1998) describes
reflection as an opportunity to work with students as “agents in their own learning” (p. 5).
Yancey (1998) defines reflection as “the processes by which we know what we have
accomplished and by which we articulate accomplishment” as well as the “products of those
processes” (p. 6). Susan, like Elizabeth, Julie, and Walter, engaged in reflection throughout our
interviews, but these self-assessments involved much more than looking back to and articulating
what had happened in their past writing experiences. It also involved looking forward, as Susan
demonstrated in her comments on plans for future papers and a future career as a teacher.
Though Susan explained that she did not see herself becoming a writer because it was not her
“thing,” she was looking forward to future possibilities, to assess her potentiality, or her capacity
to be a writer in the future. At present, she ruled out being a writer, but she was still thinking forward and using reflection upon her writing and learning experiences, and an awareness of her present attitude about writing to come to that conclusion. Her individual experiences had taught her that she did not want to be a writer later in life, demonstrating that her self-assessments occurred across time, and her evaluation of herself as a writer encompassed analysis of past, present, and future.

Part of Yancey’s (1998) attraction to reflection is that it empowers students to help her, as a teacher, answer the question of “what a writer is capable of” (p. 23). Clearly, program expectations, teacher assignments, feedback, and classroom practices, as well as the overall attitude about writing in a writing community such as Midwestern’s FYC Program influence student perceptions and evaluations of their own work, but assisting students in the process of self-assessment is a way of promoting students to develop a sustainable way of knowing (or beginning to know) what they are capable of themselves as writers. Advancing Yancey’s (1998) call for reflection-in-action as a means of helping students to actively participate in their own development, an expanded notion of reflection as connected to future looking plans and desires attends to the potentiality, the capacity to become that Haswell & Haswell (2010) call for in their argument for respecting student rights of authorship.

**Julie: Confidence in Writing, Just Writing What Someone Else Wants, and Negotiating A Sense of Authorship**

In contrast to Elizabeth and Susan’s doubts about themselves as writers in the beginning of our interviews, Julie expressed confidence in her writing skills from the very beginning. Curiously her interviews also demonstrated an ongoing struggle for Julie with understanding and making use of feedback from her instructor, negotiating conflicts between her own sense of what
was “right” in her papers and her reader’s sense of what was “right,” and in expressing herself
while giving the reader what the reader wanted or expected. Julie was able to articulate what she
did well in her writing process and in her written texts and what she needed to work on, and she
spoke in each interview of the value of being a good writer—notably that writers are judged by
their readers, and a good writer is judged to be a smart person. Her frustration with her teacher’s
assessments of her FYC papers mounted over the course of the semester, and in the end she did
not pass the required FYC course. In her final interview, she reflected on and shared with me
what she had learned from the experience:

Me at the beginning trying to do it for myself wasn’t working, then I know what she
wants. She said this is great, this is what I am looking for. That’s the smart way—just do
what they want. Not settling! You still have a mind of your own, but its just [pause] . . .
you are not settling. You are a smart person, a good writer . . . [pause]. That’s how good
you are; you can just write whatever they want to hear. (personal communication, April
24, 2013)

But even at the beginning, Julie was reflecting on her successful writing skills and
anticipating her success in future writing projects, explaining to me that though she had not
written her next paper yet, she could tell me something that she knew would be successful about
it: her introduction.

Q: . . . Ok, so what do you think was successful about your critique paper?
A: Um, my introduction, and um I think the, my thesis like the three little topics that I
chose from actually—

Q: Tell me what you think was good about your intro.
A: Um, cause I feel like I am very persuasive so I know how to like, like reel people in,
so I feel like that's why I love introductions. But my thing is like I can get ‘em in, but
once I get ‘em in I am stuck. Like you just in and I don't know what to do after that,
whatever. So yeah, my intro.

Q: Ok. And you said you thought your thesis was successful. You said because of the
three topics you chose from. Now, do you mean you think the thesis was good cause you
had the three topics in there or you think you picked good topics, or maybe you mean
something else.
A: Because I think I picked good topics.

Q: Alright. And how about, I guess, maybe its--is it too early to tell how this other paper is coming together?
A: Um, well, I don't ----

Q: I don't know if you can say there is anything success--successful yet about it.
A: No, I can't say --- My intro might be successful. I know that.

Q: Have you thought about an intro for it already?
A: No, not yet, but I know its going to be good. I know. Intro, that's me. (personal communication, January 30, 2013)

In this early exchange, Julie revealed confidence in her ability to write introductions that “reel” the reader in. She described a rhetorical purpose for her introduction and described being successful in her interactions with the reader by getting the reader involved with the introduction, and then offering them “good topics.” In some ways, Julie expressed a sophisticated understanding of the purpose of writing techniques, particularly as they related to audience. But in other ways, Julie had difficulty understanding basic writing concepts in her FYC class.

Following the excerpt above, Julie explained to me that her FYC instructor told her

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    to stop putting my own personal, I guess, um, cause I don't know, I think I said something and she was just like um, I guess its called like formal, or maybe cause I was just like too formal. And I think when I was younger when you used to write papers you always had to put in a personal experience and that's why I'm probably like used to it so that's why I am probably like--I don't know. (personal communication, January 30, 2013).
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Julie had used a writing technique that she had learned and successfully used previously—to include personal experience (which arguably would be a rhetorical technique used to engage the reader)—and was now being told not to. She said that the teacher told her she was being “too formal,” but she meant “too informal” and when I clarified this with her she did not seem entirely clear on the meaning of the terminology. In spite of this distinct disconnect between Julie and the vocabulary of writing assessment, she continued to struggle to understand and
comply with her FYC instructor’s feedback. In attending to her teacher’s instruction to remove personal experience from her paper, Julie explained that she had replaced the text that she had written about how her own sister’s homosexuality had affected her family (the essay was about marriage equality) with source material from “like psychologists or whatever” (personal communication, January 30, 2013).

Julie’s interviews were rife with contradictions that highlighted the tensions she was experiencing in the process of learning to write and in being a writer, and in being a college student and, eventually, a social worker. She adeptly provided a list of what would make a FYC paper pass the rubric: “A great thesis, nice intro, great conclusion, and basically um know how to back up what I put in the thesis, or everything I chose from my thesis. And nice words. I gotta learn, I am trying to learn how to like broaden my vocabulary cause this is college” (personal communication, January 30, 2013). But she struggled to really understand her teacher’s comments as the course progressed and concepts such as synthesizing sources and using an academic tone escaped her even at the end of the semester. She initially told me that she felt FYC was a useful course, that she had learned a lot from the introductory FYC course that she had taken in the Fall—“I learned about myself, and how I write, the good and the challenges of writing” (personal communication, January 30, 2013). But at the end of the semester, after the second, required FYC course, she was upset with the process:

I understand that she told me that this is wrong, but like she told me, not help me all the way but she didn’t really say how she wanted me to change it. Since I write it for her, I change it to the way I think is right, she says it is still wrong. Okay, what is your definition of right and wrong? I know she can’t do it for me, but like, what’s your right? To your liking? I kept revising to the best of my ability and it still wasn’t right. (personal communication, April 30, 2013)
Similarly, just as Julie demonstrated rhetorical knowledge and an understanding of the value of being persuasive to an audience, and the value of writing in her future career as a social worker, she also said this about having a reader:

A: And one thing I want to say about the one thing I really don't like--I feel like when you, when people see your writing like they not judge you, or they can judge you, just like "oh well, like she writes bad," or like "she uses little words so she is probably not that smart or she's probably like, not that--." That's the main reason why I really don't like writing. I like someone to hear me speak and then, okay, "well she speaks properly" and all that stuff instead of like reading. That's why I am really really nervous about writing cause I feel like you know people will judge you and just be like "she didn't put a comma, this run on sentence,"--that's horrible, That's why I like speaking instead of writing. And I think maybe that's why some people like, well, I can't speak for everybody, but personally I feel like maybe that is why some people don't really like writing. (personal communication, January 30, 2013)

Her relatively sophisticated notions of audience and persuasion were countered by her fears and anxiety about being judged harshly by readers—not just in terms of good or bad writing, but of her intelligence and of herself as a person. Her confidence in her own writing abilities through the expression of her personal experiences, her “reeling” in of readers with introductions, her choice of interesting topics was underscored by her observation that she preferred talking to writing, and did not really like writing. Her comments echoed Elizabeth’s observation that the writing she enjoyed most was writing in her scrapbook—writing that no one would read. For both of these student writers, an audience signaled to them a limitation on what they could say and how they could say it, because they were being judged, and not just as student writers, but as human beings. For both Julie and Elizabeth, the presence of an audience translated into a loss of agency, and, subsequently, to a limitation of potentiality in their work. Elizabeth’s early goal was to write a “perfect” paper, which had a very specific form. Julie learned over the course of the semester to eliminate her personal knowledge from papers and replace it with credible source material. Both of these instances demonstrate how these two student writers experienced the
conforming of their own ideas and expression of those ideas to the external standard by which they would be judged. Though they had very different results, they both conformed in their own ways, which ultimately impacted their potentiality to write. The external judgments that they both disliked served to circumscribe what they might do with their writing. In her second interview, Julie elaborated on her attitude about writing, clarifying that she accepted having to write and did, in fact, have a kind of writing that she enjoyed: “If I had a choice I wouldn’t write, but I know I have to. I write outside of school but it isn’t college standard. I love quotes and different things. I write stuff down off the top of my head.” (personal communication, April 24, 2013). Free of the restrictions of school, Julie used writing for her own purposes, even as she acknowledge that it wasn’t “college standard.”

While Julie had good specific assessments of what was successful in her writing process and written texts and of what she struggled with in writing, and while she had a sense of the value of writing in her future career as a social worker, she did not seem to transfer the lessons of FYC into other classes. She continually referred to her need and her endeavor to be more “college like” in her writing (personal communication, February 28, 2013). Her goals were “to sound more mature,” (personal communication, February 28, 2013), because “People judge you on your writing, how intelligent you are” and because “Being a social worker, I will have a lot of writing to do” (personal communication, April 12, 2013). Beyond her FYC class, Julie had described other writing assignments in her Social Work and Africana Studies courses. She had written a diversity paper for her Social Work class in which she described the experience of observing what occurred at a Mexican restaurant. She said

A: We didn’t get grades back yet—I think it turned out pretty well. My intro was good. We don’t have like [FYC], five pages. Just front and back, just explaining. I don’t really have to use sources. It was more in my own words. I wrote about we went to the restaurant, described place and people and how it was different and how I enjoyed it.
Q: Did you have a thesis?
A: Yeah, but then no. Yes, but it wasn’t like—No, I just talked about when I was there. It wasn’t like three main points I was talking about. Maybe I should have had a thesis. (personal communication, February 28, 2013)

Julie’s understanding of a thesis statement was limited to the type of thesis statement that she had learned to write in FYC, with “three main points.” Similarly, she described receiving feedback on a paper in her Africana Studies course:

I thought we just write, but she wanted thesis, argument, and counterargument. I learned da-da-da [pause] . . . there is a difference between writing and college writing. Usually we don’t write papers in that class, and I thought it would be easy, but she said we needed a thesis etc. I thought, whoa, I didn’t think we did that in this class. (personal communication, April 12, 2013)

In spite of all of the contradictions she experienced, Julie held onto her desire to present herself (even as a developing writer with much to learn) in her writing throughout the semester, and though she ended the semester with a rather dire perception of what it meant to write, she seemed to maintain a sense of what she was capable of doing well already, and what she needed to improve on going forward. In her second interview, she responded to my question about the success of her current FYC paper by explaining that she disagreed with her teacher’s comments.

Q: What do you think was successful about the whole project, not just the words on the page, but the whole thing?
A: So, like when I turned it in I didn't really know what was going on. But then once she gave me, put her comments that really helped me to understand where I needed to go or was on the right track or not. So that really helped me. And some of the stuff like she was saying I did not understand, or like did not agree, so I tried to like use what she said still trying to keep just to see, just to see like--I don't know what I'm trying to say--like I don't know how to explain it. I wanted to like, cause it was like something she said, like, because I heard like she actually commented then I had someone else from the Learning Commons help me and like the teacher would be like you need to change all this around and then like the person that was helping me would be like this is okay or whatever, so um, when stuff like that happened I would take her advice but still try to have my own in it. Like I wouldn't just fully change my whole thing because she said. She's the teacher, I understand that, but I still wanted to have my own input in there. So the comments helped me. (personal communication, February 28, 2013)
In her third interview, Julie described a recent experience with her teacher’s feedback on a first draft of a current FYC paper:

Q: Where in the process of the assignments are you?
A: First draft done, back with instructor comments. Basically try to shorten down the info, fit something else in to it. Still need to make it eight pages. I really think she’s wrong. I know she is the teacher but [pause] . . . I worked really hard on that paper. You can never have too much info.

Q: How do you think the writing project is going?
A: I though it was going good. When the draft was turned in, I felt so good and she was going to congratulate me and it went the total opposite. . . . What I learned is that in [FYC] its about your teachers. . . . I am not writing, I am giving her what she wants. (personal communication, April 12, 2013)

And in her final interview, with the knowledge that she would not pass the class because she had not passed the final research essay for the course even after revision, Julie explained that in the future she would:

be a smart writer, put myself in, [pause] . . . write how they want me to write, do what they want me to do. I feel like I sound like I am settling but I feel like that is the world we live in. Its not really about you, its about the company or whoever you are with, you just gotta think about them. (personal communication, April 30, 2013)

In many ways, Julie had insight into her strengths and weaknesses as a writer. By her own standards, she felt that her writing projects were successful. She perceived herself as learning from the experiences, gaining skills and processes that would improve her writing, but her self-assessments did not match with the assessments of her instructors, suggesting a lack of insight into what was expected of her. This became an ongoing negotiation for Julie during the course of our interviews. At one point she explained,

Its probably sad, but I think I am just be a ‘enough writer,’ just enough to get me by. . . . Just enough so you know I am not dumb, but that I am probably not that intelligent at writing. Just enough for you to know who I am. (personal communication, April 12, 2013)
Of the four student participants, Julie was the only one who did not pass Midwestern’s required FYC course at the end of the semester, yet her assessments of herself, her writing projects, and the larger conundrum of writing—its value, and what it means for a writer and a reader—suggests that Julie was the most analytical of the four student participants about the experience of learning to write academically in a college FYC Program.

_Walter: The Importance of Being Entertaining, the Power of Choice, and Student Assessment of the FYC Program_

Just as his student research participant peers made use of the common language of the FYC Program (e.g. thesis, synthesis, counterargument), Walter combined the terminology of the writing program community with his own interpretation of the purposes and effects of different rhetorical strategies. Walter’s interviews were notable for his concern about whether his writing was interesting or entertaining (as opposed to “forced”)—both of which he valued in the writing that he read as well as in the writing that he produced himself. His interviews were also notable for Walter’s perception of the interview as an opportunity for him to share his criticisms of the FYC Program and his suggestions for its improvement. Walter was not just assessing his own work in the course of attending FYC courses and our interviews; he assessed the program as well.

While Walter consistently described the goals for his various writing assignments as a certain letter grade or a “pass,” he also articulated more sophisticated rhetorical purposes in his writing through the interplay of form and content. He was able to bifurcate goals for his educational success as dictated by the program from goals for his effectiveness as a communicator. In his first interview he explained:
Q: What do you hope to achieve with your writing project? How do you see it changing from what it is right now? Or what do you want it to be when you are finished with it? What purpose do you want it to serve?
A: Just more structure and to where like its better to read. And have a good ending.

Q: What makes a good ending?
A: The ending, um, you should be able to sum up everything you wrote, have the conclusion, and like when you sum up it should be different than the thesis and . . . just—

Q: Different how?
A: It shouldn't be the exact same thesis, but it should say the same thing. Like, I mean it should have the same meaning. (personal communication, January 25, 2013)

In real-time reflection during our first interview, Walter had a realization about the purpose of counterarguments after telling me that he did not “learn” anything in FYC, but rather just “did stuff”:

A: Its not really that you learn stuff, its that you do stuff.

Q: Oh, ok, explain what you mean by that.
A: I don't really think, ok, I don't really think like you go in there and learn stuff that's new. Its more of just, that you do different activities like such as, ok, we um, we pretended to be like different characters in like one of the articles and its like you had to, you had to speak to the class as if you were them, had their opinions and characteristics. That's more like doing something, not learning something.

Q: What did you learn from doing that?
A: What did I learn? I learned how I thought the person--ooh, I did learn something. Um, it made me like think more about how the person feels about things.

Q: Did you have to pick somebody who was different than you like that didn't--you know what I mean, you had to put yourself in their shoes and act like you believed what they believed which would be different from how you believed?
A: Yeah.

