THE ROLE OF SPACE AND PLACE: A CASE STUDY OF STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN
ONLINE FIRST-YEAR WRITING COURSES (OWFYCS)

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ABSTRACT

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While enrollments in online writing courses (OWCs), especially online first-year writing courses (OFYWCs) continue to grow at public and private non-profit institutions in the U.S., online writing instruction (OWI) scholars argue this change signals a desperate need for additional research on teaching and writing in online learning environments (OLEs), however, OWI research often overlooks student voices making this adaptation particularly challenging for online instructors. This study addresses this challenge for online instructors and gap in OWI research by amplifying the voices of students enrolled in OFYWCs at Bowling Green State University (BGSU) through the collection of survey and interview data. The results of this study will offer insight for online instructors teaching OFYWCs at BGSU by giving voice to students' experiences and challenges and offering insight for potential pedagogical and teacher preparation approaches to OWI.

For LRS & MAS

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GLOSSARY

Bowling Green Perspective (BGP)   Bowling Green State University's general education program, also known as BG Perspective: 21st Century Liberal Studies; prioritizes active learning strategies, formal assessment, and student preparation for upper-level courses

Bowling Green State University

(BGSU)   large, residential public research university located in Bowling Green, Ohio; 17,644 students enrolled

College-Credit Plus (CCP)   Ohio state program that replaced dual enrollment; allows Ohio public school students in grades 7-12 to enroll in public and participating private college courses for free

Conference on College Composition

and Communication (CCCC)   world's largest organization for the research and teaching of composition; special interest groups within the organization create position statements on issues impacting composition studies

course shell   unique series of webpages, typically housed within a learning management system (LMS); instructors and students in individual class sections can access these pages to submit assignments, host discussions, etc.

course site   *see course shell*

eCampus   Bowling Green State University online-only degree program featuring 7-week courses and 6 start dates throughout the year

face-to-face (f2f) course   courses that are hosted exclusively in a physical classroom and often supplemented by but not mediated by an online course shell

first-year writing (FYW)	also known as first-year composition, freshman composition, or freshman writing; general education or core courses required for incoming students typically focused on developing writing skills, rhetorical awareness, and critical thinking
General Studies Writing (GSW)	Bowling Green State University's first-year writing program; enrolls 3,600 students per semester in three courses— GSW 1100, GSW 1110, and GSW1120
hybrid course	also referred to as blended; courses that are hosted both face-to-face in a physical classroom and online through an online learning environment like a course shell; a substantial amount of assignment completed online
learning management system (LMS)	also referred to as course management system (CMS); software application designed to help instructors deliver course information, conduct administrative tasks, and/or facilitate learning; (ex: Canvas, Blackboard, Moodle)
locale	according to Agnew (1987) the setting for social relations
location	a general term to refer to "sense of where" an action happens or actor is located; location can be used to refer more generally to context or positionality; for Agnew (1987), the geographical area that includes locale
online first-year writing course

(OFYWC) | an either hybrid or online-only version of a general education or core writing course for first-year students |
| online learning environment (OLE) | also virtual learning environments (VLEs); platform for facilitating the digital components of a course; (ex: learning management systems; externally hosted course websites |

online writing course (OWC)

an either hybrid or online-only writing course with some, most, or all class instruction facilitated in a learning management system either synchronously or asynchronously

online writing instruction (OWI)

the study and practice of writing pedagogy implemented in both hybrid and online-only courses

online-only course

courses that conduct all or nearly all of instruction online either synchronously or asynchronously; typically use a learning management system course shell; often referred to just as "online courses"

place

a physical structure associated with experiences, emotions, or meaning for individual people or groups; place = (space + experience) x time; (ex: your childhood bedroom)

Quality Matters (QM)

organization that certifies colleges and universities with high quality online courses through faculty peer review; offers training for instructors and course designers

sense of place (SOP)

the "structure of feeling" or emotional influence of locales; encourages identity formation, the development of a specified place's value, attachment people feel for a place

space

abstract, non-specific location or "realm without meaning" (Cresswell, 2004); can become a place through intervention from people (ex: an empty bedroom in a house you do not live in)

Thirdspace   as theorized by Soja (1996), the
                                        interaction between the "real" world
                                        Firstspace and imagined representation of
                                        Secondspace as perceived by people

wireless access point (WAP)   also referred to as access point (AP);
                                        hardware that allows Wi-Fi enabled
                                        devices to connect to a network

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BGP   Bowling Green Perspective

BGSU   Bowling Green State University

CCCC   Conference on College Composition and Communication

CCP   College-Credit Plus

f2f   face-to-face

FYW   first-year writing

GSW   General Studies Writing

LMS   learning management system

OFYWC   online first-year writing course

OLE   online learning environment

OWC   online writing course

OWI   online writing instruction

QM   Quality Matters

SOP   sense of place

WAP   wireless access point

CHAPTER ONE: THEORIZING STUDENT EXPERIENCES OF SPACE AND PLACE IN

ONLINE WRITING INSTRUCTION RESEARCH

Every time a student sits down to write for us, [they have] to *invent the university* for the occasion invent the university, that is, or a branch of it, like history or anthropology or economics or English. The student has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the dis-course of our community. Or perhaps I should say the various discourses of our community, since it is in the nature of a liberal arts education that a student, after the first year or two, must learn to try on a variety of voices and interpretive schemes. (Bartholomae, 1986, p. 4)

Over the course of thirteen annual reports we have seen the number of students taking at least one online course triple with a steep rise and fall in the percent of students studying online at for-profit institutions. Throughout this time we have observed very little change in faculty acceptance of the value and legitimacy of online education…When more than one-quarter of higher education students are taking a course online, distance education is clearly mainstream. (Allen & Seaman, 2016, pp. 3-4)

Composition scholars have long agreed that writing courses—especially first-year writing

(FYW) courses—encourage students to invent. Through their writing courses, students may

invent themselves, their means for expressing identity, and even the position they write in and

from. As Bartholomae (1986) concludes in his landmark essay "Inventing the University,"

"Every time a student sits down to write for us, [they have] to *invent the university*" (p. 4). At

traditionally brick-and-mortar institutions, these students write from the physically grounded

location of the university. These students sit in classrooms and libraries, walk to and from classes

on campus sidewalks, and see and speak with their instructors and classmates in those shared,

public spaces. When students enroll in online rather than face-to-face course sections however,

these spaces evolve to include the digital in addition to the physical. In online courses, students

are no longer grounded in a single, shared location and they do not write from a communal

space. Instead, the students and the course by extension are re-located to a many individual,

private places that are unique to each student. These places, unlike the observable, shared

classroom, are separate from the instructor and often exist beyond what is typically considered the space of the institution.

As a result of these shifts, identifying exactly *where* the online writing course (OWC) and online writing students are can be a complicated process. Among the reasons for this complication is the hybrid nature of the question: students—even individually—are never in just one location. Instead, while students write in online courses they are in both physical and digital spaces. Students might log in to the institutional learning management system (LMS) in a browser window while sitting in a local coffee shop. They might later log in from their living room while looking at Twitter on their phone. Due to the mobile nature of online courses, students can move through the physical world alongside the digital one, inhabiting multiple spaces simultaneously. Fleckenstein (2005) agrees, "Online, students are in at least two places at once: the virtual classroom and their physical site, one that can facilitate or disrupt their virtual classroom interactions." (p. 163). The OWC then is no longer a single location—like a face-to-face course's physical classroom—but instead is the confluence of multiple spaces and places stitched together through students' individual experiences in both physical and digital worlds.

Since it is the confluence of these worlds that shapes students' experiences, it is important that OWI scholars and course designers understand *where* students are when they write in OWCs. As Dobrin (2001) declares, a "basis tenet of writing: writing takes place" (p. 19). This is especially true in OFYWCs where students encounter and invent the university for the first time. According to geographical scholars theorizing space and place, location is both a product and producer of meaning that directly influences the experiences of those occupying that location (Agnew 1987; Cresswell, 2004; Malpras, 1999; Tuan, 1975). This means the physical and digital locations students inhabit directly influence their learning experiences as well as how

they "invent the university." In online courses where learning spaces are often selected by students who must negotiate both physical and digital worlds, this invention is necessarily different than it is for students in face-to-face courses. Researching the locations students inhabit while enrolled in OFYWCs can therefore help course designers, instructors, and administrators better understand how online students go through this process of invention and, as a result, address students' needs based on their individual contexts and experiences.

Presumption of Loss in OWCs

Just as students must invent what it means to write in an OWC, instructors must invent what it means to teach in one. The first time I taught an online first-year writing course (OFYWC) was in Fall 2014. The course was a second semester writing requirement focused on academic research writing and one of only four online sections of the course offered that semester. I had taken several online courses as an undergraduate student in various formats and subject areas, but I had never experienced an online course from the perspective of an instructor. I quickly realized that, despite having taught the same course in a face-to-face setting, I did not know how to—and ultimately could not—translate or recreate the same experiences of those face-to-face sections in an online learning environment (OLE).

My experience is not unique and probably sounds familiar to online writing instructors. Translation and migration of face-to-face writing pedagogies to the OLE are the most common strategies instructors and administrators use when developing OWCs (CCCC OWI Committee for Effective Practices in Online Writing Instruction, 2011, p. 7). Like many online instructors, I realized these methods fell short of achieving effective online instruction but, as of Fall 2014, I did not know what other strategy to try or how to meet my students' needs in an OLE. I fumbled my way through that semester but was dissatisfied with the way I designed and taught the course;

I felt I had failed to challenge my online students in the same way I did my face-to-face ones. Again, this experience is not unique and is still a challenge of OWI many new and experienced instructors must confront.

Many of the challenges I faced and that other online instructors face stem from the physical distance that separates and potentially isolates students from each other and their instructor (Melkun, 2011; Shea, 2011). That distance displaces and disembodies students and instructors while creating the illusion that the learning and writing process happens in a private vacuum. While face-to-face writing courses allow students and instructors to interact in the same physical space and develop a writing community within that shared location, learners in online courses might struggle to form a similar community due to the physical distance that separates them. In fact, students may never even try to since isolation can seem like a necessary quality of the OLE.

For writing instructors who value community and collaboration this can be an unintended and unpleasant side effect of teaching online. Researchers of online learning overwhelmingly argue effective instruction is possible in face-to-face courses or OLEs (Russell, 1999) but this assumption of inferiority persists with some instructors. Online courses are typically perceived by those instructors to have "something missing in terms of course quality and interaction" (Rendahl & Breuch, 2013, p. 298) and might encourage less interactivity than their face-to-face counterparts due to the separation of students and instructors (Blair & Hoy, 2006; Ehmann & Hewett, 2015; Stine, 2010). When instructors try to translate effective teaching practices that encourage collaboration and community building in face-to-face courses they cannot achieve the same outcomes. As a result, some instructors still view online courses as less effective for students' learning than their face-to-face counterparts.

This "presumption of loss" (Blair, 2010) is often blamed on institutional LMSs that rely on required interactions (Blair & Hoy, 2006) which are text-based and believed to be inferior to face-to-face communications (Hewett, 2015, p. 2). Indeed, interactions that rely on a single-mode of communication like text tend to be less interactive and less effective than media-rich environments that encourage multiple modes of interaction between members (Huang, Kahai, & Jestice, 2010; Stewart, 2017). Allen and Seaman (2016) confirm that while the number of academic leaders who believe online instruction is inferior to face-to-face instruction is relatively low (28.6%), most leaders are "far more positive about…blended instruction than they are [about] online education" (p. 5). This response suggests that instructors still believe at least some face-to-face interaction is necessary for successful, high quality instruction even when some or most instruction happens online. Instructors prioritize the physical proximity of students and their ability to interact in a shared place which, as Allen and Seaman's (2016) findings and personal testimonies (Schaberg, 2018) suggest, they do not believe is possible in OLEs. As Ubell (2017) points out, "academic departments at some colleges and universities even strongly discourage young faculty from teaching online" (para. 3) because online instruction, unlike face-to-face, is seen as a distraction that requires less of a commitment to faculty life and does not demonstrate effective teaching skills. These negative perceptions and presumptions of loss are based on the increasing pressure to shift away from an exclusively physical environment to an online one but also the assumption that online instruction is simply not as good as face-to-face.

Although many instructors might perceive online courses as inferior to face-to-face due to the physical distance between them and their students, this presumption does not seem to have had much impact on the prevalence of online instruction. Each year, millions of United States' students self-select online course sections due to the perceived accessibility, mobility, and

flexibility of OLEs (Blair, 2010; Blair & Hoy, 2006; Blythe 2001; Stine, 2010). Students who have already taken online courses continue to enroll in them and many students only take courses online. In fact, approximately half of students taking at least one online course are enrolled in only online courses (Allen & Seaman, 2017, p. 21). As a result of this shift toward an online-only education model where many students never take a face-to-face course, fewer part-time and full-time students (-5.09%) are physically on-campus at both public and private institutions than ever before (Allen & Seaman, 2017, p. 23).

Despite what instructors perceive as a disadvantage to instruction, students want to enroll in course types that privilege flexible and mobile online learning models. What instructors see as weaknesses of the online model, students seem to see as perks. The disconnect between instructor and student perceptions of online learning that has emerged suggests researchers must study how students learn in OLEs and develop theories about how instructors teach, students learn, and communities form in OWI. Though many have already begun this work, I propose to continue this research we must devote attention to students' experiences and concerns in OWCs. This project prioritizes students' experiences and concerns in OWCS and theorizes how applying concepts of location can help OWI scholars and instructors bridge the gap between their perspectives and their students'.

Theorizing Location in OWI

Central to these proposed approaches is attention to students' locations in and beyond the physical space of the university as well as the digital space of the OWC. While composition scholars have long understood students must "invent the university," that process of invention necessarily changes when the university is no longer contained in buildings and classrooms alone but also includes OLEs. Rather than thinking of OLEs as nonspecific "spaces," reconsidering

OLEs as specified "places" (Agnew, 1987; Cresswell, 2004; Tuan, 1975) can help online instructors and administrators better understand how students engage in that process of invention. I theorize, as digital and material places converge, the OWC becomes a kind of Thirdspace (Soja, 1996) that allows instructors and students to renegotiate the structure of their learning environments as well as their relationship to them. Composition and OWI scholars must therefore reconsider how OLEs function in the larger context of the university and how students position themselves in physical locations contained in and beyond campus (Mauk, 2003) and, simultaneously in digital locations (Payne, 2005) facilitated and not-facilitated by the institution.

Studying these places can shape not only scholars' understanding of student experiences in OWCs but can also provide room to theorize about OWCs through an investigation of place. The form and design of OLEs is incredibly significant to how teachers teach and how students learn in OWCs. OWI scholarship often refers to online courses taught in a singular online learning *environment* or series of separate *environments*, however our perspective of that environment is often limited to the immediate surroundings of the institutional LMS. The LMS is often just one piece of this environment and students are actually located in more digital spaces. Online students are uniquely positioned in both physical environments and digital environments simultaneously and often many environments at the same time. By inhabit a multitude of places that comprise the larger learning environment and students curate their experiences of online courses through the new complex OLE they create (Blythe, 2001; Posey & Lyons, 2011; Resta & Laferrière, 2007; Stewart, 2017). For this reason, I propose more attentive theorizing and study of places and the way OWI research locates students in OWCs. Essential to recognizing this new community is admitting that the environment is not shaped by the technology alone but is created

and reinforced by students' perceptions of and engagement with the course and various learning spaces they inhabit.

Although composition scholars have done thoughtful theorizing about the contexts and perspectives students bring with them to the composition classroom and well as the significance of the learning space itself, much of this scholarship relies on or assumes the material and physical nature of a face-to-face course. While OWCs might not be intentionally excluded from this scholarship, there is a great deal we do not yet know about the influence of place on OWI. This lack of knowledge of students' experiences in online courses directly impacts the way course designers and instructors not only plan OWCs but also their ability to facilitate and interact with students through them.

Since Fall 2014, I have taught several more writing courses online, but I still often experience some of the same fumbling as I design and facilitate OWCs in part because of the physical distance between myself and my students. Even though I begin all my online courses, as many online instructors do, by asking students about their experiences with online learning and advice they have for first-time online learners and conclude with a course reflection, I know very little about their individual experiences with OWCs. Unlike in face-to-face sections where students and instructors share a physical space multiple times per week, students in online courses are physically distant from their instructors. As a result, students go mostly unobserved by instructors and their day-to-day experiences navigating and writing for the course go unshared; even if instructors are curious about their students' contexts and locations they might never know this information. This absence of information about online learners is particularly strange when we consider how many college students enroll in online courses each semester in the United States.

The State of Online Learning in the United States

Little over a decade ago, online learning was a relatively new method for instruction being tested with great caution by public and private colleges and universities in the United States. In its nascent days, online learning was reserved for for-profit institutions serving working adult populations. These classes, then typically referred to as "distance courses,"—much like the twentieth century equivalent "correspondence" courses conducted through the mail—were taught with varying levels of attention to design and effectiveness. Distance courses were seen as vehicles for degree completion in technical and professional fields as opposed to the heady academic experience of attending an onsite four-year institution. Much like we might think of the literal information "delivery" of correspondence courses, online courses were considered systems for instructors to transfer and deliver information to students. Now, we can understand this view of online instruction is simplistic and outdated, especially considering how dramatically the landscape of online learning has changed in the last decade.

Allen and Seaman (2016) report that in Fall 2014, when I was teaching my first OFYWC, more than one in four (28.4%) United States' college students—5.8 million in total—were enrolled in online coursework. Of those 5.8 million nearly half—2.85 million students—were registered for online coursework exclusively. Even as overall enrollments at institutions across the country drop, distance enrollments continue to grow significantly with online course enrollment increasing 3.9% in 2014 alone up from a 3.7% increase in 2013 (Allen & Seaman, 2016, p. 4). This increase, as documented by Allen and Seaman's annual reports, marks the thirteenth consecutive year of online enrollment growth and demonstrates the new reality of a hybrid system of higher education.

As of 2017, online course offerings are nearly as widely available as face-to-face options and continue to grow exponentially at public and private nonprofit institutions. While private for-profit institutions like the University of Phoenix, DeVry University, and ITT Technical Institute once cornered the market for online learning options, these schools alone face significantly declining enrollments while for public and private non-profit institutions experience rapid increases in both undergraduate and graduate online enrollments. While from 2012-2015 overall online enrollments grew by 596,699 students, the for-profit sector saw an 18%—191,300 students—decrease in online enrollment (Allen & Seaman, 2017, p. 15). Public institutions have the highest online enrollments according to Allen and Seaman (2016) who report 72.7% of undergraduate students and 38.7% of graduate students are enrolled in online courses (p. 4). In fact, 67% of all online learners in the United States are enrolled at public institutions (Allen & Seaman, 2016, p. 12). This makes public institutions especially susceptible to extreme enrollment shifts based on the availability and perceived quality of their online courses. Private institutions must also focus their attention to online learning though; these institutions also are experiencing a significant growth in online enrollment to the tune of approximately 100,000 new online students per year (Allen & Seaman, 2016, p. 13; 2017, p. 14). Allen and Seaman's (2017) Digital Education Enrollment Report points out that this growth trend for institution types accelerated in 2014-2015 with public institutions grew online enrollment by over 207,000 students (13.4% growth from 2012-2015) and private nonprofits by over 109,000 (40% growth from 2012-2015) (p. 15).

These current enrollment trends suggest the for-profit model of online education is quickly becoming ineffective and students are turning to non-profits. As these institutions hemorrhage students, public and nonprofit models for online learning are needed replace them.

Non-profit institutions are, therefore, tasked with cultivating high-quality, rigorous online programs comparable to well-established face-to-face programs. Designing and facilitating quality online courses is longer a question of if but rather of how. Online instruction's validity and value to twenty-first century education is increasingly difficult to deny in view of current data on its status in the United States. Online education is no longer just a possibility for the future of learning. That future is already here.

Prevalence of online writing instruction (OWI) and online first-year writing courses (OFYWCs).

The impact of online enrollment growth can be felt across disciplines and departments; however, composition scholars are especially attentive to the effect these enrollments have on required first-year writing (FYW) courses and, as a result, online writing pedagogy. OWI research is prompted and reinforced in part by data collected in reports by Babson Survey Research Group (BSRG) like Allen and Seaman's annual reports (2002-2016) and the newly established Digital Education Enrollment Report (2017), but also by the specific growth seen in college-level OWCs. It makes sense that as fully online programs grow, general education offerings like FYW must quickly become more widely available online. Although it is difficult to calculate how many students are enrolled in OWCs specifically, some data collected by OWI scholars suggests these courses are offered in most institutions in the United States and taught by instructors of varying ranks and experience levels (CCCC OWI Committee for Effective Practices in Online Writing Instruction, 2011).

One such data set, the Initial Report of the CCCC Committee for Best Practice In Online Writing Instruction (OWI): "The State-Of-The-Art Of OWI" (2011), reports that among OWCs, 75% of instructors reported teaching first-year writing (FYW) courses (CCCC OWI Committee

for Effective Practices in Online Writing Instruction, p. 73). Of all instructors teaching

blended/hybrid courses, 86% taught FYW courses (p. 96). This suggests that instructors who

teach online—especially, according to the report, those who are full-time tenured or non-tenure

track—may teach some elective and advanced writing courses, but most teach online sections of

first-year courses (p. 15; p. 42). These statistics are reflected in BGSU's OWCs (see Table 1.1).

Of those sections of OWCs offered at BGSU between Fall 2017 and Spring 2018, 77.78% of

them were OFYWCs taught by GSW full- and part-time non-tenure track faculty. In the same

time frame, of those faculty teaching OWCs at BGSU 70.00% taught OFYWCs. These statistics

are representative of the report's findings and demonstrate that BGSU OWCs similarly trend

toward OFYWCs with most online faculty teaching FYW.

Table 1.1.

Number of OFYW and OWCs Taught at BGSU from Fall 2017-Spring 2018

	Online Sections	**Online Instructors**
Fall 2017		
GSW 1110	2 sections	2 instructors
GSW 1120	7 sections	4 instructors
ENG 2000[1]	0 sections	0 instructors
ENG 3880[2]	4 sections	2 instructors
Spring 2018		
GSW 1110	3 sections	2 instructors
GSW 1120	9 sections	5 instructors
ENG 2000	1 sections	1 instructors
ENG 3880	2 sections	2 instructors
Total OWCs	**28 sections**	**10 unique instructors[3]**
	21 OFYWCs	*7 unique instructors*
	7 non-FYW OWCs	*3 unique instructors*
Total (%) OFWYCs	**77.78%** *of OWCs are OFYWCs*	**70.00%** *of instructors teach OFYWCs*

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[1] "Writing about Literature"
[2] "Introductory Technical Writing"
[3] Only one instructor taught an OFYWC and a non-OFYW OWC. The instructor taught online sections of both ENG 3880 and GSW 1120. All other instructors taught either OFYW in the GSW program or taught OWCs in other programs in the English department.

Still, the Committee's "The State-of-the-Art of OWI" report provides only a limited sample of part-time faculty and graduate teaching assistants. It is likewise difficult to determine how many instructors at BGSU have been prepared to teach online and in what capacity without further study. However, scholarship (Bourelle, Bourelle, & Rankins-Robertson, 2015; Grover, Cook, Harris, & DePew, 2016; Hewett & Ehmann, 2004; Hewett & Powers, 2007; Rodrigo & Ramirez, 2016) and preparation programs—like University of Arkansas at Little Rock's Graduate Certificate in Online Writing Instruction, the Global Society of Online Literacy Educators (GSOLE), and the Online Learning Consortium—suggest that instructors at all levels must be prepared to teach writing courses online with growing frequency. Bourelle, et al. (2015) claim, "As online education continues to grow, it becomes imperative that we prepare our future teachers with the skills they need to succeed, and…[introduce] online teaching in a non-threatening way" (p. 97). Selber (2004) argues, "For better or worse, computer environments have become primary spaces where much education happens" (p. 3) but soon, it seems, OLEs will supersede even those spaces.

The need for targeted OWI preparation is undeniably significant as the integral nature of computers in education surpasses what even Selber could have predicted and reflects the significant growth in these courses in the last decade. As the CCCC OWI Committee for Effective Practices in Online Writing Instruction's "A Position Statement of Principles and Example Effective Practices for Online Writing Instruction (OWI)" (2013) points out, the landscape of college composition is hurriedly shifting toward online courses and teaching and learning practices must shift with it. Online course sections, especially sections of general education requirements like FYW, are often developed by departments as attempts to solve staffing problems, broaden their student base, and respond to institutional budget cuts (Bourelle,

Rankins-Robertson, Bourelle, & Roen, 2013). In addition, the rate at which students enroll in these sections suggests they want more online course options starting with general education requirements. Although exclusively face-to-face and hybrid writing sections are still prevalent at most institutions, "online courses increasingly are a primary means of instruction for many first-year composition students" (CCCC OWI Committee for Effective Practices in Online Writing Instruction, 2013, p. 5). Indeed, as Hewett and DePew (2015) rightly declare, echoing Selber's (2004) argument for computer learning environments: "There is no question that OWI will be a part of higher education's future, but…the future is *now* (p. 8).

To address that future, institutions must develop more online course sections in addition to those they already offer face-to-face. Designing and facilitating online courses that meet quality standards and adapt best practices typically falls to instructors whether they have experience teaching or learning online or not. Institutions often offer support to instructors designing these new courses and programs, but receiving course releases or compensation and preparation from trained course designers or experienced teachers is not always a given. Likewise, any preparation instructors receive is typically not content or discipline specific meaning instructors learn a one size fits all style approach to teaching online (Kuriloff, 2001; Payne, 2005). Most instructors inherit the OLEs—most often LMSs—they must teach in and, despite being experts in their course content, are not considered experts in online instruction (CCCC OWI Committee for Effective Practices in Online Writing Instruction, 2011, p. 8). Consequently, many instructors are tasked with adapting face-to-face teaching practices to OLEs without fully understanding what that adaptation might require given the needs of their course, their teaching style, and their students. The process of online course design then quickly becomes

a matter of trial and error wherein they learn as they teach, basing their practice on anecdotal experience and their perceptions of successful online instruction.

Changing demographics and challenges in OWCs.

As student demand for the flexibility of online courses increases, so does the demand for technology incorporation in all FYW courses (Boyd, 2008, p. 225). The CCCC OWI Committee for Effective Practices in Online Writing Instruction's report (2011) defines OWI as, "writing instruction that occurs—at least partially if not fully—in a computer-based, Internet, or intranet instructional setting" (p. 2). Almost all writing courses incorporate some form of online technology and most courses, even those described as face-to-face sections, incorporate enough online activities to be considered hybrid. As FYW instructors incorporate more digital technologies into their pedagogy and make greater use of institutional LMSs and external course sites, all FYW courses become OFYWCs. As Stewart (2017) points out, "it is increasingly unlikely for courses to be taught in a face-to-face classroom void of any technology" (p. 68).

This trend is reflective of the growth of online instruction in higher education overall and what Blair (2010) proclaims is "an era of 24/7 learning" (p. 68). A recent Adobe blog post (2018) called it the "always on" style of instruction because students can always access course materials from wherever they want to. Much in the way that the G.I. Bill changed the make-up of the college student population in the 20th century post-World War II, online education is changing the college student population in the 21st century. Blair (2010) calls this era a continuation of a "customer-service model of higher education" wherein faculty must acknowledge the "need to extend the curriculum through delivery systems that meet the needs of non-traditional learners" who are often considered the "ideal" online learners (p. 67). To respond

to both these new environments for learning and new learners, instructors must adapt their teaching practices and methods for helping students achieve course outcomes.

Though online courses call for new teaching approaches, several obstacles, including the absence of data on student expectations and experiences, have prevented instructors from fully transforming their pedagogical methods. Boyd (2008) observes that although the rise of online education signals a pedagogical shift, "all of this is taking place within an educational system that has not changed its ideological approaches to education" (p. 238). Often, instructors know that they need to make changes to adapt to the new learning environment but are not sure how to do so successfully and are not adequately supported by their institutions. In many cases, the gap between what instructors need to know are what institutions are equipped to offer is significant. While instructors might receive training on specific tools like those within the institutional LMS, they often need guidance and preparation that supports their individual approaches to teaching and content needs. Preparation and online learning research that is discipline-specific can be difficult to find. To help fill this need for writing instructors, OWI research is rapidly gaining traction in the broader discipline of composition studies. OWI researchers have the difficult task of investigating several diverging aspects of online learning at once. Although that research is growing, there is still a great deal we do not know about OWI.

Students' voices are particularly underrepresented in this research. Like instructors, students often receive little preparation or targeted support as online learners. Instructors are largely unaware—unless they ask directly—about students' experiences with and perceptions of online learning, which in first-year and general education courses like FYW can vary greatly. Instructors, therefore, may find it hard to meet students where they are and address their diverse experiences. This project, furthers ongoing OWI work by investigating these students and

amplifying their voices. As a direct response to the gap in OWI scholarship as pointed out by researchers in the field. It is my hope that GSW instructors at BGSU benefit from this insight and, likewise, online writing instructors at other institutions like BGSU are motivated to conduct similar research.

This research has been long called for in OWI scholarship. Due to the significant rise in OWCs and online courses in general at the university level, many OWI scholars have suggested more research into not just effective methods for teaching online but also how online courses impact students enrolled in those courses. Most studies neglect students' perceptions and experiences of OWCs. As Boyd (2008) points out:

> …few studies have looked at online and hybrid first-year composition courses and fewer yet have actually analyzed students' perceptions of these writing courses. Studies undertaken by those in rhetoric and composition typically begin with the teachers' and/or researchers' perceptions; although they might include a student account along the way, the main focus of the articles remains on teachers' evaluation of the success of the courses. While teachers' perceptions are certainly valuable, we must also seriously consider the students' perceptions. (p. 225)

If we want to learn more about the state of OWI and impact OLEs have on composition studies we must, as Boyd (2008) argues, "critically engage students' voices" in our adoption, design, and evaluation of OWCs (p. 242). This engagement begins with thoughtful research that amplifies students' voices as well as with consideration to who those students are and where they are. Consequently, this work requires that we listen to students' voices contextually and critically engage with theoretical frameworks that can help us understand how their experiences are shaped by their relationship to that context.