Q: Ok. What's the point of learning that relative to your writing? What good does that do you for your writing project?
A: Because if you um, you go back and write something about it then its like you looked at it from like a different point, like you seen the other side of it. Like you already took the other side more because you are most likely to take your side anyway like doing the paper. (personal communication, January 25, 2013)
Walter projected confidence in his writing in his introductory FYC class before we began our interviews. He also questioned my feedback to him on his essays and challenged some of the programmatic interpretations of rhetorical techniques that were taught in FYC. I specifically recall him asking me about the use of a thesis statement at the beginning of his paper. “But why?” he asked. He wanted to draw the reader in and then let the reader discover the main argument of the paper—why give it away at the beginning? His questioning and his resistance continued through his interviews, with him explaining to me in his second interview that he knew how to write a paper and he found FYC “boring.”

Q: So with all these writing projects, what are you learning about your own writing skills that's helpful to you?
A: [pause] Mmm, I don't know. Its like I know how to write a paper, its like with [FYC] its like its a lot more rules than other classes that write papers. And then its different cause like its like required.

Q: And what effect does that have on all of it, on what you feel you are learning?
A: Its boring, its not entertaining. And my teacher kind of said that the other day, that's exactly what he wrote on the board.

Q: What? [FYC] is boring?
A: He wrote, “This is not creative writing, this is um [FYC] and you are writing to an academic audience.” (personal communication, February 27, 2013)

He objected to FYC courses being “so structured” and being “different than writing papers like in other classes” where “its just like write four pages and then that’s the paper” (personal communication, January 25, 2013). His objection to the FYC Program’s structure reminded me of Julie’s perception that readers were looking for errors in vocabulary, and grammar—both FYC (through its rubric and portfolio readers) and the readers who Julie anticipated were concerned with form, perhaps to the exclusion of ideas and content. As reinforcement of the significance of Walter’s distaste for boring, formulaic writing as he saw taught in FYC, Walter’s general lack of interest in talking about his FYC papers contrasted sharply with his enthusiastic
and detailed conversation about papers that were “interesting” to him in other classes. Walter elaborated on a project in his tourism, leadership and event planning class, after being asked what writing projects he was looking forward to:

A: Ok, for tourism, leadership, event planning class . . .

Q: That sounds like such a cool class. Tourism, leadership, and event planning?
A: Yeah. I get to write about how instructor of a physical activity um just pretty much runs their class such as a gym teacher or something and I get to watch how they, like the tone of their voice, just how they get the participation, the respect and then I have to critique that and I also get to write another paper about um, about a game. I gotta pick a game to um show a whole class how to play and I have make like, to have like all the details in case someone's never played it.

Q: So you have to explain it, teach them how to play it? Are you going to watch somebody do a gym class. Is that how you are going to do the first paper?
A: Its more like I have to sit there and just like watch the whole thing go and then its pretty much me saying they could have done this better, that better, they did do this good and stuff like that. (personal communication, January 25, 2013)

Unlike his FYC papers, this project was interesting to Walter, and he perceived it as an opportunity for him to be interesting himself in presenting the game instructions. He also emphasized that this paper was “just” him providing certain pieces of information about his observation of the instructor and his critique of the instructor’s methods. Both of these aspects of this writing project made Walter more engaged than he was with his FYC papers, which were “forced,” according to Walter, by virtue of their structure and lack of entertainment value. Also of note was the difference between the context of this writing assignment and FYC writing assignments. Walter had chosen the tourism, leadership, and event planning course as a consequence of his choice of major (Communications with a focus in Promotions and Advertising), which was a function of his own educational and professional goals for the future. Walter had not chosen to take the FYC courses; this choice was made for him, in direct opposition to his own perception of his ability to “write papers.” For Walter, the FYC Program
had forced him to abdicate his sense of a writerly self, despite his confidence and his demonstrated skill with rhetorical strategies and purposes. He was developing a sense of authorship, but, ironically, it was happening through his efforts to explain to himself and to me why Midwestern’s FYC Program was problematic for him.

Another significant aspect of Walter’s interest in his teacher observation and instruction writing project outside of the FYC classroom was that it matched with Susan’s description of her human development paper in which she observed and profiled two elementary school students, Julie’s diversity paper for which she went with a friend to a Mexican restaurant to observe what happened in a different place, and Elizabeth’s photography project in which she documented a day in the life of a glassblower, as well as in the reflective pieces that both Walter and Elizabeth were asked to write at the end of their visual communications assignments to create what amounted to rhetorical analyses of their multimodal projects. In stark contrast to their FYC papers, which were designed to provide students with instruction and experience with inquiry based research to create new knowledge and make use of academic source material in their own arguments, these projects engaged students in a kind of personal knowledge making that preceded the writing process. In response to questions about these projects beyond their FYC coursework, all four students were articulate about their ideas, the content that they were generating, and their prewriting processes. In ways that their FYC writing projects did not promote active generation of new knowledge that they felt they had created, these projects offered students opportunity to build a unique command of a specific situation, even within the larger context of academic literature and assignment parameters. The descriptions of the projects offered by the four students was markedly different in detail, tone, and energy—these projects were exciting and interesting and empowering for them.
Walter argued that his present writerly self was compromised by his experience in FYC. While he acknowledged learning useful skills in research, he felt that interest and entertainment—which he valued highly in his own and in others’ writing—were impossible in FYC, where being and writing in the class was required and forced:

Q: . . . So do you think of yourself as a writer now, and if you do what kind of writer do you think you are?
A: Um, I feel like I'm an entertaining writer.

Q: Yes, you are. Is that the kind of writer you want to be later on too? Is that something you value in your self being able to be an entertaining writer?
A: Yeah.

Q: Do you think you can be an entertaining writer and still write your required [FYC] papers?
A: No.

Q: You can't do both?
A: No.

Q: Why not?
A: Cause you cannot.

Q: I thought your papers were entertaining last semester.
A: My papers were boring. (personal communication, February 27, 2013)

Just as Elizabeth had critiqued the forced nature of FYC writing assignments, Susan expressed appreciation for assignments that gave her more choice, and Julie feared the judgment of a grammar-fixated teacher/reader, Walter described the FYC Program as limiting his capacity to express himself in a manner that he thought was important for effective communication with his audience. And similar to the Julie’s writing down of quotes that she liked, Elizabeth’s scrapbook, and Susan’s human development paper rooted in her own experiences and observations, Walter enjoyed writing under circumstances that were impactful and unconstrained by a critical readers:
Q: How about any writing you may do for yourself?
A: That's everyday.

Q: What's everyday?
A: Social networking, that writing goes on every day.

Q: Do you look forward to that?
A: Yeah.

Q: Why?
A: Cause social networking, I mean branch out your name, more people see, its just open and free and nobody—

Q: Its open and free and what?
A: And just nobody bothers you cause you wrote something wrong or that you need more information or just. It’s just nice and smooth, a smooth process you just write what you want. (personal communication, April 24, 2013)

Many aspects of Walter’s interviews suggest a sense of himself as an author or agent, with the capacity to create change in himself and the environment in which he acted, specifically through written and oral communication. This was accompanied by a clear image of who he wanted to be and what he wanted to do in the future. Walter was a creative writer before coming to Midwestern University, and he continued writing rap lyrics even after he changed his major from Creative Writing to Communications with a focus in Promotions and Advertising (personal communication, April 24, 2013). Walter’s description of himself as a writer in his final interview reflected a clear image of his future professional self, writing creatively:

Q: ... So, do you have an idea in your head like if I said to you what kind of writer are you going to be? What kind of writer are you going to be?
A: A planner slash creative musical writer.

Q: A planner slash creative what writer? Musical?
A: Yes. Didn't I tell you I um, cause remember I changed my stuff right?

Q: Mm-hmm.
A: And I told you what it was right? Or did I?

Q: I think so but tell me about it.
A: I went from creative writing to communications with a focus in promotions and advertising. So that's why I consider myself a planner cause in those type of job descriptions I am the main person to plan ways that you're going to promote and advertise what the job is, advertising manager or promotion, promotional manager.

Q: Do you, but you still maintain, I mean you said when you described yourself you said planner/creative so you still see that as a creative writing opportunity?
A: Cause I'm gonna still have like the um, cause I'll like think like other businesses, other competitions that whichever business I am going to work for is facing so we can promote or advertise. (personal communication, April 24, 2013)

In spite of his disgust with the FYC Program, Walter conceded that the course would be useful to some students, and he even acknowledged that he learned new writing skills that would be useful for him moving forward in his education and in his professional life. His assessments of his own work, however, led to assessments of the writing program, which he shared with me in a way that suggested that he perceived himself as a member of the Program’s community and that he perceived himself as having the ability to create change in the community through his arguments for different ways of approaching first-year writing instruction. In their critique of self-assessment practices, “Student Self-Assessment: Some Issues and Concerns from Postmodern and Feminist Perspectives,” Susan Latta and Janice Lauer argue that students can “assume many different subject positions” in the process of evaluating their own work and can never truly separate from their social, historical, and cultural contexts (p. 30). But they also acknowledge that this leads to a potential benefit of self-assessment—one demonstrated in Walter’s interviews:

Student self-assessment, therefore, could provide students with the opportunity to clarify for themselves the differences between their understandings of academic expectations and their own, an opportunity for students to genuinely engage with the academic institution on their own terms and to offer them a possible forum for critique. (p. 30)
The data recounted here represents only a small part of the self-assessment that these four students engaged in during their series of interviews with me over the Spring semester of 2013 at Midwestern University. An initial observation during the initial note-taking that I performed during the interviews themselves was that these four students assessed themselves in rich, dynamic, and meaningful ways. Not just as part of the FYC Program’s goal to complete a self-reflective narrative at the end of the semester, but independent of the Program and toward their own ends, which at some times conflicted with the Program’s ends and at other times synthesized into new goals and purposes for individual students. In considering the intersection of writing assessment as a larger area of study and self-assessment practices in FYC classrooms, Brian Huot (2002) explains two assumptions that are supported by the data in this project: (1) “in literate activity, assessment is everywhere . . . we evaluate what we write on a fairly continuous basis,” and (2) “being able to assess writing is an important part of being able to write” (p. 61-62). Edward White (2007) endorsed the second assumption in Assigning, Responding, Evaluating: A Writing Teacher’s Guide, as the did the Council of Writing Program Administrators in the WPA Outcomes Statement in 2000 and 2008. The student writers in this study were assessing continuously, but, importantly, it was not just about their writing, even when it was about their writing. As Yancey (1998), Huot (2002), and White (2007) all argue, assessment is about power and authority, and successful writing pedagogy focuses students “on their writing and the choices writers make” (Huot, 2002, p. 69). Self-assessment, as demonstrated by these students took them far beyond practical strategies for revision; it empowered them to see the potential in their own writing and in themselves as writers and agents in discourse communities.
As these descriptions demonstrate, each writer experienced the FYC Program in his or her own unique way in spite of a shared learning objectives, programmatically proscribed rubrics, and a common language. Students arrived to Midwestern and its FYC Program with different educational experiences, different personalities, different expectations, and they experienced the courses with different teachers, balanced against various other school and personal obligations and connections. Because students are individual in both obvious and unobvious ways, it is important to note that while community can create a shared experience, individuals bring to that community differences that affect their interaction with and their takeaway from learning objectives and teaching strategies. For purposes of this study, the individual experiences of these students highlight some of the ways in which these first-year writing students assessed their own skills and capacities during the writing process and as writers in the present and in the future. The assessments made by these students involved reflection on their past writing practices and experiences, use and application of writing terms and techniques on the present writing projects, and consideration of the value of writing and the kind of writer that they might be in the future. Though the students had different ways of expressing their assessments, which reflected their very unique and personal experiences in their first year of college at Midwestern, as well as the varying but notable social influence of the community in which they were learning to write, all four of them engaged in self-assessment practices which involved an awareness of their own capacities for writing through an active process of looking back and looking forward. Their self-assessments aspire to what Yancey (1998) valued in reflective practices:

When we reflect, we call upon the cognitive, the affective, the intuitive, putting these into play with each other: to help us understand how something completed looks later, how it
compares with what has come before, how it meets stated or implicit criteria, our own, those of others. Moreover, we can use those processes to theorize from and about our own practices, making knowledge and coming to understandings that will themselves be revised through reflection. (p. 6)

Differences between Direct and Indirect Self-Assessment Disclosures

Hilgers, Hussey and Stitt-Bergh (2000) describe successful self-assessment when students are “engaged systematically,” “embed[d] in a facilitating context,” and “provide[d] criteria and guidance” (p. 6). And prompting them to self-assess seems like an effective method of “teaching” self-assessment practices to students. Just as writing teachers “teach” revision strategies by offering students opportunity to work with different writing techniques, draft separate drafts of a paper before the final is due, collect feedback from instructors and peers, they “teach” assessment by assigning reflective essays, asking students to write letters or narratives describing the contents of their portfolios and their developed writing skills, and asking them questions during interviews about how their writing projects are going and how they think and feel about their written texts and writing processes. Certainly, these are the practices employed in Midwestern University’s first-year writing program.

Along the lines of this accepted notion of self-assessment, I purposefully prompted students to self-assess with variations on three typical “directed” questions:

1. **How do you think this writing project is going for you?**

2. **What do you think is successful about this draft of this paper at this point in time?**
3. If you had to say that there was something that wasn’t successful about it at this point in time, what might that be?

I asked these questions at each interview about each writing project they were engaged with at the time, some of those in their FYC course and some in other courses. Typically, their answers were summative, vague, and generic in response to how they thought their writing project was going. These were their answers to the first, most generic question, “how is the writing project going for you?”

“Pretty good” (Elizabeth personal communication, January 15, 2013)
“Really good. I don’t know” (Elizabeth, personal communication, February 12,)
“Really good. The feedback said it was really good, strong rough draft, just a few revisions and editing” (Elizabeth, personal communication, April 2, 2013)
“Narrative going good, I just need to look over it again. I am not too worried about it” (Elizabeth, personal communication, April 19, 2013)

“Going good so far” (Susan, personal communication, January 23, 2013)
“Good” (Susan, personal communication, February 27, 2013)
“Looking good” (Susan, personal communication, April 3, 2013)

“It was okay” (Julie, personal communication, January 30, 2013)
“I actually think it turned out pretty well” (Julie, personal communication, February 28, 2013)
“I thought it was going good” (Julie, personal communication, April 12, 2013)

“Its fine” (Walter, personal communication, January 25, 2013)
“It will get done” (Walter, personal communication, February 27, 2013)
“Its cool. Its fine. Its not bad” (Walter, personal communication, April 15, 2013)
“Going well” (Walter, personal communication, April 24, 2013)

As this list of answers illustrates, responses were similarly non-informational, and showed little to no variation from the beginning of the semester to the end of the semester. Though the different responses suggest slightly differing levels of confidence among the four student writers, they all tended to be positive but non-specific assessments about how the project was going. The responses were similar in that they demonstrated some confidence, but not too much. I
suspect the students wanted to project themselves to me as doing good work without seeming to brag about their abilities. These answers also prevented students from having to give any specifics about their writing projects. In a way, the questions asked students to gloss over the details, to not really engage in a detailed analysis of the elements of a paper that would be deemed successful or unsuccessful. The questions were rather loaded in that true answers would involve a complicated processing of information that the general question just does not allow students to do. And, in some ways, the question “how do you think the writing project is going?” is the equivalent of asking a passing acquaintance, “how are you?” It is a nicety most of the time, and not much more.

The four students were generally more able to provide details about their evaluations in response to the second directed self-assessment question: “what do you think is successful about this draft of this paper at this point in time?” More of their answers were about the form and structure of their essays rather than the content and ideas contained in their papers. For example, Elizabeth offered this assessment in her first interview, regarding her first paper in her FYC course:

I think its actually pretty well put together. Its got like an intro and a conclusion and main points, and I think they are pretty fully developed and I support it with the article too. And I do like, a, the first or second paragraph like a review of the article itself. And I just feel like its pretty well put together. And before I like printed it out I even read over it to add like some of my normal grammar errors. So I feel like its just pretty good. I am rather happy with it. (personal communication, January 15, 2013)

Susan, however, focused her responses on the content of her essays. In her first interview, she identified the counterargument in her first FYC essay as something that was successful and explained:

. . . this article is saying like where jobs will be in 2020 and stuff like that and they don't even touch base on any technology and stuff like that so I think my counterargument
against that is strong. And they are saying that manufacturing is one of the only jobs or like occupations that is going to stay strong in American because of exporting stuff and I don't think that's true. (personal communication, January 23, 2013)

In her second interview, she described this in response to my question about what was successful about the paper:

I know like the last essay we had to do was very like narrow and we had to write about a certain thing and this one is more like open to like what you want to do, so like that we kinda like get to choose. (personal communication, February 27, 2013)

Susan’s assessment here was neither about the structure of the essay nor about the content of the essay, but rather about the nature of the assignment and her ability to choose what she would write about. Julie responded with “My thesis was great—effective, efficient, doesn’t harm the body. It was easy for me to find information about it—just google it and see” (personal communication, April 12, 2013). Walter, hesitant to offer any details about his FYC papers throughout his interviews, once said “I like that its almost done” (personal communication, January 25, 2013), and on another occasion answered with a focus on form and structure:

A: I think I have like good time frame and then the details and the way the paper is organized and then the um conclusion--that’s pretty much the good part.

Q: And what do you think is awesome about essay 3 right now?
A: Essay 3, um, I mean I got some pretty good sources and I got like a lot of information that I didn't know before. (personal communication, February 27, 2013)

Overall, responses to the question were more focused on content, ideas, and student’s opinions when they were talking about papers that had yet to be drafted and submitted, essays in the pre-writing or early drafting stages, and when they were talking about papers that were being written in courses other than FYC courses. Once FYC essays had been submitted, even first drafts, and returned with feedback from an instructor, the general trend from the student participants was to focus on form, structure, and mechanical matters, and mostly those raised by the instructor’s feedback. While Elizabeth and Susan seemed to incorporate instructor feedback into their own
bank of knowledge about revision and preparing a final draft of a paper, Julie and Walter struggled against what they disagreed with in the instructor’s commentary. Julie and Walter maintained their own sense of what they believed was effective in their writing abilities while acknowledging the need to conform to the instructor’s beliefs about what was need for a final draft to pass the criteria set out for the course. In all cases, though, each of the four writing students asserted a sense of authorship in the process of comparing his or her own assessments to his or her instructor’s assessments, whether by assimilating them into their own evaluations moving forward like Elizabeth and Susan or by resisting the assimilation and acknowledging that, as Julie explained, “Even though I thought it was good, it wasn’t her good. So I need to give her her good. But in my mind, I know I had a good thing” (personal communication, April 12, 2013). Though Julie’s perception of the success of her FYC essay differed from that of her teacher’s assessment, she ended this comment on a note of confidence in her work. As Yancey (1998) explains in *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*,

> when writers are treated as writers, they will need to be awarded the authority that comes with writing. They may make decisions that run counter to our recommendations, and if they do so for reasons that are rhetorically sound, then we need to defer. Through reflection-in-action, we begin to negotiate; our practice changes in fundamental ways. (p. 41)

Though Yancey’s (1998) focus here is on the effect that reflection-in-action might have on pedagogical practices for the writing teacher, there is also an important point to be noted about the effect of it on students. Haswell & Haswell (2010) argue that a student’s sense of authorship is a sustainable “skill” that writing teachers should promote so that students can write with confidence and an awareness of their own agency and power as writers—just as “real” writers
do. Julie was not being awarded authority in her writing in her FYC class; in fact, she was being
denied authority and she was acutely aware of it. But she struggled, in part through our
conversations, to maintain a sense of authority by continually negotiating between what her
teacher wanted and what she wanted to write. If Yancey (1998) is correct, that writing teachers
should defer to student writing that is “rhetorically sound,” then writing assessment should defer
to Julie’s very rhetorically sound description of what it was for a writer to experience the give
and take of appealing to an audience. In spite of her FYC experience, Julie refused to
completely give up her authority as a writer, and though in the short term she failed to satisfy the
requirements of her FYC class, that refusal might be a sustainable skill that she possesses in the
long term to help her achieve later goals even beyond being a writer.

Just as students were not very articulate about how their projects were going, they had
difficulty identifying what caused them to struggle. Walter often answered that he was not
struggling with anything in the writing project. Julie, struggling to find solid ground between
differing notions of what would make a paper successful, stumbled over the question and then
recounted her teacher’s description of a problem that she had in her draft:

> Just once I get my thesis, its just putting, like um--oh okay, I know one thing she kept
saying. The thing is um -- Like say if I would quote, my problem is I would quote
something, like in the paragraph I had like probably two quotes, two nice quotes and then
I had one sentence of like my own talking about it instead of like having two quotes or
one quote and evaluating, having more of my own say so and just evaluating that or
talking about the like the quotes I put. So she said I had to have learn how to put more
input, even if I do put in a big long two, like a nice paragraph of quotes I still have to put
my own input to talk about it so I need to learn how to put more or just add more.
(personal communication, February 28, 2013)

Susan succinctly stated that she was struggling with summarizing a complex article (personal
communication, January 23, 2013), developing a counterargument when she did not yet know
what position she herself was going to argue (personal communication, February 27, 2013), and
doing more research to find a counterargument (personal communication, April 3, 2013). Elizabeth’s responses to this question largely focused on the structure of her paper, and they typically were struggles that she described already resolving. For example, she felt that she struggled with having strong points in her first FYC paper, but she also explained that she would find another point or strengthen her third point (personal communication, January 15, 2013). She later struggled with how to fill out a second FYC paper after she had done the teacher’s activities to generate some of the paragraphs for the paper, but she also described her teacher’s advice to her to resolve it:

Q: Okay, what are you struggling with on the [multiple source essay] or what is not successful?  
A: Um, I guess that like what frustrated me was we had the two synthesize paragraphs and then I was like what else do we write about now. The topic was why do people do stupid things, and then like my other paragraphs-- cause she wants five base paragraphs--and I have my two synthesize and I was kind of like what do I write about in the other three paragraphs and she's just like write about what you think like you are talking to me. I'm like okay, you know, so it was kind of like I understand the synthesize but I didn't know what to do with the others so it was kind of like frustration of –. (personal communication, February 12, 2013)

Along the same lines as the direct, prompted self-assessment questions that I posed during interviews, but with a focus more on the student’s perception of his or her own development as a writer (rather than on the student’s perception of a specific writing project progress), I also asked student writers during each interview, “Do you see a difference in your writing skills or process on this project as compared to your previous writing projects?” This question served to take a half-step between inquiring about specific techniques used in writing projects and inquiring about their sense of themselves as writers. Additionally, this question engaged them in reflective practices typical of the self-assessment methods endorsed by Smith and Yancey (2000) and other writing self-assessment scholars, and employed in the FYC
Program’s Self-Reflective Narrative Essay that is prepared by each student for his or her portfolio at the end of the semester. The participants revealed an awareness of themselves as developing writers—gaining knowledge, skill, and experience about writing from their FYC and other writing projects, but also possessing the capacity to learn and grow more as they moved forward in their lives to other classes, and to other writings beyond coursework. As described above, Elizabeth developed a new writing process for herself over the course of the semester. She admitted during her first interview that she typically started writing in front of the TV without much organization but had changed for her current writing assignment to a very specific process:

I put like an intro, a review of article, body paragraph one, body paragraph two, body paragraph three, conclusion and counterargument in there and then I just like found what I wanted to write. I went in and I like wrote it in that little section and I kind of blocked it off for it. So I had never really done that before. It just kinda helped me get started cause I was kinda doing it while watching TV. Kinda like my motivation. (personal communication, January 15, 2013)

Elizabeth had not just adopted a procedure here; she had an understanding of what was useful about this procedure and why. During her third interview she described the difference in her writing process and in her “critical thinking” as a result of what she was learning in FYC, which, she noted, was reinforced by her experience with writing in her women’s studies course:

Q: Do you see a difference or did you notice a difference so far in your writing skills or your writing process while you were working on this final paper compared to your earlier papers or your papers last semester?
A: Oh yeah. I would say so.

Q: Alright
A: Um, she has us, there's like the worksheet kind of like the whole how to do the synthesis paragraph so I guess just I don't know, I actually read through sources now and try to find like confirming things for the whole synthesis. And I guess it takes a lot more critical thinking instead of just writing now that I've ?? writing papers.

Q: And when you say it takes more critical thinking instead of writing, can you say some more about that?
A: I feel like I'm spending more time in preparation and reading and like trying to find articles that confirm than actually just spending time on the writing the actual paper. Cause writing papers used to take like barely any time cause I would just write what I think and then throw in an article that agrees that I found like on a quick search that the key terms matched and I found something that easily confirmed it, but.

Q: You just became [FYC] 1120 poster child for saying that, cause that's what you are supposed to learn! So you used to just write and throw in an article to support it, but now, it sounds like you are learning from the research.
A: Uh-huh, and then my like women's studies course, like she pushes that so much like pushing, having articles confirming like she, like you have to have two readings in the class also confirmed with outside sources so I mean that course in itself backs up everything. (personal communication, April 2, 2013).

Susan also described differences in her writing over time, noting that she did more preparation, both in terms of taking time and in developing ideas, with the goal of being more organized in her final written texts (personal communication, February 27, 2013 and April 3, 2013).

Likewise, Julie’s described differences had to do largely with time management and preparation for writing in her first interview, but then reassessing that in her second interview by noting,

A: I still procrastinate, I still turn in papers at 3 in the morning. I don't know why.
Q: But you still me the deadline, right?
A: Yeah [laughs]. That didn't change. But I think like the way, the way I organize my paper and the way I speak, I feel like you can tell a difference from first semester and this semester, or slight if its not a big difference. (personal communication, February 28, 2013)

Though she lacked insight into why she continued to procrastinate despite knowing that it would be better if she did not, Julie demonstrated a complicated move of reflecting, analyzing her current situation, and in evaluating herself along a trajectory which involved seeing progress (“the way I organize my paper”) but also seeing a shortcoming (“I still turn in papers at 3 in the morning”), which created room for improvement. By her third interview, Julie reported, “I am learning not to wait ‘til the last minute, especially eight pages” (personal communication, April 12, 2013). Walter, in contrast reported in each interview that he had not observed any changes in his writing skills or processes, with this exception:
Q: Do you see any difference in your writing skills or how you are putting your papers together?
A: I mean yeah, cause like when I come up with an idea now I go and find a source to back up that idea like the first time.

Q: Any change in your writing process . . .?
A: I mean that's pretty much the same. Its just making sure I have a good title, just um like introducing what I am talking about. And having like an idea already and you just find the sources and keep writing. (personal communication, April 15, 2013)

Of note, Walter was the most confident of the four writing student participants at the beginning of the research project. He had identified himself as a writer in our FYC course in the semester before the interviews, and he ended his last interview with a clear description of a future writing self. He felt good about his writing process in the first place, but acknowledged this addendum to it—he was employing research in his writing differently as a result of his experience in FYC 1120.

In addition to reflecting on what they had learned and how their writing processes had changed from one writing project to the next, these four writers were also assessing the value of changes that they had made incrementally and in terms of a larger trajectory of becoming a certain type of writer or producing a certain type of writing moving forward. They did not describe themselves as being any specific kind of writer in the moment without describing a future writing self. This movement back and forth through reflection and imagination of selves and texts in the future demonstrates that these students assessed their own capacity for being changed and changing themselves as well as their potentiality. Julie said it this way:

Q: Do you feel maybe you would be judged better than you might have felt when you first started last semester?
A: Yes, even though that I am trying or that I have the ability to be a better writer, to become a better writer.

Q: How do you see yourself as a writer two year from now?
A: Two years from now. Ok.
Q: What kind of writer do you want to be in two years?
A: Um, somebody will read it and say "she is a smart writer, she's a smart person, she's very intelligent." I don't know, I just believe. . .. (personal communication, January 30, 2013)

Despite knowing that she would not pass her FYC class, Julie fought for her own rights of authorship to the end of the semester. She maintained her belief that writing was a means to demonstrate that one was intelligent, that it would enable her to persuade others in her future career as a social worker, and that she could be better at it. And even though she did not succeed in the course in the way that Elizabeth, Sarah, and Walter did, Julie engaged in dynamic and rich processes of reflection on past writing experiences, contemplation current writing processes, and looking forward to future goals and the value of writing in achieving them. In their own unique ways, all four of the student writers assessed their potentiality—their capacity to do “better” or different work in the future, their ability to learn, and their ability to be a writer at some later time. Whether they saw themselves as writers seemed to depend upon their negotiations between external expectations of the FYC Program (through rubrics, teacher feedback, and portfolio assessment) and their internal perceptions of what they were capable of doing. The ability and willingness to negotiate these matters arose, in part, from the self-assessments that the students performed in the course of our interviews as they had opportunity to analyze what they were experiencing it. In a sense, these interviews functioned as a method of developing, or sustaining, a sense of authorship—the right to write and the right to evaluate that writing as successful or not in accomplishing individual goals as well as FYC Program goals.
Conclusion

In *Assigning, Responding, Evaluating: A Writing Teacher’s Guide*, Ed White offered this brief endorsement of self-assessment as one of the types of assessment that should be fostered in the writing classroom:

we must be aware that self-assessment is a painful and difficult process for students—as it is for teachers, whose resistance to evaluation is legendary. And yet without self-assessment, students will not revise or will do so reluctantly and without the requisite personal involvement. What else can teachers do to foster self-assessment? (p. 67)

The responses to directed self-assessment interview questions were just an introduction to the complexity of the self-assessments that these student writers described performing of their writing and of themselves within the context of their FYC Program. What I discovered in the process of coding and reviewing the data was that the entire interviews were in fact an act of self-assessment. If I treated the entire interview as verbalized “self-assessment” with direct prompts (which is how instructors typically do self-assessment in FYC and seemingly in other classes) at some points, but without such prompts at other points, then all of their answers were a demonstration of how these students self-assessed their writing. This meant that each response was a kind of assessment, even when students were just talking about their assignments, their classes, their processes, and their texts. Interestingly, Peggy O’Neil (2010) has observed the limitations of efforts to direct reflection in such traditional self-assessment devices as the reflective letter:

The content of the reflective writing is also restricted, and at times, can be ritualistic especially when we provide the writer with guidelines, directions, maybe even samples, so that the student constructs the appropriate kind of reflective writer. Conversely, if students do something unusual or unexpected, readers may penalize them.
A comparison of the kinds of responses that I received to more directed self-assessment questions and the kinds of responses that I received to less directed and more conversational questions shows that the latter received much more analytical and detailed answers. This might suggest that self-assessment is more effective under less “ritualistic” conditions. Though the interview scenario still called for students to present a construct of themselves that was in part dictated by their perceptions of my expectations, their discussions often revealed thoughtfulness, through pauses and revisions of previous statements, and contradictions, which suggested that they were more engaged in assessment when it was less prompted and more sponsored by their own desire to explain and explore their writing projects and their writing selves.

Putting together the moments of their learning and writing experiences, past, present, and future—which they did in these interviews where they were essentially assessing themselves as writers, students, thinkers, selves—was learning in and of itself, and it happened aggregately over time, with each moment bumping into their perception of the previous moment and the moment to come. The continuum revealed in their constructions of their experiences is potentiality—capacity, growth, development—and in the perceptions of each of these four students, it is smooth and ongoing and moving on a trajectory toward something else, even when they could not name what that would be.

As the summaries of each interview above reveal, students engaged in rich, complex, and varying kinds of self-assessment that were informed by very personal perceptions of the writing program community and by standards and objectives set forth by the teachers and administrators that defined success and effectiveness in written work within that community. Thus, these four students experienced the impact of the assessment procedures and attitudes created externally by others in their environment, but they did not simply replace their own values and beliefs about
their writing abilities with the Program’s values and beliefs. Rather, they weighed the external assessments against their own assessments in a rhetorical manner of balancing the interests of the writer in expressing an idea or having a certain effect and the interests of the reader in receiving that effect accurately and persuasively. This negotiation is a demonstration of how self-assessment practices can advance the goals of FYC Programs, goals such as those set forth in the WPA Outcomes Statement even beyond the obvious “learn to critique their own and others’ works,” such as “understand the relationships among language, knowledge, and power,” “understand writing as an open process that permits writers to use later invention and re-thinking,” and “understand how genres shape reading and writing.” These are outcomes that have to do with potentiality—in writing and in writers. Loosed from constraints of the required formats and formulas of their FYC course, these four student writers described excitement in developing new knowledges for themselves and their readers, sharing personal experiences, and persuading others to see things their way. These are the possibilities of language that can be fostered through engagement with self-assessment practices. These are the roots of agency. I would argue that the data suggests that these four student writers, without prompting, engaged in regular self-assessment that involved reflection on past work as well as imagination of future work with awareness of affect and impact generated through effective writing, perceptions of themselves as writers in process, and valuation of writing in the development of their future selves.
In the same spirit of this study, Anne Herrington and Marcia Curtis (2000) interviewed four student writers to learn how they were developing as writers and people, particularly in relation to the kinds of writing that they were doing in their college courses and to the relationships they were building with their teacher-readers. In *Persons in Process: Four Stories of Writing and Personal Development in College*, Herrington and Curtis (2000) note the overall demonstration that “they actively use writing—including the sorts of public writing required of them in college—for the ongoing development of their personal identities, including their sense of themselves in relation to others” (p. 1). Focusing on their research participants’ writing processes, the authors also observed that “However ‘personal’ or subjective their essays may have seemed, each sought a sense of agency through the writing, a sense of both speaking for and speaking to others whose thinking, if not behavior, they might in some way affect” (p. 17). Like Herrington & Curtis’s (2000) student writers, the four research participants represented in this project demonstrate a significant awareness of their own sense of (or lack of) authorship, their agency and their ability to affect others’ thinking and behavior. In interviews I observed what Herrington explained: “for some students, more than for others, learning was not a passive acculturation process, but a negotiation where they were actively considering how they would position themselves in relation to teacher and disciplinary expectations” (Herrington & Curtis, 2000, p. 34). This negotiation can be seen very clearly in the description of Walter and Julie’s interviews, marked by their resistance to give up their beliefs and confidence in what they believed to be good writing in the face of the requirements and demands of the FYC Program and their writing instructors. As Walter explained, “I feel they like, its set up to where you like
can write about what you want to write about but then its not really like that” (personal interview, February 27, 2013). And in Julie’s words about her teacher’s comments, “I really think she’s wrong. I know she is the teacher but I really worked hard on that paper—you can never have too much information” (personal interview, April 12, 2013). Though it took a different form for Elizabeth and Susan, they, too, negotiated actively in their acceptance and integration of writing processes to come to a cohesive notion of what constituted successful writing—but a notion that they could call their own. I would argue that self-assessment is a way of both engaging students in this important negotiation and in learning from students how this negotiation can improve first-year writing program assessment practices and writing pedagogy.