Applying Theories of Place to OWI Research

One such framework is the application of geographers' study of place to discuss the influence of location on human behavior. In composition studies, location is used to "explore the 'sense of *where*' that structures academic spaces, [and] rhetorical situations" (Clary-Lemon, 2015, p. 103). Issues of "location" are often discussed through terms like "place," "site," "space," and "locale" (Clary-Lemon, 2015, p. 103), but these words are often used indiscriminately or without consideration for theoretical frameworks established by geography scholars like Tuan (1975), Pred (1984), and Agnew (1987) and further developed by Malpras (1999), Stedman (2003), and Cresswell (2004). This imprecise use of terminology makes it difficult to know how any given writer is using and applying "location."

Composition studies work does, however, emphasize the significance of location through methodological frameworks (Kirsch & Ritchie, 1995) and to describe writing-about-writing and location-based pedagogical practices that consider the role spatial context and communities play on students' discourse (Clary-Lemon, 2015, p. 105). Most often "location" is a way to talk about context or positionality—a "sense of where" writing happens. Though composition studies values location-based research, it is at times difficult to understand how location—and its related terms—are used.

Geography scholarship provides a valuable foundation for naming issues of location that can help us contextualize composition studies research as well as clarify our application of location-based terminology. Geographical theorists writing on "location" have long debated and distinguished between distinct kinds of "space" and "place" to better understand people's experiences, cultures, and actions in physical locations. Applying these terms and definitions to composition studies can help us talk and write more directly about locating writing, especially as

that writing transcends physical locations into digital ones. To begin that theoretical work, we

must be more specific in our terminology and conscious of the distinct meanings of those terms.

Simply referring to "location" or to other terms like "space" and "place" as synonymous ignores

the context, history, and experiences of that place. This practice ignores who is in the place and

what happens there. Instead, by applying the terms with distinction, theories of location can offer

an insightful and valuable framework to study composition and especially OWI and OWCs.

Space and place.

The first major distinction we must make in when referring to issues of "location" is

between the terms "space" and "place." As Agnew (1987) articulates, "place is one of those

'contestable concepts'" (p. 27) and is often used synonymously with a wide variety of other

phrases. "Place" is often used when a writer or researcher wants to refer to "location," "point,"

"area," and, of course, "space" in geography though these terms are not always used with

inherent specificity. Cresswell (2004) argues that making these distinctions in terminology is

challenging, at least in part, due to how straightforward and "common-sense" they seem

(p. 1884). This may also be the reason most composition scholars use these terms

interchangeably. What we must do, as Cresswell (2004) suggests, is "get beyond that common-

sense level in order to understand [place] in a more developed way" because "place...is both

simple...and complicated", when used to describe "both geography and everyday life" (p. 1884).

Making these distinctions can also help deepen our conversations in composition by adding

specificity to the terminology we use and the metaphors we create.

To do so, we must better understand how geographers distinguish between "space" and

"place." Tuan (1975) complicates our "common-sense" perceptions of concepts of "space" and

"place" by privileging the role of meaning and experience in his definitions of the terms. Tuan

(1977) argues the difference between "space' and "place" is seen in their significance culturally, socially, and personally. Whereas "space" is abstract and non-specific, "place" is stable and holds meaning. For Tuan (1977), "what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with meaning" (p. 6). Space is, then, a "realm without meaning" (Cresswell, 2004, p. 1892) until our "attachment" to that space results in the creation of a "place." A place's value is assigned as a result of the experiences we have in or even associate with the place over time. We might imagine "place" then as a product of the following equation:

place = (space + experiences) x time

A "space" can become a "place" but that process of becoming requires human intervention over an indeterminant span of time. The "place," therefore, only takes shape when a person or people attach meaning to it.

Another way to think about Tuan's (1975) space-place distinction is through concepts of emotion and feeling. For example, my feelings about the house I live in are the result of my experiences with and in that house over time. I live in a house my grandmother owned since before I was born and until her death in 2016. Before even moving in, I had imbued meaning on the physical structure of the house: the rooms where we gathered for the holidays, the patio where she painted wide landscapes with acrylic on canvas, and the yard where she grew hibiscus blooms the size of dinner plates. After moving in, I experienced the house in a new way: as a homeowner. I continued to build on my earlier associations with the house and form attachment to it as a "place" and, as a result, the house provokes strong emotion from me when I turn soil in the garden or bake bread in the kitchen. If I sell my house, the new owners will have no such associations with the house. Because they have not yet formed attachments to it or experienced

the house over any length of time (barring a walkthrough or open house) they will see the house as a "space" that has potential for meaning but has not yet had meaning inscribed on it. After moving, the house will still be a place for me, but with different meanings as I reflect on it and the memories had there. The new homeowners and I might have distinct associations with the house but also simultaneously view it as a "place." If we use this example as a model, we might understand the process of creating "place" from "space" as the transition of a "house" to a "home."

Cresswell (2004), suggests a similar thought experiment; he asks us to think about the first time we moved into a new space like a college dorm room. We are "confronted with a particular area of floor space and a certain volume of air" as well as objects like "pieces of furniture" that are not unique and "mean nothing to [us] beyond the provision of certain necessities of student life" (Cresswell, 2004, p. 1884-5). A new occupant or homeowner typically adds to a new living space by incorporating objects that already hold meaning like photographs, artwork, and furniture to prompt its transition from "space" to "place"—or "house" to "home." Through this process and the natural progression of time, the space becomes personal and unique. As a result of our individual experiences with a space, assign meaning to it and therefore transform it into a place.

The same concept holds true for not just individual space like houses or dorm rooms, but for larger spaces like neighborhoods, towns, and even countries. Communities might begin as "spaces" for new residents or visitors who have not experienced them in any meaningful way. New neighborhoods without residents develop identity over time and through incoming residents. These residents and travelers experience the space first as a vacant geographical location—little more than coordinates on a map— however, teaching their child to ride a bicycle

on their neighborhood's sidewalk, becoming a regular at a local restaurant, joining a club, or becoming involved in political actions can transform that space to a place. As peoples' experiences deepen their associations with the space prompt this evolution.

We might see college students' experiences of not just their dorm rooms but campuses and the town or city surrounding their institution similarly. Students often arrive at college—in itself an abstract concept—without any associations to that space. The spaces they see are often empty shells where they might imagine someday forming memories—cramming for a final late at night in the library, or having a coffee date at the student union—but they have yet to form them. They may similarly have impressions of what the university will be like based on the stories and experiences of others but have no associations of their own yet. In the times it takes students to move off-campus or earn their degrees they experience the institution as no longer just an open space or "potential place" but as a series of interconnected places that hold meaning and feeling. Pred (1984) argues this is because place is not just a landscape, locale, or setting for experience. It is also "what contributes to history in a specific context through the creation and utilization of a physical setting" (p. 279). Though the campus might have a collective identity it will function uniquely as a "place" in different ways based on the relationships individual students have with it.

Location, locale, and "sense of place."

That relationship that develops as "place" is formed is what Agnew (1987) calls "sense of place" (SOP). For Agnew, "place" is the confluence of "locale"—the setting for social relations—"location"—the geographical area that includes these settings—and "sense of place"—is the "structure of feeling" of these settings (1987, p. 28). If we think back to the example of a "house" versus a "home," the SOP in that scenario would be the feeling we have

when walking through the front door or imagining doing so on our way back from a long trip. SOP is an emotive response to a place's familiarity. SOP, because it relies on people's emotions, can be used to invoke other feelings about a place in people like regionalism or nationalism (Agnew, 1987, p. 28). SOP encourages identity formation and the further development of a place's value. If, for example, we have strong feelings about a place like our home town or alma mater, we likely also identify with that place. People tend to hold certain pride or shape their identities around not just personality traits, but also places that are important to them or previously were important to them. Places that evoke an emotional response have a strong SOP and that SOP can be unique for different people.

The emphasis on emotion in SOP draws attention to the social nature of place. Although SOP must be understood through both the objective and subjective, theorists often overemphasize the social, subjective nature of place at the expense of the objective and physical features of place. Stedman (2003) argues that SOP research is predisposed to favor the social, but the material reality of place—the landscape that is observable to researchers and residents alike—is just as essential to the relationship between people and place and researchers' conceptualization of that relationship. For this reason, to truly understand the meaning inscribed on a place and the process of that inscription, we must look at the physical and observable qualities of a place alongside the social context that place exists in.

Both elements of SOP are essential to place oriented research. This is confirmed by Pred's (1984) attention to the history and context of a physical setting. In this way, as Zia, et al. (2014) explain, "sense of place is both the objective, observable physical place and the subjective relationship to space" (p. 293). Zia, et al. (2014) tie SOP to behavioral concepts of space wherein it "reflects the spatial extent of human activity over time" (p. 293-4). SOP

"reinforces the social-spatial definition of place from inside" (Agnew, 1987, p. 27). SOP is not, then, completely observable, and instead must be understood through interpretation of human experiences in a place paired with the physical landscape of the place itself.

Essential to understanding SOP is the concept of place attachment (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001) which describes the unique bond people form with the place. Stedman (2003) argues that though social structures partially shape this bond, the landscape and other physical qualities of the place also shape it. This attachment is likewise essential to Tuan (1975) and Relph's (1976) early concepts of place which rely on not just attachment but also the greater meaning a place takes on and people's satisfaction with a place. Hay (1998) further develops these criteria by suggesting insiders—people who live or dwell in a place—develop an even deeper "rooted sense of place" that represents the bond residents feel for a place like my attachment to my home verses the SOP a visiting friend or family member might feel for it (p. 5). This is the kind of bond that develops between a family and a neighborhood or even, potentially, a resident college student and a campus.

Place, identity, and meaning.

As concepts of place further develop, researchers have become increasingly interested in how places hold and create meaning. SOP is essential in place making but also can, through the relationship between the social and the spatial, become a way of self-identification for an individual. Place is not just a product of meaning but also a producer (Malpras, 1999). Place is not deterministic; rather the interpretant affects the constitution and influence of a physical environment." (Fleckenstein, 2005, p. 164). As places gain value through our relationships to them, we also gain sense of belonging or identification with those places. If we refer to our college student example, we might think about the way a student becomes a student of not just

any institution but *their* institution. As a student begins to inscribe meaning on the university—through their study sessions in the library and coffee dates at the union—they begin to form emotional attachments to those places. Likewise, the university has an impact on their identity formation; they are a "falcon," "Buckeye," or "Wolverine." They might also strongly identify with specific locations on campus as a resident of a certain dorm or frequenter of a particular dining hall. Their identity is shaped and reshaped based on their experiences with the physical "place" of the university. If we apply Bartholomae to this understanding of place, students invent the university, but they also invent themselves. As Cresswell (2004) articulates, "place is how we make the world meaningful and the way we experience the world" (p. 1894). It is also a way we make ourselves.

Pairing Thirdspace and SOP to understand meaning making and identity formation.

Much of this meaning making happens through the creation of what Soja (1996) calls Thirdspace. People create Thirdspace based on the interaction between Firstspace—what we perceive to be the "real" world that surrounds us—and Secondspace—the way we interpret the world through imagined representations of reality (Soja, 1996, p. 6). Thirdspace—the real-and-imagined—is the confluence or collision of First- and Secondspace. Like Agnew's (1987) conceptualization of SOP, Soja (1996) argues it is important to think "about the meanings and significance of space and those related concepts that compose and comprise the inherent *spatiality of human life*" (p. 1). Space and place are what we use as the raw material to make our lives. Through our experience of spaces, we can make places and those places, as we conceive of them, make us.

Through and understanding of SOP and Thirdspace, we see that meaning making and identity formation are cyclical processes that rely on not just space and place, but also peoples' interpretations of and experiences in those spaces and places. If we agree that we are the products of our experiences and those experiences are based on where we are in the world, it makes sense that a way to better understand not only those experiences but the way they shape our lives is through our location. We can learn a great deal about a group, phenomenon, or experience through the locations of those subjects—the First-, Second-, and Thirdspaces they occupy and their SOP. We can likewise apply these theories to better understand students' experiences in the OWC.

Composition scholars have already begun to apply Thirdspace to understand students' relationships to different learning environments (Grego & Thompson, 2008; Lauer, 2009; Mauk, 2003). Most have applied Thirdspace to physical environments like classrooms or writing studios however, some like Mauk (2003) and Payne (2005) have suggested its applicability to OLEs. Though they apply Thirdspace to different environments, composition scholars argue the concept of Thirdspace and the act of "thirding" require instructors and students to "engage in a restricting" wherein we "identify the dichotomies that we have settled for and seek new combination in response" (Lauer, 2009, p. 70). Applying Thirdspace to composition courses allows us to "come to fully appreciate the 'difference' of others and of the broader social contexts in which we communicate until we come to appreciate and understand the heterogeneity inherent in our own selves" (Lauer, 2009, p. 54). Though Thirdspace already offers insight into the physical classroom and university campus, I argue the theory should also be applied to investigate OWCs and the role of place in OFYWCs.

Mauk (2003) agrees, citing the similar predicament of community college students who, on predominately commuter campuses, experience college differently than students at traditionally residential campuses. These commuter students—with jobs, families, and lives beyond the college campus—do not experience the physical space of the campus in the same way students living on campus do. Instead, these students bring the external places where they complete homework, interact with their colleagues and professors, and study like their cars, workplaces, and homes with them to the physical campus Firstspace. Mauk (2003) pushes instructors and course designers to consider the existence of a real-and-imagined space like Soja's (1996) Thirdspace. That space is no longer fixed but is instead transportable and mutable. This new space is linked to students' "being" and feeling about the real and imagined, rather than their immediate material surroundings. Mauk (2003) argues that, in light of Thirdspace, what we consider "academic space" must move beyond just physical classrooms and campuses into spaces that constitute the lives of students. To better understand how students learn and interact with the institution, we must consider not just their physical location or being on-campus, but also what Fleckenstein (1999) would call their somatic mind, and relationship to places off-campus.

Mauk (2003) also argues this student-created Thirdspace is particularly important for OWI scholarship though he does not investigate OWCs himself. Just like commuter students are influenced by their occupation of places beyond the previously defined academic space, students' occupation of different online places influence their online identities. Likewise, those online identities alter their experiences in and understanding of what constitutes academic space. Payne (2005) agrees, "the evolving *virtual* spatialities...are shaping our students' intellectual lives and reconfiguring the academic landscape" (p. 484). The physical classroom, then, is no

longer the singular center or fixed location for students to situate themselves in a course or at an institution.

Although Mauk (2003) and Payne (2005) both agree that space and place theories can and should be applied to OWI, some might argue that due to their virtual nature, OWCs are inherently not "spaces". Though certainly they are not physical in nature, OWCs are "spaces" and can even become "places." It is important to remember, as Fleckenstein (2005) articulates, "Location—material or virtual—isn't simply a somewhere" (p. 157). The physical world provides a backdrop to creating digital tools and "our positionality within that physical environment—directly impinge on the consciousness or mind developed within that network of socially functional tools" (Fleckenstein, 2005, p. 161). There is great value in applying geographical studies to OLEs. As Fleckenstein (2005) explains:

> By integrating physical reality into a theory of place, we dispel the illusion that technology is merely a tool, a neutral, transparent device with no real world consequences in and of itself. Through this perspective, we recognize ways in which technology is value-laden and integral to online accountability and communal health. (p. 161)

The OLE then is no longer just a tool, but instead becomes a virtual place formed by both the "physical reality of body, room, building, and natural environment, as well as the virtual reality of online chats...and email" (Fleckenstein, 2005, p. 157). OWCs become places for disruption wherein the physical space falls away as the sole "real" space and a Thirdspace emerges for students to learn and write in.

Theories of space and place that examine the relationship between the body, the body's physical location, and the mind are particularly useful for understanding how students work in

OWCs. Students in OWCs complicate these both physical and online space by working both in and beyond the physical Firstspace of the institution and the imagined Secondspace of the OWC. Indeed, students in OWCs live and work in spaces beyond those physical—classrooms, libraries, and student unions—and digital—LMSs, email providers, and library databases—spaces mandated and supported by the institution. Online writing students contribute to the disruption of physical and digital space by working in these distinct places simultaneously. By doing so, students blur the lines between the physical and digital until the two become one greater Thirdspace that may not include on-campus physical space at all.

As the population of online students continues to grow at public and private institutions alike, OWI scholars must investigate the role these students have in developing university culture and expanding the university space to include the Thirdspace of OWCs. This investigation must include not only an analysis of students' experiences in OWCs, but the understanding that OWCs are not synonymous with or limited to OLEs like LMSs. Instead, OWCs are the Thirdspace, created from a variety of spaces—like the institutional LMS, on-campus library, and students' living room—colliding.

If we study OWCs as both material—in the sense that they have specific landscapes, features like menus that give the space shape, and inspire a "sense of place"—and imagined—as they are created and recreated based on that sense of place and context each student brings to the course—a picture of the OWC as Thirdspace can begin to emerge. What makes this analysis of OWCs particularly complex and therefore complicated is the simultaneous physical and digital locatedness they necessitate. Students in OWCs are never only online and they are never only in the LMS. Students are also in dorm rooms, student unions, campus libraries, apartment kitchens, laundromats, bleacher seats at little league games, and in workplace breakrooms. Unlike the

face-to-face classroom, no matter how "web-enhanced" it is, the OWC will always, by its nature, find students in different individual physical places even as they inhabit shared digital ones.

A version of the OWC as Thirdspace is depicted in Figure 1.1. This figure depicts a student in their dorm room accessing BGSU's LMS Canvas to participate in their OWC. In the model, we see the physical space of the dorm room including the walls, floor, window, and door which were built and existed long before the student moved in to their dorm. These elements make up the generic "space" of the room. In addition to the construction of the room itself, there are personal elements that show the "space" has evolved into a "place." There are posters and stickers on the wall and door and décor on the walls. The student's attachment to these elements and the dorm room as "place" is represented by their "sense of place" (SOP) or those feelings the student has about the room. All these physical elements—the walls, window, bed, desk, and posters—make up the Firstspace of the OWC. These elements are all observable elements of reality.
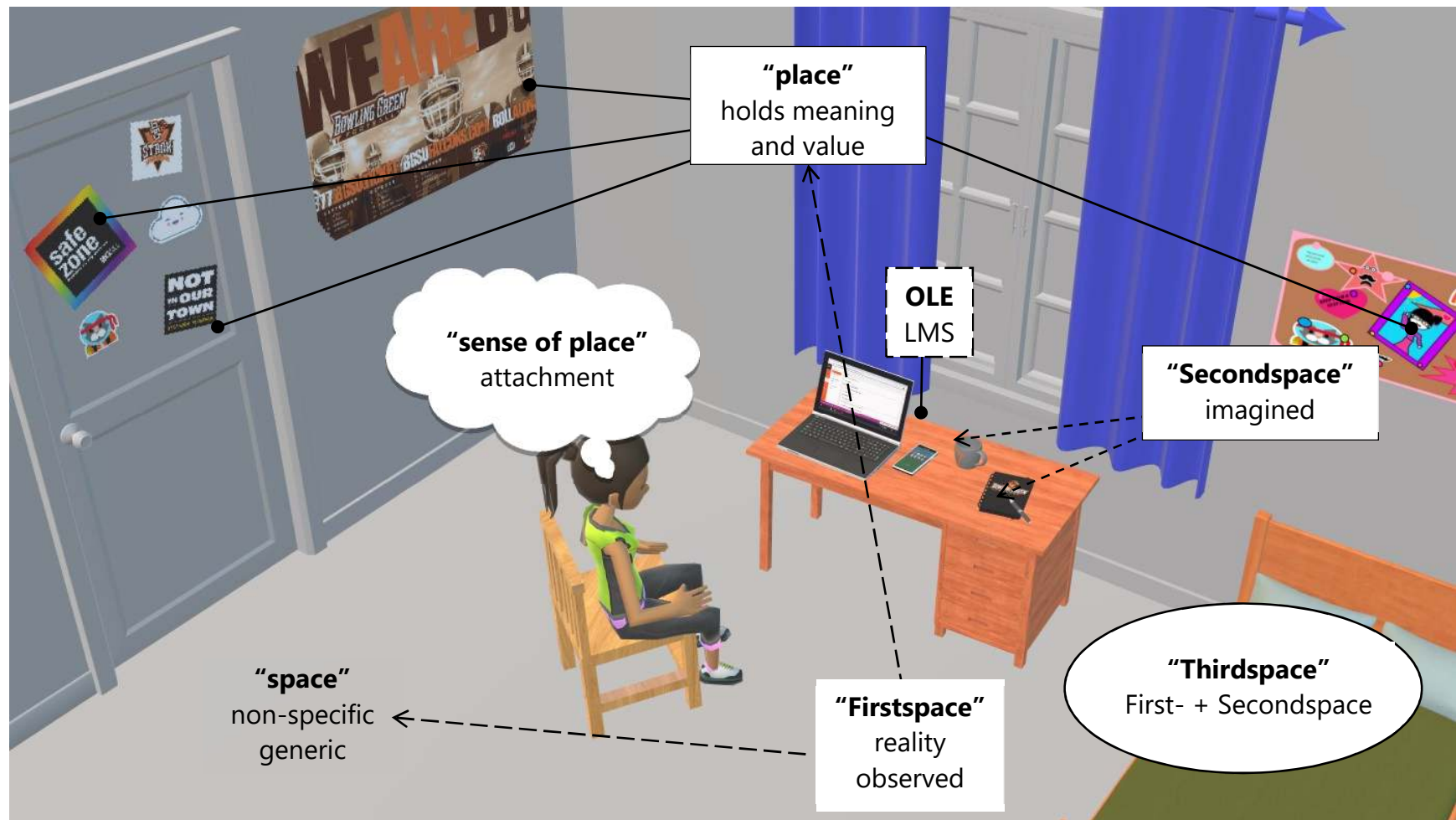
Figure 1.1. Model of the online writing course (OWC) as a Thirdspace that is constituted of the immediate physical reality of Firstspace and the imagined physical and digital Secondspace.

In addition to these physical elements, there are also digital components: the student's laptop and cellphone sit on top of the desk. The laptop is open to the OLE of the LMS Canvas. This is an entry point into the digital space of the OWC and also requires the student to imagine the boundaries of the online course. While we often think of the digital representation of the OWC—the LMS—as the course space, the physical components or "Firstspace" of the student's surroundings are also part of that space. As a result, it is a combination of the Firstspace—the generic "space" and personalized "place" of the room—and Secondspace—the student's imagined "SOP" and the digital OLE—that make up the Thirdspace of the OWC. The result of this confluence of elements is a much more complex view of online courses than we typically consider.

If we agree to apply Thirdspace theory to OWCs, we must adapt that theory with this complexity in mind. Understanding how students position themselves in OWCs—both physically and virtually— is essential to this adaptation. As Fleckenstein (2005) argues:

> Physical place is inextricable from virtual place. Thus, both the topography of cyberspace or the online location and the topography of the user's scene of participation are important for virtual pedagogy...Other students offered similar revelations, pulling their physical environments, including their bodies, into their virtual ones. One sphere inevitably impinges on the other. Whether characterized by social chatter, television programs, and a constant flow of friends entering and leaving the material scene…or by noiseless solitude…physical environment will affect the nature of an individual's engagement with a virtual environment. By factoring in the physical reality of place we can emphasize the critical interface between life onscreen and life offscreen. (pp. 163-164)

If an OFYWC like GSW 1110 enrolls twenty-five students, there will be twenty-five—

twenty-six if we include the instructor—differently constructed OFYWCs because no two people

experience the same physical or "real" Firstspace and, therefore, will also imagine a different

Secondspace. Each student constructs a unique Thirdspace understanding of the online course

which directly impacts how they act and position themselves in not only the course, but the

university as well. If we can agree that places make meaning (Cresswell, 2004, p. 1894) and

"writing takes place" (Dobrin, 2001, p. 19), studying the way place and students' SOP change in

OFYWCs is especially important research for composition studies to take on. This study engages

with questions that reflect that work.

Project Overview

In the following chapters of this project, I prioritize students' voices and experiences of

place in OFYWCs. By relating students' experiences in their words while also analyzing

common threads of that experience, this project offers insight for not only instructors and

administrators in BGSU's GSW program, but the larger discipline of composition studies and

OWI. This analysis can help OWI scholars theorize about the role of place in OWCs, especially

OFYWCs, and offer instructors and administrators practical guidance for growing and

supporting those courses within their writing programs. To theorize about issues of place and

location in OWI and offer suggestions for instructor and administrative action, I investigate the

following questions:

1. What are the motivations of students enrolled in OFYWCs?

2. What are the experiences of students enrolled in OFYWCs?

3. How do students negotiate the various contexts and spaces they inhabit while working

   and writing in OFYWCs?

To further address these questions, I use the following to frame and find themes in students'

experiences. To understand the motivations and experiences of students enrolled in OFYWCs, I

consider:

1.1 Why do students enroll in OFYWCs?

1.2 What expectations do students have for OFYWCs?

2.1 What physical spaces do students inhabit when participating in or completing work for

OFYWCs?

2.2 What digital and online spaces do students inhabit when participating in or completing

work for OFYWCs?

2.3 What are students' perceptions of the space/spaces both physical and digital/online

associated with OFYWCs?

To begin to build institutional knowledge about how students negotiate the various contexts and

spaces they inhabit while working and writing and OFYWCs, I explore:

3.1 How do students define or understand the relationship between the various spaces they

inhabit—the physical, contextual, and digital—in OFYWCs?

3.2 How do students' perceptions of the space/spaces associated with OFYWCs impact their

definition of and relationship to writing?

3.3 How do students' perceptions of the space/spaces associated with OFYWCs impact their

definition of and relationship to the university?

To investigate these questions, I present stories collected from OFYW students in surveys and

interviews. I privilege their voices and share their narratives about OFYWCs at BGSU. By

applying grounded theory through a feminist approach and relying on student voices to drive my

analysis, I offer a sample of students' positionalities and processes of inventing OFYWCs as

"place." These FYW students represent a cohort of college students forming new associations

with and relationships to the university based on not just physical landmarks and places but

online places as well. For these students, the university is not *just* a physical place but also a

digital one. This shift toward learning that is no longer contained by the physical boundaries of

the university is worth investigating further.

       To do so I spotlight students' lived experiences in OFYWCs and explore the application

of Thirdspace theory to OWCs. Research of this kind should be duplicated and expanded on to

not only further develop theories of place in OWCs but to also place student voices at the center

of OWI scholarship and praxis. Prioritizing students' voices will not only allow researchers to

collect important data on OWI but will also help us refocus our efforts to theorizing about and

acting on students' needs for success in OWCs.

       Researchers wanting to duplicate or otherwise build on this study will find a detailed

description of methods and methodologies in Chapter Two: What, How, Why, and Where:

Exploring Context, Methods, and Methodologies. This chapter includes a description of the

research site's writing program as well as its current OFYWC offerings. Using Allen and

Seaman's (2016) online education reports, I situate the research site in the larger context of

online learning in the United States. I articulate my data collection methods as well as a clear

delineation between my research questions and these methods. In addition to describing the

research project design in detail, I also transparently writer about challenges of conducting this

research to help future OWI scholars undertaking student-centered research methods. I discuss

my approach for synthesizing findings from the student surveys and follow-up interviews.

       I present the data collected from this research in Chapter Three: Self-Paced or Self-

Taught: First-Year Writing Students as Independent Learners in the Private Places of the Online

Writing Course (OWC). In this chapter, I report the findings of both data sets—the survey and follow-up interview—including how students' expectations for and perceptions of both writing and the university are affected by the places they inhabit in OFYWCs. Using both data sets, I identify patterns in student responses. These patterns include students' expectations for OFYWCs to be challenging, independent courses where they can and do exclusively write in private places they are already familiar with and comfortable in.

In Chapter Four: Inventing the Online University: Negotiating the Thirdspace(s) of the Online First-Year Writing Courses (OFYWCs) I discuss the results presented in Chapter Three and analyze the way that data responds to this project's research questions. In addition to discussing these research questions, I discuss how these trends in students' responses necessarily shape how we approach teaching OFYWCs whether we accept students' perceptions of the online learning space or decide to challenge them.

I reflect on the results of this case study in Chapter Five: Re-Inventing General Studies Writing at Bowling Green State University: How to Invest in Online Writing Courses While Focusing on Students' Experiences and link those results to existing OWI research and scholarship on space and place. In this chapter, I discuss what instructors and administrators can learn about OFYWCs and, more broadly, OWI based on the approaches students use to understand and negotiate space and context in OWCs. I argue all institutions with OWCs should similarly reflect on their teaching and administrative practices for preparing students and instructors for online courses. I conclude with suggestions for future research in OWI with specific attention to student-centered methods.

Summary

While online enrollments at public and private non-profit institutions continue to rise and student and teacher preparation for online learning stagnate, it is particularly important for instructors, administrators, and OWI scholars to better understand how and why students write in OWCs. This study works to address that need by amplifying students' voices and placing their experiences in individual contexts and spaces that might reach beyond the physical university campus. Specifically, I describe the motivations and experiences of student enrolled in OFYWCs at BGSU and explore how students negotiate the various contexts and spaces they inhabit while working and writing in OFYWCs.

To address these questions, I conducted a mixed-methods case study of OFYWCs at a mid-sized public institution that includes data collection through surveys and interviews, analyzed through textual and context analysis using grounded theory. The results of this study offer insight for online instructors teaching OFYWCs at the research site by giving voice to experiences and challenges that students might not otherwise have occasion to describe. These student stories give insight for individual teachers' pedagogical approaches to OWI at the research site but also have the potential to shape teacher preparation practices. In addition, these experiences offer a case study for other public and private non-profit institutions experiencing growing online enrollments but who are not sure how to address students' needs in these courses. This study offers the research site, but also the wider field of OWI and composition studies suggestions for understanding how and where students locate themselves in OFYWCs.

CHAPTER TWO: WHAT, HOW, WHY, AND WHERE: EXPLORING CONTEXT,

METHODS, AND METHODOLOGIES

[M]ethodology is the big picture of how research is theorized and framed, and it encompasses the
systems that inform particular research practices, which are the research methods
themselves. (VanKooten, 2016, para. 2)

In the introduction to their edited collection *Writing Studies Research in Practice*,

Sheridan and Nickoson (2012) point out that while conversations about methods and

methodologies typically revolve around questions about the "what," "how," and "why" of

research (p.1) the ways we respond to these questions necessarily changes as we consider new

research sites, new modes of inquiry, and new questions about what it is to write, compose, and

teach in the twenty-first century. While for many researchers the answers to these questions may

remain the same or at least similar in the age of digital and online research, as a field

composition studies must acknowledge the increasing importance of context to "how and why

research about writing is currently being conducted" in these spaces (Nickoson & Sheridan,

2012, p. 2). Researchers must thoughtfully and thoroughly articulate not just the questions they

put forth in their scholarship or the approaches they take to respond to them, but their

motivations for exploring those questions in a particular context while using specific methods.

Nickoson and Sheridan (2012) deem these motivations the "*whys* of research" (p. 2) and argue

they are just as important for researchers to articulate as *what* and *how*. I propose, especially in

this study, questions of *where* are just as important.

Researchers must, then, give attention to questions of methods and methodology and not,

as Smagorinsky (2008) discourages, as an "afterthought" (p. 390). Rather, research methods

sections should be what he calls "a driving force" (Smagorinsky, 2008, p. 390) for researchers

and a guide for readers to understand not just the actions of research but the theory guiding it.

For these reasons, this chapter will respond to not just the "what" and "how" of this study but also the "why" and the "where."

First, I briefly summarize the research questions this study addresses. I then provide contextual information about the research site including why the site is ideal for piloting this study. Specifically, I describe Bowling Green State University's (BGSU) history, physical location, online course offerings, and undergraduate student population including the group of FYW students participating in this study. I describe BGSU's General Studies Writing (GSW) program including the online first-year writing courses (OFYWCs) that are the subject of this study. Using Allen and Seaman's (2016) online education reports I situate BGSU in the larger context of online learning in the United States. I also articulate the relationship between my research questions, my methodological approach to research, and the methods I use for data collection and analysis to link the *whats* and *hows* to the *whys* of this research in this specific context.

As I describe the inner workings of this study, I contend it is also important to identify my insider role at the research site. It is important to acknowledge my multifaceted identity as graduate student, instructor, and researcher at BGSU as a motivating factor for my research; these roles also contribute to my insider experience that shapes my research. Through this articulation of my role I intend to practice not self-indulgence—as Hertz (1997) warns against— but self-reflection. Throughout this chapter I make visible not only the methods and methodologies I use as a researcher, but also me *as* researcher. In doing so I hope to demonstrate that, as Kirsch (1992) argues "research methods are never neutral, impartial or disinterested" (p. 257). My role, context, and biases directly impact the way I conduct research, the methods I use to analyze data, and the conclusions derived from that data. In articulating these connections,

I maintain I am not only "less likely to ignore" them (Kirsch, 1992, p. 257) but also more likely to effectively differentiate between my voice and the student voices (Hertz, 1997) I prioritize in this study. Each of these discrete pieces of my research must be contextualized and explored while acknowledging my biases, perspective, and assumptions to maintain that priority. In this way, I hope to not only describe the study in a way that is replicable for future researchers but also to make more transparent the way I as researcher influence, shape, and steer the research.

Summary of the Study

As demonstrated in Chapter One, the rising population of undergraduate students enrolled in online courses warrants not only the legitimizing of online instruction as a field of study but also the need for extensive research on approaches to and impacts of that instruction. We must include and privilege the inclusion of multiple perspectives in this research. While all voices are important—including those belonging to students, instructors, and administrators—they must be heard in conjunction with one another and given equal attention by researchers. To spotlight those voices, I survey and interview online writing students enrolled in OFYWCs at BGSU, a mid-sized public university in northwest Ohio. In this study, I take a qualitative constructivist approach to empirical research, placing students and their voices in context of this institution's history, physical location, and attention to online learning. It is my goal that by viewing online students as not just participating in the online writing course (OWC) but shaping its construction as a space—and ultimately place—I can build on current OWI scholarship and advocate researchers place students at the center of their research alongside instructors.

Though many researchers likely agree with this call, a much of OWI scholarship has focused on instructors' perspectives, for good reason. Until very recently, online instruction was still considered a niche research area. Instructors and administrators were unsure about the

longevity of online instruction and scholars, in many ways, needed to justify OWI and online

pedagogy. OWI scholars were occupied with creating usable, practical guides for instructors who

found themselves assigned to online sections of courses they had taught for years as face-to-face.

These guides focus, necessarily, on the perspective of the instructor and offer advice on course

site design, assignments, and course policy issues (Cook & Grant-Davie, 2013; Harrington,

Rickly, & Day, 2000; Hewett, 2004; Hewett, 2015a; Hewett 2015b; Warnock, 2009). Like many

books written for general online education audiences, they are geared toward "getting through"

online teaching like Boettcher and Conrad's (2016) aptly named *The Online Teaching Survival*

Guide. While useful for surviving online teaching or assuaging the fears of underprepared first-

time instructors, these guides do not always theorize online instruction or expand the scope of

their focus beyond praxis. Despite this targeted scope, this scholarship does serve a secondary

purpose of advocating for stronger teacher preparation. This advocacy was and still is important

since, as McGrath (2008) points out "it behooves departments of English, writing programs, and

other stakeholders to pay attention to what online writing instructors are saying about their

experiences and needs" (para. 4). I agree, instructors' voices should be valued however, not at

the expense of their students' voices. These voices should be placed in conversation with one

another to offer a fuller picture of how both groups view and experience OWI.

 While the focus in OWI scholarship has trended toward instructor perspectives, this is not

to say that there has been a complete lack of research on student perspectives. Certainly,

researchers have surveyed and interviewed online students about their experiences in OWCs for

as long as students have enrolled in those courses. Surveys and interviews of online students are

a commonly used research method in OWI (Anderson, 2006; Goodfellow & Lea, 2005;

Handayani, 2012; Rendahl & Breuch, 2013). While student voices are present and central in this

research however, many studies only present students' responses to actions taken by their

instructors, most often the feedback methods and mediums (e.g. oral versus written feedback)

instructors employ in OWCs (Ice, et al., 2007; McVey, 2008; Moore & Filling, 2012; Tuzi,

2004; Vincelette & Bostic, 2013; Wichadee, 2013). These studies do not investigate or articulate

students' experiences as distinct from instructors' instructional choices and therefore are still

concerned with instructors' praxis rather than the stories of online students.

In this study, I privilege those stories through student surveys and interviews. To better

understand the growing online student population in U.S. colleges, I ask for and listen to the

stories of students enrolled in online courses and privilege their experiences rather than the

pedagogical choices of their instructors. I do so because it is especially important that online

instructors and college administrators have insight into the identities and contexts these students

are learning in, especially since online students are more likely to go unobserved and are less

likely to take part in individualized interactions than face-to-face students (Blair, & Hoy, 2006;

Hewett, 2015a). Berry, Hawisher, and Selfe's (2012) demonstrate how researchers can

understand students' experiences and more importantly privilege the ways those students tell

their stories to push for participant-centered research. This study is itself a form of advocacy in

which I argue we must hear these experiences directly from students and relate those experiences

using students' voices even when seeking out those voices is difficult due to physical distance,

limited contact, or having to use online-only communication methods.

I also argue that to better understand students' learning contexts, we must learn more

about the spaces they inhabit, both physical and digital, while learning online. Students, not

instructors, choose these spaces and this means that their voices, rather than instructors', should

be privileged. As a result, in studies like this one where the goal is to learn more about students'

contexts, we must place students at the center of our research questions. In this study, to learn

more about students' experiences learning and writing in OFYWCs I pose the following broad,

primary research questions:

1. What are the motivations of students enrolled in OFYWCs?

2. What are the experiences of students enrolled in OFYWCs?

3. How do students negotiate the various contexts and spaces they inhabit while working

    and writing in OFYWCs?

I am particularly concerned with students' motivations for enrolling in online courses, especially

when they have the option to enroll in a face-to-face section—as is the case for residential

students and many commuter students. As I address these questions I am concerned with

students' perspectives rather than their instructors' pedagogical choices. To respond to these

three primary research questions, I use the following secondary questions to frame and explore

themes in OFYWC students' experiences:

2.4 What physical spaces do students inhabit when participating in or completing work for

    OFYWCs?

2.5 What digital and online spaces do students inhabit when participating in or completing

    work for OFYWCs?

2.6 What are students' perceptions of the space/spaces both physical and digital/online

    associated with OFYWCs?

To begin to build institutional knowledge about how students negotiate the various contexts and

spaces they inhabit while working and writing and OFYWCs, I explore:

3.1 How do students define or understand the relationship between the various spaces they

    inhabit—the physical, contextual, and digital—in OFYWCs?

3.2 How do students' perceptions of the space/spaces associated with OFYWCs impact their

definition of and relationship to writing?

3.3 How do students' perceptions of the space/spaces associated with OFYWCs impact their

definition of and relationship to the university?

Although these research questions refer to OFYWCs generally, the data collected in this

study is specific to the context of BGSU. This project, by its design as a case study, can only

present information about OFYW students at the research site however, researchers, instructors,

and administrators can learn a great deal about how students react to and reinvent a specific

context in an online learning environment (OLE). Studying a single institution allows me to

describe the site in greater detail and with more attention to how online students reinterpret this

institution's history and role as a space and place.

Research Site: Bowling Green State University

The State of Ohio founded what was then "Bowling Green State Normal College" in

1910 to educate future schoolteachers. It was one of many so-called normal schools opened

during the Progressive era when many teachers did not yet have advanced training or

professional degrees in education. The school was founded alongside another village normal

college, now Kent State University, as part of the Lowry Normal School Bill[4] which aimed to

further the successful work of southern Ohio schools offering teacher training courses—Ohio

University in Athens (1902), Miami University in Oxford (1902), and Ohio State University in

Columbus (1907)—in the northern half of the state. When classes began in 1914, BGSU enrolled

304 students who were taught by 21 faculty. Over the century that followed, the school became a

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[4] Bowling Green and Kent were selected by committee out of a list of multiple northern Ohio towns. Napoleon—John Lowry's hometown—was almost selected but ruled out because it was home to multiple saloons whereas Bowling Green was, at the time, a dry town. Those committee members would likely be shocked at the state of Bowling Green's downtown bar scene in 2018.

college (1929) and then university (1935) as it started to offer degrees in the Colleges of

Education (1929), Liberal Arts (1929), Business (1935), Health and Human Services (1973),

Musical Arts (1975), and Technology (1985).

Since public universities are the institutions with the fastest growing online enrollment,

BGSU is an ideal research site to pilot this kind of study. As of Fall 2017, BGSU enrolls over

19,000 students including 2,000 students at the satellite Firelands campus in Huron, Ohio and

employs over 800 full-time faculty members including 50 at Firelands. While it is still well-

known in northwest Ohio for its College of Education, the university now offers over 200

undergraduate degree programs in eight colleges, fifty-four master's degree programs, and

seventeen doctoral degrees. Like many U.S. universities, BGSU also offers multiple online-only

degree programs and certificates including eight online master's degrees in Education, and

blended programs including a specialization in English Teaching and specialization in

Professional Writing and Rhetoric through their eCampus[56]. Many courses offered through

eCampus are accelerated in 8-week sessions and are advertised as time savers that allow students

to "focus your energy and studies" as well as "maximize your educational experience"

("eCampus," n.d.). Online students can apply to programs, meet with advisors, and enroll

without stepping foot on campus, which is a very different experience than that of young

prospective teachers from Ohio, Michigan, and New York in 1914 who would have left their

small villages and towns to pursue higher level degrees at BGSU.

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[5] eCampus started offering programs through BGSU in 2015 to "provide the courses and flexibility working adults require" ("Board Of Trustees Approves," 2015). Not all online programs or courses offered at BGSU are eCampus programs. eCampus offers programs designed specifically for adult, online learners and are 100% online. Other services like advising are offered online for eCampus students.
[6] Students can even earn a certificate in K-12 Online Teaching and Learning.

Though the university still attracts many residential students from these surrounding states, approximately 17% of BGSU undergraduates are enrolled in distance education courses compared to the national average of 14% (Allen & Seaman, 2016, p. 10). However, while nationally students enrolled in exclusively online courses make up 12.5% of all students (Allen & Seaman, 2016, p. 10), these students make up only 4% of all undergraduates at BGSU (*Bowling Green State University-Main Campus*, Enrollment section, Undergraduate Distance Education Status chart). Still, BGSU does host a wide variety of online courses as well as entirely online degree and certificate programs through eCampus. Most eCampus programs are designed for graduate students which, as Allen and Seaman (2016) point out, is typical for universities trying to start or expand their online programs because of the programs' shorter lengths and the resulting cost-effectiveness of converting or developing fewer courses in the OLE (p. 17). Overall, BGSU's online offerings and enrollment data demonstrate it is representative of the average public institution that is in the process of growing their online student population and is on track with national averages for online education. This makes it a representational research site that might inform or reflect online writing instructors' work at institutions like it.

Surroundings and physical location.

Though BGSU is representative of national averages for online education, it is important to understand the physical and material conditions unique to the institution. This is especially important since this study is concerned with how students interact with and perceive space. BGSU, like the students it enrolls is shaped by the history of its founding and the story of the space it currently occupies. These elements inform my analysis of the university's online courses and students' experiences in those courses. BGSU's history as a residential campus that focused

so much of its early years on growing the physical campus space makes its evolution into online

education particularly interesting.

In 1910, 82.5 acres including the city park were allotted for BGSU's campus. Although

funds were appropriated by the General Assembly of Ohio in 1911 and the school's first students

were admitted in 1914, it was not until 1915 that BGSU had its first two physical buildings to

host administrative services and classes—University Hall—and house female students—

Williams Hall ("Williams Hall," 2015). The first men's dormitory—Kohl Hall—would not be

completed until 1939[7] ("Kohl Hall," 2015). In the century since that allotment the campus has

grown to 1,338 acres including over thirty academic and administrative buildings as well as

athletic arenas, medical facilities, and performing arts halls.[8] Perhaps most notably, a small,

fenced cemetery sits on the north side of campus surrounded by multiple commuter student

parking lots.[9]

The campus's main entrance on Wooster Street is easily accessible from I-75 exit 181

and is situated in the middle of farmland and a town of just 31,588 residents. Surrounded by

many smaller towns like Pemberville, Rudolph, Portage, and Tontogany, Bowling Green is,

because of the university's presence, a mini-hub for restaurants, downtown shopping, and local

venues for musical performances. Due to the rural nature of the town and lack of mass

transportation options, many BG students drive (57%) or ride the university operated on- and

off-campus shuttle service. There are several commuter and residential student parking lots

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[7] When Kohl Hall opened in 1939 it had a potential capacity of 162 men. Double rooms on the first floor were available for $1.50 per week or about $24 per semester. Comparatively, as of 2018 students paid approximately $179 per week or $2,8565 per semester.
[8] An interactive map of campus can be found at http://map.bgsu.edu/.
[9] Although many visitors might find its presence strange, Oak Grove Cemetery sold its first plot in 1873, four decades before BGSU admitted its first students. It is the only cemetery within Bowling Green city limits and is open to city residents and non-residents alike.

distributed around campus to accommodate the high number of students that drive to campus each day or keep a car at the university during the academic year.

Though many departments on campus have dedicated buildings like the Math Science building, the GSW program does not. The GSW program administrative office and instructors' offices are in East Hall, the English department building, however GSW courses are taught across campus. Like many first-year writing and English departments at U.S. institutions, this means face-to-face students experience GSW and, perhaps their first foray into college-level writing in multiple physical contexts. Students may take a fall section of GSW 1110 in a computer lab in the basement of the Moore Musical Arts Center and then take a spring section of GSW 1120 in a small classroom on the second floor of the Education building[10]. Likewise, instructors may teach in different classrooms in multiple buildings each semester.

Students on BGSU main campus.

BGSU's residency requirement ensures that all students live on campus for their first two years of study unless they are commuting under 50 miles from a guardian's house or meet specific lifestyle requirements (e.g. marriage; custodial guardian of a child; over 20 years of age) to live off campus. Six thousand of BGSU's 17,644 students live in on-campus residences. Of BGSU's 15,000 undergraduates 44% live in college-owned or affiliated housing—78% of which live in dorms and 7% in sorority or fraternity housing— and pay, on average, approximately $9,000 for room and board per year. This fee is in addition to either in-state ($11,057) or out-of-state ($18,593) tuition fees and might be significantly higher for students living in Greek housing or upscale university-owned apartment complexes.

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[10] Some sections are even offered in dormitory buildings as part of BGSU's Learning Communities program for students who share a major, program, or interest.

Internet access and LMS-use at BGSU.

Since so many students are residential or commute to the physical campus for class, internet access is a university priority. Historically, internet access has been a focus for the university. Residence halls were first wired for Ethernet access in 1997 before most of their current residents were born. The first wireless access points (WAPs) were added in 2002. Now, BGSU's campus hosts 2,794 total (WAPs) including many in residence hall rooms and outdoor areas like the student union oval making it much easier for students to access the internet on laptops, smartphones, and other mobile devices no matter where they are on campus.

After using Blackboard for many years, BGSU adopted the LMS Canvas by Instructure in December 2013. All BGSU courses have a Canvas shell automatically generated and supported by Information Technology Services. Instructors are required to use this course shell however, instructors may choose to incorporate external tools to facilitate their online course sections. Instructors who are inexperienced with Canvas or online instruction can enroll in multiple professional development workshops through BGSU's Center for Faculty Excellence (CFE) including "Canvas 101," "Advanced Topics in Canvas," and "An Introduction to Online Course Design & Teaching."[11] Instructors who want to learn more about online teaching practices can also enroll in professional development workshops offered in connection to Quality Matters (QM). QM, "a faculty-centered, peer review process," is likewise partnered with hundreds of institutions that want to improve online course design and facilitation. Along with 35 institutions in total, BGSU is part of the Ohio Consortium for QM and is a peer reviewer training site. While online learning grows at BGSU, more professional development opportunities continue to be developed for faculty.

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[11] In addition to these offered trainings, BGSU also offers targeted support for faculty and students as well as a Faculty Resource Site ("Faculty Resource Site").

GSW program.

GSW is BGSU's FYW program and is the largest program at the university. Although it served as a stand-alone program for many years, in Fall 2017 GSW reintegrated as part of the English department. Because of this move and administrative changes, the FYW curriculum has changed significantly. These changes mean the program is in a period of flux which I argue makes a study like this one even more important.

As the program continues to change and evolve it is important that GSW instructors understand how their students and their learning methods are also evolving. On a national level, online education research is significant due to skyrocketing enrollments but on a local level this study is particularly important for a program in the midst of redefining its identity and goals. By better understanding current experiences of GSW students in OFYWCs at BGSU program administrators and faculty can approach online instruction with a more nuanced perspective as well as the tools needed to adapt to an evolving program and changing learning environment.

The GSW program aims to "prepare first-year students for the writing opportunities they will encounter throughout their academic careers, in personal, professional, and civic communities, and in the workplace" ("About GSW," 2017). To help students meet these goals, GSW offers three courses: GSW 1100 Intensive Introduction to Academic Writing (5 credit hours), GSW 1110 Introduction to Academic Writing (3 credit hours), and GSW 1120 Academic Writing (3 credit hours). These courses serve 3,600 students per semester and are taught by full-time non-tenure track faculty, contingent faculty, and graduate teaching assistants in literature, creative writing, and rhetoric and writing programs. Rather than placing students in one of these courses based on ACT or SAT scores, before enrolling—usually over the summer before their first semester—students write a placement essay through an online interface that is

then read and assessed GSW instructors (typically graduate teaching associates who earn a

summer stipend for this work). Based on the readers' assessments, students are placed in one of

the three courses with most students placed in GSW 1110.

Each GSW course is designed to meet students at their current writing level. GSW 1100

is a pass or no-pass five credit hour course designed for students who would benefit from

"intensive practice with rhetorical moves and processes" ("About GSW," 2017, par. 4).

GSW 1110 is also a pass or no-pass course that is "less intensive" than GSW 1100 "for students

who generally understand processes but need more practice in effectively constructing projects"

("About GSW," 2017, par. 5). If students are placed in either GSW 1100 or 1110, they must pass

that course before enrolling in GSW 1120. As the final course in the sequence, GSW 1120

challenges students to "demonstrate proficiency in several types of academic writing" ("About

GSW," 2017, par. 6) and instructors use an ABC/No Credit grading scale rather than a Pass/No

Pass scale to assess students. While some students are placed in GSW 1120 without first taking

GSW 1100 or 1110, most students place in one of these prerequisite courses and take GSW 1120

as second semester first-year students (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1.

GSW Course Summaries

	Credit Hours	**Course Description**	**Placement**	**Class Enrollment**
GSW 1100	5	Basic expository writing; emphasis on organizing and developing essays of at least 800 words for college-educated audiences. Additional emphasis on development of skills in sentence structure, usage, and mechanics.	Placement essay	20 students
GSW 1110	3	Basic expository writing; emphasis on organizing and developing coherent essays of at least 800 words for college-educated audiences.	Placement essay OR no-credit grade in GSW 1100	25 students
GSW 1120	3	Expository writing including research paper; emphasis on analytical writing based on critical reading.	Placement essay OR pass-grade in GSW 1100 or 1110	25 students

Although the way individual GSW instructors meet these objectives may vary by course

section, there are several course requirements shared by all course sections regardless of

instructor or learning environment. GSW courses require students to complete at least 20 pages

of polished or revised writing which are then placed in an end-of-course eportfolio[12]. Students

often write projects that analyze and synthesize arguments made by secondary sources and form

arguments of their own in research projects. As part of their eportfolios and to meet BGSU's

general education program—BG Perspective (BGP)—assessment requirements, GSW 1110 and

1120 students write a reflective introduction to these writing projects. GSW instructors can grade

individual projects based on their own rubrics or heuristics, but must provide assessment data to

BGP using the corresponding rubric (see Appendix B for BGP rubrics).

In addition to face-to-face sections of GSW courses, BGSU offers OFYWCs as well.

BGSU's OFYWC offerings are aligned with their overall online enrollment rates. Of the BGSU

FYW courses that are offered in both face-to-face and online formats, 10.7% are online. On

average, 5.6% of students at BGSU who enroll in GSW 1110 or GSW 1120 take those courses

online (GSW 1100 is not currently offered online). Both courses, taught either face-to-face or

online, have a universal course enrollment cap of twenty-five students and use the same course

objectives and requirements. Though BGSU does offer what they call "web-centric" or hybrid

course formats where learning is split between online and face-to-face environments, most GSW

courses are offered as either face-to-face or online-only.

The number of online GSW sections BGSU offers grew from five in Fall 2015 to nine in

Fall 2017 suggesting a small but noticeable increase in the number of FYW students learning

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[12] This requirement reflects the State of Ohio Department of Higher Education's Ohio Transfer Module (OTM) Guidelines and Learning Outcomes for the First and Second Writing Course. These outcomes require students to have written "a variety of texts" and have "opportunities for response and revision" totaling at least "5000 total words" (*Ohio Transfer Module*, 2017).

online (see Table 2.2). Likewise, the number of students enrolled in these courses increased from

85 students in Fall 2015 to 222 students in Spring 2018 (see Figure 2.1). The high percentage of

students enrolled in BGSU's OFYWCs suggests that these courses are in demand and worthy of

research. This data also suggests that a study of BGSU's online writing students may offer data

relevant to writing programs at other mid-sized public institutions who are also experiencing

online enrollment growth. Still, it is important to note that, as this study prioritizes and

investigates the role of students' unique contexts and environments, the experiences and

perspectives of online students will change based on institution and location. Rather than give

universal data on all students in OFYWCs, this study aims to give a case study of how students

who enroll in OFYWCs at BGSU.

Table 2.2.

Face-To-Face and Online Courses Offered by Semester

Course and Semester	Face-to-Face	Online
GSW 1100		
Fall 2017	11 sections 4 instructors	N/A
Spring 2018	2 sections 2 instructors	N/A
Total	**13 sections**	**N/A**
GSW 1110		
Fall 2017	76 sections 51 instructors	2 sections 2 instructors
Spring 2018	9 sections 4 instructors	3 sections 2 instructors
Total	**85 sections**	**5 sections**
GSW 1120		
Fall 2017	24 sections 9 instructors	7 sections 4 instructors
Spring 2018	87 sections 50 instructors	9 sections 5 instructors
Total	**111 sections**	**16 sections**
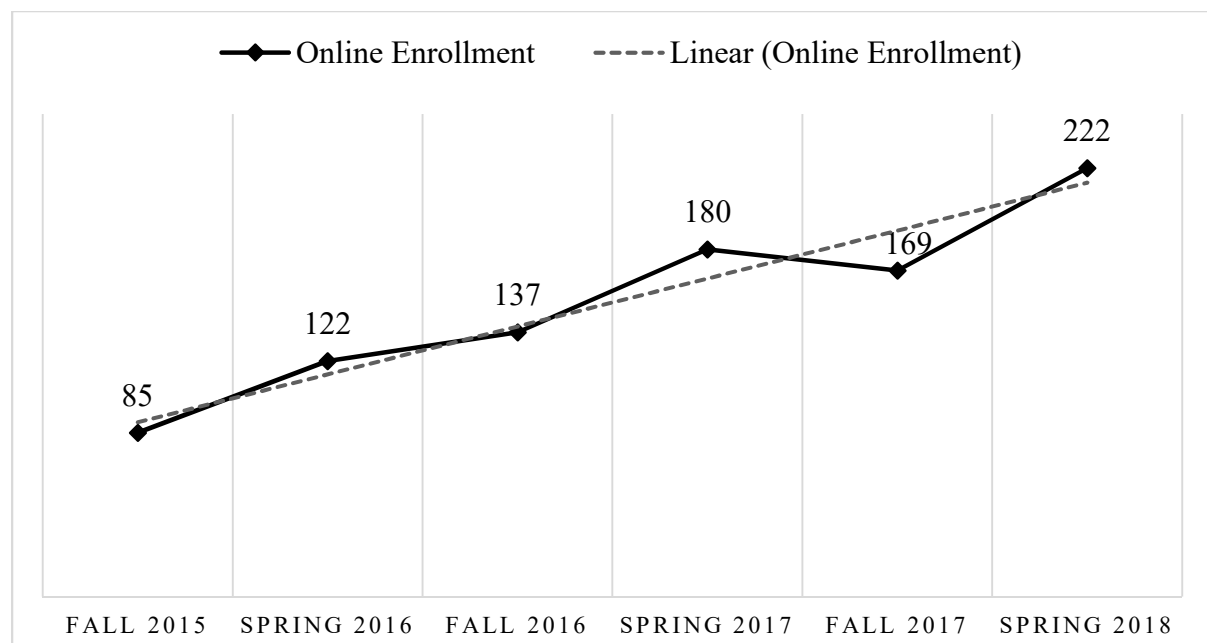
Figure 2.1. Online GSW Enrollment Fall 2015-Spring 2018.

Table 2.3.

Student Enrollment in GSW sections at BGSU Fall 2015-Spring 2018

Course and Semester	Total Enrolled	Online Students (% of all)	Online CCP Students (% of online)
2015-2016			
Fall 2015	2,218	85 (3.8%)	11 (12.9%)
Spring 2016	2,663	122 (4.5%)	24 (19.6%)
2016-2017			
Fall 2016	2,683	137 (5.1%)	44 (32.1%)
Spring 2017	2,587	180 (7.0%)	34 (18.8%)
2017-2018			
Fall 2017	2,275	169 (7.4%)	49 (29.0%)
Spring 2018	2,460	222 (9.0%)	23 (10.4%)
Total	14,886	915 (6.1%)	185 (20.2%)
Average	2,481	153 (6.2%)	31 (20.3 %)

It is also worth noting that a significant percentage (AVG 20.3%) of the students enrolled in online sections of GSW at BGSU are College-Credit Plus (CCP) students. Through the CCP program, high school students can earn dual-credit for college courses. In addition to sections taught face-to-face on-campus at BGSU's Main Campus, Firelands Campus in Huron, Ohio and at area high schools, CCP students often enroll in online sections of college courses to avoid schedule conflicts with their high school courses and long commute times. Since this study focuses on students over the age of 18, many CCP students are excluded from the data collected. During the data collection period from Fall 2017-Spring 2018, 72 students in online GSW courses (18.4%) were CCP students. It is important to consider how these students might offer a unique perspective or further complicate our understandings of space in the OFYWC. Their voices would be valuable to include in future research on both OWI overall as well as CCP students' experiences specifically.

Methodology

As Harding (1987) asserts, a research methodology is first and foremost the "theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed" (p. 2). I adopt, in this research, a methodology that is "feminist informed" (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 41) and grounded in practices of self-reflexivity and questioning (Schell & Rawson, 2010, p. 4). I see this interpretation of feminist research as an expansion and reconstitution of a broader phenomenological approach that not only recognizes reality as socially constructed (Bogden & Biklen, 2007, p. 26) but also as influenced by issues of gender, race, class, and place (Royster & Kirsch, 2012). As a result, I believe researchers do not create knowledge alone but interpret data to uncover existing phenomena. For this reason, in this project I focus on qualitative data collection and analyze that data using what Strauss and Corbin (1998) call the "telescope" (p.1) of grounded theory so I can "start" with data (Charmaz, 2010, p. 3) and do my best to understand it (p. 25).

I employ qualitative methods because I hold that knowledge exists through symbolic interaction. Objects, people, situations, and events do not and cannot have inherent meaning much in the way that spaces cannot hold meaning on their own. Instead, human experiences mediated by the process of interpretation grant these things meaning. Bogden and Biklen (2007) argue "People act…as interpreters…whose behavior can only be understood by having the researcher enter into the defining process through [qualitative] methods" (p. 27). Researchers must approach their work and subjects of study expecting the possibility of multiple interpretations of reality or a given experience that challenge their assumptions. This approach requires us to critically reflect on our subjectivity (Bogden & Biklen, 2007, p. 38) and interrogate how our presence manifests itself in the data analysis and research texts (p. 202). As Strauss and Corbin (1998) argue, analysis is a result of relationship between the researcher and data collected

(p. 13). After all, "neither observer nor observed come to a scene untouched by the world" (Charmaz, 2010, p. 15).

This self-reflexivity and questioning is likewise a key component of feminist methodology which also inspires this work. I define this work as "feminist informed" (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 41) because though my methodological approach aligns with feminist researchers, this study is not directly engaged with issues of gender. Still, I argue this study is concerned with imagining, connecting with, and opening a space for those I study (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 22) and therefore employs "strategic contemplation." Likewise, this study is particularly involved in analyzing "how social, historical, and cultural factors shape the research site as well as participants' goals values, and experiences" (Kirsch, 1999, pp. 4-5).

This analysis aligns with Ritchie and Ronald's (2001) argument that feminist rhetorics explore our "relationship not only to [our] own physical embodiment but also [our] integral connection to the wider bodies and spaces of the physical world" (p. xxvi). In other words, where researchers and participants locate their bodies and their relationships to the spaces and places they reside in are concerns of feminist methodological work. So too are the social institutions that create, define, or manifest in those places (Schell & Rawson, 2010, p. 8). In this project these concerns appear in my interrogation of students' locatedness in physical and digital places that are sponsored by the university or that exist beyond its institutional boundaries. In this way the boundaries of the research site become complicated and muddled, and relating and reflecting on the social, historical, and cultural factors that shape it is even more important.