In this chapter, I connect the findings detailed in Chapter 4 to the theoretical concepts outlined in Chapter 1 from feminist pedagogy, affect studies, and writing assessment scholarship to describe a framework for interpreting the self-assessment work these four student writers performed during the course of this research project. This chapter explores answers generated to the research questions that guided this project:

1. How do first-year composition students assess their own writing?

2. How do first-year composition students think about their own writing in terms of future writing projects or writing skills?

3. How do first-year composition students assess writing projects that are in process?

4. What kinds of assessments do first-year composition students make about themselves as a certain kind of writer?

In addressing these questions, I discuss and develop a notion of potentiality as a quality of first-year student writer self-assessment (how the student writers demonstrated that they do
assess their potentiality), and as a valuable concept for considering how self-assessment can contribute to the types of evaluations that are performed in a writing community such as Midwestern University’s FYC Program. Finally, I explore the implications of employing self-assessment of potentiality as a means for empowering student writers with a sense authorship, agency, and affect for writing assessment theory and writing pedagogy practice.

How Students Assess Their Own Writing

As Chapter 4 revealed, the four student writers in this project engaged in a rich and dynamic process of assessing their writing projects and themselves as writers. This in and of itself is a significant finding given that student self-assessment occurs largely in the student writer’s mind, invisibly and somewhat even unconsciously, rather than in the bright light of typical assessment methods such as commenting on a draft or grading a portfolio. Haswell & Haswell (2010) lament the effect of the cultural turn in banishing composition research from the personal, cognitive space of the individual writer’s mind, perhaps for this very reason. But I would argue that affect studies can more explicitly reconnect writing pedagogy to this rich, invisible activity by tuning writing scholars and teachers to what goes on at the surface by providing more opportunities for self-assessment to be vocalized by student writers. The students’ self-assessment processes were a matter of negotiation among perceived (and real) external means of assessment, their own ideas and expectations about writing, and their sense of the work that they themselves were doing, and were going to do. These were also a matter of development over time. That development occurred through a series of recursive internal processes:

• reflection on past work as well as imagination of future work
• awareness of affect and impact generated through effective writing
• perceptions of themselves as writers in process
• valuation of writing in the development of their future selves

As an example, Elizabeth demonstrated these processes in the way she described learning about synthesis of sources from a worksheet activity that her FYC teacher conducted in class, applying it to her current paper as she integrated sources, and planning to use it in future papers because “I made sure that with doing it that way I didn’t miss any parts, like any transitions. It just made the flow really nice” (personal interview, February 12, 2013). Elizabeth assessed this writing technique in terms of what she understood to be the expectations of her current writing assignment and in terms of what she anticipated being expected in future papers, along with what she herself valued in effective writing. Elizabeth later explained that she did in fact use this process in developing a paper for a non-FYC class, and received praise from her teacher for doing so. As she experienced this reinforcement of the use of this particular writing technique (of synthesizing sources in this specific way), she reflected on and then assimilated its value into her own scheme for writing an essay. The self-assessment processes these four student writers demonstrated involved considering past writing experiences or assessments, and then considering the impact of those experiences on their present work, and then contemplating (to a greater and lesser extent) the future effects of their writing endeavors on later versions of projects, of projects not yet known, and of themselves as writers. For these (student) writers, the process of “learning to write” was a series of moments that they viewed as a continuous and fluid growth (or diminution) of capacity to write and be a writer. In some cases, this trajectory was energized by their external positive interactions with teacher and program-level assessments, such as the positive reinforcement Elizabeth received for assimilating her FYC teacher’s exercise
in synthesizing sources into her non-FYC paper and receiving positive feedback from her non-FYC teacher. But in other cases, the student writer’s trajectory was deterred by the struggle between self-perception and teacher instruction and advice, as in Julie’s case, where her second semester of FYC became a challenge to her own sense of herself as a writer, undermining her confidence in things she felt she did well (using personal stories to engage the reader, developing introductions that would draw the reader in) and pushing her to use techniques that she did not fully understand (synthesis of sources, formal academic language).

Julie’s experience was that her teacher criticized her writing for things that she thought she did well, and she struggled to keep her own sense of good writing while adhering to what her teacher, and the FYC Program, identified as good writing. Throughout the series of interviews, her assessments were contradictory and complicated in a way that suggested she had not been able to reconcile these differences in expectation, but that she was working hard to do something with her confusion. And though she did not fully grasp how to integrate the writing practices the FYC Program into her own writing processes in the same way that Elizabeth and Susan described, her final words at her last interview sounded like a mantra that she would use moving forward to help her assimilate her ideas and “their” ideas: “you are not settling, you are a smart person, a good writer. That’s how good you are—you can just write whatever they want to hear” (personal interview, April 24, 2013). Likewise, Walter’s trajectory bore the scars of a self-confident writer who felt stifled by the performance of writing in his FYC course, even as he was engaged and entertained by the writing that he did in his other classes.

Each of the student writers represented in this study demonstrated his or her own way of managing, understanding, and describing the experience of writing and reflecting on writing in very different ways. They came to the FYC Program with different backgrounds, different
personalities, different expectations about the course and their own education. Their FYC classroom, however, operated largely on generalizations about them and their needs as writing students, and assessments, in particular, by the teacher and the Program reinforced the notion that students shared common needs and desires. For example, the thrust of Midwestern’s FYC 1120, the course in which these four students were enrolled during the time of our interviews, was synthesis of academic sources. This was a significant component of each assigned essay, and of the rubric used by the instructor and the Program to determine if a student’s paper was passing or not passing. The FYC Program valued synthesis equally in all writing by all students, but each of these students valued (and therefore made use of) synthesis to lesser or greater degrees depending upon their reflection upon the use of it, and their anticipation of its usefulness to them in other or future writing projects. The students had to evaluate synthesis as a learning objective for themselves, within the context of their own personal and individual needs and desires, even while they had to accept it as a task that had to be performed in a certain way to succeed in the course. This process of reconciling one’s unique beliefs, needs, and desires with those of the community in which one functions and interacts contributes to the contour of the student writer’s trajectory.

In addition to demonstrating that each student writer’s trajectory was unique, the findings of this study also demonstrated that the trajectory was not just personal and internal, a string of unknowable cognitive and emotional events, nor was it just socially-constructed by the context of an FYC program through its practices, values, and expectations. It is not easily reduced by traditional binaries, but is best explored as multiplicities, a notion that is central to affect studies. Rather than conceiving of internal/external, or self/world as clearly delineated opposites, affect studies conceives of differences as many variations which intermingle to generate other
variations. Megan Watkins (2010) describes these variations in the classroom as interaffectivity—the dynamic experience of various affects as they are exchanged and create impacts as they pass from one individual to another in the context of a social space. Watkins (2010) focuses on the desire of teachers and students to be recognized by one another as an affect exchanged in the classroom, in what she has described as an “accumulation of affects.” As can be seen in the critical analyses and intellectual and emotional self-assessments performed by these student writers, the desire to be recognized is shared—students wish to be recognized in positive ways by their teachers, even when they disagree with the feedback that they are given as in Julie’s case. Watkins (2010) argues that this desire accumulates little by little and becomes a part of the environment in which teachers and students interact. The accumulation is an exercise in agency—sometimes intentional and sometimes not—by the student writer in crafting a narrative that connects all of the moments in which he or she is impacted by or impacting those around him or herself. This narrative is evident in the way these students described how they assessed themselves in their writing processes and as writers. And the trajectory evidenced by these narratives of self-assessment seemed central to the student writer’s growth, to his or her realization of potential and ability to both identify future goals that he or she felt were her own and then to interact, negotiate and develop in ways that moved toward those goals. This is the path on which these student writers moved through the liminal space that was the FYC Program at Midwestern University. Just like Deleuze’s (1990) description of Alice in Wonderland, these student writers are not-yet the writers they might be in the future, nor are they the writers that they were in the past. The key to their success is to help them have a sense of their own authorship and the agency that can be derived from having a say in how they use writing, and in having a say through their writing, to foster their awareness (and to be aware as a teacher of
writing also) of their potentiality—their ability to become through interactions with their environment and negotiations between their own perceptions and those of others. Rather than being the trap that Walter felt FYC was, a first-year writing program should ideally be considered a liminal space as anthropologist Victor Turner (1964) described it: “a stage of reflection” in which the student writer can safely experience the processes of self-assessment, of negotiation between self-assessment and external assessment, and of becoming. Viewed this way, self-assessment for first-year writers can be part of the pedagogy of potentiality that Haswell & Haswell (2010) urge writing teachers to employ.

Affect Studies as a Frame for Potentiality in Student Writer Self-Assessment

Affect studies has offered composition studies a vehicle for re-accessing rhetorical notions of emotion (Jacobs & Micciche, 2003, Micciche, 2005), exploring the interaction of social justice and empathy (Langstraat & Bowdon, 2011), and considering classroom affects (Lindquist, 2004, Watkins, 2010, 2013). For the many reasons that it has been useful and illuminating in these composition matters, it is a useful framework for consideration of self-assessment and the role it might play in student lives and in writing programs. For one, affect studies operates without the use of binaries. Deleuze & Guattari (1987) argued that reality is not a matter of dualisms, but rather of multiplicities. Binaries such as self/other, male/female, intellect/emotion are not only constructed but they are useless in facilitating an understanding of the world in which individuals live. Achieving the feminist goal of deconstructing binaries, affect studies views the world as “acentered systems . . . in which communication runs from any neighbor to any other” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 17). This rejection of pre-existing “stems and channels” for communication and interaction, allowed for more recent affect theorists to
develop a means for understanding rhetoric, social justice, and learning/teaching environments beyond the traditional constructions of their existence, value, and practice. Beyond a refusal to believe that dualisms serve as a useful framework for understanding and operating within “systems,” affect studies works around the dilemma of postmodernism that Haswell & Haswell (2010) argue has damaged how student writers are treated in writing classrooms. The notion that the individual is socially constructed, according to Haswell & Haswell (2010) denies writing teachers and students opportunities and strategies to explore that inner workings of the writer’s mind and heart, destroying a notion of the “self” that seems to be intimately tied to a writer’s ability to write and to assume the rights of authorship. Affect studies does not require that an individual be entirely socially constructed, nor does it require that an individual be a stable, unknowable representation of complex innerworkings. In affect studies, the systems operate fluidly, changeably through the transmission of energies that emanate from one body to the next (Massumi, 2002). This is the source of possibility, of potential: “Potential is the immanence of a thing to its still indeterminate variation, under way” (Massumi, 2002, p. 9). Teresa Brennan (2004) employed affect studies for this very reason: “There is no secure distinction between the ‘individual’ and the ‘environment.’” Ahmed’s (2004) description of the affect seems entirely appropriate for describing the interaction of writers and readers, and the FYC Program experience described by the four student writers in this study: “multiple collisions with objects and others. It is through such collisions that I form a sense of myself as (more or less) apart from others, as well as sense of the surfaces of my body” (p. 26). In these few words, Ahmed (2004) illuminates affect as a way of understanding the dynamic quality of the “self,” constructed and reconstructed in the impacting of bodies with other bodies, occurring not in the unknowable depths of the soul, but at the surface—where material bodies experience their surroundings and
the bodies in those surroundings. The advantage of this perspective is that it becomes reasonable, and perhaps, imperative, to observe, understand, and attend to what occurs at these points, or moments, of impact.

Of particular utility to developing a notion of potentiality that is empowering for writing students and teachers is Tiessen’s (2011) concept of desire lines. Tiessen’s (2011) work explores affective landscapes, contemplating the interaction of and impacts shared by bodies and the physical, natural spaces in which bodies move. Of concern to many affect theorists is the notion of desire, which has significant ties to matters of agency, of material and incorporeal qualities of the body, and, for this project, of authorship. Tiessen’s (2011) experience of mountain biking became a revelation about the dynamic relationship between the rider-body, the ground-landscape, and the way in which desire is mutually constituted by the action of traveling—an action manifesting as the line, which is created by the interaction of the earth and the bike, operated by the rider. This is a useful metaphor for writing instruction and for a notion of self-assessment of potentiality. The FYC Program is akin to the forest landscape in which student writers operate, and the objectives and program and teacher can be seen as the trail already etched in the earth by previous mountain bikers, the weather, and the give of the soil. Student writers’ texts are the mountain bike, operated clumsily along a new, unfamiliar trail and they are acutely aware of the lack of control that they have as the bike bumps and bucks in response not to their grip and pedaling, but to the contour of the trail—feedback, instruction, advice, encouragement. But they struggle nonetheless, negotiating the impact of the trail and the bike, and in turn on their bodies, and work to manipulate the bike to go at their desired speed, along their desired course. None of these exists without its interaction with and relation to the others—student, text, teacher, learning objectives, programmatic assessments. Tiessen’s desire lines
might be realized by student writers (and writing teachers) through the encouragement of self-assessment practices.

In *Discipline and Learn: Bodies, Pedagogy and Writing*, Watkins (2013) challenges notions of disciplinary power as always limiting for students, instead arguing that it can be “pedagogically productive” in its “potential to function as a form of embodied social conscience” (p. 25). Not unlike the FYC Program’s emphasis on audience awareness, this claim suggests that self-assessment might be able to flourish in a writing classroom where it is simultaneously the personal work of the individual and the negotiation of personal concepts of good writing with external expectations set forth and “taught” by teachers and writing programs. All four writing students in this project described awareness of their own desires as well as those of the course and their teachers, and their descriptions, their self-assessments, were negotiations of these sometimes conflicting and sometimes similar desires. Walter explained to me on several occasions that he knew how to write a paper, that he perceived himself as an entertaining writer, and that he anticipated having to write creatively in his future career. These factors figured significantly into his criticism of the FYC Program (and, perhaps, into his willingness to criticize it so vocally), which he explained was not allowing for creativity, nor teaching students to write the way they were expected to write elsewhere: “this is like you have to have the critique, you have to have a counterargument. Like, you can’t just talk about what you’re going to talk about. So then if something’s missing, then you got it wrong” (personal interview, January 25, 2013). Julie, perhaps the most vocal about this gap between what she thought was successful in her writing and what her teacher wanted her to do in her writing projects: “I am not writing, I am giving her what she wants. Even though I thought it was good, it wasn’t her good. So I need to give her her good. But in my mind, I know I had a good thing” (personal interview April 12,
2013). Even Elizabeth, who described a positive experience in her FYC courses, made efforts to negotiate between her teacher’s expectations and her own, describing her FYC writing as “forced” and “not fun” in comparison to her scrapbook writing, which was “just very carefree and no one really reads it so its just for me to look back on, so its not very stressful” (personal interview, January 15, 2013). Elizabeth’s concern for grammatical correctness also dissolved over the course of interviews as she struggled to conform to formal grammar rules, which she at first perceived as necessary for her success as a writer. As she grew more confident in her writing process and results, she was less concerned with the “perfection” that she described in early interviews as the standard or goal for her writing. Even Susan, who did not see herself becoming a writer, analyzed the ways in which a series of writing assignments in her education class could meet the needs that she had in becoming what she desired to become, a teacher:

All these different topics are kind of like they deal when you’re going into teaching, so I think its giving me a better idea of what I am getting myself into when it comes to that. Cause they all kind of give you an overview of what teachers, like planning and everything like that, like what we are going to have to go through when we start teaching. (personal interview, February 27, 2013)

Each of the students reflected upon his or her own writing experiences, anticipated the value of those experiences in their own plans and desires to become something or someone else in the future, and negotiated between external expectations and his or her own expectations in realizing his or her own potentiality. These negotiations seemed tied to the writing students’ sense of authorship, their sense of confidence in their writing, their willingness to write, and their sense of how their writing would impact others. Elizabeth, for example, described herself as being not so bad a writer after all, after she articulated a new writing process that she perceived as having developed by herself, and which she could use in future writing projects. Susan’s writing experiences became valuable to her when she was able to identify how they would
advance her toward her very focused goal of being a teacher. This is apparent in her description of her developmental profile writing assignment, in which she excitedly elaborated on the process of beginning the project, conducting the project, and learning about child development from the project. Walter also enthusiastically engaged in writing projects that he perceived as creative and interesting to his own goals as a writer. But his critique of the FYC Program was part of his development and growth as well, testing his own values against the values of the system, contributing his suggestions for its improvement of the program by offering his insights. Walter valued his assessments of his own work and of the work being done by the FYC Program in teaching students to write.