Though this attention to situation, location, and context is well aligned with feminist rhetorics, my study is not inherently gender focused. I am concerned with how factors like gender, class, race, and especially place impact students' experiences in OFYWCs however, I am

not investigating the experiences of women specifically or comparing students' experiences based on gender, race, or class. Still, I argue this work is feminist at its core. Feminist research is a field of inquiry in "constant motion" (Schell & Rawson, 2010, p. 7) and need not always be concerned exclusively with issues of gender. Feminist work has moved beyond binary categories of gender (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 44) and its "possible for researchers to pursue feminist methodologies without studying gender primarily" (McKee & Porter, 2010, p. 154). Researchers should be attuned to power dynamics and the constant influence of these identities on the human experiences of their participants.

Therefore, in this work, I make a case for "what counts as feminist rhetorics" (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 35). In OWI research and this study specifically, I argue it is necessary for researchers to acknowledge and reflect on their subjectivity, where participants fit in dynamics of power, and the social, historical, and cultural factors shaping the research site. Researchers must also prioritize participants' voices in the way they analyze and represent data. As Royster and Kirsch (2012) acknowledge:

> [W]omen scholars have insisted, time and again, that participants' voices need to be not only included but also amplified and represented respectfully. In other words, feminist scholars have made the case for designing research that can enrich the lives of those whom they study, whether the rhetorical agents are women, students, historical figures, Internet users, or other groups. (p. 34)

They point to Brandt's (2001) *Literacy in American Lives* as work that—as this project aims to— "pushes provocatively the envelope of what happens to our understanding of literacy when multiple factors—including gender, class, race, place, and the like—converge" (p. 54). This

study likewise acknowledges the significance of such a convergence and works to discuss that phenomena accurately and respectfully.

To adequately analyze this convergence while prioritizing the voices of those I am studying, I use a constant comparative approach to grounded theory. This application calls for analysis in each stage of data collection and theory development through data coding and memo writing. Applying this reflexive approach to grounded theory still holds data as the foundation for analysis and allows researchers to create codes, adapt protocols, and collect supplementary data based on data they aggregate. The process of coding data allows us to build rather than test theories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 13). This use of grounded theory is both systematic and flexible, and encourages researchers to let data generate the concepts we construct during research.

I employ grounded theory in this project because it relies on reflexivity and is otherwise strongly aligned with the goals of feminist research. As Charmaz (2010) defines, grounded theory is built on the awareness that researchers must develop theories rather than deduce objective truth (p. 4) because "neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We construct our grounded theories through our past and present" (p. 10). Just as Royster and Kirsch (2012) point out our assumptions can be challenged by the data we collect and the subjects we study, grounded theory calls for us to "let the world appear anew through [our] data" (Charmaz, 2010, p. 14). As researchers, we bring our interpretations and subjectivity to the data.

Methods for Data Collection and Analysis

Although the results of this case study may not be representative of all OFYWCs, OWI scholars encourage case studies for OWI research due to the rich data and detailed insights that

can emerge from looking at one course, program, or institution exclusively. Rendahl and Breuch (2013) point out case studies allow researchers to employ data sets to form student profiles that "combine data from multiple sources for a more complete picture of students' experiences of learning to write in an online environment" (p. 313). Rather than collect one large data set to make claims about OWI overall, Rendahl and Breuch (2013) recommend OWI researchers collect multiple forms of data because "studying parts of an online class may not give us the full picture…and may even lead us to inaccurate conclusions about the effects or effectiveness of online writing courses" (p. 313). Instead, collecting multiple forms of data can allow us to see OWI—and even a course, program, or institutions—from a variety of perspectives and through distinct lenses. While wider reaching qualitative data sets like Allen and Seaman's reports can provide us with an idea of how many students are learning online and which institutions are experiencing the largest online enrollment growth, these data sets cannot provide us with insight into students' individual experiences with online learning in general or OWCs specifically.

The same is true of experimental research that relies on quantitative data alone. Ehmann and Hewett (2015) agree that although close-ended experimental research can be important, more interpretative open-ended research "should be a leading priority in any study of OWI" (p. 526). They argue studies that explore OWI and address "individual cases across various institutions and learning contexts" provide "opportunities to investigate overall trends and patterns that can lead to a deeper understanding of OWI as a phenomenon in and of itself" (Ehmann & Hewett, 2015, p. 526). An investigation of BGSU's OFYWCs therefore can give insight into the current landscape of online students in writing courses at public institutions as well as offer a replicable model for future mixed-methods case studies at additional research sites. Furthermore, this study takes up the call of OWI and digital rhetoric scholars (McKee &

DeVoss, 2007; VanKooten, 2016) who suggest blending multiple methods of data collection while placing the results in a specific context.

To address these calls for mixed-methods research, I employed two phases of data collection. In the first phase, I distributed a recruitment email and survey to instructors teaching OFYWCs at BGSU for distribution in their GSW 1110 and GSW 1120 sections. In the second phase, I contacted student survey participants who indicated they were willing to discuss their survey responses further in follow-up interviews. I analyzed both the quantitative and qualitative survey data as well as the qualitative, narrative interview data to discuss the perceptions and experiences of students enrolled in BGSU's OFYWCs and theorize about their relationship to the OFYWC and university as space and place.

Student survey.

In the first phase of the study, I surveyed students enrolled in online sections of GSW 1110 and GSW 1120 during the Fall 2017-Spring 2018 academic year. First, via email, I invited online GSW instructors to distribute a recruitment email and electronic survey link to current FYW students taking either GSW 1110 or GSW 1120 online (see Appendix C for instructor recruitment email). Participating instructors sent out the recruitment email to their current online students (see Appendix D for student survey recruitment email). These students then had the option to click on the link provided to participate in the online survey hosted in BGSU's survey software Qualtrics. Students who completed the survey were entered in a drawing to win a $25 gift card. At the conclusion of the survey students were asked if they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview. Students that indicated their willingness to take part in these interviews provided their name and email address.

The online survey consisted of twenty total questions (see Appendix E for a complete survey protocol) including the informed consent, demographic questions for classification purposes, and invitation for follow-up interviews. Although some of the demographic questions asked students about their gender identity and ethnicity, I also included questions about their current class rank (e.g. "Freshman (first-year)"; "Sophmore (second-year)") and enrollment status to better understand the population of students enrolled in online GSW courses. Beyond these demographic and classification questions, I included three distinct clusters of questions: (a) Student Experience with Writing Courses and Online Learning; (b) Spaces and Contexts for Student Learning in Online First-Year Writing Courses (OFYWCs; and (c) Students' Perceptions of College Writing and the University. I designed each of these clusters to solicit answers that address this study's primary and secondary research questions.

Student interview.

In the second phase of the study, I solicited interviews with students who indicated their interest in participating in a follow-up interview in the student survey distributed in phase one. To arrange interviews, I contacted students using the contact information (name and email address) they provided in the survey. This email included a copy of a consent form and the letter of recruitment (see Appendix F for student interview recruitment email). One student their interest and we arranged an interview appointment. The student who completed an interview earned a $10 gift card. The interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and focused on the student's survey responses about their perceptions and experiences in their OWC (see Appendix G for a complete interview protocol).

The interview was designed to be a loose, unstructured discussion in the spirit of Berry, Hawisher, and Selfe (2012) to allow the student the opportunity to expand on their responses

from the initial survey as well as clarify thoughts they had about their OFYWC. To initiate these

discussions, I asked the volunteer student participant about their expectations and experiences in

their OFYWC and asked follow-up questions to promote discussion. Since students' names are

confidential, I use a pseudonym to describe their responses in Chapter Three. The interview was

audio-recorded and later transcribed for coding purposes with the student's permission. The

interview was then coded using a grounded theory approach with attention to the codes and

themes I uncovered and analyzed from the survey phase of the research.

Participants.

Students who took part in this study were enrolled in GSW 1110 and GSW 1120 online

during the Fall 2017-Spring 2018 academic year at BGSU. Though I did ask instructors to send

the recruitment email to their class sections, I did not collect data directly from those instructors.

Since this study is an inquiry into student experiences in OFYWCs, I prioritized students' voices

rather than instructors' perceptions or impressions of those experiences. While it is common

practice to solicit students' reactions to instructors' pedagogical choices as they design and

facilitate online courses, in this study I am concerned with students' experiences beyond those

choices. Comparing these student voices to instructors' and contextualizing their responses

would however, be a productive method to approach future scholarship.

Relationship between research questions and data collection methods.

These data collection methods were designed to directly address this project's research

questions (see Table 2.4). Through the student survey, I was able to learn about the physical and

digital spaces students inhabit while enrolled in OFYWCs as well as their understanding of the

relationship between those spaces and the OFYWC. The student interview helped me expound

on this survey data. By asking follow-up questions to clarify student survey responses I learned

more about their individual contexts and perspectives. This interview focused on how the student's perception of these various spaces impacted their relationship to writing and the university. These questions were specifically designed to learn more about the ways students describe FYW and BGSU and how they might invent the university in unique ways in OFYWCs. Analyzed together, the survey and interview data teach us more about how students use their physical location and the digital spaces they inhabit in their OFYWCs.

Challenges of data collection.

I think it is important to note here that collecting these responses from online students and arranging interviews with them came with several challenges. Initially, I recruited online GSW instructors to email the survey link to their students. I emailed instructors in the second half of the Fall 2017 semester and again in the first half of the Spring 2018 semester asking that they email current and former students who had enrolled in their online sections in either semester. I followed up with instructors later in the Spring 2018 semester, asking that they email their current and former students again and add an announcement to their Canvas course shells. This follow-up email and announcement included a video that introduced me as researcher and the study. Though some instructors were enthusiastic about sending the link to their students, this recruitment yielded very few responses. To encourage more students to participate I offered a chance to enter a drawing for a $25 gift card for completing the online survey. Though this added incentive communicated through a follow-up email from instructors did encourage a few more students to take part, the survey yielded far fewer responses than I predicted or desired. Likewise, to encourage students to participate in follow-up interviews, I offered students who completed the interview a $10 gift card.

I want to write about this challenge here for a few reasons. First, I want to be transparent about the struggles and setbacks in my research process. Despite my enthusiasm for the project and its significance to the program, encouraging participation from instructors and students was difficult. Although the project has the potential to impact instructors and students, the immediate connection between my project and their lives was not clear. I did not communicate the purpose or significance of the project enough before requesting participation despite the lengthy recruitment email and justification required by BGSU's institutional review board (IRB). This means that not only was the number of survey responses low, the pool of students willing to be interviewed was even more limited. The response I collected is therefore specific to only one student's experiences rather than necessarily reflective of all online GSW students.

This challenge is also reflective of the general challenge of conducting research in OWCs. Students in online courses are—as this project ultimately argues—physically distant and displaced in ways face-to-face and on-campus students are not. This makes contacting them, arranging interviews, and communicating the significance of research difficult. Researchers who want to conduct research in OWCs, especially those that want to speak to students, should keep this potential complication in mind while designing the research questions, data collection methods, and recruitment materials. This is not to say that research of online students cannot be done successfully, but it is potentially more difficult than researching students who are in physical proximity to the researcher, instructor, and institution.

Table 2.4.

Relationship Between Secondary Research Questions and Research Methods

Research Question	Method of Data Collection	Method of Data Analysis
What physical spaces do students inhabit when participating in or completing work for OFYWCs?	• Survey of OFYW students	• Statistical analysis of survey data. • Context analysis and textual analysis, using grounded theory, of survey data—coding for descriptions of these spaces.
What digital and online spaces do students inhabit when participating in or completing work for OFYWCs?	• Survey of OFYW students	• Statistical analysis of survey data. • Context analysis and textual analysis, using grounded theory, of survey data—coding for descriptions of these spaces.
What are students' perceptions of the space/spaces both physical and digital/online associated with OFYWCs?	• Survey of OFYW students	• Statistical analysis of survey data. • Context analysis and textual analysis, using grounded theory, of survey data—coding for descriptions of perceptions.
How do students define or understand the relationship between the various spaces they inhabit—the physical, contextual, and digital—in OFYWCs?	• Survey of OFYW students • Interview with OFYW students • Analysis/Coding of both survey and interview	• Statistical analysis of survey and interview data. • Context analysis and textual analysis, using grounded theory, of survey and interview data—coding for statements about spaces students work and learn in, how they interact with these spaces, and how the spaces form a network.
How do students' perceptions of the space/spaces associated with OFYWCs impact their definition of and relationship to writing?	• Survey of OFYW students • Interview with OFYW students • Analysis/Coding of both survey and interview	• Statistical analysis of survey and interview data. • Context analysis and textual analysis, using grounded theory, of survey and interview data—coding for statements about students writing and using spaces for writing processes or activities.
How do students' perceptions of the space/spaces associated with OFYWCs impact their definition of and relationship to the university?	• Survey of OFYW students • Interview with OFYW students • Analysis/Coding of both survey and interview	• Statistical analysis of survey and interview data. • Context analysis and textual analysis, using grounded theory, of survey and interview data—coding for statements about students' relationship to BGSU/college and their use of university spaces.

Data analysis.

Although grounded theory methods do require a certain amount of "methodological faith" (Broad, 2017, p. 96) they also offer a wealth of possibilities for rereading and "recoding" (Saldaña, 2012, p. 58) data. Since grounded theory methods allow researchers to focus on the data throughout the collection and analysis processes, researchers have greater opportunity to see that data through multiple lenses and consider what it might reveal about the research questions they set out to investigate as well as ones they had not yet considered. I use grounded theory to conduct what Strauss and Corbin (1998) define as "conceptual ordering" or organizing data according to specified set of properties and their dimensions (p. 15) to "mine" the data (p. 65) for meaning.

To facilitate this process of coding and "recoding," I employ what Saldaña (2012) calls simultaneous coding (p. 63) which involves applying two or more codes to one datum. This approach means that more than one code might be attached to a single line in an interview or a single survey response. In fact, it can mean that each line or response might have multiple intersecting, overlapping, or otherwise corresponding codes. For example, in one survey response a student participant noted the following:

I do most of my work in my dorm room because all my resources are here but I do go to

the library occasionally when needing to check out a book for the course.

Although this response is a single sentence written in reply to one survey question, it describes multiple lines of thought relevant to this study and, as a result, is a source for multiple codes. The student describes multiple locations ("dorm room" and "library") which each become codes, as well as their motivation for working in those places ("resources"). The student also is referring to a larger concept that I saw throughout survey responses of "convenience" wherein students

decided to either work in or remain in a place because it was the most convenient, available, or in some cases "only" spot for them to work.

This method reflects a methodology that likewise acknowledges all experiences are the result of many intersecting realities and identities. Just as my research methodology reflects a belief in the intersectionality of experience and meaning making, this approach to data analysis reflects a belief that a single response can hold multiple meanings and we can learn a great deal about human existence, experience, and phenomena from a single response, line, or datum.

This approach also reflects and allows me to highlight the immense value I place on students' language. In this project, since I want to describe students' experiences, I have made a choice to use their words whenever possible including in the coding process. For this reason, I use in vivo coding to ground my analysis in students' perspectives. Not only does in vivo coding allow me to use the students' direct language, it also provides a language full of "imagery, symbols, and metaphors for rich category, theme, and concept development" (Saldaña, 2012, p. 94). If I refer to the earlier student survey response example, some of the codes developed from this sentence and others like it in the responses are in vivo codes like "resources" and "dorm room." Other responses often used phrases like "focus" or "focusing" which also became a single in vivo code.

Though prioritizing students' perspectives is important, I also want to make sure my analysis speaks to my research questions. For this reason, I also use structural coding around my primary and secondary research questions. While in vivo codes allow me to notice students' language practices and ways of speaking about different topics, structural coding allows me to refocus on the subject matter. This layer of coding has the advantage of letting me look for responses that directly speak to individual research questions but also reveals responses that do

not fit in any one category or explore an aspect of this topic I had not considered. Structural codes, therefore, reveal patterns in responses that address my questions but also phenomena and concerns I had not anticipated. For example, many students approached their responses with a sense of annoyance with their OWC or writing courses in general. I did not anticipate students airing their irritation in these responses, but I needed to develop codes (e.g. "frustration") to reflect reactions like them that did not necessarily respond to my focus but did reveal important aspects of students' experiences. These moments in students' narratives become not outliers but rather important data that address the disconnect and misunderstanding between researcher and students, as well as instructors and students. These moments also provide a rich well to draw on for future research which I will discuss further in Chapter Five.

My Relationship to the Research

In this project, I must use self-reflexivity to acknowledge my subjectivity and relationship to the research site. As researcher, I am also host to a myriad of complex and often conflicting identities. I am an insider-researcher at this site and instructor in the GSW program. I have taught online GSW courses in the summer semester and mentor graduate teaching associates and CCP instructors that teach in the program. This mentorship includes facilitating professional development, addressing instructor concerns, and visiting class sessions which gives me unique insight into how graduate teaching associates teach these courses as well as how students respond to their teaching methods.

I am also a graduate student at this research site and have taken multiple courses online using the same LMS that OFYW students use in their courses. I have experienced online instruction at BGSU from the perspective of instructor and student including the technological challenges that come with that experience. I have also seen and facilitated multiple online

courses at other institutions in multiple departments. Taking and teaching these courses have offered me perspective on the many ways to teach online—the good, the bad, and the ugly. I have strong preferences for certain techniques as both an instructor and student that make me biased against practices that counter these preferences.

Also shaping my relationship to this project is my experience as a GSW student during my first year of undergraduate studies. As a first-year student, I registered at BGSU and enrolled in GSW 1110—then ENG 111—in the fall and GSW 1120—ENG 112—in the spring. I took and passed both courses before transferring to another institution for my second year. During that first year, I was a commuter student living at home, twenty minutes away from campus. I experienced, during that year, the isolation and frustration commuter students often face. I did not identify with the campus in the way residential students did and only spent three days per week on campus both semesters. I did not take any online courses in that year, but I did find unique places to work on assignments and write for my FYW courses. I often spent the hours between my classes in small lounges on campus in the Bowen-Thompson Student Union and Olscamp Hall, or the quiet floor in Jerome Library. I even sat in my car, my laptop balanced on my knees and notebook pressed against my steering wheel. I did not often venture off campus for fear of losing my hard-to-come-by parking spot. On the days I was home, I worked at my dining room table or on my couch—a habit I still have—while catching up on laundry or cooking dinner. Occasionally, I migrated to the public library or a local coffeeshop to work, but I worked from home most often. I felt incredibly displaced and separated from the friends I had who lived in residence halls. I could not easily pop in to Jerome to work on group projects or study with classmates in my dorm room. I experienced separation from campus like Mauk's (2003) students and had to invent what the university meant to me in a different way.

I write about this experience here to reveal a bit about my own identity as a student but also to explain some of what drives me as a researcher. My undergraduate experience—even after transferring to the university in my hometown—was not one of a "traditional" student. Although I did begin my first year at seventeen, I did not feel like a normal college student. This feeling persisted throughout my undergraduate career and was, in hindsight, based in part on my location and relationship to the university as a place. I most often studied off-campus and, unlike many of my peers, saw campus as a destination rather than a home. This perspective shapes how I continue to relate my college experience and my identification with commuter and online students. As both a commuter and online student I experienced the isolation and displacement that a great deal of online learning research discusses but I also became more informed about the kind of learner I am, what strong teaching looks like online, and how to communicate with colleagues and mentors in online spaces. These experiences also directly influence the way I relate to the online students in this study and how I hear and recount their stories. I cannot help but see their experiences in relation to my own. I might compare, for example, negative experiences student participants have had with courses I took as an undergraduate student or think about the way the technologies and our understandings of those technologies have changed in the last ten years. For this reason, I am cautious about using language that does not belong to those student participants, preferring to base my tags, codes, and analysis on the words, phrases, and statements they use in their narratives. This experience does mean that I am able to relate to the students whose narratives I tell and, I hope, that allows me to convey their stories with care, accuracy, and respect.

In Chapter Three, I begin to relate these stories. Gathering pieces of students' experiences from survey and interview responses, I interpret this data and present a narrative or, more

appropriately, series of narratives of students in BGSU OFYWCs. I do so using, whenever

possible, students' language through the codes, categories, and themes that emerged from their

responses. I draw connections across their responses to better present the complex and varied

accounts gathered through the methods described here.

CHAPTER THREE: SELF-PACED OR SELF-TAUGHT: FIRST-YEAR WRITING

STUDENTS AS INDEPENDENT LEARNERS IN THE PRIVATE PLACES OF THE

ONLINE WRITING COURSE (OWC)

In this chapter, I report on the results of both the student survey distributed to General

Studies Writing (GSW) students at Bowling Green State University (BGSU) enrolled in online

sections during the Fall 2017-Spring 2018 academic year. I used these two data gathering

methods to learn more about the motivations students have for enrolling in online sections of

GSW 1110 and 1120 in the Fall 2017-Spring 2018 academic year as well as the experiences they

have while enrolled in those sections (see Chapter Two for a description of these courses). I was

particularly interested in the places students chose to work on their coursework and the criteria

they used to select those places since identifying exactly *where* we locate the OWC is quite

complex see Chapter One for a discussion of this challenge). Through this data, we can better

understand where and how students write in online GSW sections and, as a result, how

instructors might better address the unique and varied physical and digital places those students

inhabit.

As I relate the results of both data gathering methods throughout this chapter, I include a

few methods of description to help clarify the results. First, I try to point out major trends as well

as any surprising outlying responses or responses that might be expected but did not show up in

the data. As I describe these trends, I have also included the codes I used throughout the research

process to identify, label, analyze, and evaluate the results. These codes appear in italics in this

chapter and Chapter Four. I have also included percentages rounded to the nearest hundredth in

parentheses after these codes to note how many students' responses fit these codes (ex:

independence and *self-motivation* (46.15%)). These results, including both codes and

percentages, also often appear in tables and charts to help readers as they sift through the various

responses and data collated in this chapter. In addition to these codes and brief descriptions, I

have included illustrative examples of students' responses that help contextualize and highlight

students' voices rather than rely solely on my interpretation of those responses.

Data Collection Tools and Methods

I created the student survey in the online survey software Qualtrics. I distributed a link to

the survey was distributed, along with a recruitment letter, to instructors teaching online sections

of GSW courses in the Fall 2017 and Spring 2018 semesters (see Appendix C for instructor

recruitment email). Participating instructors then distributed the recruitment letter and survey

link to their students (see Appendix D for student survey recruitment email). Of the seven

instructors teaching the sixteen total GSW online course sections during the

Fall 2017-Spring 2018 academic year, four agreed to distribute the survey at least once to their

students via email. This distribution yielded seventeen total student responses.

The survey consisted of twenty-three questions including the informed consent agreement

and follow-up interview recruitment. Students who responded to the survey were asked briefly

about their identities including demographic information about their gender, race, and class rank.

Next, students indicated their experience with college-level writing courses and online learning.

Students then answered multiple open-ended questions about the reasons they enrolled in an

online section, what their expectations were for the course, and how and where they completed

work for the course (see Appendix E for a complete survey protocol). These questions allowed

for long-form response but did not advise students to reply with answers of a specific length.

At the conclusion of the survey, student participants were asked if they would be willing

to take part in a follow-up interview to answer more questions about their experiences in the

course. Although nine of the seventeen total students who took the survey indicated they would

be interested in completing a survey and provided their contact information, only one student

responded when asked for an interview via email recruitment (see Appendix F for student

interview recruitment email). As a result, this student's responses are included in this chapter as

a case study. Their responses are reflective of students' responses in the broader survey but can

also only represent one online GSW student. To learn more about students enrolled in online

sections of GSW 1110 and GSW 1120, I suggest more interviews must be conducted.

Student Survey Results

Seventeen students responded to the survey portion of this study. Although the total

number of responses was seventeen, not all students responded to all questions in the survey

completely since most questions were optional with no requirements for a minimum length of

response. This means some responses were brief (ex: "They haven't") and did not offer

additional explanation for interpretation. These brief survey responses reinforce the need for

additional data, especially in the form of follow-up interviews where students have the

opportunity to expound on their experiences.

Demographic information.

Of those students responding, five (33.33%) identified as male and ten (66.67%) as

female. Twelve (75.00%) out of sixteen respondents identified as "Caucasian/White", two

(12.5%) as "South Asian", and two (12.5%) as "East Asian". Of fourteen students who identified

their class rank, eight (57.14%) identified as "Freshman (first-year)", four (28.57%) as

"Sophomore (second-year)", one (7.14%) as "Senior (fourth-year)", and one (7.14%) as "College

Credit Plus (CCP)/Postsecondary/pre-freshman."

Students' experience with GSW and online courses.

When asked about their previous enrollment in first-year writing (FYW) courses at BGSU and other institutions, most students indicated they had enrolled in a GSW course at BGSU in the past while only one (5%) had enrolled in a college writing course at their high school or middle school (see Figure 3.1). Four students had not enrolled in any first-year writing courses before the semester in which they took the survey. Just as most student respondents had experience with GSW courses (71.43%), nine (64.29%) had experience with online courses at BGSU. Only five students (35.71%) indicated they had not taken another online course at BGSU or any other institution before enrolling in an online GSW section. Four of those nine who had taken online courses before had enrolled in other online sections of GSW courses[13]. This rate is consistent with Allen and Seaman's (2016) findings which indicate the majority of undergraduate college students (72.7%) have enrolled in at least one online course (p. 4).

■ GSW 1100 - 10%

■ GSW 1110 - 25%

■ GSW 1120 - 40%

■ College writing course at a high school or middle school -5%

■ No/None - 20%
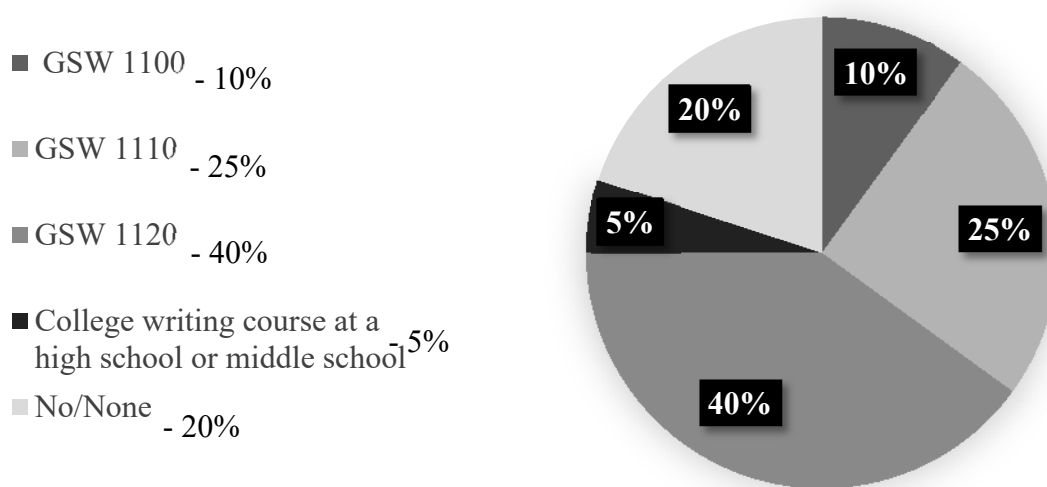
Figure 3.1. Percentage of students previously enrolled in a first-year writing course.

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[13] These students indicated that they had previously enrolled in GSW 1110 online and were currently taking GSW 1120 online.

Students' motivations and expectations for online GSW.

When asked about their reasons for enrolling in an online section of GSW, students tended to describe the freedom or *flexibility* that the online option offered them (see Figure 3.2). This response was not unexpected since online courses are often described as flexible options for adult and commuter students or those with otherwise challenging schedules. Among those references to flexibility, students frequented mentioned challenging course or work schedules (30.77%) and location or distance required to travel to campus (15.38%) as reasons for enrolling in an online GSW section. One student even comically noted, "The 647-mile commute would be pretty tough."
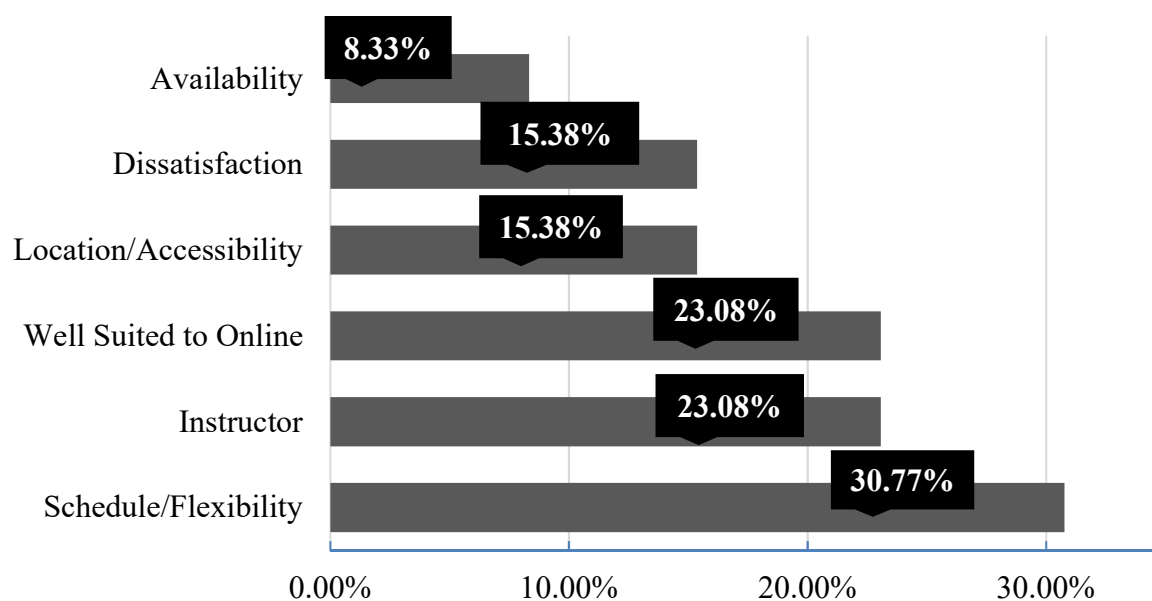
Figure 3.2. Students' reported reasons for enrolling in online GSW sections.