Self-assessment, reconceived through Watkin’s (2013) notion of affect, is a powerful pedagogical experience in which these student writers were engaging without the prompting of their teacher, as a function of their own, individual desire, to impact the space around them. The process of interviewing them, of providing them opportunity to vocalize their assessments, gave power to their internal work by helping them to “write” their negotiations and to exert their interpretations, impressions, and energy into the system of the FYC Program—at the surface of their interactions. Granted, the interview process was a contrived scenario to prompt self-assessment, but as students strayed from the questions into their own explanations and descriptions, they gained insight that the standard FYC Program reflection opportunities did not offer them. Would Julie have made the connections she made about her own concept of good writing and its dissonance with the instructions that she received from her teacher, and with the gap between the writer expressing herself and the audience receiving her in different ways? Her goal, her desire to be recognized as smart through her writing became a guiding force in her putting together the moments of her experiences in FYC. The verbalization of her self-
assessments enabled her to see herself as a self, and as a member of a socially constructed community. Julie’s self-assessments—like those of the other three student writers—were a complex combination of reflection (past), analysis (present), and future looking that allowed her to develop a narrative, a trajectory, a desire line along which she made sense of her learning (or at least struggled to find coherence in the process), forming a sense of herself as a writer (or as not-a-writer, in some cases), but always as having a capacity to do more or better or different in the future—a sense of her not-yetness, and a profound desire to have a say in what she might eventually become.

A Feminist Approach to Student Writer Assessment

At the intersection of affect studies and feminist theory in Composition Studies, writers have an impact and an ethical responsibility to care and be cared for—impacts are exchanges that honor difference and seek to empower each other as a means of obtaining agency. As these four student writers demonstrated, they did assess their writing, themselves as writers and their writing processes as dynamic, changing, along a trajectory that they were composing through a narrative of self-assessment that connected moments of being impacted and a desire to be impactful. In “A Feminist Perspective on Student Assessment: An Epistemology of Caring and Concern,” Stacy Gray Akyea and Pamela Sandoval (2005) argue that

Feminist assessment needs to be illuminating and transforming so as to provide knowledge and skills students need to make informed choices in their lives. Teachers can challenge traditional notions of power and yet be caring. . . . This is to mean that teachers must encourage students to go on to succeed, and not give up.
Many traditional program-level assessment practices fun afoul of feminist principles of empowerment and caring. As Betty Shiffman (1997) outlines in “Grading Student Writing: The Dilemma from a Feminist Perspective,” “grading stifles the kind of linguistic risk-taking that can lead to creativity of expression. Grading privileges only the final product of writing rather than the enlightening process of creating” (p. 58-9). And, perhaps most problematically, grading interferes with the all-important student-teacher relationship, frustrating the feminist goal of a “learning dialogue” with issues of power and lack of trust. Shiffman (1997), like Nel Noddings (1984) before her and Akyea & Sandoval (2005) after her, believes that feminist principles can be achieved even when there is evaluation and grading and that those principles can make for improved assessment processes. Shiffman’s (1997) call is for the feminist teacher to “develop a system of evaluation that does not diminish the student’s role” and to “push at the boundaries that constrain her, for the boundaries that deny her power also deny her students power (p. 61).

Given these concerns, self-assessment in the writing classroom becomes a viable method of evaluation that can help to achieve feminist aims of empowerment and engagement. Self-assessment not only gives students insight and thus power over their own texts, but it helps to achieve a more trusting relationship between teacher and student. Where student writers are given opportunity to vocalize their assessments of their writing projects, they enter into a negotiation with their instructor. In this context, self-assessment might be defined as opportunities for students to vocalize their own methods of writing in terms of processes and rhetorical goals by identifying and connecting moments in their writing experiences—reflecting, analyzing, and planning for the future. This can be seen in the ways that Julie and Walter negotiated with their teachers, and with me, in the process of assessing their writing, which clearly involved consideration of what they wanted to communicate, how they wanted to
communicate it, and how it would be received—read, interpreted, judged, evaluated. In a very
different way, Elizabeth’s self-assessment demonstrated how the process of assessing one’s own
writing can also empower student writers in their roles as learners when they are provided a
venue in which they can make connections among their writing experiences past, present and
future. In her interviews, Elizabeth’s narrative was one of assimilation and claiming what she
learned as her own writing process, imbuing her with confidence as she moved into new writing
challenges. For all three of these students, self-assessment was a process of give and take, of
discovery, of writing and being read, and the experience of the process empowered them to
maintain their own sense of authorship to a greater or lesser degree, and to maintain an
awareness of their own potentiality and capacity to change moving forward to other classes,
other writings, and other life experiences, also to a greater or lesser degree.

In explaining how portfolio assessment works to achieve feminist pedagogical goals of
empowerment and engagement, Shiffman (1997) emphasizes that student writers “begin to talk
about their own and each other’s writing in a mature way. They’re very aware of their
idiosyncracies as writers. . . . [T]hey recognize that their idiosyncrasies are just that: that they
are different, but valid and valuable nevertheless” (p. 63). The students in this study
demonstrated Shiffman’s (1997) claim, each revealing idiosyncratic, but sophisticated and
complicated self-analysis over the course of our interviews—even though they had varying
degrees of confidence in the validity and value of their own idiosyncrasies over the course of
time. Shiffman’s (1997) claim calls to mind Elizabeth’s realization that no one had “perfect”
grammar, that it was a matter of context and choice rather than a set of rules to be conformed to.
It was a realization of potentiality—of language, of writing ability, of self as writer, and,
hopefully, of writer as agent. If the self-assessment element of the end of semester portfolio can
foster this kind of empowerment, then a more visible and consistent process of self-assessment over the course of a semester in a writing classroom might do even more to provide student writers with opportunities to develop their own sense of authorship in a meaningful and sustainable way, as Haswell & Haswell (2010) call for in their proposed pedagogy of potentiality.

Emphasis on self-assessment practices is showcased in a series of pieces in Assessing Writing, in which Asao Inoue (2005, 2007) and Peter Elbow (2006) describe their efforts to devise writing assessment methods that enact feminist principles of empowerment and liberatory education. Inoue’s (2005) community-based assessment pedagogy centers on “a class-constructed assessment rubric, the assessment practices that revolve around it, and frequent reflection activities that ask students to think explicitly about assessment” (p. 209). Elbow’s (2006) contract grading also values self-assessment, but he rejects the idea of a standard, communally-agreed upon rubric for a system of evaluation in which students’ levels of achievement are attached to their activities rather than “judgments of quality” (p. 94). Elbow (2006) explains that contract grading functions to “to help [students] see competing standards as a positive resource for understanding quality—and a testimony to the complexity and diversity both in pieces of writing and in pieces of humanity” (p. 91). Though they differ in their methods and their theories about the constructedness of values and conventions, Inoue and Elbow’s efforts to promote self-assessment are efforts that open the door for the notions of affect, potentiality, authorship that inform this study. Somewhere between Inoue’s “corporate rubric” and Elbow’s call to recognize multiplicity in the creation of “value,”—and, in particular, in the creation of “what good writing is”—is the student. In both cases, the goal is to facilitate student learning and liberation but both models operate on the guidance of the teacher to achieve
certain goals—the rubric, the disagreement, public reflection—which are neither generated by
the students individually nor expressly desired by the students. While the public-ness of
assessment is a valuable experience and an experience that clearly moves students toward a more
complete understanding of the power of writing and of creating better written texts, students
need to understand that while they are impacted by conventions which, as Elbow (2006) argues,
are socially constructed, they experience life bodily as individuals operating in and among those
constructs. The evidence of their existence (and their source of agency) is in their ability and
capacity to deviate from the standards (consider Walter and Julie) or to assimilate them into their
own conception of authoring (consider Elizabeth and Susan). Even though culturally we accept
that value and conventions are socially constructed, these students experienced their second
semester of FYC as an individual. Their individuality existed in the form of the connections that
they made, a process that can be enhanced through self-assessment practices.

While Inoue (2005) builds a community-based assessment pedagogy, this project argues
for an individual-based assessment pedagogy that both empowers students to make choices and
take action, and offers them a sense of their own agency in engaging in the social construction of
“what good writing is.” The hope would be that, through individual-based assessment, student
writers could explore their own goals, their own ways of reaching them, and their own
potentiality for different, better, or changeable work. This could be done in conjunction with the
inspiring work of community-based assessment through exploration of individual students’
reflective practices, through some attention to their own perceptions of and descriptions of their
personal desires and needs, as Elbow might argue, without conforming to a rubric. The rubric is
a centerpiece of community-based assessment, but it is not the only piece. There is room in
between the work Inoue (2005, 2007) and Elbow (2006) describe to realize the potential of such
a feminist-informed classroom situation, which honors and respects its student stakeholders, as well as the potential of its individual agents to publically contribute to the assessments of the community and to personally engage in their own growth and development consistent with personal desires and goals.

Potentiality and Agency in Writing Assessment at the Programmatic Level

In response to Brian Huot’s (2002) claim that “we need to talk about assessment in new ways,” I offer potentiality and self-assessment as possible means by which writing assessment theory, research, and practice might develop further. Broad (2003, 2009), Huot (2002), White (2007), and Yancey (1998, 2000, 2004, 2012) have contributed significantly to current notions of the value of self-assessment practices through reflection, revision, and representation. Yancey’s (2004) continued work with reflection in the context of electronic and digital portfolios honors the agency-building power of self-assessment practices, and makes important connections between reflection and the composing of identity. But in addition to what Yancey and others recognize as the power of reflection and self-assessment practices to enable student writers to compose their work and their writing selves, the self-assessment practices of these four student writers suggest that there is more to be gained from attention to self-assessment. Most obviously, Walter’s self-assessments drew in and formed the groundwork for his ongoing critique of Midwestern’s FYC Program. As a stakeholder, and as a student writer who came to the program with a writerly identity (by his own description), Walter’s perspective on the ways in which the FYC Program limited him should be a significant consideration for a program whose goal is to empower student writers to write effectively in various contexts, including contexts beyond the academy. This is Walter’s unique experience of the program, and perhaps it
is not generalizeable, but consider his description of the difficulty of “forced” or “required”
writing. This was a sentiment that Julie, Elizabeth, and Susan all expressed in various ways—
even unconsciously through the observable differences between their formulaic and
unenthusiastic descriptions of their “required” FYC writing assignments and their much more
energetic and engaged explanations of writing projects from their other classes, where they
consistently described being able to write what they wanted.

Self-assessment does not simply empower student writers to write texts and compose
writing selves; it might also function to improve larger concepts about program level writing
assessment. Bob Broad’s (2009) dynamic criteria mapping offers writing assessment researchers
opportunity to explore the myriad aspects of a writing program and to see how they impact and
affect each other. It, like the work of Huot (2002), Haswell (2009), and O’Neil (2002), among
others, emphasizes the importance of writing programs and writing assessment being local,
honoring the needs of the immediate stakeholders, and evaluating itself in an ongoing way that
recognizes the changing nature of such writing communities. In the case of the four student
writers in this study, their self-assessments occur within the context of Midwestern’s FYC
Program, and the Program’s influence—its impacts—are experienced very profoundly by these
students and evaluated in rather sophisticated ways by these students. Each of the student
participants in this project voiced a critical evaluation of the FYC Program, in his or her own
way, as noted above. And their experiences in FYC, and in non-FYC writing projects, had an
impact on their individual sense of authorship. Consider Julie’s experience of being told not to
include personal testimony in her first FYC 1120 essay. This had a significant impact on her as
the first of several challenges to what she believed made for engaging and smart writing.
Listening to students describe the impacts of writing instruction and program practices could
inform the FYC Program’s overall objectives and desires in beneficial ways for students, teachers, and administrators. Student stakeholders should have a role in the way that writing program and assessment practices are developed in writing programs by having opportunity to vocalize their self-assessments and to be listened to in that vocalization. Not only would student writers be empowered with a sense of having contributed, but they would be empowered by virtue of having created change, of having a real impact, on the writing community in which they learn and work.

**Conclusion**

This project from its inception, in its design and execution, and in its findings and conclusions, worked toward this shared goal of first-year composition, as poignantly described by Victor Villaneuva in his afterword to *Grading in the Post-Process Classroom: From Theory to Practice*:

> Ultimately, first-year composition emphasizes awareness of writing as a process—from a process of jotting meaningful marks on a page (even if through a computer monitor), to a process of discovery, to a potential process of change (of the self and of others)” (p. 178)

Villaneuva’s words were at the heart of this project, as it was an effort to discover a way to foreground the needs of student writers in achieving the discipline’s and their own personal goal to see potential in their writing and in themselves as writers. Potential enables revision of a draft just as it enables a written text to inspire, entertain, or engage a reader, just as it enables student writers to make choices and changes in the search for their own goals and for the impacts that they desire to make. The research questions and the discoveries made in this study attend to such a notion of potentiality and ultimately build the basis for an argument for more self-assessment
opportunities for student writers that empower them to perceive their potentiality and their capacity to learn, grow, and change beyond the FYC classroom.

(1) How do first-year composition students assess their own writing? Just as external academic assessments of student writing occur within a complex matrix of values, objectives, and methods identified in and by the FYC Program, these students demonstrated that their own assessments involved complex interactions of what they believed was successful about their writing, what their teacher told them was successful about their writing, and what the FYC Program declared was successful about academic writing. And while these interactions were influenced by assessments via reader expectations, instructional practices, and programmatic level goals and objectives, they were interactions of an individual who was mediating these influences continually with his or her own perception of a self. One did not overwrite or eliminate the others, but these competing interests did impact one another, creating more and less opportunity for these students to develop a sense of authorship.

(2) How do first-year composition students think about or reflect on their own writing in terms of a future writing project or writing skills? (3) How do first-year composition students assess writing projects that are in process? Student writer self-assessment is a moment in which potentiality is revealed, where the differences among various assessments and assessment methods can be illuminated and explored, where the agency of the individual can be exercised. These student writers were self-assessing all the time, and there was no difference between assessing a writing project and assessing themselves as writers, students, even as intellectuals, or as successful professionals eventually. For these writers, self-assessment was a complicated process of moving back and forth in time—reflecting on past projects and
processes, analyzing present projects and skills, and anticipating and “desiring” future objectives
for grades, outcomes, and selves.

(4) What kind of assessments do first-year composition students make about
themselves as a certain kind of writer? I cannot say that the data gathered in this study does
anymore than suggest to me that, at least when prompted, students have varying versions of what
they themselves would be if they were going to be a writer. Elizabeth responded in her last
interview that she was “not really that bad of a writer as I thought” (personal interview, April 19,
2013). She never really described being a writer, though she very consistently articulated her
ideas and her processes while writing. Julie wanted to be a “smart writer,” and have readers say,
“she’s a smart writer, she’s a smart person” (personal interview, January 30, 2013), at the
beginning of our interviews, and at the end she wanted to give the reader what they wanted or
expected from her. Though not mutually exclusive goals, there was a shift in her way of
describing what kind of writer she wanted to be eventually because of specific experiences with
assessment in her FYC course. Susan did not see herself becoming a writer (“its just not my
thing” (personal interview, April 3, 2013), but she did say that she wanted to write “having a
clear thought, and . . . the reader knows exactly what I am trying to say” (personal interview,
April 3, 2013). While Elizabeth, Julie, and Susan expressed their future writing selves as
achieving a certain effect with their readers, Walter has a sense of himself as a writer both
entering the FYC Program and leaving it. Of the four students, he was the only one that
articulated a future identity as a writer (as opposed to a certain skill level or effectiveness as a
writer). Though he had changed his major from Creative Writing to Communications with a
focus in Promotions and Advertising, by the end of the semester, Walter declared himself to be
“a planner/creative musical writer” (personal interview, April 24, 2013). In this short, specific,
and thoughtful description, Walter connected his creative writing self from before he came to
college, to his ongoing engagement with writing music and lyrics, to a future vision of himself in
a career, writing. Each of the students changed their description of themselves as a writer over
the course of the semester and the series of interviews, and for some it was a more positive
change than for others.

Realizing that assessments (self, teacher, program, academic) are a matter of impacts, or
affects (1) empowers students to be participatory in the processes of creating and recreating a
dynamic and progressive writing program—their impact on the system (on me in this study by
way of example) is significant and they are important stakeholders in the community, and (2)
honors potentiality—what they can become, what they desire becoming. If learning is about
impacts occurring over time (which it was for these four students), it is reciprocal, it opens up
space for student desires and perceptions of success and failure to be part of how writing is
assessed and in turn how writing is valued. Self-assessment is a way to help student writers
make informed choices and to challenge traditional notions of power as well as to care—consider
hooks’s (1994) application of engaged pedagogy, Yancy’s (1998) call to honor students’
rhetorically sound choices, Akyea & Sandoval’s (2005) feminist assessment call to “encourage
students to go on to succeed,” and Haswell & Haswell’s (2010) entreaty to writing teachers to
respect their students’ rights of authorship. In the sense that self-assessment practices might
empower students beyond the classroom, they are sustainable, negotiable life skills, not unlike
critical thinking, knowledge of genre conventions, and rhetorical analysis. These are life skills
that students will carry beyond the classroom into their lived discourse communities. Potentiality
is a notion that can allow students to reflect, analyze, and look forward to a future, to see their
learning as a series of impacts, points at which self and world brush up against each—at the
surface as Deleuze & Guattari would say. And as such, potentiality is essential to a reconceived notion of assessment that calls self-assessment into play.