Though some of these students mentioned that they exclusively or regularly enroll in online courses, many mentioned that they specifically took GSW online because they did not think a face-to-face section was necessary for their success in the class. These students often noted that writing courses were particularly suited to an online learning environment (OLE) (23.08%). One student explained, "My GSW course first semester was a face-to-face class and I

believed it did not need to be." Another argued that their strengths as a student in addition to the nature of a writing class made it an ideal course to take online: "I have always enjoyed writing, and felt that I was a strong enough writer to learn and teach myself, without the face-to-face explanations from a professor." In these cases, students argued either their skills or the nature of writing as a skill made face-to-face interaction unnecessary and online learning more appealing.

An unexpected reason that students cited for choosing an online section rather than a face-to-face one was *dissatisfaction* with the course or GSW in general (15.38%). This thread continued to be prevalent in other responses from students throughout the survey. A few students specifically mentioned dissatisfaction with an instructor that led them to enroll in an online section: "My teacher failed me on the last project the first time I took 1110 so I tried online." It is important to note how this student specifically blames their instructor ("my teacher failed me") for this past failure and need to repeat the course. Others seemed frustrated GSW is a required course for graduation: "…I took 1110 in person and found it pointless." One student, when asked how they would define "college writing" after taking the online course, responded, "My definition [of college writing] has not changed because this class doesn't provide me with a better understanding of my writing and I haven't learned anything about writing since taking GSW." Though their reasons for dissatisfaction were often unique, students did share a common emotional response to GSW and often cited online sections of the courses as a way to cope with that frustration.

Though course and instructor *dissatisfaction* was a motivating factor mentioned by some students, others "followed" their instructors from the first writing requirement (GSW 1110) to the second (GSW 1120); this is a method students sometimes use for selecting face-to-face course sections at BGSU as well. One student specifically mentioned, "I liked [my instructor's]

teaching method, so after completing GSW 1110 with [them] and knowing that [they] only taught GSW1120 online for the upcoming semester, I decided to register for it." Overall, many students mentioned an experience, either positive or negative, with an instructor as their motivation for online enrollment (23.08%). This is particularly interesting since so many students also mentioned not needing face-to-face interaction with an instructor to succeed in GSW.

Only one student reply cited a lack of availability of face-to-face sections as their motivation for enrolling in GSW online. This reply is likewise surprising since 111 sections of GSW—85 sections of GSW 1110 and 111 sections of GSW 1120—were offered in the Fall 2017-Spring 2018 academic year (see Table 2.2 in Chapter Two). It is possible that the student in question had a very challenging schedule, with demands beyond their coursework or that the student registered late for courses and could not find an open section that fit their schedule. Without a follow-up interview I cannot cite a definitive reason. In any case, availability is an outlier that does not seem to reflect the experience of many students mostly because so many sections are offered at various times, days, and locations on campus each semester. At smaller institutions availability may be a motivating factor for online enrollment worth examining, but at state universities like BGSU with ~100 face-to-face sections of FYW each semester, students are more likely to self-select online sections. At BGSU students seem to base this selection on flexibility and their expectations for how well the course material lends itself to an OLE.

Student Expectations for Online GSW

If the online course sections meet these expectations is a different question entirely. Although students' motivations for enrolling in an online section of GSW varied slightly, most

had similar expectations for the course. Some of these expectations arose from students'

individual experiences with online courses in the past while others noted that their original

expectations for online learning were not met (see Figure 3.3).

Several students noted that they would need to demonstrate more *independent* work and

self-motivation (46.15%) in an online section than a face-to-face one. Students frequently used

phrases like "self-taught" and "time to myself" to describe this sense of independent work. One

student explained, "I expected my role to be more disciplined as far as scheduling and follow

through with assignments." This more independent student role also included, for some students,

the added component of the OLE. One student pointed out:

> I expected to have more responsibility as far as turning in papers online. Also, more
>
> awareness of how to navigate the [C]anvas site, as my last GSW class was in-person and
>
> the professor showed us how to get to everything.

While this lack of personal connection is often considered a downside of online learning in OWI

scholarship, students, although they acknowledged it as a challenge, seemed to also view this

more self-motivated approach as a positive aspect of online courses. Students tended to call what

OWI scholars often call "isolation" an added "responsibility." Some students even found that

responsibility was a freeing quality of the online course. In one response a student explained, "I

would have more time to myself and get to work on the papers on my own time without going to

class." Rather than see this as a negative, students argued that the ability work alone was an

affordance of the OFYWC.
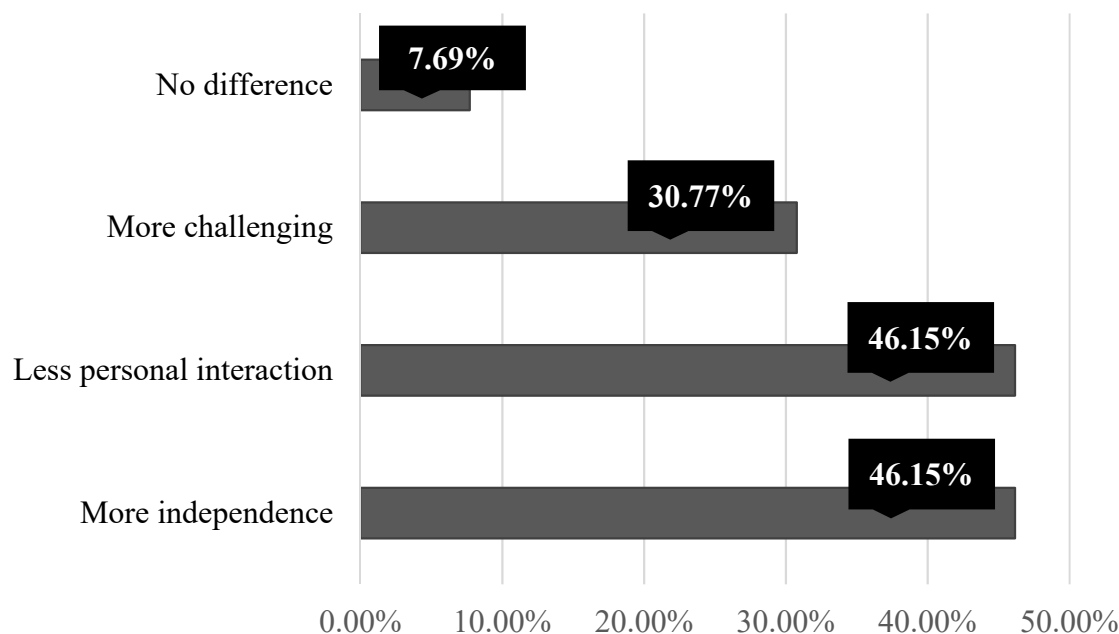
Figure 3.3. Students' expectations for online GSW.

Students also cited a *lack of personal or one-on-one interaction* with their instructor

(46.15%) as the reason they anticipated this need for independence. Some students pointed out

that this lack of connection might make the course more challenging: "I thought the online

course might have been harder because there wasn't a personal connection between students and

the teacher." Another student said, "I thought online would be harder and less personal because I

never see the professor." None of these students however, cited this as a reason to not enroll in

an online course. It also did not appear in reflective responses about their actual experiences in

the OFYWC they enrolled in.

Students' Experiences with Physical and Digital Spaces

As prompted in the survey, students reported on the physical and digital or online spaces

they inhabited while working on their OFYWCs. While students tended to have descriptive

responses when asked about the physical spaces they typically used when writing, they had a

harder time describing the digital spaces they used. Although it is unclear why students did not

describe these spaces as deeply as physical ones, it is possible they lacked the language to do so as fully as when describing physical spaces.

Physical spaces students used while writing.

When asked where they worked on their writing for their online GSW course, most students described spaces that Agnew (1987), Cresswell (2004), and Tuan (1977) would define as "places." Most of the locations students reported as spaces they most often worked in were personal environments where they felt safe and secure and had already developed attachments to (Cresswell, 2004, p. 1892). These spaces were most often private ones (83.33%) like *dorm rooms or bedrooms* (66.66%). Other students more generally mentioned working "at home," in their "apartment," or other specific areas of their homes like the dining room. Nearly all students reported working best in private places that were already familiar to them which seems to align with the motivating factor of *independence* (46.15%) that so many students expected from online course sections.

Though these private places were the most commonly mentioned, students also reported working in shared spaces like the *campus library* (33.33%), *communal areas* in dorms (16.6%), the *student union* (8.33%), and, for one CCP student, *study hall* (8.33%). While these locations might be less personal to students than their living quarters, these spaces still qualify as "places" with personal connections and attachments.

Conversely, students did not report using public or non-personal spaces to work on their writing. Though the image of a student typing away on a laptop in a coffee shop might seem common place, no students in this study mentioned using public spaces like cafés or restaurants to work on their writing. For residential students at least, this might be due in part to the availability of such spaces close to campus versus the convenience of a dorm room. It is worth

noting that due to the rural nature of northwest Ohio, these spaces may be unavailable or difficult
to get to for many students.

Motivations for choosing personal places over public spaces.

When describing the physical locations they worked in, students often described their
motivations for choosing private places like dorm rooms or apartments to work on their writing
(see Figure 3.4). Though they did not specifically mention choosing these places "instead of"
public spaces like coffee shops, public benches at the park, or elsewhere, students did imply in
their responses that private places had clear advantages over these more public and impersonal
spaces. These motivations were mostly related to convenience and comfort, meaning public
spaces are likely to be at a disadvantage.
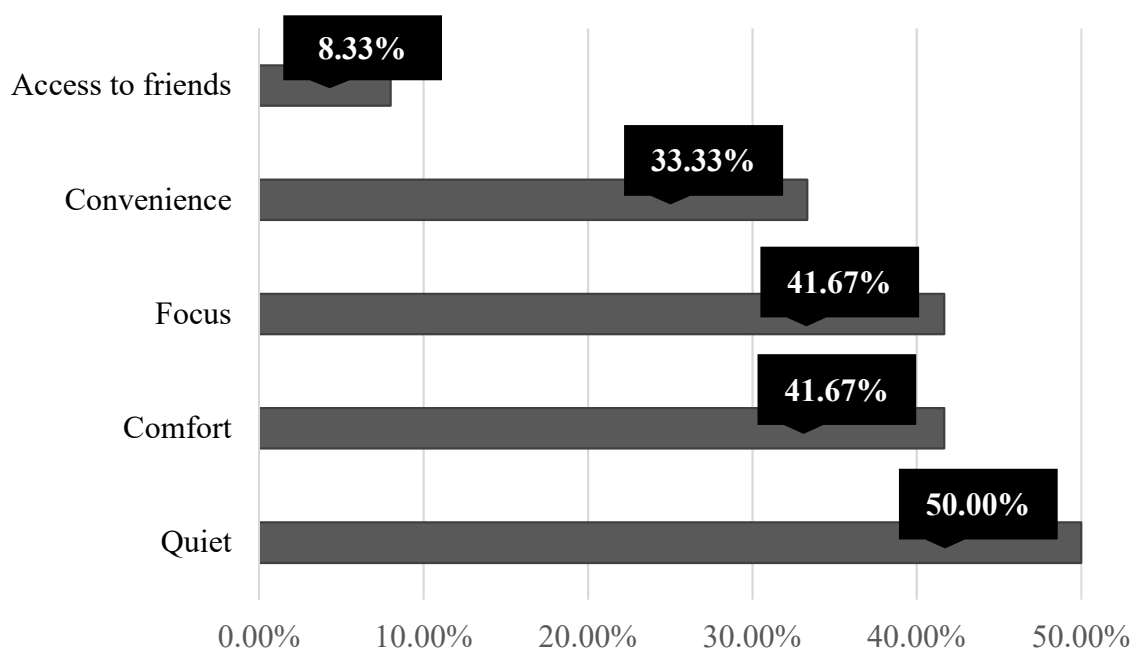
Figure 3.4. Students' reasons for choosing physical places to write (overall).

Most students mentioned the same kind of requirements for a good working or writing
space. Students, especially those who claimed to work exclusively in their dorm or bedrooms,
argued that any place they wrote needed to be *quiet* (50%) and *comfortable* (41.67%). These

qualities were most important to students who cited a need to *focus* (41.67%) or "concentrate" on their work. Again, it is likely students thought public spaces could not meet these criteria as well as private places.

Students' perception of physical places' and spaces' influence on their work.

Though students mentioned that they specifically selected places to work where they could focus, that were quiet, and provided comfort, these same students did not see any connection between the places they worked and the work they did. In other words, most students (66.67%) saw no connection between their physical location and their writing. This means that students did not see their surroundings as influencing how they thought about their writing or the process by which they completed that writing, even though they did report having a set of criteria for selecting a workspace. Only one student specifically mentioned a way they saw their writing influenced by the places they chose to write: "They've influenced me because I feel most comfortable there and the pages just flow when I'm writing in my dorm." While this response does suggest that this student sees a correlation between where they work and the quantity of work they can complete, it does not necessarily mean that the student sees this same correlation between where they work and the content, quality, or process of their writing. The correlation may exist but the student is not cognizant of it.

While these responses were surprising, it is possible that students were not able to reflect on the ways their physical surroundings might be influential on their work. In such a brief survey, and without the chance to follow-up with most students in an interview, it is unclear if students responding did not understand what the question was asking or if they might elaborate on their responses when prompted. Specifically, it might be helpful to scaffold more metacognitive reflection that asks students to consider why they work best in different

environments as well as the various levels of location that exist—like those described in

Chapter One for example (e.g. "location," "space," "place," "sense of place," etc.). Without the

language to articulate how these places influence their mood and thought processes, students

may have simply been unable to fully respond this line of questioning. This again suggests

students may not have adequate language to do so.

Digital spaces students used while writing and motivations for using them.

When asked to describe the digital and/or online spaces they used while writing, students

consistently mentioned institutionally sponsored spaces that were in some part required by their

instructors (see Figure 3.5). The institutional learning management system (LMS) *Canvas*

(66.67%) was the digital space students most frequently cited in their responses. Students who

mentioned Canvas specifically noted that they used it because it was *required* (44.44%),

convenient (33.33%), and *familiar* (33.33%).
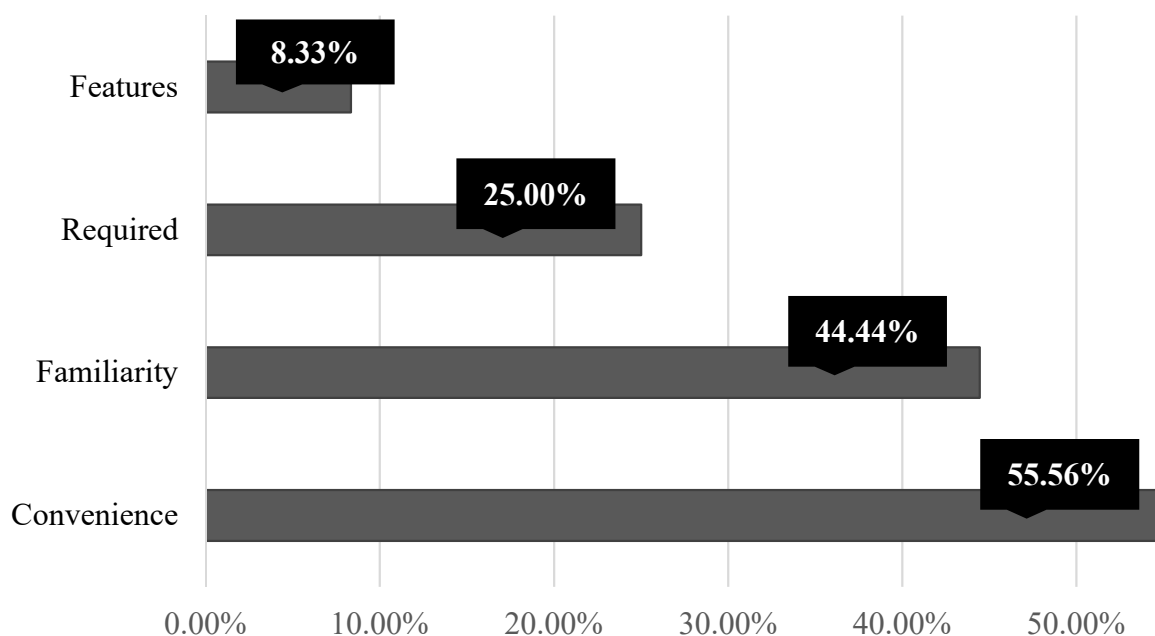
Figure 3.5. Students' reasons for choosing digital spaces to write (overall).

These reasons were the most cited causes for students using additional spaces that were not necessarily institutionally sponsored. For students who mentioned a *word processing tool* (66.66%) like Microsoft Word (50%) and Google Docs (33.33%) these factors were also most important. Students mentioned that these products were both free and functional either online or offline making them *convenient* (55.56%) spaces that are readily available to use. Likewise, of those students who mentioned at least one *word processing tool*, several mentioned their *familiarity* (44.44%) with the tool, echoing students' desire to be comfortable when inhabiting either a physical or digital space. In this way, students see the institutional LMS and word processing tools similarly to the way they see their dorm room or bedroom. We might see the *familiarity* that so many students mentioned as akin to the *comfort* they used to describe their dorm rooms. Only one student mentioned that a word processing tool was a required tool. Likewise, only one student mentioned that they chose the word processor they did because they liked its *features* (8.33%), specifically the fact that Google Docs "autosaves [their] work." This might suggest students were less concerned with what word processing tools could do and more with how comfortable they felt using them.

Only three students mentioned using additionally online spaces that were not institutionally sponsored or required while they wrote. Two students described using *social media* (16.67%) platforms and one mentioned using a *citation generator* (8.33%). These students all mentioned how they used these spaces, providing additional context that not all students who described using *Canvas* or *word processing tools* did. One student explained that they used social media as a kind of release: "When writing, I usually take breaks just to clear my thoughts. During this time, I usually check my social media platforms (i.e. Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook)." Another student used social media to conduct primary research "because they

are the quickest and easiest ways to get my work." The fact that these spaces were *familiar* and

convenient to use made them valuable to these students even though they were not *required* like

Canvas or Microsoft Word might have been.

      One student, after describing the digital spaces they use most frequently while they write,

also expressed a desire to use their phone more in the writing process. Specifically, they

communicated potential applications that might be useful in their writing process like ones

students could use to set reminders or timers for their writing. Though this student did not

mention specific tools that exist or they were aware of, they did have a clear vision of what these

spaces might look like and how they might use them.

      Students' perception of digital places' and spaces' influence on their work.

      As was true for their perception of physical places' influence on their work, some

students did not believe the digital places and spaces they worked in had any influence on their

writing (*no influence*, 33.33%). These students, when asked how digital spaces affected their

writing simply responded, "They haven't." Many of these students responded similarly if not

verbatim when asked how they thought the physical places they worked in impacted their writing

or performance in class. Despite this ambivalence by many students, other responses did reveal

that students thought a bit more about the digital spaces they inhabited than the physical ones.

Surprisingly, students were more likely to talk about the way working in online or otherwise

digital spaces affected the way they wrote and participated in the online GSW course.

      Some students were careful to note the way that they saw their writing change or evolve

because of the high concentration of work they did online versus face-to-face. One of the biggest

changes students noted was the way their *access broadened* (33%) due to the digital and online

spaces they inhabited in their online course. One student pointed out, "These spaces have

influenced my performance in online classes through the way that they are all set up in ways

which I can work on them no matter where I'm at or how much time I have." This response

reflects one of the great advantages to online learning that is so often used as a marketing

technique by institutions to promote online course sections. Even though most students reported

that they worked in the same physical location from week to week, they liked the idea that if they

wanted to or for some reason needed to work from a different space they could without much

difficulty. In fact, they noted the courses seemed designed to accommodate that possibility.

This flexibility in access might also have influenced students' comfort level with the

online spaces they worked in. In addition to pointing out the way their access broadened with the

flexibility of OLEs, students were quick to point out that they were *more comfortable* (42%) in

these spaces that they were before the course. For one student, these online spaces even became

places—familiar in the way that their physical dorm room was: "They have influenced me

because they're where I go to clear my head." This description almost exactly mirrors the way

students wrote about the physical places they wrote and worked in, especially if those places

included their homes or dorms. Unlike those physical places however, students most often

described their comfort with digital spaces as evolving into new "places" where they had

attachments and routines. Many students pointed out that they used their computer more in the

online course section than they had in any other course and that their comfort with different

spaces like Canvas, Microsoft Word, Google Docs, and even email grew as the course

progressed. One student even pointed out that they grew to appreciate the affordances of these

newfound places like the ability to communicate with their instructor easily and asynchronously

through Canvas or to autosave their writing in Google Docs. This growth in comfort suggests an

evolution of attachment just like the one Tuan (1977) describes as happening to transform physical spaces to places.

Even though many students did point out ways that these places were important to them as writers in their courses, it is worth noting that many students did not think about their influence at all. Just as the physical places they work in seem to fade into the background of their lives, the digital places—whether tools, learning environments, or some combination therein— also seem to blur and become less visible as they use them.

Students' Perceptions of BGSU and College-Level Writing Before and After Online GSW

In addition to asking students about their experiences with writing in different physical and digital environments, the survey also asked about their perceptions of college-level writing and BGSU before and after taking GSW online. Composition scholars have written a great deal about the way college writing courses prompt students to invent themselves and the university. In face-to-face courses, students write from the physical space of the university and can therefore refer to those spaces and places—classrooms, libraries, dining halls, dorm rooms, etc.—as they go through that process of invention. Students in online courses are no longer located in a single space and therefore do not invent from a shared location. This may very well change how students go about the process of inventing and understanding the university and college-level writing depending on where they are when they participate in the course.

Students' perceptions of BGSU before and after GSW.

When asked about their perceptions or expectations of BGSU students were incredibility brief in their replies. Most students simply described their perception of BGSU as "good" or "fine" without much elaboration about why they had that belief. It is worth noting that some students might have had a tough time reflecting on what they thought about the university before

they started taking courses, especially since many of the students taking the survey (42.85%) were no longer in their first-year. Similarly, when asked to think about how their perception of the university had changed or evolved over time, students had difficulty answering the question. Most replied "still good" or "it hasn't changed" and did not give more detail. Once again, it is possible students were unsure how to describe their responses in more detail.

Unfortunately, these responses do not tell us much about how the students surveyed thought of BGSU before enrolling and what impact, if any, the online writing course might have had on their invention of the university. An added step that might be helpful in gathering this information in future studies is distributing a series of surveys and interviews. Students who enroll in OFYWCs during their first semester at the university could be given a survey before the beginning of their coursework wherein they describe their feelings and expectations for the university, the course, and online learning and then, at the conclusion of the course they could be given a second survey that asks them to elaborate on how these expectations evolved as the course progressed. Though this suggestion cannot yield any further results in this study, it might be helpful for any future iterations of this research whether at BGSU or other institutions.

Defining "college writing" before and after GSW.

While their responses were still brief, students did seem more forthcoming about their expectations for college-level writing. First, students were asked what they expected before enrolling in an online GSW course and how they would define "college writing." Then, they wrote about how those expectations were confirmed or changed after taking the course (see Figure 3.6).

When describing their expectations for college writing before the course, students most often talked about how *difficult and challenging* (41.67%) they expected the course to be.

Likewise, students expected the course to focus on *writing essays* (41.67%). One student even

simply responded, "essays, essays, essays" when asked what they expected to do in the GSW

course. One student even expected to write "one essay per week." All students who wrote about

this focus said they thought most of their time would be spent writing longform essays but did

not mention any other writing tasks or course activities. These responses seem to mirror the way

these students discussed their expectations for themselves as students in online courses where

they would need to be *independent* and *self-motivated* in the sense that they viewed the main

activity of the course as independent writing.
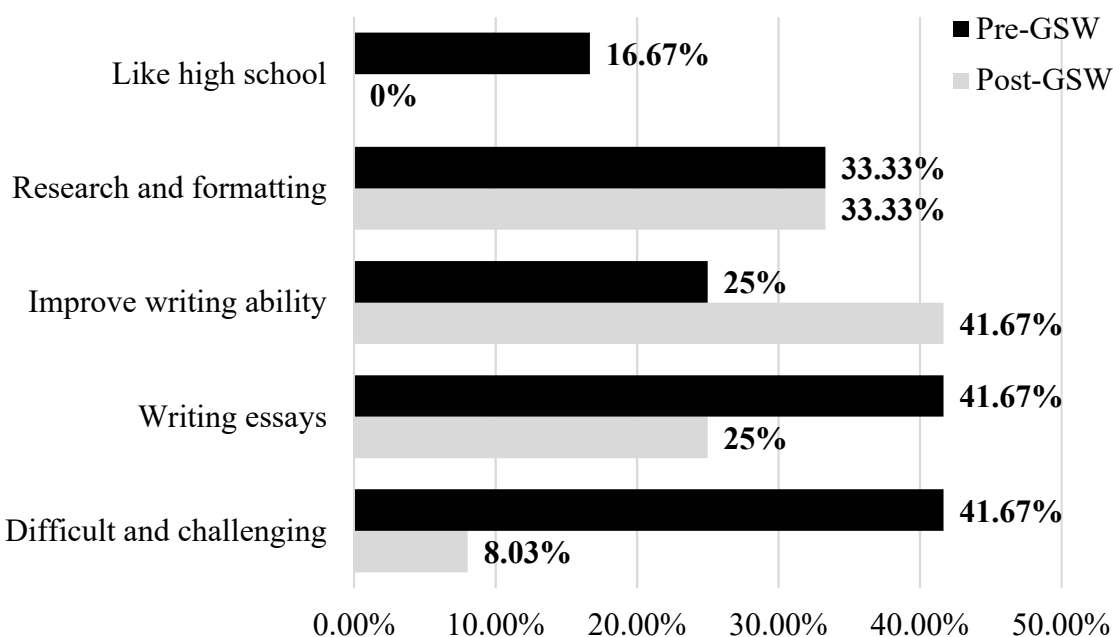
Figure 3.6. Students' perceptions of college-writing before and after GSW.

Some students described more specific qualities or content they expected from the

course. Students thought the GSW course would help *improve writing ability* (25%). Often,

students that cited writing improvement as a course expectation also anticipated writing a great

deal which would also make the course challenging. A few other students wrote that they

expected the course to be focused on *research* and *formatting* (33.33%) and that these qualities distinguished college-level writing from high school.

While some students were careful to point out the ways they thought the course would be different than their earlier experiences, a couple students mentioned that they expected GSW to be similar to if not exactly *like high school* (16.67%) writing. These students expected the course would seem familiar or that they would be able to use the same writing techniques they had used in the past. Students did not elaborate much further about what this meant or what qualities high school writing courses had that they expected to also see in college-level courses.

Students reported that after they completed the online GSW course they still thought of college-level writing similarly to how they had before the course. For example, some students still considered the course the be mostly about *writing essays* (25%). One student doubled down on their response and wrote, "essays, essays, essays, essays" in response to this question. The same number of students also claimed *research* and *format* (33.33%) were important aspects of the course. Some students even argued that there was *no difference* (25%) between their expectations before taking the course and how they would describe college writing after the conclusion of the course. One student even seemed frustrated by this and claimed that "GSW shouldn't be a requirement and BGSU should get rid of it or change the curriculum."

There was a slight change in the number of students who claimed that a major focus of the class was to *improve writing ability* (46.67%) although none of these students explained much about what that improvement entailed or how writing could be improved at the college-level. A similar number noted that this was *less challenging* (46.67%) than they anticipated and that they felt like they did well in the course although, again, they did not elaborate much about why the course was less challenging. Some pointed to a fewer number of

assigned essays which might be a reason for this claim. Overall and surprisingly, students did not give too many changes or evolutions of perspective in these reflections.

Student Interview: Case Study

In the same way that it was difficult to solicit student participation in the survey portion of the study, finding students willing to complete a follow-up interview proved more challenging than anticipated. Nine of the seventeen students who began the survey indicated their willingness to participate in an interview and provided their contact information. After receiving responses to the survey in Qualtrics, I contacted all nine of the students who provided their name and email address to tell them more about the study and ask if they were still willing to be interviewed. Despite follow-up emails, which included notice of the gift card incentive for participation and video introduction to the study, only one student responded with their availability for an interview.

As a result, I was only able to interview and gather additional information about this one student's experience. Though ideally I would have interviewed multiple students from varying backgrounds, locations, and class ranks, this interview did give rich insight into how one student experienced online GSW at BGSU. This experience serves as an important case study of online GSW students at BGSU and jumping off point to learn more about how students experience those courses. In this section, I will relate the findings of this interview and how they intersect with students' responses from the survey.

Carl: GSW 1110 student.

At the end of the Spring 2018 semester I interviewed Carl—a pseudonym I am using here to protect the privacy of the student—via Google Hangouts. We arranged a time and method for contacting one another via the university email system. We determined Google Hangouts would

work best as a meeting space since Carl lives in Georgia while I live in northwest Ohio. As he

joked in his survey response, the 647-mile trip would not have been feasible to conduct an in-

person interview. Google Hangouts offered us the chance to speak to one another face-to-face

and have an engaging conversation about his experiences in an online section of GSW 1110 in

the Spring 2018 semester.

Carl has a unique perspective on online GSW courses because he, unlike many of the

other students who responded to the survey, has only ever taken online courses from BGSU. All

of Carl's coursework has been at a distance, meaning he has not engaged with many physical

spaces and places that on-campus and even local commuter students have. He has never written

in a classroom in East Hall or worked on a group project in Jerome Library. He has, however,

spent time in his living room at home and in his office at the fire station where he works writing

and engaging with his coursework.

Carl's use of physical spaces while writing.

Like many working, adult students, Carl's schedule is malleable and changes depending

on his work responsibilities or duties at home. He works a varied schedule at the fire station,

sometimes working 24-hours on and 48-hours off. This means that Carl is always conscious of

how his schedule impacts his coursework and vice versa. This includes not only when but where

he completes his coursework.

In our conversation Carl suggested he worked on his GSW papers and projects when it

was most convenient for him. Sometimes this meant "it was easier to work, you know, in my

living room in my recliner with a laptop, or…work in my office at the fire station with a desktop

and a thumb drive." Though he mentioned working in both places regularly, Carl also admitted

that he sometimes tried to avoid writing at work because he knew, due to the nature of his job, he

could get called away "at any moment." Still, unlike many of the survey participants (50%), Carl

said that a place did not have to be *quiet* (50%) for him to work in. Instead, he valued his *comfort*

(41.67%) and the *convenience* (33.33%) of the work place. Just like 66.67% of students who

responded to the survey, Carl did not think his location "really mattered."

Carl's location while writing.

Though his opinion about his immediate surroundings—the "place" of his living room or

office—was unsurprising in relation to the survey results, Carl did offer a unique perspective

about the physical distance he has from BGSU's campus—what he called "location" or

"geography." One of the first differences that Carl noted between being in Georgia rather than

Ohio for his courses was the weather. He admitted:

> We don't have long winters like you guys have up there and I can't understand how you
>
> guys live up there! I'm not a winter person. I hate cold weather. I don't like the three days
>
> of winter we get in Georgia. [laughs] So yeah, I mean in the sunlight, being able to work
>
> outside for longer times because our being outside months start about February and they
>
> end about December. So, we have a lot more time outside and how much more
>
> enjoyment we can get out of it. I don't know that we necessarily get more enjoyment out
>
> of it than someone in a cold climate or somewhere where your winters are longer but you
>
> know. And plus I don't understand the winter sports [laughs].

He acknowledged that his colleagues in the class likely had a different outlook, especially if they

lived in Ohio. For Carl, this different perspective seemed important, especially when interacting

with or trying to relate to his instructors.

Carl's personal or one-on-one interaction.

He admitted, as many students expected, he did not have much interaction with his colleagues in the class though he did have some one-on-one communication with his instructor. In fact, *lack of personal or one-on-one interaction* (46.15%) was, along with *independence* and *self-motivation* (46.15%), the most often cited expectation for the online GSW courses. Like students explained in the survey, Carl agreed that this lack of interaction adds a unique challenge to online coursework:

> Well when you're actually face-to-face with people, your conversations are way, way richer. They're much better conversations than they are on a computer. Face-to-face interactions, you know, having conversations like this [our interview]: in our conversation you hear the inflection of my voice. Those conversations are priceless.

Carl noted that he also is cautious when he gets the opportunity to talk to his colleagues or instructors because "sometimes things can get misconstrued or lost" in conversations online. He makes it a habit to read his writing out loud to himself before submitting a response or sending an email because "being my age and being the kind of person I am" he does not want to be seen as "too critical" or "offensive." For Carl, being in the same physical space as his colleagues would be helpful in this way because, in his experience, face-to-face conversations allow for simple cues like being "able to see somebody's face…or hear their voice." This revelation is interesting since so many other students surveyed experienced a lack of interaction but did not see that as a negative quality of the OFYWC.

Carl's experiences with online coursework: Challenges and frustrations.

This distance also sometimes leads to challenges when it comes to completing coursework or meeting instructors' expectations. When I asked him if there was anything he

wished his GSW instructor or previous instructors knew about being a student in an online

course, Carl talked about a few different situations when online interactions led to

misunderstandings or gaps in communication with his instructors. In one example, he had only

twenty minutes to complete a fifteen-question quiz in Canvas. Carl only made it to question

seven by the time the quiz timed out. He was frustrated:

> So, it was like, I'm done, I can't do this. And I wish that instructor understood that we're
>
> not in a classroom setting. We are doing jobs or maybe some other students have full load
>
> that they're trying to take care of and a part time job—granted while they're on the
>
> college campus. But you know I have a full-time job. I'm taking care of a lot of different
>
> things, happening at the house at once. It was just a little overwhelming. I think that was
>
> the only thing that that I ever got upset about.

For students like Carl, even if they live more locally, responsibilities can stretch well beyond

their coursework. Course, work, and home-life duties are often at odds with one another and can

be challenging to navigate especially without the support or even acknowledgement from their

instructors.

These responsibilities lead Carl to plan out his week as much as possible and even

schedule when he works on certain assignments or courses. He follows a strict schedule and

makes sure he completes assignments at least 24-hours before the due date. In the survey,

students often mentioned that they expected the online course to be *more challenging* (30.77%)

and believed this meant they needed to show *more independence* (46.15%) than they might in a

face-to-face course. Carl agreed and said his GSW course met his expectations in this regard.

Even though he expected this, he acknowledged that to be an independent student the course also

had to be designed with that independence in mind. Carl's system worked well in GSW because the structure was like other courses he has taken in the past.

In addition to issues with the delivery or design of course materials not meeting his needs as an online student, Carl also mentioned instructors commonly assume he lives locally or is an on-campus student even though he is enrolled online. This assumption often leads to added challenges or misunderstandings with instructors who might not know why Carl cannot, for example, meet for office hours. He recalled, "I had an instructor keep saying, 'If you want to meet with me.'" He realized the instructor was offering in-person office hours, but, as he joked, "I'm not driving or flying up there to meet with you!" The instructor did not have equivalent online office hours which meant Carl was without means for accepting the instructor's offer for support beyond the course shell. While offering office hours or conferences can be a great solution for face-to-face sections, students in online courses are frequently unable to meet one-on-one or face-to-face due to time constraints, inflexible schedules, and physical distance. Students are often not in the same spaces or familiar with the same places instructors are meaning their frame of reference and perspective may be entirely different. Indeed, instructors are not always aware of where students are.

Additional connections between Carl and other surveyed students.

My conversation with Carl focused on physical spaces rather than the digital ones largely because his location or "geography" as he referred to it was so unique and influential on his experience. Since he has never experienced BGSU as a student on campus, his understanding of the university and its culture is shaped by the interactions he has online with his instructors and colleagues. In fact, when asked, Carl did not spend much time describing the digital spaces he worked in but did mention them in passing or during anecdotes like the story about his online

quiz frustration. The digital and online spaces he worked in did not seem to register with him as an influencing factor in his work as much as the physical ones did. This perspective aligned with surveyed students who argued digital spaces had *no influence* (33.33%) on their work. In the same way they saw physical places as having no or minor impact on their writing, most students did not believe the digital spaces they inhabited were influential.

Despite having unique challenges with online learning due to his location and responsibilities, Carl did not express much frustration with GSW, writing, or the university. In student survey responses, one unique result I had not predicted was the number of students who expressed frustration or dissatisfaction with GSW coursework as a motivating factor for enrolling in an online section or as an influence on their expectations for the course. Some students even said the course was unnecessary or should be removed from the curriculum. Carl, on the other hand, mentioned he "enjoyed" GSW 1110 more than many of his other online courses because of the care and presence of his instructor in the course. This is particularly interesting since both Carl and other students surveyed mentioned the reduction in effective communication in the online course format.

Conclusion

The results I present here give a snapshot of the experiences of online GSW students at BGSU. The students who participated in this study had varied backgrounds and experiences with online learning. Though we might not be able to generalize the data gathered here for a wider population and or for all online students, this data does highlight themes that are worth exploring further and considering when designing future OFYWCs. While students' survey responses did not reveal much about their perceptions of BGSU or how they viewed the process of "inventing

the university," they did communicate a lot about how and where they work on their writing in online courses.

Students frequently mentioned their expectation and performance as *independent*, *self-motivated* students. These expectations shaped how and where they wrote for GSW with most students choosing to work on their own as much as possible in spaces that were *private* and *quiet*. Above other concerns about ideal places to write and work, students prioritized their *comfort* and *familiarity* with a place above *access*, *resources*, and other *features* of the place. Indeed, *convenience*, especially regarding online and digital places, was among the most important qualities students looked for.

In Chapter Four, I further discuss how students' responses both in the survey and Carl's interview provide insight into this study's research questions. I describe the emerging threads in this data and how students' insights can help OWI scholars, instructors, and administrators better understand how and where students write in OFYWCs. I reflect on this study's research questions, describe how students' definitions of college-level writing differ from disciplinary definitions, and suggest actions instructors can take to disrupt students' expectations for OWI.

CHAPTER FOUR: INVENTING THE ONLINE UNIVERSITY: NEGOTIATING THE

THIRDSPACE(S) OF ONLINE FIRST-YEAR WRITING COURSES

> [T]he online classroom…is asking students (and teacher) to challenge their assumptions about learning, yet all of this is taking place within an educational system that has not changed its ideological approaches to education. (Boyd, 2008, p. 238)

In a face-to-face first-year writing (FYW) course, instructors are likely to know all their students' names and faces. If asked to describe an individual course section, they may know where in the room those students sit or which of their peers they talk to before class starts. They may know which students wear sweatpants on Mondays or uniforms for work after class and which students bring snacks or lunch with them. They are likely to know which of their students are adult learners and which are high school students. Instructors in face-to-face courses are more likely to be aware of their students' experiences simply because they see them multiple times throughout the week.

In an online section of the same course, instructors may find it much more challenging to identify their students on sight or speak to their experiences as learners and writers. They may not know what their students look like unless their institutional learning management system (LMS) encourages users to post avatars or if they receive a roster that includes student ID photos. They may be unsure which of their students are 18-years-old or 48-years-old. It is least likely of all that instructors know where their students are when they access course materials or write their projects. Instructors in online courses simply do not get the same kind of interaction they do with students in face-to-face sections.

This added challenge might seem minor when we consider the significant undertaking it is to teach first-year writing but for online instructors it can be a hurdle that stands between them and engaging students in meaningful learning activities. As more composition courses move

online, it is common for instructors to teach FYW courses without ever meeting one of their

students, let alone discussing their responsibilities beyond the course or the material nature of

their writing process. This complication makes it all the more important to ask students about

their experiences in online first-year writing courses (OFYWCs) and analyze that data for key

themes, student practices, and beliefs about online learning as I strive to do in this study through

surveys and interviews of students in the General Studies Writing (GSW) program at Bowling

Green State University (BGSU).

In this chapter, I analyze the survey and interview data gathered and presented in Chapter

Three. I interpret this data by describing the themes that emerged during my data collection and

analysis process. I then discuss how these trends in students' responses can help online writing

instruction (OWI) scholars and instructors better understand students' perspectives and

experiences in online writing courses (OWCs), particularly OFYWCs where students often form

personal definitions of college-level writing and develop their identities as college writers that

stick with them for the rest of their undergraduate careers.

As I conduct this analysis and reflect on the significance of students' responses, I am

guided by my primary research questions:

4. What are the motivations of students enrolled in OFYWCs?

5. What are the experiences of students enrolled in OFYWCs?

6. How do students negotiate the various contexts and spaces they inhabit while working
   and writing in OFYWCs?

To address these questions, I tailored my survey and interviews to learn:

    1.3 Why do students enroll in OFYWCs?

    1.4 What expectations do students have for OFYWCs?

    2.7 What physical spaces do students inhabit when participating in or completing work for

        OFYWCs?

    2.8 What digital and online spaces do students inhabit when participating in or completing

        work for OFYWCs?

    2.9 What are students' perceptions of the space/spaces both physical and digital/online

        associated with OFYWCs?

    3.4 How do students define or understand the relationship between the various spaces they

        inhabit—the physical, contextual, and digital—in OFYWCs?

    3.5 How do students' perceptions of the space/spaces associated with OFYWCs impact their

        definition of and relationship to writing?

    3.6 How do students' perceptions of the space/spaces associated with OFYWCs impact their

        definition of and relationship to the university?

Using these questions to shape my analysis, I focus on *where* students write in OFYWCs and *how* they choose those locations. In doing so, I call on Soja's (1996) theory of Thirdspace as well as geography scholarship (Agnew, 1986; Malpras, 1999; Tuan, 1977) to propose ways online writing instructors might conceive of the "space" and "place" of their OWCs.

      I also call attention to some of the challenges of OWI, both those perceived by instructors and students and those they may face unknowingly. Specifically, I draw on survey responses that suggest students expect OWCs to entail solely independent thinking, learning, and writing and

that point to students' preference for learning environments and experiences in which they feel *comfortable* and *familiar*.

Based on students' preference for familiar experiences, I contend instructors of OFYWCs must address and challenge students' assumptions about online learning and college-level writing. To do so, instructors must engage with not only students' writing but where and how they write. Instructors must call on threshold concepts of writing studies to guide students as they navigate the Thirdspace of the OWC and invent the online university. This engagement requires instructors to reimagine composition instruction in not only the single new OLE of the OFYWC, but the several distinct and individualized learning environments each student will participate in and from. The result of this shift in attention will be an OFYWC that more realistically represents and engages with online writing environments and online audiences.

Analysis of Students' Responses in Survey and Interview Data

In their responses to survey and interview questions, students revealed a great deal about their reasons for choosing an OFYWC as well as what they considered valuable or beneficial about taking a writing course online. One of the most significant findings from this study is students most often choose to write in private "places" that are familiar to them rather than public or private "spaces" that are new and unfamiliar. In choosing these places students demonstrate their belief that writing courses—and especially OWCs—are solitary endeavors that do not require collaboration or community. This belief is contradictory to most current scholarship in writing studies as well as principles espoused in the CCCC OWI Committee's (2013) "A Position Statement of Principles and Example Effective Practices for Online Writing Instruction (OWI)." In fact, the very "presumption of loss" (Blair, 2010) instructors expect from OLEs is what students claim draws them to online courses.

Most students surveyed claimed they believed GSW was a course that worked well in the online environment because writing is an independent activity to be completed without interference or influence from other people. These students admitted that to "succeed" or pass an online course they would need to be *independent* and *self-motivated* (46.5%) learners. Though for some students this style of learning made the course *more challenging* (30.77%), the challenge was one they expected and even welcomed as part of the online learning experience. Students saw what they perceived as the principles and objective of the course—independently *writing essays* (41.67%)—reflected in the affordances of what instructors might argue are potential limitations of the learning space. From students' points of view, those affordances include accessing and working on the course at any time, working from private locations, and simply not being "bothered by" their instructor. As one student noted, "I would have more time to myself and get to work on the papers on my own time without going to class." This time alone is seen as more essential than interactions with their instructors or peers. This preference may be in part because they want to "get the course over with" but it also reflects students' attitudes of writing itself and the way they feel writing is presented and taught in OFYWCs.

Likewise, these responses suggest students value comfort and familiarity in their learning processes over challenges and new experiences. The ability to self-select experiences and sites for that learning are, as far as students are concerned, great advantages of online courses. Students repeatedly praised their OFYWC for allowing them to write in their dorm or bedrooms where not only did they have easy access to their materials and resources but were also most *comfortable* (41.67%) (see Figs. 4.1 and 4.2 for images of dorm rooms on BGSU campus). They were also more likely to use digital places that evoked this same sense of comfort and familiarity. These students felt the online course allowed and encouraged this kind of interaction

and did not feel their perspectives on writing evolved much as a result of the course or instructors' influences. Students enrolled in the OFYWC believing they could complete the class on their own; most felt these expectations were met.

Figure 4.1. Photo of an undecorated double room in Offenhauer Towers, the dorm hall with the largest population at BGSU. Offenhauer Towers double room layout, by Office of Residence Life, June 14, 2018, retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/p/BkAvu5-hjZt/.

Figure 4.2. Photo of a decorated double room in Offenhauer Towers. Reprinted from Offenhauer

Towers | Double Bedroom Layout, by Office of Residence Life, August 15, 2018, retrieved from

https://www.instagram.com/p/Bmg0zgHBrow/?taken-by=bgsureslife.

It is especially important for instructors to consider the way this perspective and the

values students enter and leave the OFYWC with complicate and contradict values we hold as

teacher-scholars in composition studies. Students who claim to value the independence of the

OFYWC do not, for example, value collaboration in writing. Though some may never interact

with their colleagues in the course, as was true for interviewee Carl, this opportunity is not one

that students seem to miss. Rather, students are more comfortable working on their own in

private places that are isolated or physically distant from peers and instructors. What we as

instructors must ask ourselves is whether we want to promote that same level of comfort and

familiarity in the courses we teach and design and how, if at all, we want to challenge students'
expectations.

When online course sections are not designed with students' locations or preference for
independent work in mind, instructors run the risk of further enforcing these student-held beliefs
about writing. In course sections that do not take these factors into account, students are not
likely to be challenged to write beyond their comfort level or confront assumptions they may
have about writing and the university. Instead, OFYWCs that do not consider these factors can
reinforce students' assumptions about writing that run counter to the concepts and values
compositionists support and believe are essential to the writing process. This is especially
damaging for students who may only experience college writing instruction in the self-isolation
of the OLE as is true for those BGSU students who enroll in both GSW 1110 and GSW 1120
online. As a result, OFYW instructors must consider the role of students' locations and
motivations for enrollment in their courses as they decide how much they want to challenge and
disrupt those expectations. To begin this work, we can look more closely at five themes
highlighted in the student survey data gathered in this study.

Themes in student survey responses.

Students' reports on online GSW sections focused on five points we can use to analyze
and better understand students' experiences in those course sections: *self-sufficiency*, *self-isolation*, *privacy*, *"places"* and *individualism*. Surveyed students repeatedly emphasized that the
OFYWC emphasized independent writing. Students saw this promotion of independent writing
as an advantage of the course, especially when seen in contrast to face-to-face course sections
which they often described with feelings of frustration or even anger. Though these themes for
analysis were prevalent in students' responses, it is important to point out the way they challenge

and even contradict concepts that composition scholars see as disciplinary truths. It is therefore

important to not only understand how students internalize these expectations and perform them

in OFYWCs, but also to decide how we can and should react as instructors.

These themes manifested in most students' reports about not only what they expected

from OFYWCs generally, but also what they experienced in the online section of GSW 1110 or

GSW 1120 they enrolled in. Most often, the expectations students had for the online GSW

course, namely that it would require their diligent independent work, were also what motivated

their decision to enroll in an online section over a face-to-face one. Those motivations for

enrollment evolved into what students reported as advantages of the OLE and OFYWC format.

For these students, the ability to be self-reliant and *self-sufficient* rather than dependent on their

instructor or colleagues in the course was an advantage that they believed improved the course

format and delivery. This is most apparent in the negative language students used to describe the

face-to-face FYW course versus the positive language they used to describe the OFYWC.

Students strongly value the principles they believe are inherent to the online format rather than

those they associate with face-to-face GSW courses.
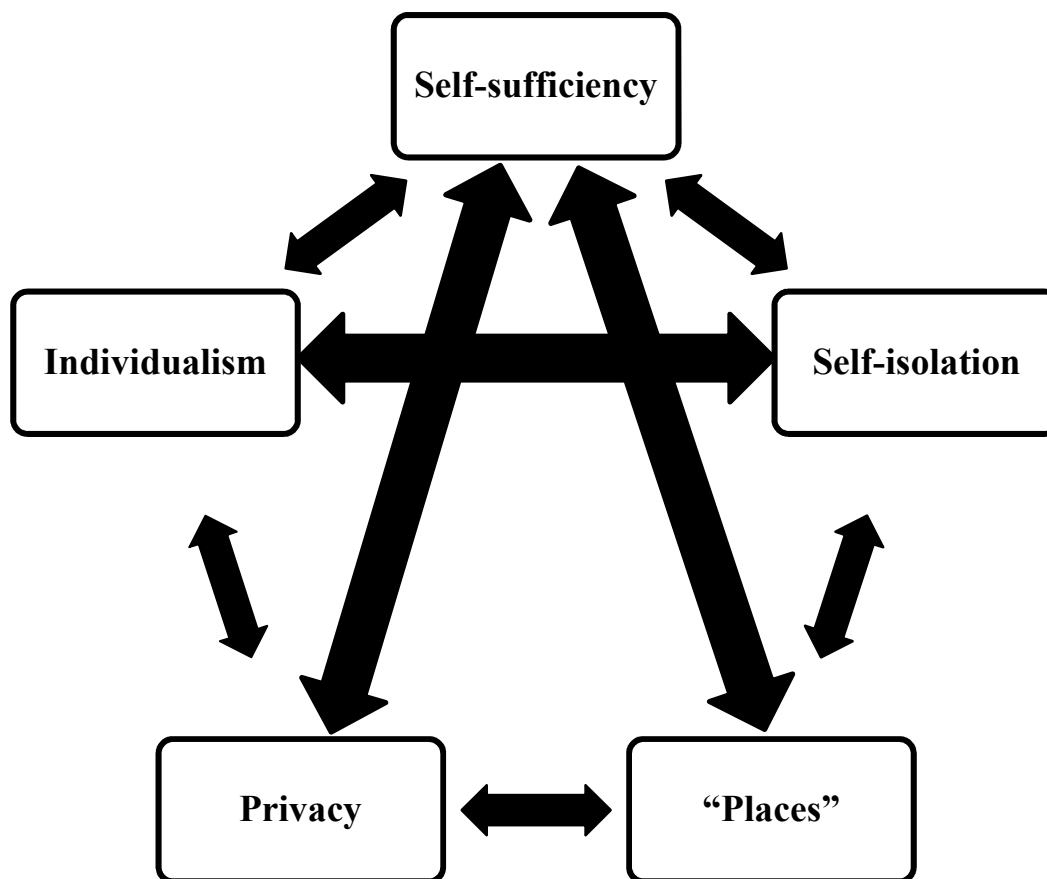
Figure 4.3. Themes of independence in students' survey responses.

The relationship between these student-valued principles is cyclical and interdependent (see Fig. 4.3). While these principles did seem to progress from feelings of self-sufficiency to self-isolation, leading to students working in "places" that reinforced a sense of privacy and individualism, each of these beliefs also reinforce one another. Each theme that appeared in students' stories about the online course emphasized how greatly they valued the OLE's distinction from the physical classroom as well as the way these beliefs became self-fulfilling prophecies. Students made this distinction based not just on aesthetics or accessibility, but the methods used to teach and do writing in each location. For students, this distinction is most apparent in the way OFYWCs seem to value individual learning practices rather than learning as part of a course community. Students found merit in the way the OFYWC gave them autonomy

from what they sometimes described as an unnecessary or even oppressive set of relationships, both *student-to-student* and *student-to-teacher*.

What initially students define as a need to practice *self-sufficiency* evolves into a rationalization for isolation. This process of isolation is one of OWI scholars' greatest critiques and instructors' greatest concerns about OWCs (Blair & Hoy, 2006; Blair, 2010; Ehmann & Hewett, 2015; Melkun, 2011; Shea, 2011). Students' *self-isolation* manifests in the practice of privileging the *personal* and *private* in both the physical and online spaces they choose to write in. Students primarily work in locations in which they already have a sense of place (SOP) or "structure of feeling" (Agnew, 1987, p. 28). This means that students choose to work in *places* that they have attachments to, that are stable, and that hold meaning, rather than *spaces* that are without personal meaning, or seem non-specific (Tuan, 1977). By working exclusively in places that are already familiar to them, students embrace the OFYWC as one that privileges and rewards *individualism* rather than collaboration. That acceptance of the OFYWC as an individual endeavor reinforces students' beliefs that self-sufficiency is a benefit and requirement of OWCs and, by extension, college-level writing.

Self-sufficiency.

Instructors, administrators, and scholars often question what motivates students to choose an online section of a course that is also offered face-to-face. It was therefore important to investigate students' motivations in this study and their responses revealed a great deal about their perceptions of OWI.[14] While some students cited lifestyle-based reasons as we might expect like long commutes to campus or work and family commitments that restrict their time, more

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[14] To understand what motivated online GSW students, one of the first questions in this study's survey was "Why did you enroll in an online section of GSW 1110/1120 rather than a face-to-face/on-campus section?" (see Appendix X for a complete student survey protocol).

students mentioned what they believed to be specific affordances of OLEs and online courses. This is a shift away from the most often cited student motivators in OWI scholarship: *accessibility*, *mobility*, and *flexibility* (Blair, 2010; Blair & Hoy, 2006; Blythe, 2001; Stine, 2010). Most notable among these affordances was the way OWCs—in students' views—prioritize the individual. For students, this refocusing on independent learning seemed natural and beneficial to the overall successful facilitation of the course. Many students implied or directly stated that because writing is an individual activity, GSW courses work well when taught online.

For students, writing in OLEs rather than a face-to-face classroom translated to a need for self-sufficiency. They noted that online courses can be uniquely challenging because, in that format, they are only accountable to themselves rather than an instructor or peers whom they meet with two or three times per week. This challenge was one students expected and claimed to take on willingly when enrolling in an OFYWC. Some students even implied that they would learn more or become stronger writers because they had to depend on themselves more. This was especially true for students who believed they were already strong writers when they started GSW.

Self-isolation.

As shown in students' survey responses, this emphasis on self-sufficiency can quickly and easily manifest as *self-isolation* from instructors and peers. Students almost unanimously reported they preferred to work in *private* locations that were secluded and away from other people. Students' self-imposed physical distance from potential peers and instructors allowed them to maintain their view of writing as an independent activity. Students saw it as an

advantage of the OLE that they could work this way, separate from classmates in the course and without interference from their instructor. One student noted:

> My GSW course first semester was a face-to-face class and I believed it did not need to
> be. We spent most of our time not doing a whole lot and I dreaded going to class every
> day, so I chose to do online so I would enjoy the course more.

In addition to a general sense of frustration with the course, this student's response suggests they saw class time as an unnecessary requirement of face-to-face sections, one that the OLE remedied. In some cases, students even cited this quality of the OFYWC as their main motivation for enrolling in an online rather than face-to-face GSW section.

Particularly interesting is the way this practice of self-isolation directly corresponds to a concern long held by OWI scholars and instructors who believe online courses have "something missing in terms of course quality and interaction" (Rendahl & Kastman Breuch, 2013, p. 298). Instructors like Schaberg (2018) regularly lament what is lost in the OLE. In his article in *Inside Higher Ed* "Why I Won't Teach Online," Schaberg (2018) articulates common fears or points of resistance to online teaching many instructors share. He writes there are "several things I can't do in my class on the internet, and these are why I won't be found teaching online, not ever" (para. 4). Among those "things" are getting to know his students, meeting with them in his office, and even developing strong enough bonds to write effective letters of recommendation.

Though experienced online instructors could provide counterpoints to most if not all his arguments with methods to achieve the same effect using practices uniquely designed for online instruction, Schaberg (2018) does address shared challenges of the OLE. These challenges are especially trying for instructors when students see them as advantages rather than shortcomings.

While instructors may describe a "presumption of loss" (Blair, 2010), students presume an array of benefits.

This disconnect between their fears and students' enthusiasm can be disorienting and unexpected for instructors. Schaberg (2018) underscores this conflict and why it can be so distressing, especially for instructors who claim collaboration and community as essential aspects of their pedagogy: "Part of what we're training students to do in college, after all, is to work with actual other people" (para. 5). While this goal may be obvious for some instructors, it is less clear for students. The students surveyed in this study do not place the same importance on this skill—at least not in GSW. Students do not see communication or collaboration with their peers as an essential aspect of the college-level writing course or writing for the university despite instructors contradictory beliefs.

"Places."

Though this lack of community engagement is seen as a challenge by instructors, students see it as a clear advantage of the OFYWC. For students, not having to be physically in the same location as twenty-four fellow college writers is an advantage of online learning because the goal of the course, as they see it, is to write individual papers without outside influence. This means although instructors may see the inherent benefit to holding class sessions in a common room multiple times per week, students do not see it as essential for effective writing instruction.

This lack of a common space is more often felt by instructors who see collaboration as necessary for writers. Instructors like Schaberg (2018) often lament the lack of a shared communal classroom in online course sections to build community as well as the inability to collectively move students to a new shared location: "I can't teach outside online…online there is no outside. (What a chilling thought)" (para. 7). Students cannot be physically rearranged into

small groups in an online setting or asked to read their essays aloud to each other on a grassy

quad.

Instructors like Schaberg argue there is something missing from learning and instruction

in OLEs because students are not *together* in the online course in the same way they are when in

the public, shared "space" of a classroom. Students do not come together in the OLE in the same

way they might in a physical classroom to form sense of place (SOP) through shared activity,

memory, and meaning making. In a physical classroom, students may feel a sense of

unfamiliarity and even discomfort in the first days of the course. Students physically arrange

themselves and get used to the "space," eventually coming to associate it with the course itself

and the people in it. As a familiarity with the classroom develops so does a SOP, meaning what

once was a generic "space" becomes a "place as we get to know it better and endow it with

meaning" (Tuan, 1977, p. 6). Students' growing attachment to the generic classroom space is

what allows it to evolve into a specified place imbued with significance.

Privacy.

Though this evolution might take place easily and without much required intervention in

the physical classroom, place is not established in the same way in an OLE. Instead, in an OLE,

there are many learning environments that converge simultaneously made up of students'

individual perspectives from their various dorm rooms and kitchen tables, all of them *private*,

individualized "places"[15] familiar and available to them alone. Peers and instructors remain

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[15] We might consider the difference between "place" and "space" through the following
equation: place = (space + experiences) x time. See Chapter 1 for a more complete discussion of
"place" and "space."

unaware of these other learning environments despite the significant ways each individual place impacts students' perceptions of and work in the OFYWC.

Students always inhabit at least one digital location and one physical location in the online course and, as a result, we cannot conceive of the OLE as a single location. Students are never "just" online but instead are in a constant state of hybridity, always physically and digitally present. The two locations are inextricable from one another in the sense that they both directly influence students' understandings of and participation in the course. Students and the course they participate in are relocated to a series of private, unshared locations individual to each student.

The classroom, which once was a fixed, specific "place," becomes a transient, ever shifting Thirdspace that is constantly defined and redefined depending on where students are physically and digitally as they engage with it. Rather than locate the course in a single environment, the OFYWC is a product of multiple unseen and undescribed locations colliding. The online course is not a sole location but is instead the reality of the physical spaces and the reality of the digital spaces students inhabit. In an OFYWC course this means there may be twenty-five distinct constructions of the OLE because students do not share a physical Firstspace even if they share a digital space like an LMS or word processing program. It also means that students' instructors and peers enrolled in the course do not and cannot share their experience of place formation. While the establishment of SOP in a face-to-face course is typically shared and collaborative, the same process in an online course is privatized and individual.

As students assign meaning and develop their individualized Thirdspace of the OFYWC, they also create their identities as writers. Students' experiences of college-level writing evolves and are directly influenced by those Thirdspaces. As Fleckenstein (2005) explains, location,

whether physical or digital, positions us and our understanding of ideas, processes, and actions (pp. 163-164). In this way, place is not just a product of the meaning we inscribe on a location, but also a producer of meaning (Malpras, 1999). The physical and digital environments students self-select necessarily influence the way they engage with the course, the material, and their learning process.

If we accept this influential power of location on identity and idea formation, we must then consider the way this process shapes students understanding of college-level writing and the university. If all students engaging with the course are in private places that promote individual comfort and familiarity, they will also associate these qualities with college-level writing. Likewise, this experience of an isolated and privatized Thirdspace will reinforce students' belief that writing is also a private and individual activity. This belief will extend beyond the OFYWC and impact how students position themselves in the university overall. Bartholomae (1986) notes students invent the university through learning discourses and behaviors privileged there; students invent the online university in much the same way, enacting discourses and performing behaviors privileged online. For 21st century students, the online university is increasingly synonymous with the university overall. Online environments are becoming a common way for students to engage with the university meaning that, as Hewett and DePew (2015) rightfully point out, "the future is now" (p. 8) and OWI is here to stay. We should consider whether this sense of individualism is here to stay as well.