This study is a small, initial exploration into the interconnectedness of affect studies, feminist pedagogy, and writing assessment that focuses on developing a notion of potentiality that can aid student writers and writing teachers in illuminating self-assessment practices of student writers, and valuing self-assessment as a process that can enhance the learning and teaching of writing within FYC programs, such as this program at Midwestern University. It is impossible to extrapolate from this short time with these few students any general claim about student writer potentiality and personal methods of self-assessment. But while the data is limited in scope and generalizability, the exercise of interviewing these student writers reveals some of the space in between—the space where Jacqueline Rhodes (2005) and other feminists find potential for change and agency. Even among these four students, not all of them succeeded in their FYC class and not all of them engaged critically with their assessment practices in a conscious way, and perhaps none of them felt that they benefitted from the opportunity to talk about their assessment practices, their expectations, their desires. And the FYC Program at Midwestern University has a unique culture, just as any FYC program would have, that does not necessarily inform other programs with its practices. I cannot assert from this small slice of life for these students in this program that I know what best practices are for self-assessment in writing classrooms. But it is my hope that this scratch of the surface might inspire more consideration of a feminist theory of writing assessment, development of how writing community members understand and use self-assessment practices, and additional application of affect studies to explore the interrelatedness, and potential, of writing and agency. Consider what following these students through the end of their college careers might reveal, or what
following more students through the period when they are in FYC courses. Additional insights might come from a study across several programs similar to Midwestern’s FYC Program, or from a comparison of very different FYC approaches. Perhaps further teacher research would be a significant methodology for exploring this not-yet fully fathomed space in which individual students develop and enact personal and social desires through their self-assessments. To that end, I would suggest these next practical steps:

- Inquire of student writers about their self-assessment practices to empower them
- Engage student writers in verbal and ongoing conversations about self-assessment, not with the goal of “teaching” them to self-assess, but to learn from them about self-assessment and to incorporate their assessments into the overall evaluation of writing
- Study student writers’ self-assessment practices as a way of incorporating student writers’ perspectives and desires into programmatic writing assessment—honor and respect them as stakeholders with knowledge that can inform the overall practices and values of the writing program community
- Further investigate how student writers’ self-assessments occur and what impacts it has, and what impacts happen in the process of performing self-assessment
- Build on contemporary self-assessment opportunities in the portfolio process by tapping into the rich self-assessment activity of individual student writers throughout the semester, not just in a final reflective letter and not just in alphabetic texts

Contemporary writing assessment practices have opened the door to pedagogies, such as Inoue’s (2005) community-based assessment, Elbow’s (2007) grading contracts, and Yancey’s (2004, 2009) digital portfolios, which value self-assessment through reflection, social engagement, and meaning making. They honor the call of feminist writing assessment to empower students to discover their own agency through a sense of authorship. What might an FYC teacher do to enact within such pedagogies an increased role for self-assessment of potentiality? Provide students with a vocabulary that would allow them to talk and write about their development, their capacity to do work, to grow, to learn. The language of affect,
impacts, and trajectories can help students to articulate personal goals within the context of communal goals, and to give voice to the negotiations and struggles that they experience in shaping their own trajectory. Encourage students to write vision plans in addition to revision plans, to set personal, forward-looking goals for their writing projects, some of which coincide with teacher and programmatic learning objectives, and some of which might help students define and achieve their own ends and rhetorical purposes. I think of the way in which the students in this study came to life talking about their non-FYC writing projects in which they were generating personal knowledge through observations and interviews, positioning themselves as experts—even if just momentarily—and speaking or writing because they felt they had the right of an author to do so. Do more than a narrative self-assessment essay at the end of a semester by creating opportunities for students to reflect on past work, analyze the value of experiences in present work, and project into the future their desires and goals as writers, or, in some cases as not-writers, but as individuals who use writing to manifest their desires. Yancey’s (2004, 2009) argument for digital portfolios lies in the power of these creations to function as meaningful self-assessment, which is meaningful assessment, in part because they “privilege perspective and multiplicity,” (p. 752). Privileging perspective and multiplicity becomes an opportunity for student writers to explore their own potentiality and to begin developing a sense of their rights of authorship.
REFERENCES


Langstraat, L. (2002). The point is there is no point: miasmic cynicism and cultural studies composition.” *JAC, 22*(2), 293-325.


In B. Huot & P. O’Neil (Eds.), *Assessing writing: A critical sourcebook* (pp. 82-92). Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s.


APPENDIX A: LEARNING OBJECTIONS IN SAMPLE FYC SYLLABUS

SYLLABUS (MTWR)
FYC 1100 | Section 106L/306L
University Hall 308
Monday & Wednesday 12:30 to 1:20 pm
Tuesday & Thursday 1:00 to 2:15 pm
Fall 2013

| Instructor: | 215D East Hall |
| E-mail: | XXX-XXX-XXXX |
| Office: | 1:30-2:30 pm Wednesdays (and by appointment) |
| Office Phone: | (no calls after 9:00 p.m., please) |
| Office Hours: | (my mailbox is above my name) |
| Cell Phone/Text: | Learning Commons, 1st floor of library |
| Mailbox: | XXX-XXX-XXXX |

Writing Support at the Learning Commons:
Learning Commons Phone: Learning Commons Website:

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<td>Thurs. 12/19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri. 1/6 (5:00 p.m.)</td>
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**GSW Learning Outcomes**

Below are abbreviated FYC Learning Outcomes. Please see your portfolio coursepack for a full description of FYC Learning Outcomes and how they correlate with MU Learning Outcomes, also listed in the portfolio coursepack.

1. Demonstrate rhetorical knowledge through writing in a variety of academic genres and to a variety of academic audiences.

2. Develop critical thinking, reading, and writing skills through approaching academic writing assignments as a series of cognitive tasks, engaging in multiple modes of inquiry, synthesizing multiple points of view, critiquing student and professional writing, and assessing source materials.

3. Understand the processes entailed in academic writing including recursive processes for drafting texts, collaborative activities, the development of personalized strategies, and strategies for identifying and locating source materials.

4. Demonstrate knowledge of the conventions of academic writing including format and documentation systems, coherence devices, conventional syntax, and control over surface features such as grammar, punctuation, mechanics, and spelling.

5. Engage in the electronic research and composing processes by locating, evaluating, disseminating, using and acknowledging research, both textual and visual, from popular and scholarly electronic databases.

6. Understand the importance of values systems in academic writing including the abilities to write effectively to audiences with opposing viewpoints, to participate in an active learning community which values academic honesty, and to value the place of writing within learning processes.
APPENDIX B: AUDIENCE AND VALUES EXPLORATION WORKSHEET

**Audience and Values Exploration (a prewriting worksheet)**

*General Studies Writing Program, Bowling Green State University*

- Strategies to convince the audience of the paper's thesis without offending them
- Values, beliefs, or experiences that influenced you to take this stance
- Tentative Thesis
- Audience you are attempting to persuade
- Experiences that may have shaped your audience's values and beliefs on the topic
- Potential objections your audience might raise
APPENDIX C: STUDENT PROCESS ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Student Process Analysis (a worksheet to be submitted with first drafts)
General Studies Writing Program, Bowling Green State University

Name ____________________________ Date ____________________________
Type of Assignment ____________________________ Paper # ____________________________

Please work through the following directions before answering the questions below.

• Underline the paper’s thesis.
• Write CA next to the paper’s counterargument(s).
• Write REFUTE or CONCEDE, as appropriate, next to the rebuttals or concessions to the counterargument(s).
• Put a box around a particular clause, sentence, or idea that you are struggling with in terms of clarity, grammar, or something else that you simply cannot pinpoint.

How long have you worked on this draft? ________ hours

What pleases you most about this draft?

With what are you most struggling in this draft?

What strategies have you used to guide your readers through this draft?

Before your instructor offers feedback on this draft, what goals have you already established for revision?

What else should your instructor know about this draft?
APPENDIX D: ACHIEVEMENT REQUIREMENTS FYC 1110

SAMPLE ACHIEVEMENT REQUIREMENTS
FYC 1110 / Section L0000
Fall 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructor:</th>
<th>Cynthia Siss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-mail:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:csiss@mu.edu">csiss@mu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office:</td>
<td>501 East Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Phone:</td>
<td>372-5555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Hours:</td>
<td>9:30-10:30 a.m. Monday (and by appointment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Phone (optional):</td>
<td>352-5555 (no calls after 9:00 p.m., please)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mailbox:</td>
<td>210 East Hall (my mailbox is above my name)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Commons:</td>
<td>140 MU Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Commons Phone:</td>
<td>372-2823 (call ahead to make an appointment)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REQUIRED COURSE TEXTS AND MATERIALS

- Portfolio of FYC 1100/1110 materials (available at the MU Bookstore and SBX Bookstore).
- A laptop with a word processing program (Microsoft Word or Open Office) that you must bring to every class, fully charged.
- A means of backing up your work (for example—flash drive, MyFiles, etc.).
- Your MU Learning Portfolio.
- A MU e-mail address which you should check on a regular basis, and a MyMU account.
- A “writer’s blog” created at [http://blogs.mu.edu](http://blogs.mu.edu) (which we will discuss during the first week of classes).
- A college-level dictionary, such as Merriam-Webster, which is available online for no charge ([http://www.merriam-webster.com/](http://www.merriam-webster.com/)). Alternatively, you could purchase a hard copy collegiate dictionary, such as *The American Heritage Dictionary*, which is available at the University Bookstore and SBX.
- Paper clips or staples and a stapler.

FYC LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Demonstrate rhetorical knowledge through writing in a variety of academic genres and to a variety of academic audiences.
2. Develop critical thinking, reading, and writing skills through approaching academic writing assignments as a series of cognitive tasks, engaging in multiple modes of inquiry, synthesizing multiple points of view, critiquing student and professional writing, and assessing source materials.

3. Understand the processes entailed in academic writing including recursive processes for drafting texts, collaborative activities, the development of personalized strategies, and strategies for identifying and locating source materials.

4. Demonstrate knowledge of the conventions of academic writing including format and documentation systems, coherence devices, conventional syntax, and control over surface features such as grammar, punctuation, mechanics, and spelling.

5. Engage in the electronic research and composing processes by locating, evaluating, disseminating, using and acknowledging research, both textual and visual, from popular and scholarly electronic databases.

6. Understand the importance of values systems in academic writing including the abilities to write effectively to audiences with opposing viewpoints, to participate in an active learning community which values academic honesty, and to value the place of writing within learning processes.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

First-Year Composition 1110 (FYC 1110) has been designed to provide college students with an introduction to academic writing—the kind of writing students are asked to do throughout college and often beyond. Most students who are new to college have had little experience with academic writing and sometimes find learning to write in new ways challenging. To this end, FYC 1110 has been designed to assist students in making the transition from high school writing to college-level writing.

FYC 1110 is a highly interactive “workshop” class in which you, your classmates, and I will read, write, and discuss together. You will encounter a wide variety of activities in this class: among them, you will be introduced to various invention strategies that have been designed to generate and deepen your ideas; you will be provided with ample feedback on your drafts by your classmates and me; you will be helped to critically evaluate your own writing in order to revise effectively; you will gain experience with analyzing the audience and purpose of your papers in order to write your papers persuasively; and you will be given assistance with presenting your ideas clearly and supporting them with academically credible sources.

To achieve these various goals, you will write five well-developed essays, the majority of which will be documented with sources. Throughout the course, you will assemble all of the drafts you write for each essay in a portfolio in order to demonstrate your progress as a writer over the semester.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES**
**Classroom Etiquette**
The classroom is a place for learning, and learning requires a respectful and appropriate environment. Therefore, students are expected to adhere to the following rules:

- As soon as class begins, students must log off – and stay logged off – Facebook, Twitter, email, chat, and any other part of the Internet that is not part of a required class activity.
- Students must silence/turn off their phones and put them away at the beginning of each class session; phones may not be visible during class time.
- Likewise, iPods, MP3 players, and similar devices may not be used during class unless the instructor has specifically incorporated them into a class activity.
- Students should not talk with their neighbors while another person is talking. Ample time for discussion will be allotted in this class, but when the instructor or a fellow student has the floor, that person should be given everyone’s undivided attention.
- Students may not come to class habitually late. Work and other activities should be scheduled around courses, not the other way around.
- Students may not leave before the instructor has dismissed class, and they should not start packing up early.
- Class discussion must be respectful. That is, whenever students speak, they should be considerate of other students’ feelings, use appropriate language, and make their points without being combative or confrontational. As well, students should not use discriminatory language regarding their fellow students’ gender, sexual orientation, race, color, religion, national origin, age, or anything else. Students should listen to one another, ask questions, and explain their disagreements without attacking others.

**Essays**
Each of the five major essays you will write will be based on chapters from *The St. Martin’s Guide to Writing, 9th ed.* You will also work with Kirszner & Mandell: *The Brief Wadsworth Handbook* for assistance with writing and revising the multiple drafts you will be required to write for each essay. At the end of the semester your entire writing portfolio will be evaluated by other members of the FYC staff (following my evaluation of your work). Ultimately, this portfolio evaluation will determine whether or not you will pass FYC 1110. **Incomplete portfolios will not be evaluated; students without portfolios will not pass the course.**

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

Please follow these format requirements for submitting your work:
- Papers should follow MLA format. Examples and information on MLA can be found in Kirszner & Mandell’s *The Brief Wadsworth Handbook*. We will discuss MLA format in greater detail during class.
Essays must be word processed, double-spaced, and have standard 1” margins on the right and left sides, top, and bottom of the page. The font used for your final drafts should be 12-point Times New Roman or another similarly proportioned and sized font. Pages must be numbered with your last name and page number in the upper right-hand corner, according to MLA specifications. Your essays must have an engaging title, but please don’t include a separate title page with your papers.

Student Author Jones
Ima Riter
GSW 1110
4 September 2011

Title: A Good Paper

Final Drafts
When you submit a final draft of an essay to me for evaluation, you will need to include a number of other materials (some of which are found in your FYC 1100/1110 Portfolio) along with it, arranged in the following order:

- A FYC Rubric (goldenrod color) should be on top.
- The assignment sheet should be included next.
- The final (or most recent) draft of your essay should be included next.
- The various drafts of your paper should be included next, in reverse chronological order. Only drafts which contain substantial revisions or which peers or I have commented upon should be included, however.
- On the bottom of the stack should be a completed Audience and Values Exploration/Student Process Analysis Sheet (purple color) and all other prewriting you have done for the assignment.

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

Paper Printing
Students who anticipate using university printers should keep funds available on their MU1 Cards (http://www.bgsu.edu/bg1card/index.html). Please note that a lack of funds on a MU1 card is not considered a valid reason for failing to submit a hard copy of a FYC paper at the time it is due.

To save resources and to help students save money, First-Year Composition asks students to submit two-sided papers.
Laptop Sections
All students enrolled in this section are required to have a laptop that they will bring to each class. Because computers affect how scholars write, research, and communicate, this course will use laptops extensively to introduce student writers to the basics of academic writing. Your laptop must have a word processing program on it, and it should be fully charged and ready for each class. The use of power cords during class sessions is not permitted.

While we will use the Internet periodically throughout the semester, you will be expected to remain on task during class time. (See the previous Classroom Etiquette section.) Because we only meet for a few hours a week, it is required that you stay focused on the tasks at hand rather than surfing the internet or checking your email or Facebook site.

Your Writer’s Blog
This semester we will be reading a variety of sample essays along with various other selections from our course texts. Subsequently, in addition to your regular essay work, I will often ask you to prepare reading-response assignments. I will also periodically ask you to write reflections on other parts of the course – on peer work or on your prewriting or revision processes, for example. These assignments are designed to reinforce what you are learning in class and to help you better understand your own reading and writing processes. When you get in the habit of reflecting upon your work in this way, you may find that you better recall and better understand what you read, and you may discover ways of improving your own writing habits.

You should type and publish such activities which I assign on your blog hosted at http://blogs.mu.edu. The blog posts should be completed on time and ready to use and access in class. Sometimes I will ask for volunteers to share their blog entries with the class as a way to start discussion, and I may ask you to use your posts for small-group discussions. I will read and respond to your posts periodically via email or the comment function to monitor your efforts.

Writing Conferences
Because college-level writing can be frustrating at times, it is important to get encouraging and specific feedback from not only other members of the class, but also from me. To ensure that you are getting the encouragement and feedback you need in your writing, it is required that you attend at least two scheduled conferences in my office so that I can give you personalized help and assistance.

FYC 1100/1110 LibGuide
To help familiarize you with academic library research skills, in this class you will work with an online LibGuide site that has been assembled for FYC 1100 and 1110 by the staff of the MU Library. Our LibGuide site can be accessed through this link: http://libguides.mu.edu/fyc1100-1110

This Research Guide is also available by going to the main library web page and clicking on “LibGuides.”