Individualism.

When students describe the private places they write in and the sense of individualism these places enforce, their writing processes seem reminiscent of the iconic solo author. This solo author sits alone at their desk, door closed, without outside influence and dreams up brilliant

prose without feedback, revision, or interference. In an interview with Knopf Doubleday (2011),

Ian McEwan depicted his writing style in a similarly isolationist way: "It's very important to

close off all those avenues to the outside world like the internet, the email, the telephone, so I

switch all those things off, and try and get a solid bit of work done" (Knopfdoubleday, 2011)

Although this process might work for the Ian McEwans of the world, it is not a writing

method most composition instructors would claim to promote. Instead, compositionists are more

likely to agree that "Writing is a social and rhetorical activity" (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015,

p. 17). As Roozen conveys, "No matter how isolated a writer may seem as she sits at her

computer, types on the touchpad of her smartphone or makes notes on a legal pad, she is always

drawing upon the ideas and experiences of countless others." (p. 17). Writing, although it may

appear a purely individual activity, can in fact, "never be anything but" social (Roozen, 2015,

p. 18). Still, the phenomenon of the solo author persists. Estrem (2015) points out, "Common

cultural conceptions of the act of writing often emphasize magic and discovery, as though ideas

are buried and the writer uncovers them" (p. 151). However, this cultural myth is in direct

contradiction to what we know to be true as teachers of writing. As far back as Isocrates,

teachers have understood writing as part of a process of social knowledge that requires rigorous

practice and guidance. As Bruffee (2011) explains, students working on writing "converse"

about that writing, pooling resources until "writing is internalized conversation re-externalized"

(p. 402).

Though students seem to perceive OFYWCs differently than face-to-face sections, these

threshold concepts that promote social interaction in composition instruction are likewise

essential concepts in OWI scholarship. In fact, two principles in the OWI Position Statement—

Principle 10 and Principle 11—directly address issues of interaction, collaboration, and

community. In much the same way Adler-Kassner and Wardle (2015) claim "writing is a social and rhetorical activity," OWI scholars argue:

- OWI Principle 10: Students should be prepared by the institution and their teachers for the unique technological and pedagogical components of OWI.

- OWI Principle 11: Online writing teachers and their institutions should develop personalized and interpersonal online communities to foster student success.

Community formation is at the center of both these principles and each reflects a shared belief with Adler-Kassner and Wardle's threshold concepts. The document reinforces this notion: "Composition teachers long have practiced pedagogy of collaboration and individualization in which students are encouraged to see themselves as connected to their peers while being unique writers" (2013, p. 23). To develop this sense of community, the CCCC's OWI Committee for Effective Practices in Online Writing Instruction recommends universities and instructors to keep class sizes low, develop course community early, communicate with students one-on-one and as a group, give prompt feedback, employ informal writing, seek feedback, and develop forums for open discussions among students.

Despite the Committee's steadfastness that "an OWC is not a self-paced or individually managed course" (2013, pp. 21-22), students articulate that they believe just that. Rather than seek community or discussion, which the both Adler-Kassner and Wardle and the Committee argue are essential components of a successful course, students choose to isolate themselves in private locations that allowed them to practice writing as an individual activity.

More so, students did not choose just any private locations. Rather, students specifically chose work environments that were familiar and personal to them. For example, though a study room in the library may have been private, or a comfy chair and table in the union may have

been convenient for residents, students opted for locations that exemplified both and students looked for the most personal *places* they could in most cases. Students most often cited writing in their dorm or bedroom. These students claimed they chose these rooms because they were *convenient* (33.33%) and all their materials available when and where they needed them. A byproduct of or even requirement for this convenience is the familiarity and comfort students felt in their rooms. Students also chose digital places based on these qualifications. The Canvas LMS was, for example, comfortable and familiar because despite what individual design choices instructors may make course shells tend to resemble one another (Salisbury, 2018, p. 10) (see Figs. 4.4 and 4.5 to compare two different Canvas course shells to demonstrate similarity).

In this way students chose writing locations that were not just *spaces* but *places*, and not just *places* but *private places* that allowed them to practice writing as an individual activity. Students wrote from locations where they had history and memory, and could speak and write from a unique, individualized point-of-view, often unobserved by their instructor or peers. When we consider just how personal a bedroom can be, it seems particularly important that it is from there that most online GSW students took part in their OFYWC. One student explained that they usually work in their dorm room "because it is a space I have to myself where it is quiet, and I can do what I want." Students invented the concept of college-level writing as an individual activity and did everything in their power to strengthen feelings of comfort while working in the OFYWC.
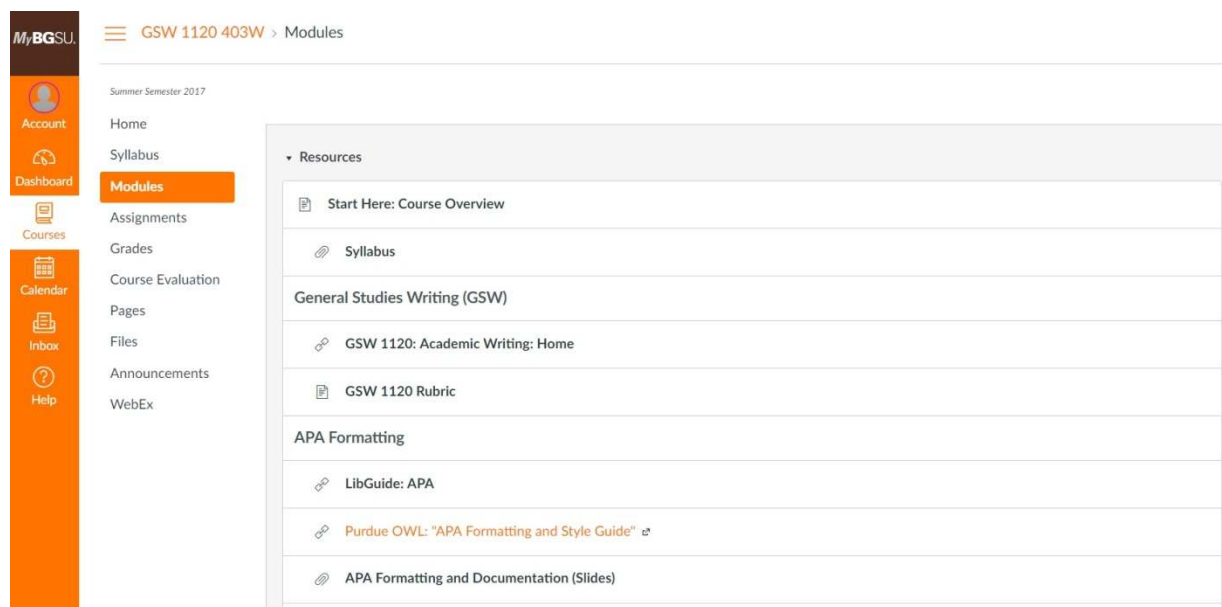
Figure 4.4. Screenshot of a GSW 1120 course shell in Canvas LMS.

Figure 4.5. Screenshot of a GSW 1110 course shell in Canvas LMS.

The Challenge of Teaching OFYW

By choosing a work location based on comfort and familiarity each of the twenty-four

students in an online GSW course are writing—likely asynchronously—from places

simultaneously familiar to themselves and unknown to one another. Students are not required to

get to know a new space, form SOP attachment, or make meaning together as a united

community despite threshold concepts and best practices that promote community formation as an essential learning process in composition. Instead, each student, from a separate point-of-view and SOP, learn what it is to be a college writer and how to "do" college writing. This means each student forms their own experience, resulting in what might be twenty-four students creating as many as twenty-four unique interpretations of college writing and twenty-four inventions of the university.

In this individualistic process of invention, students are unburdened by the need to challenge or change their perspective of writing. Students do not need to negotiate that meaning with one another or even, according to those surveyed, with their instructor. Instead, students can choose to be solo authors in the spirit of Ian McEwan. However, if we agree as compositionists that writing must be and always is social, that the solo author is in fact a mythical creature—a writing unicorn[16]—what do we make of the solo college writer? What do we as a field do *with* and *about* the online college writer, sequestered in their bedroom, without outside influence unchallenged by peer instructor feedback?

I argue we have two choices as instructors: we can *accept* this perspective as a reality of OWI, or we can *challenge* it. It is important to note that these choices are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Instead, instructors should anticipate students' expectations for OFYWCs. They must accept how those expectations will shape the course and the unique rhetorical situation of the online course while also challenging students to reconsider what they think they know about writing using support from threshold concepts. In this way, instructors do not have to decide that they will universally accept or push back on students' expectations. Rather,

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[16] Sorry, Sir McEwan.

instructors should consider the OFWYC a new frontier in which they must make several smaller decisions about how and why they will accept or challenge those beliefs.

If we choose to accept it.

We might understand from our anecdotal teaching experience as composition instructors—as well as concerns voiced by OWI scholars—that students are more likely to disengage or become isolated in an OWC. Students tell us that this isolation is often self-imposed and intentional. This isolation is even an advantage for students who see the first-year writing course as a burden to be endured rather than a positive or helpful course. As shown in the student survey and interview data collected in this study, students choose online learning at least in part due to what they believe is a privileging of independent writing over collaborative or interactive learning.

We can choose to accept preference for independence as a reality and distinction between face-to-face and online course sections and the practices we use to approach designing and facilitating course sections in both environments. Instructors might acknowledge that students will not, for example, conduct peer review or offer colleagues feedback on their writing in an online section in the same way they do in a face-to-face course. Soliciting students' feedback has always been a challenge, even more so in the OLE where students cannot see each other's faces in most cases. In the online course, it becomes more difficult to ask peers direct questions, especially when students know they will not receive an immediate response. Student audiences cannot always perceive the writer's tone or intention in a piece of writing, especially when they may not be familiar with the writer or their personality. So why not forgo peer review and compulsory social interaction entirely—at least, in the traditional sense?

This prospect might seem outrageous to composition instructors, especially those that accept writing is inherently a social activity. However, it is important to acknowledge the rhetorical situation of the OLE and what it means for student writers and their audiences. Those challenges facing student writers and audiences are also realities in any online environment. Twitter users often do not know the person behind the handle on their feed. Commenters often misinterpret intention, tone, or backgrounds of the original poster and can accidentally misrepresent these things about themselves in their comments. The original author and context of a text—whether blog post, idea, or meme—is not always clear and is often intentionally and unintentionally obscured. This is the reality of much of online communication beyond the OLE, or what we might even argue is the online version of "going outside" Schaberg (2018) misses from face-to-face courses.

Learning to write in a way that predicts these misrepresentations and multiple interpretations is an essential skill for writing online. Writers cannot rely on traditional methods for audience analysis because what they write may never reach the audience they initially imagined. Conversely, their audience may be one they never engage with directly just as they may never engage with their peers in the OFYWC directly. Their writing may be removed from its original context, stripped of authorial credit, presented in a new format, or remixed at a speed that would be impossible for traditional print texts.

If we want our students to write socially and authentically in a way that mimics real world contexts, audiences, and rhetorical situations, we must understand and adapt to an online version of that real world that often lacks context, lacks accountability, and lacks immediate feedback from audiences. These added challenges complicate Bartholomae's (1986) picture of the "*various* discourses" students must learn to "speak" to enter the community of the university

(p. 4). As Bartholomae points out, students perform these discourses before they become part of them and therefore "appropriate" or are "appropriate by" the specialized discourse (1986, p. 4). If we consider this as we think about that self-aware solo college writer, typing alone in their dorm, we might begin to see a more authentic *online* writer, one who instinctually designs their process and practice around the environment and audience they are writing for. The informed solo college writer understands online interaction is distinct from the face-to-face and therefore the writing process is as well. It is our job as instructors to help the college writer develop that self-awareness and learn the functions of online discourse.

To help foster mindfulness in their students, instructors can and must rethink how they teach composition online. Instructors can begin by crafting assignments that ask students to compose for online environments and audiences rather than solely traditional print genres and local audiences. Students can use these new assignments to thoughtfully engage with concepts instructors already teach including rhetorical situations, genre, and authorial voice. Assignments that are specifically designed for the OLE and online writer also allow instructors and students to consider rhetorical concepts like rhetorical velocity (Ridolfo & DeVoss, 2009) in more authentic ways that reflect how circulation works online.

In addition to considering how texts can change and evolve in the online environment, these assignments prompt students to look beyond the course and their peers for an audience for their writing. Students must consider how their writing changes in an online environment and how the act and process of writing online texts is distinct from print texts. Instructors can ask students to reflect on the decisions they make as online writers and how those decisions may differ due to the rhetorical velocity of the text.

Most importantly, instructors can use this shift to online course facilitation to reconsider what we mean as a field when we argue "writing is social." In the context of the OWC that social interaction may not happen in the course itself. Teaching in an OLE presupposes the course exists in an indeterminate Thirdspace that is dependent on the Firstspace of each individual student. This shift also means that students may find writing more *comfortable* than they do in a face-to-face classroom setting because they are already familiar with and comfortable in that Firstspace—most often the private, "place" of their bedroom. In that case, writing that is social may no longer look the same as it does in a face-to-face course and instead students decide when and how much social exchange is required to write for the given rhetorical situation. In this way, instructors may be unable to force students' individual concepts of that Thirdspace to converge or interact, and instead may rely on students to make this decision.

If we choose to challenge it.

Alternatively, instructors can challenge students' expectations for the OFYWC to motivate them beyond what is comfortable and familiar. This departure from student expectations can and should reinforce threshold concepts for composition instruction that are applicable in both face-to-face and online environments. While Bartholomae does argue that students appropriate functions of discourses they observe but are not yet part of, he also acknowledges that they can make missteps in doing so. These missteps, Bartholomae acknowledges, can happen because students are "not so much trapped in a private language as [they are] shut out from one of the privileged languages of public life" (1986, p. 8). Students cannot make fully informed choices or understand all the expectations and rules of a discourse "before they are located in a discourse" (Bartholomae, 1986, p. 9) and guided by an informed

instructor. Students' expectations for and understanding of online writing can, therefore, be fundamentally flawed and incomplete if they are not challenged by their instructors.

A key part of this challenge is disruption. Disrupting these expectations will, by necessity, make students and even instructors *uncomfortable*. It is important that feeling of discomfort be productive rather than simply disorienting or distracting. The most constructive way to achieve this level of productive disruption is to refocus the OFYWC using threshold concepts, not only in the content of the course but also the design of course facilitation and learning environments where students engage with the course, their instructor, and their peers.

Scholar-teachers often think of threshold concepts as realities of a discipline that influence the content of that discipline. We might shape our research on threshold concepts— truths we have come to know as part of our practice in the field—and encourage students to study or practice those concepts in the writing they do in courses we teach. Threshold concepts are just as important, as Adler-Kassner and Wardle make clear, to methods and methodologies we use to teach and learn in our field. This means that threshold concepts should not only influence what we teach, but how we teach it. This is especially significant for teaching online where, though the methods of course delivery and communication are changed, there is typically an expectation from administrators, instructors, and students that the content is the same as in face-to-face sections. This is challenging when instructors cannot employ the same practices or methods they are used to using face-to-face to teach the same material online. By refocusing on threshold concepts and adapting rather than translating teaching practices, instructors can still challenge students and move them beyond their comfort zones.

Though we might agree writing is always collaborative and a product of social interaction (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015) and students should participate in online learning communities

(CCCC, 2013), in OWCs interaction and discussion is physically disembodied with students participating from different and physically distant locations. The community of writers typically visible and present in a face-to-face course do not typically physically interact in an online course. Indeed, students and teachers are often displaced—either temporally or geographically— in online courses potentially leading a sense that communication is removed from the immediate rhetorical situation of the class. This means that although students might still express their identities and unique perspectives in their writing, students might not consider their colleagues as potential audiences for that writing. As shown in students' survey responses, this distance changes how students interact with each other and their instructor in ways that can reinforce the misconception that writing—and online courses—are individualized, solitary activities.

An advantage to OWCs is that they give the opportunity for students to engage in authentic environments and reflect on the affordances and constraints of those environments in their writing. Rhetoric and composition scholars have long agreed that digital environments differ from physical environments in terms of the available means and potential audiences addressed in writing. It makes sense then that OWCs can provide students with experiences writing in online environments and encourage them to make decisions about their writing based on those environments. OWI Principle 13 confirms: "OWI students should be provided support components through online/digital media as a primary resource; they should have access to onsite support components as a secondary set of resources" (CCCC OWI Committee for Effective Practices in Online Writing Instruction, 2013, p. 26). As Duffy (2016) explains "when creating a text, the writer addresses others...[a]nd...initiates a relationship between writer and readers, one that necessarily involves human values and virtues" (p. 31). Students can gain experience initiating this relationship in online spaces with a wider array of audiences.

Additionally, these interactions can be provided in context so students see how online writing mediates and intervenes on social and political actions. Students can also can write in a series of new of genres that are constantly shifting and adapting to these new audiences. In online spaces, writers and contexts change over time; they are not static.

This means that instructors should encourage online discussions that use tools and methods common to online rhetorical situations. For example, instructors can prompt students to consider how video conferencing and online chat differs from face-to-face office hours. Students should contemplate how online office hours function differently than face-to-face office hours might. Students should familiarize themselves with the concept of scheduling a time to chat online and the various affordances of video conferencing—like screen-sharing and recording options versus email—including asynchronous communication and archiving functions. Additionally, students can analyze the different genres and opportunities for meaning-making in online environments because, unlike the physical classroom, the course space can be easily expanded. Rather than be physically restricted or isolated, online courses allow for hypertextual understandings of space and place wherein students can move in different environments and experience discourses and interactions beyond those with their colleagues or instructor.

Central to applying threshold concepts to OWI is thinking of OWCs as unique writing contexts. Instructors must consider how OWI is a distinct practices from face-to-face writing instruction and what specific misconceptions and expectations students will bring to that experience. Rather than translate teaching practices from face-to-face environments to OLEs, instructors should consider the ways threshold concepts can serve as a foundation for considering the environments of the online course. Threshold concepts can guide not only students' understandings of online writing, but also instructors' design of OWCs and OLEs.

Conclusion

In this chapter I examined the data I collected from online GSW students with the goal of understanding not only *how* but *where* students participate in OFYWCs at BGSU. The aim of this study is to learn more about the motivations and experiences of students enrolled in OFYWCs and specifically those enrolled in online GSW courses at BGSU. Through this research, we can be more aware of the ways students negotiate the various contexts and locations they inhabit while writing in OFYWCs and how we, as composition instructors, can facilitate more effective courses in the OLE that challenge students and encourage their writing processes to evolve.

Students' expectations for OFYWCs imply they believe writing is an individual activity best done when alone, without influence or interference from the outside world. Many students were motivated to self-select an OFYWC over a face-to-face section because they believed GSW, unlike other courses they enrolled in face-to-face, would work well when facilitated in an online format. In addition to believing an OFYWC is the ideal format for GSW content, students also chose to write in private, isolated places like dorms and bedrooms. These locations have the advantage of being familiar and personal to the students, which make them "places" unlike the generic, unfamiliar "spaces" of a face-to-face classroom.

As shown in their responses, the way students locate themselves in OFYWCs is based on how *comfortable* they are in that place. This decision-making process stays the same for both physical and digital places students choose to write in. Students view the LMS and word processing programs like Word and Google Docs similarly to the way they view their dorms or bedrooms. These places are primarily *familiar* to students and this familiarity and comfort in place supersedes any functional or usable advantage and affordances alternative spaces may

have. These places likely feel familiar because, even if an instructor customizes their course

shell, every course the student enrolls in will follow a similar template and organization as

dictated by the limited customization of the LMS (Salisbury, 2018, p. 10). In this way, both the

digital and physical locations students chose to write in were "places" rather than "spaces."

Students have the choice in an OWC to self-select physical and digital places that are *familiar*,

and that they can, as a result, use and write in without moving beyond their comfort zones to

learn or try something new.

 Instructors, therefore, must determine if and how much they want to challenge students to

move beyond these places of comfort. When deciding if and how to disrupt student expectations

for OFYWCs, instructors need to learn about their individual students' locations as well as the

reasons they locate themselves where they do. It is vital that instructors understand whether

students have chosen these places due to *comfort* or another reason like accessibility and

availability, so they can challenge students without unduly burdening them physically,

emotionally, or economically.

 In Chapter Five, I reflect on this discussion and the implications of this study considering

current research in the field of OWI and what I predict as the future of online learning. I continue

to contemplate the implications of this shifting terrain for instructors, administrators, and

students and how challenging student—and instructor—expectations for online learning is a

pedagogical necessity. I reflect on how instructors in BGSU's GSW department should consider

specific challenges of location and space as they design, facilitate, and participate in OFYWCs. I

also suggest future areas for research in OWI and methods for conducting this research.

CHAPTER FIVE: RE-INVENTING GENERAL STUDIES WRITING AT

BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY: INVESTING IN ONLINE WRITING

COURSES WHILE FOCUSING ON STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

> There is no question that OWI will be a part of higher education's future, but…the future is *now*. When OWI is addressed in a principled manner, administrators and instructors will have reasonable guidance in sometimes murky waters—all to the benefit of writing students, who are flocking to online courses in unprecedented numbers and often with unrealistic expectations.
> (Hewett & DePew, 2015, p. 8)

> [M]aintaining online courses is like raising children: they need consistent care and attention, and plenty of grooming and upgrading as they mature. (Lieberman, 2018, para. 3)

In this chapter, I reflect on the data collected in this case study as presented in Chapter Three and analyzed in Chapter Four. Referencing those results, I form connections to the scholarship reviewed in Chapter One and demonstrate how this study's findings build on that existing research. I also suggest what instructors, administrators, and students can learn about online first-year writing courses (OFYWCs) and, more broadly, online writing instruction (OWI) by understanding students' expectations for online learning and their experiences negotiating space and context in OFYWCs. Though this data is gathered exclusively from students in the General Studies Writing (GSW) program at Bowling Green State University (BGSU), I argue the implications and suggestions for action I describe here can also be applied to other institutions who are growing and reassessing their writing programs and the online writing courses (OWCs) they offer.

Indeed, I suggest that all instructors at institutions with OFYWCs—or those who use online learning environments (OLEs) like learning management systems (LMSs) to supplement face-to-face courses—must further consider the role of space and place on their students' experiences in those courses as well as the way space and place irrevocably alter the way

instructors enact composition pedagogy in OLEs. Instructors do not and should not teach the same way in OWCs they do in face-to-face classrooms (Salisbury, 2018). However, we must acknowledge that distinction in teaching approaches and develop new, contextual practices that specifically address the affordances and limitations of OLEs. This development of new teaching practices must be grounded in awareness of and attention to students' individual backgrounds and experiences.

To better prepare instructors to develop these practices, I suggest the GSW program at BGSU give more attention to OWI. While BGSU and the GSW program both offer professional development for instructors teaching online, these opportunities could go further to address the specific student population, disciplinary concepts, and pedagogical approaches unique to OFYWCs and OWI. Other first-year writing (FYW) programs could likewise benefit from this refocusing. To continue the program's efforts to encourage online instruction preparation for instructors, I advise GSW administrators to develop additional methods for gathering data about the online GSW student population, make that data available to instructors, and create targeted and reflective professional development opportunities in OWI for instructors. Increasing administrative investment in OWI scholarship will likewise increase instructors' investment and lead to stronger OFYWCs and OWI in the program. While the GSW program already has a strong culture of professional development, I suggest ways to strengthen that culture and further the efforts of GSW instructors.

Beyond these recommendations for the GSW program, I also make suggestions for future OWI research. In addition to calling for more engagement with OWI methods and methodologies, I propose different sites and focuses for research including more attention to secondary students as well as College Credit Plus (CCP) and dual enrollment populations. To

study these populations and their experiences with OWI, I advise conducting both case studies

and national surveys to gather localized and broad-spectrum data with attention to the unique

spaces and places that comprise the research sites. OWI can benefit from additional longitudinal

studies that consider research sites from multiple perspectives and at different moments in time.

As programs further develop their OWC offerings and support for OWI, researchers must

investigate how these evolutions impact instructors and students, but also the way writing

instruction is impacted by OWI as a whole. There will always be more to research in online

learning and instruction, but this case study and the proposed projects included here will begin to

offer much needed insight for OWI stakeholders.

Origins and Goals of this Research

Throughout the research process, I have prioritized students' voices and experiences. My

goal has been to not only research how students experience spaces and places in OFYWCs, but

to refocus OWI scholars' attentions on students. This research must consider not only how they

react and adapt to instructors' teaching practices or institutional policies, but the ways their

attitudes, behaviors, and actions likewise influence OWI and the OFYWCs they enroll in. It is

imperative that OWI researchers consider the full spectrum of OWC experiences from the

perspectives of all stakeholders: administrators, instructors, and students. While each of these

perspectives are significant, focusing on one exclusively or not considering how each group

impacts the other limits our ability as scholars and instructors to address the unique challenges of

OWI.

This project works to broaden that line of inquiry with students' experiences at the

forefront while giving suggestions for actions administrators and instructors should take

considering those experiences. To address these goals, I began this case study with two central research questions in mind:

1. What are the motivations of students enrolled in OFYWCs?

2. What are the experiences of students enrolled in OFYWCs?

3. How do students negotiate the various contexts and spaces they inhabit while working and writing in OFYWCs?

I am interested in these questions due in part to the increasing rate of students who enroll in online sections regardless of their physical proximity to or presence on a residential college campus. As more students enroll in online courses, especially introductory courses like FYW, instructors, administrators, and researchers must consider what influence this shift in location will have on not only the way teachers teach threshold concepts, but the way students learn those concepts and how to be a college student. If 72.7% of undergraduate students at public colleges and universities enroll in at least one online course and over half of those students enroll exclusively online (Allen & Seaman, 2017) what impact does their physical displacement from the traditional physical classroom have on their perceptions of course content, how they experience the learning process, and how they think about the university as an institution?

I first saw these questions reflected in Mauk's (2003) discussion of location in community college writing courses and believe his research is an important starting point for parallel research in online learning. Mauk argues we can no longer think of "academic space" as solely physical classrooms and residential campuses, because these spaces now must inherently include the private spaces that constitute students' personal lives. For online courses, this means academic space is displaced from the physical university and is instead defined by the confluence of physical and digital spaces. A challenge in defining this newfound space arises when we

realize that academic space can no longer be discussed as a singularly defined location. How

students learn and interact with the institution depends on not only their physical location on

campus but their individual somatic mind (Fleckenstein, 1999) and personal relationship to

spaces beyond that campus. This means that if an OFYWC has twenty-five students (the

enrollment cap for General Studies Writing 1110) there are twenty-five—twenty-six if we

include the instructor—distinct definitions of academic space in one course section alone. Each

participants' experience of the course is therefore different and is directly shaped by the physical

place or places they access the course from, the online and digital spaces they inhabit

simultaneously, and how they connect these places in their minds to create the OFYWC (see

Fig. 1 in Chapter One for a model of the OFYWC as Thirdspace made up of these distinct

elements).

Mauk addresses this challenge, as it relates to commuter community college students,

through the application of Soja's (1996) Thirdspace which allows instructors to consider the

places beyond campus where students compose projects, interact with colleagues and professors,

and study for exams. Online instructors can, through the concept of Thirdspace, visualize the

academic space as no longer fixed but rather flexible and related to not only the "real"

Firstspace, but also the "imagined" Secondspace of students' experiences. This reimagining of

the academic space means instructors and students can likewise reinvent the university

incorporating online learning and the confluence of several physical Firstspaces and digital

Secondspaces.

This project works to provide language and examples to define the way Thirdspace or,

more accurately, Thirdspace*s* manifest in OFYWCs. Since much of this active Thirdspace

creation happens in student-owned places, I focused on gathering and analyzing students'

experiences of OFYWCs rather than instructors' perceptions of or lore about those course

experiences. Much has been said about how instructors' feel about online courses, but little data

has been gathered about students that does not place instructors' actions at the center (Ice, et al.,

2007; McVey, 2008; Moore & Filling, 2012; Tuzi, 2004; Vincelette & Bostic, 2013; Wichadee,

2013). Through students' articulations of this unique academic space, I aimed to gain insight into

how they understand the differences between the face-to-face and online course experience and

how they negotiate those differences, to share that insight with instructors.

The Significance of OWI and OFYWCs at BGSU

For some composition instructors and administrators, this attention to OFYWCs might

seem overstated especially at institutions like BGSU where most FYW courses (90.3%[17]) are still

taught in face-to-face classrooms. However, enrollment data suggests that even at BGSU, online

learning is growing rapidly. Between Fall 2015 and Fall 2017 the GSW program experienced

98.8% growth in online enrollment. This exponential growth over such a short period of time

suggests OFYWCs are in demand by BGSU students and worthy of significant attention by

GSW program administrators and instructors. It is worth exploring why this growth is happening

and what impact it has on BGSU students. Examining students' motivations for enrollment in

OFYWCs and listening to their experiences in those courses is a useful place to begin this

exploration.

Data presented in Chapter Three shows that this student demand for online course

sections is due to a variety of reasons. Some motivations are expected—like balancing a busy

course and work schedule—while others may come as a surprise to administration and

instructors—like frustration with face-to-face coursework. In fact, students' physical distance

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[17] This is the percentage of sections of GSW 1110 (85 out of 90 sections; 94.4%) and GSW 1120 (111 out of 127 sections, 87.4%) taught face-to-face in the Fall 2017-Spring 2018 academic year.

from campus was the least cited motivator for choosing an online course, a fact that seems more common (Lederman, 2018) as the prevalence of online learning increases. Instead, students are more likely to select online sections for their perceived flexibility and convenience, regardless of where they are physically located. This data continues to suggest despite many instructors' perception of online instruction as limiting, students want to learn online and will likely enroll in at least one online course in their pursuit of higher education.