As you will see, the FYC 1100/1110 LibGuide provides significant assistance with search strategies, the use of the Library’s databases, incorporation of sources into papers, academic
honesty, and more. The site also contains a “Library Quiz” which you will be required complete when I assign it, and it contains an IM Chat Box which will allow you to ask a question which will be responded to immediately by an MU librarian.

I strongly recommend that you refer to this site as you work on your papers outside of class, as well as during class.

**Attendance**

Attendance in this class is mandatory. Class time will be devoted to actively building writing skills by writing and revising, discussing, and critiquing your own writing and the writing of others. Such activities simply cannot be “made up” satisfactorily by getting the notes from a peer or by meeting with me. I realize, however, that sickness or emergencies can occur; should you need to miss class, please be sure to contact me, preferably beforehand, to discuss what might be done to assist you with getting on track.

However, I would hope that such absences would not occur more than a couple of times this semester. At the discretion of the instructor, students with excessive absences—more than four—will not have their portfolio submitted and therefore will not pass this course.

**University Closure Due to Bad Weather**

In most cases, the University will not close for winter conditions unless the County Sheriff’s Department declares a Level 3 emergency. Closing information will be communicated through MU’s AlertMU text system, MU e-mail notification, MU’s website, and local television stations. (Note: You can sign up for AlertMU, by signing into MyMU and clicking on the AlertMU tab at the top of the page.)

**Religious Holidays**

It is the policy of the University to make every reasonable effort to allow students to observe their religious holidays without academic penalty. In such cases, it is the obligation of the student to provide the instructor with reasonable notice of the dates of religious holidays on which he or she will be absent. Should you need to miss a class due to a religious holiday, you should understand that absence from classes for religious reasons does not relieve you of responsibility for completing required work. In such an event, you should consult with me well before you leave for the holiday to find out what assignments will be due while you are absent—and you subsequently should have the assignments completed and turned in to me prior to missing class.

**Student Veteran-Friendly Campus**

MU educators recognize student veterans’ rights when entering and exiting the university system. If you are a student veteran, please let me know if accommodations need to be made for absences due to drilling or being called to active duty.

**Late Work**

All work must be handed in when I request it in class. I will not accept late work unless you have made previous arrangements with me. Similarly, I will not accept late work in my department mailbox or via email unless you have made previous arrangements with me. Please note: missing class on a day an assignment is due does not excuse you from turning in that assignment (unless we have made prior arrangements for you to do so).
Lost Essays
You are responsible for maintaining a copy of each draft of your essays. Your essays will be returned to you no later than a week after they have been submitted to me, and all essays – along with my written feedback – must be present in the portfolio at the end of the semester. It is your responsibility to compile these essays in your portfolio folder so that a portfolio assessor can further review them. Since occasionally essays, backpacks, or computers are stolen, lost, or destroyed, you should save all of your papers (in your MU learning portfolio account, on a flash drive, or in MyFiles, etc.). Ultimately, it is your responsibility to submit a complete portfolio. **Incomplete portfolios will not be evaluated; students without portfolios will not pass the course.**

Revision Policy
Knowing how to revise your writing is an important aspect of being a successful writer; therefore, you will be required to write multiple drafts of your papers, and we will work hard on the development of your personal revision and editing skills. One goal of this class is for you to learn to determine when a paper has been revised to the point where you can submit it as a “final draft” that will earn a “passing” evaluation. Taking advantage of our class time, your own homework time, my office hours, the Writing Center, and other available services and tools will provide you with the support you need for submitting final drafts that are at the “passing” level.

Sometimes, though, even with hard work students submit final drafts that are not passing. If you encounter this situation you may revise two of your essays (you may choose from essays #2, #3, or #4) once more after their original final evaluation – but only if you first schedule a conference with me to discuss your revision strategy. Note that a revised essay is due within one week after I return the original essay, and it should be turned in with the original graded essay and rubric, as well as with a new rubric.

Academic Honesty
Please refer to MU’s current *Student Handbook* (available online) and to your FYC portfolio materials for information regarding MU’s academic honesty policies. These policies and penalties apply to our class, as well as to all other classes at MU. We will discuss plagiarism and academic honesty in depth this semester.

(Dis)Abilities Statement
If you have a documented disability which requires accommodations in order to obtain equal access for your learning, please make your needs known to me, preferably during the first week of the semester. Please note that students who request accommodations need to verify their eligibility through the Office of Disability Services, 413 South Hall (phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX; TTY: XXX-XXX-XXX).

ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE WITH GSW 1110
In addition to the work you will do in class sessions and in conferences with me, there are a variety of services and tools that you can use to obtain additional assistance with this course. I suggest that you make use of the following:

**Writing Support at the Learning Commons**
Located on the first floor of MU Library, the Learning Commons is a valuable resource which provides students with individual tutoring assistance in writing, reading and study skills, math and stats, and content courses – free of charge. Within the Learning Commons, Writing Support works to create a space where writers feel comfortable discussing and developing their ideas and communication skills. Writing consultants work with writers collaboratively, rather than serving as a proofreading or editing service. Because the Commons will be very busy, you should call ahead to make an appointment well in advance of when you would like to meet with a writing consultant: XXX-XXX-XXX.

You may also submit your writing to an online writing consultant by following this link: [http://www.mu.edu/offices/writingctr/page76151.html](http://www.mu.edu/offices/writingctr/page76151.html) There, you will be given directions for submitting your questions or your entire draft. Once again, though, plan ahead. An email response may take up to 72 hours, and writing consultants are not available on weekends or evenings to give immediate feedback.

**Online Assistance with MU’s Library Resources**
The Welcome New Students LibGuide explains the ins and outs of using the MU Library. You should use this site for basic information regarding the library, including how to check out materials and how to renew materials online. This URL will take you there: [http://libguides.mu.edu/content.php?pid=94029&sid=702141](http://libguides.mu.edu/content.php?pid=94029&sid=702141)

Finally, since library personnel are always ready to help, you should stop by the Research & Information Desk with questions or concerns. Or, you may contact librarians virtually by using the services described here: [http://www.mu.edu/colleges/library/infosrv/ref/ask.html](http://www.mu.edu/colleges/library/infosrv/ref/ask.html)

**Contacting Me by Email**
Email is a wonderful communication tool, and I welcome your messages which ask for assistance. Please note, however, that email can be unreliable. Servers may be down, computers may malfunction, senders may use an incorrect email address, etc. As a result, I cannot be responsible for any email messages that I do not receive. If you email me something, I will email you back, ordinarily within 24 hours, to tell you that I have received your message. However, if you don’t receive my email reply, this means that I did not receive your message and that you should discuss the content of your email with me personally. Similarly, if you email me right before class, I probably will not be able to read your message until after class.

**FYC’s GRADING SYSTEM AND THE PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

**Essay Grades**
Throughout the term, I will collect and comment upon first drafts (and perhaps on some intermediate drafts) of every essay you write, and I will give them back to you within a week’s
time so that you can use my comments as guidelines for revision. Your first drafts will not receive a grade.

However, when you submit final drafts of your essays, I will provide you with both written comments and a grade. As well, I will fill out an evaluation sheet (called a “rubric”) for each final draft to indicate the paper’s strengths and weaknesses; like commentary on early drafts, your evaluated final drafts will be returned to you within a week’s time. The grade for each essay will be a Pass, Almost-Pass, or No-Pass.

- A **Passing (P)** essay shows good control in all of the categories of the rubric. Although there may be a few minor problems, the entire essay is generally well-written and clearly and effectively communicates its ideas.

- An **Almost-Passing (AP)** essay shows a combination of strengths and weaknesses on the rubric. There is room for improvement in some rubric categories of the essay and the essay does not consistently communicate its ideas clearly and effectively. An Almost-Pass means the essay is **not passing**, but it is getting close to being a passing essay.

- A **No-Passing (NP)** essay shows a serious weakness in at least one category of the rubric, and other categories may need attention, too. The overall quality of the essay is significantly hindered because of these weaknesses.

**FYC 1110 Course Grades**

If your work passes the portfolio assessment at the end of the term, you will receive an **S** (Satisfactory) grade for the course. An **S** will appear on your transcript, but it will not be calculated into your grade point average.

Because FYC 1120 is a challenging course that focuses exclusively upon research-supported, argumentative academic writing, it is extremely necessary for students to enter into FYC 1120 with a solid grasp of the writing skills taught in FYC 1110. However, the FYC Program acknowledges that writing is a skill that takes some people longer than others to master. For both of these reasons, if your work is not eligible for the Portfolio Assessment, or if you have met all of my requirements but your work does not pass the Portfolio Assessment, you will receive an **NC** (No Credit) for GSW 1110. An **NC** allows a student to repeat FYC 1110 without any negative effect upon his/her grade point average.

It is possible to receive a **WF** (Withdraw Fail) in this course, however. If you should stop attending this class for any reason without going through the University's official procedure for dropping the class, you will receive a **WF**, the grade will appear on your grade report, and an **F** will be calculated into your grade point average. For this reason, if you can no longer attend the course, it is very important that you officially drop the course by the official deadline, which is Friday, October 21 this semester.

**Portfolio Assessment Process**

During the last week or two of class, I will let you know whether your essays are eligible for portfolio assessment. If your writing has not reached a minimal level of proficiency in FYC 1110 or if you have not satisfied my achievement requirements for this class, your work will not be
eligible for portfolio assessment. This means that I will not be able to submit your portfolio and that you will be required to re-enroll in FYC 1110.

If I make the judgment that your portfolio is eligible for portfolio assessment, during finals week your essays will be evaluated by one or more FYC 1110 instructors in addition to me. These portfolio evaluators will determine whether or not your writing has reached proficiency at the 1110 level. Please note that unlike other courses where one or two weak assignments can ensure failure, FYC’s portfolio assessment allows you to make improvements in your writing and to grow as a writer. Even if you struggle with an essay or two, as long as your portfolio shows that you can write proficiently at the 1110 level by the end of the term, you can pass the course.

If your portfolio is passed by a first evaluator, you will receive the grade of “S” (Satisfactory) and will be eligible to take FYC 1120. However, if the first evaluator determines that your writing, overall, does not demonstrate proficiency at the 1110 level, he/she will not pass your portfolio. Subsequently, a second evaluator – often a member of the FYC staff – will evaluate your work, again looking at your writing as a whole, and will make a final determination regarding whether your writing is proficient enough for you to enroll in FYC 1120 or whether you will need to take FYC 1110 again.

Policy for FYC Portfolio Appeals: Students may appeal an instructor's decision not to submit their portfolios for evaluation if they have evidence that they have met their instructor's achievement requirements and that they have fulfilled the minimum criteria for passing the course. Likewise, students may appeal no-passing portfolio assessments if they have reason to believe that the two evaluators (both of whom are trained, experienced FYC instructors) have overlooked important evidence that their portfolio, in fact, successfully meets the established criteria for passing the course. Students should not, however, routinely appeal no-passing portfolios simply because they are unhappy with their instructor's or the portfolio evaluators' decisions.

Following is the timetable for retrieving portfolio results and for appealing a portfolio decision; please note that any students wishing to appeal a portfolio decision must adhere to this timetable.

- **Monday, December 16 5:00 p.m.**
  Deadline for students to appeal an instructor’s decision not to submit a portfolio for assessment. Students must pick up their portfolio by the designated time period in order to file an appeal.

- **Thursday, December 19**
  Students must pick up their evaluated portfolios during the time period that is designated by their instructor; this time period is ordinarily after 2:30 PM; near the end of the term, I will let you know exactly when I will be available in my office on this day to return your portfolio to you.

  [NOTE: If you are absolutely unable to retrieve your portfolio and your evaluation results from me at the designated time, it is your obligation to provide me with a large self-addressed, stamped envelope so I can mail the evaluated portfolio to you. To determine the
proper postage, before submitting your portfolio to me at the end of the course, please take your portfolio to a post office (such as Stampers on the second floor of the Student Union) where a postal employee can determine the proper postage to affix to your envelope. You should provide me with the envelope – with proper postage already on it – when you submit your portfolio to me.]

- **Thursday January 3, 5:00 pm**
  Deadline for appealing a non-passing portfolio result.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUMMARY: REQUIREMENTS FOR PASSING FYC 1110</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In summary, to pass FYC 1110 and go on to FYC 1120, you must meet the following requirements:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Write at least two clearly <strong>Passing</strong> (not <strong>Almost Passing</strong>) essays which present and develop an academic argument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Turn in all five fully-developed and revised essays, including all drafts and prewriting, on time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Turn in all other written assignments (e.g., blogs, daily homework, Audience and Values Exploration/Student Process Analysis sheets) on time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Attend classes. (Excessive absences will result in your portfolio’s ineligibility for the assessment process.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Actively participate in class discussion and group work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Attend a minimum of two required conferences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pass the portfolio assessment at the FYC 1110 level.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you have not satisfied the Achievement Requirements for this class, your work will not be eligible for a portfolio assessment. This means that I will not be able to submit your portfolio for assessment, and you will be required to re-enroll in FYC 1110.

**A Final Word**
I hope that you will find our class to be a place where you can receive good help with developing your academic writing skills. Though many students are at first uncomfortable with academic writing (which is a new kind of writing for most first-year students), understanding how to go through various writing processes will help you achieve your writing goals. To make this course as successful as possible for yourself, I encourage you to take advantage of the resources around you and to keep in touch with me as we go through the semester.

Open dialogue is very important, so if you have any questions about these achievement requirements or other class matters, please be sure to let me know. Best wishes for a terrific semester.
APPENDIX E: GRADE DESCRIPTIONS FROM FYC 1120 ACHIEVEMENT REQUIREMENTS

GSW’S GRADING SYSTEM AND THE PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT PROCESS

**Essay Grades**

Throughout the term, I will collect and comment upon first drafts (and perhaps on some intermediate drafts) of every essay you write, and I will give them back to you within a week’s time so that you can use my comments as guidelines for revision. Your first drafts will not receive a grade.

However, when you submit final drafts of your essays, I will provide you with both written comments and a grade. I will also fill out an evaluation chart (called a “rubric”) for each final draft to indicate the paper’s strengths and weaknesses; like commentary on early drafts, your evaluated final drafts will be returned to you within a week’s time. Each essay you write for GSW 1120 will be graded A, B, C, or NP (Not Passing). An explanation of these grades follows:

An **A** essay clearly passes all categories of the rubric. It demonstrates a superior command of the subject matter and presents that information so effectively that the reader enjoys reading the essay and learns from it. The **A** essay shows clear organization that captivates the audience and keeps readers involved through all stages of the essay. Moreover, the **A** essay reveals a sophistication in style and an original voice; sentences are appropriately varied in length and construction; transitions and metadiscourse are used to produce a smooth flow for the reader; connections between sentences and ideas are clear. In addition, individual sentences are concise, clear, and highly specific. The **A** essay demonstrates a high degree of selectivity in word choice and is free of all but a few minor errors in grammar and mechanics. The **A** essay is the work of a writer who is able to deal comfortably with complex material and can present that material effectively for others. As a result of its careful organizational structure and development, all factors, both in content and style, combine to form a unified whole. For the multiple source and researched essays, effective synthesis must be demonstrated for a grade of **A**.

A **B** essay clearly passes in all categories of the rubric. It contains few mechanical errors (none of which impede communication), and it effectively delivers a substantial amount of interesting information. The specific points are logically ordered, well-developed, and unified according to a clear organizing principle. The introduction and conclusion are effective, but not as engaging as in the **A** essay. The **B** essay exhibits an understanding of metadiscourse, and transitions are adequately smooth and logical. Sentence structure is sufficiently varied in both length and construction, and the choice of words has been made selectively, with few minor errors in grammar and mechanics. The writing in a **B** essay is organized, clear, coherent, and correct. The essay is far more than competent and, again, must show effective synthesis.

A **C** essay passes all categories of the rubric. It is generally competent and reasonably well developed and organized. The **C** essay demonstrates an average knowledge of the subject matter, but the presentation of that information is often vaguely stated and
superficially connected. The essay may lack adequate transitions and use of metadiscourse. The sentence structure is often not varied in either length or construction. It may contain some mechanical or grammatical errors, but they do not interfere significantly with meaning. Though the C essay fulfills the assignment, it is not especially engaging or enlightening. In GSW 1120 multiple source essays and researched essays, a C essay must show synthesis of source materials and an ability to construct and sustain an academic argument.

An NP (Not Passing) essay does not pass in one or more categories of the rubric. It has serious flaws in audience awareness, organization, development, syntax, word choice, and/or mechanics and grammar.

**GSW 1120 Course Grades**
Your final grade in GSW 1120 will be based on the following point scale. Each assignment will be worth a varied amount of points as noted below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essay Type</th>
<th>Grade and range of points that can be awarded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critique</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Source #1</td>
<td>8 - 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Source #2</td>
<td>10 - 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researched Essay</td>
<td>14 - 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Remember that your researched essay must earn a C or higher for your portfolio to be eligible for the portfolio assessment process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment Type</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critique</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Source #1</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Source #2</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researched Essay</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Points</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once all points have been awarded, add the total together and use the following scale to determine your final grade for the course:

- 36-31 points = A
- 30-24 points = B
- 23-15 points = C
- below 15 points = NP
If your work passes Portfolio Assessment at the GSW 1120 level, you will receive an A, B, or C for this course. Your GSW 1120 grade will be calculated into your grade point average.

The General Studies Writing Program acknowledges that writing is a skill that takes some people longer than others to master. For this reason, if your work is not eligible for the Portfolio Assessment or if you have met all of my requirements but your work does not pass the Portfolio Assessment, you will receive an NC (No Credit) for GSW 1120. An NC grade allows a student to repeat GSW 1120 without any negative effect upon his or her grade point average.

However, it is possible to receive a WF (Withdraw Fail) in this course. If you should stop attending this class for any reason without going through the University's official procedure for dropping the class, you will receive a WF, the grade will appear on your grade report, and an F will be calculated into your grade point average.
GSW 1120

Student's Narrative Self-Reflection

Student: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

Course/Section: ___________________________

Instructor: ___________________________

Now that the semester is almost behind you, it's time to step back and reflect on the "big picture" by considering how you have matured as a writer over the course of the semester. Experienced writers who pause to gain this larger perspective find it helps them celebrate their accomplishments and plan future improvements. Please take your time to complete this activity carefully and honestly. As you complete this form, you may want to refer to the Rubric sheets attached to your essays, the comments your instructor and peers have made about your writing, and your own experiences and memories of your learning processes. Remember that your responses to the questions will not only provide the portfolio evaluator with important information about the progress you have made as a writer this semester, but also with a final sample of your writing abilities.

Part One: Your Assessment of the Strength of Your Portfolio

Including the current semester, I have taken GSW 1100 ______ time(s), GSW 1110 ______ time(s), and GSW 1120 ______ time(s).

____ I believe that my writing should clearly pass.

____ I believe that my writing, although borderline, should pass.

Part Two: Narrative Self-Reflection

Please create a word-processed document in which you address each of the following six categories in detail. You may address the categories separately, numbering each response, or you may write a single essay within which you respond to all six categories. In your document, please provide complete explanation and refer to specific examples from the writing in your portfolio to support your points. Finally, be sure to craft your responses deliberately, draft and revise them for clarity, and proofread them carefully before submitting them in your portfolio.

Category #1: Audience and Purpose

Over the course of this semester, to what degree have you developed the writing skills necessary for achieving your specific purpose with your specific audience?
Category #2: Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing
Over the course of this semester, to what degree have you developed the skills necessary to do the following?

• to accurately analyze complex pieces of writing and the ideas within them;

• to analyze a potential source (an article, for example, or a website) and accurately assess its credibility, timeliness, and relevance;

• to provide perceptive and productive feedback to peers; and

• to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of your own work?

Category #3: Processes
Over the course of this semester, to what degree have you developed personal processes for writing which have prepared you to succeed at new writing tasks? To answer this question you might think of personal processes you have developed prewriting, planning, drafting, revising, editing, proofreading, and/or finding electronic and traditional sources.

Category #4: Knowledge of Conventions
Over the course of this semester, to what degree have you gained consistent and accurate control over “correctness” issues, such as page formatting, source citation and documentation, conventional sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, mechanics, and spelling?

Category #5: Composing in Electronic Environments
Over the course of the semester, to what degree have you developed personal processes for researching and composing in electronic environments that have prepared you to successfully use textual and visual rhetorical strategies? To answer this question, you might think about personal processes for composing; for locating, evaluating, organizing electronic texts and visuals; and for using and acknowledging electronic texts and visuals in your writing.

Category #6: Values Exploration
Over the course of this semester, to what degree have you developed an appreciation for the role that value systems play in written communication?
APPENDIX G: FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION PROGRAM RUBRIC

General Studies Writing Program Rubric
Bowling Green State University

Instructor Evaluation

Student: ___________________________________________ Instructor: ________________________________

Date: ___________________________________________ Paper #: ________________________________

Type of paper: ____________________________________________________________

Instructor: please check one: This paper was submitted as _____ a first draft _____ a final draft _____ a revision of a final draft

Notations in parentheses refer to chapters and sections in Kinzer & Mandell's The Brief Wordsworth Handbook, 7th ed.

I. Audience: This essay clearly demonstrates an awareness of its intended readers.

   ( Appropriateness of audience addressed (1-10) )
   ( Strategy toward audience (6, 9a-b) )
   ( Credibility )
   ( Information (6d, 17) )
   ( argument (6c, 4-6g) )
   ( Voice (37g, 41e) )

II. Organization/Theme/Structure: This essay has a clear structure appropriate to its thesis and subject—and to the instructor’s assignment.

   ( Thesis )
   ( Logical organizational pattern: )
   ( essay (9k, 15g) )
   ( paragraph (7q, 7h, 7i) )
   ( other: ________________________________ )

III. Development: The various phases of the essay are fully developed.

   ( Introduction (7e, 7, 15l) )
   ( Body paragraphs (7d, 15k) )
   ( unity (7e-2) )
   ( topic sentences (7c, 1) )
   ( detailed support (7b-c) )
   ( theoretical strategy (3d) )
   ( consistency/unnecessary repetition )
   ( Conclusion (7e, 3, 15l) )

IV. Syntax: The sentences of this essay are generally free of errors and appropriately varied.

   ( 65 sentences (57-58) )
   ( Unnatural sentence fragments (72) )
   ( Run-on sentences (33) )
   ( Comma splice (38) )
   ( Lack of variety in length/style (40) )
   ( Other: ________________________________ )

V. Word Choice: The words in this essay are chosen with accuracy and with attention to style.

   ( Vague/unclear words (44c) )
   ( Cliffs (44c-4) )
   ( Mnemonic expressions (44c, 55a) )
   ( Misses of voice (54h) )
   ( Other: ________________________________ )

VI. Usage/Mechanics: This essay demonstrates a sound control of conventional usage and mechanics.

   Errors in grammar/usage:
   ( noun–plural/possessive (58a, 49b) )
   ( prepositional phrase (39) )
   ( adjective/adverb forms (59) )
   ( subject/verb agreement (56a) )
   ( pronoun/antecedent (54) )
   ( shifts in tense/voice (35b, 1-3 & 5) )
   ( errors in spelling/homonyms (51) )
   ( accidental word omission/elleision (42b) )
   ( capitalization (53) )

   Errors in mechanics:
   ( end punctuation (49) )
   ( commas (66) )
   ( apostrophes (48) )
   ( semicolons/colons (41, 50a) )
   ( dashes (69b) )
   ( numbers (36) )
   ( dashes/diacriticals (55a, 56a, 54) )
   ( abbreviations (55) )
   ( parentheses/brackets (50c–d) )
   ( ellipses (55b) )

   Errors in MLA in-text format:
   ( quotation conventions (49) )
   ( parenthetical citation (21a) )
   ( works cited (21a-c) )
   ( general page format (21b-c) )
   ( heading and title )
   ( margins and spacing )
   ( page numbers )
   ( visuals (26a, 26d) )
   ( Other: ________________________________ )

GSW 1100/1110 67
SUMMARY: REQUIREMENTS FOR PASSING FYC 1100

In summary, to pass FYC 1100 and go on to FYC 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 FYC 1100/1110 level.

If you have not satisfied the Achievement Requirements for this class, your work will not be eligible for a portfolio assessment. This means that I will not be able to submit your portfolio for assessment, and you will be required to enroll in FYC 1110.
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD
Application for Approval of Research Involving Human Subjects – As of September, 2012

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

Ia. General Information:

Name of applicant (Principal Investigator): ______
Date: ______

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: ______  Campus Phone: ______
E-mail: ______  Fax: ______

Have You Completed BGSU Human Subjects Training?
☒ Yes (Office of Research Compliance will confirm training date.)
Title of the Proposed Research Project:  

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

Have you requested, or do you plan to request, external support for this project?  
☐ yes  ☒ no

If yes, external Funding Agency or Source: 

Ib. 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): 

Department or Division:  

Phone:  
Fax:  
E-mail:

Has Advisor 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.)

II. Information on Projects Using Pre-existing Data

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

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

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

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


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


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

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

(If you indicated “anonymous” and 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.


☐ 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 you answered “no” and 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 you answered “Yes” and 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

Before the data were collected, did respondents give their permission for the information to be used for research purposes?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

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

☐ Yes  ☐ No
i. If your project also involves direct data collection, please continue completing the rest of the application. Otherwise, please go to and complete sections IV (as appropriate), VII.a, VII.b, and IX.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ☐   | ☒  | a. Deception of subjects  
  (if “yes,” this application will go to the full Board for review).
| ☐   | ☒  | b. Shock or other forms of punishment  
  (if “yes”, this application will go to the full Board for review).
| ☐   | ☒  | c. Sexually explicit materials or questions
| ☐   | ☒  | d. Handling of money or other valuable commodities
| ☐   | ☒  | e. Extraction of blood or other bodily fluids
| ☐   | ☒  | f. Questions about drug and/or alcohol use
| ☐   | ☒  | g. Questions about sexual orientation, sexual experience, or sexual abuse
| ☐   | ☒  | h. Purposeful creation of anxiety
| ☐   | ☒  | i. Any procedure that might be viewed as an invasion of privacy
| ☐   | ☒  | j. Physical exercise or stress
| ☐   | ☒  | k. Administration of substances (food, drugs, etc.) to subjects
| ☐   | ☒  | l. Any procedure that might place subjects at risk (e.g., disclosure of criminal activity).
| ☐   | ☒  | m. Systematic selection or exclusion of any group. This includes the selection or exclusion of any group based on age, gender, race, ethnicity, etc.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ☐   | ☒  | a. Will health information (information relating to the past, present, or future physical or mental health or condition of an individual) be obtained from a covered entity (a health plan, health care clearinghouse or a health care provider who bills health insurers – e.g., hospitals, doctor’s offices, dentists, the BGSU Student Health Service, the BGSU Speech and Hearing Clinic, the BGSU Psychological Services Center)?
| ☐   | ☒  | b. Will the study involve the provision of health care in a covered entity?
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.)
  - 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?

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.**

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

d. Who will be your subjects?
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.)

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.

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.)

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

<table>
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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.)*

| Debriefing form: | ☐ Yes | ☒ No |

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.

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.)*

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.

VIII. Consent Form Checklist: If you are using an informed consent document, you must use the checklist below to check off the required information. Need help with your consent document? Click [here](#) for the consent document skeleton.

- ☒ The consent document is on BGSU or departmental letterhead.
- ☒ Stated the purpose of the study.
- ☒ Stated the benefits of this project (to your field of study and to participants).
Stated the risks of participation. If there are none, you can indicate that the “risk of participation is no greater than that experienced in daily life”.

An explain for how confidentiality will be protected has been provided. For example: Where will the data will be stored, and who will have access to the data?

Indicated that participation in the study is voluntary.

Indicated that participants are free to withdraw at any time.

Indicated how much time participation will take.

Informed participants that deciding to participate or not will not impact any relationship they may have with BGSU.

Provided the contact information for the PI (phone and email) regarding questions about the study.

If the PI is a student, provided the contact information for the Advisor (phone and email) regarding questions about the study.

Provided the contact information for the HSRB (419-372-7716 and hsrb@bgsu.edu) regarding questions about participant rights.

“Anonymous” or “Confidential” are used correctly.

Consent/Assent document is at an appropriate reading level. You can use the Flesch/Kincaid test in Microsoft Word to test the reading level.

If there is any chance that participants could be under 18, indicated that participants must be at least 18 years old to participate in the study.

Changed all “I understand” phrases to “I have been informed”.

Statements about accidental injury and unforeseen risk have been removed.

Acronyms have been spelled out.

If the study is online, informed participants to clear their internet browser and page history.

If requesting a waiver of written consent, indicated how consent will be documented. For example, “Completing and returning the survey indicates consent to participate.”

IX. By electronically signing this application package in IRBNet, I certify that:

1. The information provided in this application is accurate and complete.
2. I have the ultimate responsibility for the protection of the rights and welfare of human subjects and adherence to any study-specific requirements imposed by the HSRB.
3. I will comply with all HSRB and BGSU policies and procedures, as well as with all applicable Federal, State and local laws and regulations regarding the protection of human subjects in research.
4. I agree to the following:
   • I accept responsibility for the scientific and ethical conduct of this research study
   • I will obtain HSRB approval before amending or altering the research protocol or implementing changes in the approved consent documents or recruitment procedures
   • I will immediately report to the HSRB any serious adverse events and/or unanticipated effects on subjects which may occur as a result of this study
   • I will train study personnel in the proper conduct of human subjects research
• I will complete and return the Continuing Review form when requested to do so by the HSRB
Recruitment Script

To be spoken to students on Thursday, December 13, 2012 (after students pick up their reviewed portfolios from me)

Now that we are done with classes this semester, and the portfolio reviewers have passed your portfolio, I will not have any further input into whether or not you pass this course. Technically, you are no longer my student. Now that you have passed GSW 1100, you will be taking GSW 1120 next semester and I wanted to let you know about a project that I am planning to do, to see if you might be interested in working with me. Please don’t feel that you have to say yes, or say yes right now, but I think it might be of interest to you.

As you know, I am a graduate student here at Bowling Green State University, in addition to being a writing instructor. I am just starting on my dissertation, and the first step is to do some research. I want to learn more about how writing students evaluate their own writing, specifically, how writing students see their own progress and development as writers. I am planning on doing research starting at the end of this semester and going until the end of the Spring semester. I would like to follow the writing progress of several students between portfolio review this semester and portfolio review at the end of Spring semester. The project involves two things: a review of the narrative self-reflection forms that you complete for your portfolios and a series of monthly interviews from December 2012 to May 2013. These interviews would be face-to-face, with me asking you questions about the writing that you are doing in your classes and outside of class if you do any extra-curricular writing. I would record our voices during the interviews with your permission.

The purpose of the project is to study how students evaluate and think about their own writing and their development and growth as writers. I hope to gather information that will be useful to writing instructors as we learn how to make the most of students’ own abilities to think about their writing and their writing abilities. I also hope that this project will benefit you by giving you opportunity to consider your own writing projects and your own growth as a writer.

All of the information that I would gather would be kept confidential, in a locked cabinet in my campus office, which only I could access. I would not use your name in any publications, such as in my dissertation, without your permission. Whether you decide to participate or not, either way, it will have no impact on your status in the General Studies Writing (GSW) program nor on your status with the university. The decision to participate is entirely up to you.

I would appreciate it if you would look over this consent form that explains the purpose of the study, the benefits of the study, and the conditions of the study, and take a day or so to think about whether you would be interested in participating. If you have questions or concerns, please let me know. But if you could let me know your interest in the next few days, I would be appreciative. Please contact me by email at mschaff@bgsu.edu or by phone at 419-466-9272 by Friday, December 7, 2012. Then, I would just need you to sign the form and return it to me. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.
Interview Script

Thank you for volunteering to be a participant in this study. As you know from the informed consent documents and our previous conversations, I am studying how first-year composition students assess, or evaluate, their own writing. I am going to ask you a series of questions about the writing projects that you are doing currently, how you think you are doing on them, what you think is successful and not successful in your writing on these projects, and what you think about your own writing skills right now and in the future. I will be using the same set of questions for each of our seven (7) interviews. There are no right answers, so don’t hesitate to answer honestly and in your own terms. Please let me know if you do not understand my question, and I will be happy to restate or rephrase it.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?

Is it alright if I record this conversation, just so that I can have an accurate accounting of your answers to compare with my notes? Thank you. Let’s begin.

6. What writing projects are you currently working on in your General Studies Writing (GSW) course?
7. Where in the process of the assignments are you?
8. How do you think the writing project is going?
9. What do you think is successful about the writing project at this point in time?
10. What are you struggling with, or what is not successful about the writing project at this point in time?
11. Do you see a difference in your writing skills or process on this project as compared to your previous writing projects?
12. If so, can you describe the difference for me?
13. Given where you are in the process of your current writing projects, where do you see them going—what do you envision for the project over the next several weeks?
14. What do you hope to achieve with your writing project—how do you see it changing from what it is right now, or what do you want it to be when you are finished with it?
15. What are you learning about your writing skills and your writing projects that is helpful to you?
16. Why do you think these lessons or skills will be helpful to you?
17. What writing projects are you looking forward to next?
18. Why are you looking forward to them?
19. Do you have anything additional that you would like to add that might be helpful to me, to you or to the study?
20. Do you have any questions for me about these questions, the interview, or the next step in the study?

I thank you for your cooperation and participation. I will contact you to schedule your next interview at a place and time that is most convenient for you.
APPENDIX J: HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL OF RESEARCH

DATE: November 20, 2012
TO: Martha Schaffer
FROM: Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board
PROJECT TITLE: [389660-3] First-Year Composition Student Self-Assessment Practices and Potentiality
SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision
ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: November 19, 2012
EXPIRATION DATE: November 5, 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 5 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 November 5, 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.