While the preference for flexibility is not altogether unexpected (Blair, 2010; Blair & Hoy, 2006; Blythe 2001; Stine, 2010), how students adapt to online learning and, as a result, perceive college-level writing is surprising. GSW students are likely to believe writing is a solitary and independent activity that does not require or even encourage collaboration. Students reported that they could write for online GSW courses without interference or interaction from their peers or instructor and that they preferred to write that way. This revelation is likely distressing for instructors who believe collaboration is essential to effective writing instruction and writing is always contextual (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2016) as well as for the GSW program which prioritizes collaborative writing practices in their learning outcomes (Outcomes & Assessment, n.d.). Though students may not have participated in collaborative activities or see the work they do in OFWCs as collaborative, writing is still social and contextual in OLEs. One issue students may have in pointing to collaborative writing situations—like their limited descriptions of their writing spaces—is a lack of language to define those situations.

Collaboration is not always well-defined even by writing studies scholars and can take a variety of forms. Collaborative writing practices like those prioritized in the GSW learning outcomes, suggest FYW courses should include student-to-student interactions but also communication with instructors and even audiences beyond the FYW course. As Talib and

Cheung (2017) articulate in the introduction to their synthesis of collaborative writing research: "Collaborative writing refers to the process which provides participants the opportunity to explore, discuss, cooperate and develop learning capabilities (Dobao, 2012; Heidar, 2016; Noël & Robert, 2004)" (p. 44). Though a strong starting point, this definition does not offer any concrete activities or specific manifestations of collaboration. The Task Force to Revise the CCCC Principles and Standards for the Teaching of Writing's (2015) "Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing" statement builds on this general definition in their explanation of Principles of Sound Writing Instruction. They posit "sound writing instruction considers the needs of real audiences" and therefore, "writers [must] learn the many ways in which writing is a social activity, considering audiences and contexts for reception and potentially working with other writers as they compose" (2015, para. 9). To facilitate collaborative learning and writing, the task force suggests instructors emphasize writing as rhetorical and design opportunities for writers to collaborate like "collaborative planning, drafting, reviewing, revising, and editing of writing" (para. 10).

     This explanation of collaborative writing still seems broad, largely because collaboration can take many different forms. As Powers, Dunn-Lewis, and Fraser describe in their Collaborative Writing Resources writing collaborative can mean "writing text together or separately, editing another's work, peer reviewing in a face-to-face/virtual environment, or all (or none) of the above. It may involve running drafts by colleagues or having an editor piece together multiple contributions" (n.d., para. 2). Collaboration can take place at any time in the writing process. There is no single "best practice" (Powers, et al., n.d., para. 3) for collaborative writing. In this way, collaboration can mean any writing or communication—including text, audio, or video interactions in an OLE—between multiple people. Collaboration, at its most

basic level, means social interaction between writers and other people about writing.

Collaborative writing activities should be designed so students see writing as inherently social

and interactive and to benefit students' writing processes.

The majority of writing studies research in pedagogy maintains, "most students are

motivated by an improvement in their writing competencies in collaborative writing tasks" (Talib

& Cheung, 2017, p. 42) and "collaborative writing is effective in improving accuracy of student

writing and critical thinking" (p. 43). CCCC OWI Committee for Effective Practices in Online

Writing Instruction. (2013) likewise contends in Principle 11:

> Students' motivation as learners often is improved by a sense of interpersonal
>
> connectedness to others within a course. Composition teachers long have practiced
>
> pedagogy of collaboration and individualization in which students are encouraged to see
>
> themselves as connected to their peers while being unique writers. It is believed generally
>
> that such writing courses inspire student success and satisfaction. (p. 23)

To facilitate collaboration in an OWC, they suggest in Principle 3.10:

> Teachers should moderate online class discussions to develop a collaborative OWC and
>
> to ensure participation of all students, the free and productive exchange of ideas, and a
>
> constant habit of written expression with a genuine audience. Discussion board facilities
>
> in LMSs, blogs, and some social media can host discussions that are integrally part of
>
> assigned projects. (p. 14)

In a face-to-face course, collaboration might look like students forming groups in different parts

of the classroom. Online, it might look like LMS group spaces where students exchange

documents or post to discussion boards. Regardless of the specific form it takes or the

technology used to facilitate the activity, collaboration is possible, beneficial, and should be encouraged in OWCs according to the position statement.

Whether or not students participated in collaborative writing activities without knowing it or instructors did not know how to facilitate such activities in an OLE is beyond the scope of this study. In Carl's interview, he claimed the instructor in his online GSW course did not facilitate any collaborative writing activities; he did not do any peer reviews, group work, or discussion board posts. When I pressed Carl and asked if he ever read any of his colleagues' writing or even knew anything about them he said the only interaction between students was an initial "get to know you" style discussion board at the beginning of the semester. Without interviewing the other students surveyed in this study, I cannot know whether this was a shared experience. It may be that students failed to see activities in the OFYWC as collaborative due to their misconceptions about writing as individual or that the OFYWC lived up to their expectations and reinforced writing as an independent activity. In either case, students' responses speak to a larger disparity between student and instructor perceptions of online instruction. Instructors tend to prioritize physical proximity to their students and believe face-to-face or blended instruction is inherently more effective than online-only instruction (Allen & Seaman, 2017) where text-based and other required interactions do not prompt the same motivation for learning (Blair & Hoy, 2006; Hewett, 2015; Huang, Kahai, & Jestice, 2010; Stewart, 2017). Instructors like Schaberg (2018) lament lost opportunities for learning that reflect a "presumption of loss" (Blair, 2010) rather than celebrate the affordances of online learning environments (OLEs). Students on the other hand, though they may see some of these limitations and agree online courses can be more challenging than their face-to-face counterparts, see many advantages that make online courses appealing. When—not if—we consider and respond to those beliefs, we must do so thoughtfully

and with the individuality of our students in mind. We must acknowledge the way our

disciplinary knowledge may work in opposition to students' experiences with writing and online

learning.

A common misconception we must unlearn is that students demand online courses

because they are naturally adept at online learning and know what to expect in an online course.

This misconception is still widespread as demonstrated by the Adobe Blog post "We Need to

Rethink Education for Digital Natives" (2018):

> With the internet as their school, digital natives [sic] have access to unlimited content,
>
> enabling learning to be constant. Learning now doesn't depend on time, location,
>
> classrooms, or old-school lesson plans. Whether it's watching an online tutorial, reading
>
> Wikipedia, or getting support and advice from others around the world via social
>
> networks, learning is something to be done — and it's done on the go. (para. 15)

While the blog post rightly describes the reality of online learning as "always-on" it also makes

erroneous assumptions about students who learn online. Most notable is the claim students are

"digital natives." The post claims the shift toward online learning is due to the preferences of

these so-called "digital natives" who refuse to engage in learning that cannot be done "on the go"

as a reflection of their supposed transitory lifestyles and addiction to mobile technologies. This

analysis reinforces the idea that students are part of a homogenous group with the same

relationship to technology and, as Prensky (2001) originally claimed when he popularized the

term "digital native:" "are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach"

(p. 1). While this definition might align with perceptions we have of students in our courses, the

use of the term "digital native" to describe all potential online learners is reductionist (Kennedy

& Fox, 2013; Kirschner & De Bruyckere, 2017; Romero, Guitert, Sangrà, & Bullen, 2013) and

colonialist (Alexander, 2017). Its use ignores the varied experiences and skill levels of students

for whom, as Alexander (2017) points out, "being 'born into' the digital world" (p. 327) does not

mean "that person automatically knows and possesses certain skills" (p. 326). It likewise does

not reflect the reality of how students enroll in online courses since not all students were "born

into" the online world due to their age, class, location, or accessibility level. Carl, for example,

would not be considered a "digital native" due to his age.

Placing this burden on students makes it seem like they are somehow responsible for all

that goes wrong in online learning. Instead of assuming students' demand for and proficiency in

online learning then, we should consider how "the presence of digital technology has changed

the way we think about writing" (Alexander, 2017, p. 326) and how instructors perform writing

pedagogy in OWCs. We should listen to and address how students select, participate in, and

internalize what they learn in OWCs. Doing so must start with an awareness and examination of

students' relationship to writing and the university. For instructors in the GSW program, this

analysis must include an interrogation of how the teaching and learning process differs in face-

to-face and online course sections both due to their actions as instructors and students'

assumptions about OLEs.

Online GSW students' perceptions of college-level writing differ from programmatic goals.

Whether instructors intentionally teach composition principles differently or not, GSW

students in online sections begin and complete OFYWCs with opinions about college-level

writing that contradict disciplinary beliefs about effective writing instruction. Current

scholarship in writing studies and composition pedagogy suggest students should engage in

writing activities that are social and collaborative. As Adler-Kassner and Wardle (2016) argue, a

threshold concept of composition is that writing is social and contextual. According to this belief,

writers do not and should not compose texts as "solo authors" trying to avoid influence from

colleagues, mentors, or outside readers. In face-to-face FYW courses, this threshold concept

often manifests in instructors promoting or facilitating group work, peer review, co-authored

texts, and other discussion and feedback methods. Many online instructors likewise employ these

methods though they may look different or be more or less effective due to the unique

affordances and constraints of OLEs. The learning environment should not change instructors'

fundamental beliefs about the discipline. The environment may however, alter the way

instructors think about effective writing instruction methods and facilitating course content. The

result of this adaptation can be misunderstanding or miscommunication about these concepts

between instructors and their students.

Despite this attention to the social nature of writing in the discipline, BGSU OFYW

students reported their experiences in online sections of GSW reinforced writing as an

independent activity that requires little to no interaction with a community of writers including

peers or instructors. They did not lament the lack of collaborative writing tasks or

communication with their colleagues; they did not mention collaboration much at all. Instead, the

absence of collaboration came through in students' responses because they did not mention their

colleagues or student-to-student interactions in their OFYWCs. Students were untroubled by this

quality of college-level writing and, despite agreeing it might make the courses more

challenging, saw it as a feature rather than a bug.

For writing instructors though, this perspective should be troubling in the sense that it

leads to productive changes in the way we teach OFYWCs, especially at BGSU. The GSW

program argues each course in the sequence[18] helps students become more "confident within a

variety of situations and for a range of purposes" ("Course Information," para. 2). The program

site states, "We approach writing as social, rhetorical, action-based intellectual work" ("Course

Information," para. 2). GSW 1120 specifically "is designed to prepare students for the types of

college-level writing they will be expected to do in college" ("GSW 1120," para. 1). Learning

outcomes for GSW courses likewise include "participation in an active learning community,"

"practice the processes entailed in academic writing, including…collaborative activity," and

"critiquing student and professional writing" (Outcomes & Assessment, n.d.) which all describe

an approach to college-level writing that is not independent in nature but rather requires repeated

interaction between fellow writers and audience members. These statements, claims, and

outcomes all rightfully reflect the widely held disciplinary belief that "Writing is a Social and

Rhetorical Activity" (Adler-Kassner and Wardle, 2016). Despite assertations that this is GSW's

collective approach to teaching writing however, online GSW students' responses suggest that

concept is not always practiced in online sections of GSW 1110 and GSW 11120. Students often

miss this message of collaboration and community and instead complete GSW online believing

writing is an individual activity to be completed in private without outside intervention. Efforts

to expand OWI at BGSU must therefore directly address this gap between learning outcomes and

student experiences.

Suggestions for the GSW program: Data collection, instructor preparation, and

programmatic investment.

If the GSW program wants to both continue to grow its online course presence and argue

for a collaborative, community-oriented approach to writing, administrators and instructors must

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[18] This sequence includes GSW 1100, GSW 1110, and GSW 1120. A description of the course sequence can be
found in Table 2.1. GSW course summaries in Chapter Two.

rethink how they approach OWI and students in OFYWCs. Specifically, instructors must acknowledge students most often access their courses and complete assignments in the isolation of private places like their bedrooms and dorm rooms and may never seek interaction with peers and instructors if unprompted or unrequired. Because of this lack of interaction or challenge to their expectations, most students who begin online GSW courses believing writing is individual will complete those courses with the same belief. Despite GSW learning outcomes, most online students will not approach writing as a "social, rhetorical, action-based, intellectual" endeavor but instead as the work of a solo author. Online GSW instructors must therefore begin to and continually disrupt students' expectations as part of their teaching practice.

To do so, instructors and administrators must first be more aware of the population of students these courses service. Without knowing the diverse backgrounds—classes, races, genders, ages etc.—and physical locations of their students, instructors are likely to assume they are teaching local—on-campus or to Bowling Green—eighteen- to nineteen-year-old first-year students who are "digital natives." These assumptions not only do not reflect the demographics of OFYWCs at BGSU, they also restrict instructors' approaches to instruction and fail to address students' individualized levels of experience, backgrounds, and locations. Instructors cannot make informed pedagogical choices or address students' needs without this information. While gathering data about each student in each OFYWC can help instructors, it does not address the overarching systemic lack of knowledge about why students enroll and how students interact in these courses.

While gathering this data will be useful, it is an unrealistic burden to place the onus of this research on instructors, many of whom are part-time, non-tenure track, or graduate teaching associates. Instead, I recommend the GSW program administration in partnership with

instructors collect, analyze, and transparently report on the student population enrolling in

OFYWCs at BGSU. This attention to data collection and study is necessary for the growth of

their online course offerings, success of their students, and preparation of their instructors. To

successfully analyze the population in OFYWCs at BGSU, this investigation should take the

form of a longitudinal study with the full participation of GSW instructors. Instructors should

understand why the data is being gathered, how it will be used, and the advantages of such a

study. GSW must also invest time and resources to prepare instructors not only to use the

technologies (like Canvas) needed for online delivery but also how to facilitate online courses

that reflect both collaborative, community-oriented composition pedagogy and effective OWI

practices (CCCC OWI Committee for Effective Practices in Online Writing Instruction, 2013).

Most importantly, this preparation should show how these two goals are symbiotic but cannot be

achieved by simply translating face-to-face practices to OLEs. This preparation must directly

address the population enrolling in online GSW courses and make clear to instructors how their

practices can address that population.

This approach should have the goal of not only evolving online teaching practices in the

GSW program, but also raising instructor consciousness and investment in OWI in general. As

shown in the challenges of collecting data for this study, instructor buy-in to researching OWCs

is often low which makes studying and addressing programmatic needs difficult. This lack of

investment may be due to many reasons including an already high labor investment in design and

delivering OFYWCs, lack of compensation in time and money for specialized OWI preparation,

and a lack of awareness of the distinct pedagogical and research needs of online course

facilitation. By showing the programs' attention and investment in OWI, GSW can drastically

increase instructors' consciousness, commitment, and confidence in OWI and OFYWCs. If the

writing program invests in OWI so will its instructors. This partnership will help students and refocus OFYWCs on the program's learning outcomes.

It is important to note that the university's Center for Faculty Excellence does offer workshops on online teaching. These workshops include "An Introduction to Online Course Design & Teaching," "Accessibility and Content Creation," and many more on specific features and tools in the Canvas LMS. It is also important to praise the already strong participation in these kinds of workshops from GSW faculty. While these workshops are valuable, they are not the only investment in online instruction needed and do not directly address the unique issues of OWI or designing OFYWCs. The workshops offered by the CFE are important but, as is true of many online teaching professional development at institutions across the U.S., focus largely on technologies and tools. These workshops are helpful for instructors who want to develop a familiarity with the LMS, digital tools for instruction, and even learn more about the basics of online accessibility. They are useful for teaching instructors the basics of how to teach online.

They are not, however, useful for teaching instructors how to teach *first-year writing* online. In the same way that face-to-face composition pedagogy should be uniquely designed and enacted with attention to specific learning outcomes and disciplinary threshold concepts, online pedagogy and instructors' preparation to teach online must be "tailored for their discipline, philosophy, and course goals" (Salisbury, 2018, p. 14). Learning to use technologies and tools is useful but does not address the wide spectrum of knowledge FYW instructors need to have to facilitate OFWYCs that enact threshold concepts and effective teaching practices of writing studies. As I point out in "Just a Tool: Instructors' Attitudes and Use of Course Management Systems for Online Writing Instruction:"

Just as understanding the inner workings of a camera does not make someone a skilled

photographer, understanding how to create discussion board threads and join Collaborate

sessions does not necessarily lead to critical, effective online instructions. A

photographer must understand both how to operate the camera and how to compose a

well-balanced image; instructors' understanding of CMSs should be similarly well-

balanced to include critical reflection on their teaching practices both face-to-face and

online. (Salisbury, 2018, p. 14)

Instructors can also be encouraged to reflect critically on these tools since online instructional

tools are unlikely to be chosen for ideological or pedagogical reasons (Reilly & Williams, 2006,

p. 68). Instructors may choose a tool because they are familiar with it or feel comfortable

teaching it to their students—the same process students' use to choose physical and digital

writing spaces. Likewise, instructors might be encouraged to use certain tools because of their

availability or preexisting institutional and departmental support as is the case for LMSs and

institutional email systems.

Consequently, I do not mean to suggest that GSW instructors are not already seeking

professional development or that BGSU does not offer opportunities to learn about teaching

online. Rather than critique these opportunities, I want to advocate for additional professional

development that takes into account the specific needs and goals of FYW. Marrying these

goals—the *how* and the *why* of teaching online—will help instructors further develop their OWI

and effectively communicate threshold concepts in OLEs. I suggest that to continue current

efforts in GSW, the program should collect data and develop workshops that can address the

specific needs of their faculty and, as a result, their students.

Suggestions for Future OWI Research and Strategies for Scholarship

Just as this data collection and analysis is important at the institutional level, it is important to gather more data nationally about OFYWCs. There are few studies that collect information about online writing students and even fewer that target OFYW students even though FYW courses are required for all students for graduation. By design, these courses shape students' attitudes about college-level writing and the university (Bartholomae, 1986). Though it may sound like a cliché refrain, "we need more data" about OFYWCs. We need more data about which students enroll in OFYWCs, more data about what their attitudes are toward college-level writing, more data about how they write in OFYWCs, and of course more data about where they write and how those places influence their writing.

To collect this data, OWI scholars must expand their lines of inquiry to different research sites and use more varied approaches to data collection. In the past decade, OWI researchers have conducted countless important studies and published useful guides for teaching writing online[19], but we are only scratching the surface of potential research subjects, participants, and focal points. I suggest, as we develop new projects and research agendas, OWI scholars consider the following data gathering approaches and research sites so we can understand how OWI functions not only in our own courses and institutions but on a nationwide scale for all writing students. These suggestions are in no way comprehensive, but are intended as a continuation point for already fruitful research in OWI.

Case studies.

OWI scholars already often use case studies to collect information about institutional programs and policies. I agree with scholars like Rendahl and Breuch (2013) who advocate for

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[19] For a comprehensive list of research in OWI see *The Bedford Bibliography of Research in Online Writing Instruction* (2017).

researchers to seek data sets that let us see OWI from a variety of perspectives and through distinct lenses.

While many effective case studies exist and continue to be valuable, as this study aims to be, further deep investigation of individual programs can only help our overall understanding of how OWI functions at different institutions. Case studies can also lend themselves to more in depth, open-ended research that offers "opportunities to investigate overall trends and patterns that can lead to a deeper understanding of OWI as a phenomenon in and of itself" (Ehmann & Hewett, 2015, p. 526). These projects can also grant investigators the opportunity to conduct mixed methods research that place responses in a specific context rather than generalize single data sets. Case studies give researchers the room to write about how local factors like institutional and programmatic history, campus culture, and student populations influence how OWI is enacted in that context. Given enough time and resources, researchers can present a fuller picture of how all stakeholders—not just instructors or students—view OWCs as well as develop suggestions for building investment and preparing instructors to teach online.

For these reasons, I further the call for more location-specific studies that used mixed methods data gathering techniques. It is my hope that this project offers an example of what such a study can look like and how it can give institution specific suggestions for addressing the results.

National surveys.

What case studies cannot offer however, is a bigger picture of the state of OWI in the United States. The CCCC OWI Committee for Effective Practices in Online Writing Instruction. published "The State-of-the-Art of OWI" (2011) but few national surveys have been conducted since then. Allen and Seaman's surveys, which they led in conjunction with the Online Learning

Consortium, Pearson, and Tyton Partners, do offer important data about online learning in higher

education but cannot provide information about OWI. Likewise, the surveys only collect

information about the number of students enrolled online and data from administrators and

instructors about their baseline impressions of online education. Having this broad scope is

important and can help guide research in OWI, but it does not address the specific concerns of

our discipline.

Designing and distributing national surveys that specifically address OWI concerns offers

us the possibility of targeting many subjects and gathering information about not only how many

students are enrolling in OWCs and OFYWCs, but also data about who those students are, where

they are located, and how they write in online courses. We can also learn more about their

instructors, the institutions they attend, and the programs that facilitate their courses.

Composition studies has long been concerned with how our discipline functions nationwide and

OWI should be no different. Exploring the way OWI looks across the U.S. can help us

contextualize smaller scale case studies and position our local programs in the larger OWI

framework.

These larger scale studies also have the advantage of offering researchers and instructors

a basis for further research, funding, and investment in OWI. It is not enough to focus on just the

number of students enrolled in OWCs. Instead, these surveys, if they are to truly help online

writing instructors, should address how students learn to write online, how instructors teach, and

how distinct groups of instructors (e.g. graduate students, contingent faculty, full-time non-

tenure track faculty) are being prepared to teach online. Demonstrating to administration—either

programmatic or institutional—that OWI is a widespread discipline as well as documenting

effective strategies and approaches can only help instructors as they work to grow OWCs at their institutions.

Attention to different populations.

In addition to considering new degrees of depth and scope, designers of future OWI research projects must also evaluate what populations that research should study and benefit as a result. While many OWI scholars have considered how studying different populations of students can further develop our understanding of the field, we still have a great deal to learn. Though there are countless approaches to fulfilling this need, I suggest a couple populations I would like to see further represented in that scholarship.

K-12 students.

Though OWI research typically focuses on higher education sites, it is important to consider how OWI functions in the K-12 setting as well. We know online learning is growing rapidly at the college-level but it is likewise growing in secondary education. More public schools are using OLEs paired with face-to-face instruction to create hybrid courses. There is a growing number of charter schools using online-only models to reach students. As these models become more prevalent it is increasingly important that we research the impact of secondary online education and how OWI functions in that setting.

CCP and dual enrollment students.

Not only are more students taking courses in hybrid and online-only environments in middle and high school, they are also enrolling in college courses at a higher rate. Due to the widespread nature of dual enrollment programs like College Credit Plus (CCP) in Ohio, students can take these courses through their local school districts and alongside other middle and high school courses. Through the CCP program, students can earn dual-credit for college courses

while also working toward their high school graduation requirements. As demonstrated in the

population of students enrolling in OFYWCs at BGSU, more students are choosing online rather

than face-to-face sections when enrolling in these programs. Of all online GSW students at

BGSU, 28.1% from Fall 2015 to Fall 2017 were CCP students. It is important that as OWI

scholars, we consider how this specific population is affected by taking foundational courses like

FYW online as well as how the OFYWC is affected by their large presence.

>   **Developing OWI research methods and methodologies.**

We likewise must give more attention to creating and modeling effective methods and

methodologies for conducting OWI research. While many existing methods and methodologies

for writing studies research can and should be applied to OWI, we cannot ignore the unique

challenges of doing research in OWCs. Some strong resources for conducting OWI research

already exist (Hewett & DePew, 2015) but it is imperative to the growth of the field that more

researchers make their research processes transparent (VanKooten, 2016).

As part of making those processes transparent, I call on scholars to directly acknowledge

the challenges of OWI research. In this project I model this transparency by giving attention to

issues of investment and recruitment that made the data collection process difficult in Chapter

Two. Though some GSW instructors were enthusiastic about this research, I also did not receive

responses from the majority of online GSW instructors despite multiple attempts to ask for their

participation. Though I cannot know for certain why so many instructors did not respond to my

queries, I hypothesize that for at least some instructors their silence is a result of lack of

investment in OWI. This is not to say that instructors do not care about teacher researcher,

effective pedagogy, or even online instruction, but rather than OWI as a field of inquiry is not

among their priorities as instructors. For other OWI researchers designing studies that require

participation from other OWC instructors, acknowledging this challenge is important. It means

researchers are more likely to need to forge meaningful relationships with instructor participants

who may have little time, resources, or energy to devote to research and show how OWI can

directly benefit their efforts. By not making clear my goals or how this study could inform their

teaching practices online, I did not convey the significance of this study to those instructors.

Future efforts to encourage instructor buy-in might be supported by hosting introductory talks,

workshops, or one-on-one conversations with instructors to not only discuss the research but also

instructors' experiences with OWI. By not using these methods in this study, I limited the

number of students I could recruit from and therefore limited this study's sample size.

Additionally, recruiting students from that limited sample was difficult. Since the design

of this study called for surveying and interviewing students that were not my own, I had no

preestablished relationship with these online students. In a similar study, focused on face-to-face

students, I could easily visit instructors' courses to introduce myself and solicit student

responses. This interaction would encourage potential student-participants to see me as

approachable, ask questions about the study, and would probably result in a higher participation

rate. The reality of surveying online students is that this recruitment is much less personal. Even

with persistence, including multiple recruitment attempts, reminder emails, a personal video

introduction to the study, and a gift card drawing very few students responded to the call for

participation. Recruiting students in OWI research requires persistence but also attention to what

might be holding students back from responding. By describing successful strategies for

recruitment and investment, OWI researchers can directly assist fellow scholars and develop

strategies to build scholarship in the field.

Conclusion

This case study has helped build that scholarship by exploring how space and place influence students' experiences in OFYWCs at BGSU. Students' responses to the survey and interview questions have revealed disparities between BGSU's GSW program goals and students' experiences with college-level writing in online course sections. Though the students in this study represent a small sample size of just one public university's FYW program, their experiences can help OWI scholars and instructors understand how students select, participate in, and shape OFYWCs. Likewise, their perspectives on the GSW program can directly assist online writing instructors at BGSU negotiate the inconsistency between the program's learning outcomes and lived experiences of online writing students.

GSW students' expectations for and experiences in OFYWCs reflect their beliefs that writing is an individual activity best done when alone and without influence or interference from instructors or peers. In their responses, students describe choosing writing places—both digital and physical—that are most *comfortable* and *familiar* as well as *private*. The way students choose these writing places reflects their belief in an *independent* writing process which they curate through those chosen locations. Considering these student reports, instructors must decide if and how to challenge student writers and disrupt their expectations for OFYWCs to be inherently solo and private learning experiences. Learning more about students' physical locations as well as the digital locations they choose when writing will help instructors decide how to approach their OFYWCs with a pedagogy of disruption.

The GSW program can help instructors gather this data and better prepare to teach OFYWCs. To refocus OWI in GSW on writing as a "social, rhetorical, action-based, intellectual" process, the program must collect, report, and respond to data on student

populations enrolling in OFYWCs at BGSU. The program must contextualize this data with program goals and learning outcomes as well as provide professional development for instructors teaching online that moves beyond translating face-to-face practices or facilitating a self-led, independent course like many students might expect. Investing additional time and resources in OWI will encourage instructor investment and support the growth of more online course sections in GSW to meet the changing face of first-year writing.

Beyond the GSW program, the wider discipline must also recognize how important it is to invest in OWI. OWI is, undeniably, the future of composition instruction and the future is now. To meet that future, we must continue to learn more about OWI from the perspectives of all stakeholders: administrators, instructors, and students. An ongoing challenge of OWI scholarship is how much research is desperately and constantly needed. The field is simultaneously emerging and evolving, innovative and commonplace, respected and disregarded. At many institutions across the country, OWI scholars still must fight to be heard by instructors and administration alike. Even in the larger field of composition studies, OWI must continually carve out its place as a subfield deserving of attention and investment, a process which is made even more necessary with each passing year as more students self-select online courses. It is my hope this study provides demonstrable evidence for policy, impetus for change in practice, and encouragement for more teacher-scholars—especially graduate students and junior faculty—to take up the cause.

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APPENDIX A: HSRB APPROVAL LETTERS

BGSU

BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

Office of Research Compliance

DATE:	October 6, 2017
TO:	Lauren Salisbury
FROM:	Bowling Green State University Institutional Review Board
PROJECT TITLE:	[1106578-3] The Role of Space and Place: A Case Study of Students' Experiences in Online First-Year Writing Courses (OFYWCs)
SUBMISSION TYPE:	Revision
ACTION:	DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE:	October 5, 2017
REVIEW CATEGORY:	Exemption category # *2*

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Institutional Review Board has determined this project is exempt from IRB review according to federal regulations AND that the proposed research has met the principles outlined in the Belmont Report. You may now begin the research activities.

Note that changes cannot be made to exempt research because of the possibility that proposed changes may change the research in such a way that it no longer meets the criteria for exemption. If you want to make changes to this project, contact the Office of Research Compliance for guidance.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

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

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Bowling Green State University Institutional Review Board's records.

BGSU.

BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

Office of Research Compliance

DATE: March 5, 2018

TO: Lauren Salisbury
FROM: Bowling Green State University Institutional Review Board

PROJECT TITLE: [1106578-5] The Role of Space and Place: A Case Study of Students'
                         Experiences in Online First-Year Writing Courses (OFYWCs)
SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: March 3, 2018

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # *2*

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University
Institutional Review Board has determined this project is still exempt from IRB review according to federal
regulations AND that the proposed research has met the principles outlined in the Belmont Report.

Note that changes cannot be made to exempt research because of the possibility that proposed changes may
change the research in such a way that it no longer meets the criteria for exemption. If you want to make changes
to this project, contact the Office of Research Compliance for guidance.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

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

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Bowling Green State
University Institutional Review Board's records.

BGSU.

BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

Office of Research Compliance

DATE: April 17, 2018

TO: Lauren Salisbury
FROM: Bowling Green State University Institutional Review Board

PROJECT TITLE: [1106578-6] The Role of Space and Place: A Case Study of Students'
                         Experiences in Online First-Year Writing Courses (OFYWCs)
SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: April 13, 2018

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # *2*

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Institutional Review Board has determined this project is still exempt from IRB review according to federal regulations AND that the proposed research has met the principles outlined in the Belmont Report. .

Note that changes cannot be made to exempt research because of the possibility that proposed changes may change the research in such a way that it no longer meets the criteria for exemption. If you want to make changes to this project, contact the Office of Research Compliance for guidance.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

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

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Bowling Green State University Institutional Review Board's records.

APPENDIX B: BG PERSPECTIVE (BGP) RUBRICS FOR GSW 1110 AND GSW 1120

Table B.1

GSW 1110/1120 BGP Learning Outcomes Rubric[20]

BGP Learning Outcomes: English Composition & Oral Communication (ECOC)	Exceeds Expectations 2	Meets Expectations 1	Does Not Meet Expectations 0
ECOC 1. Formulate effective written and/or oral arguments which are based upon appropriate, credible research	Writing demonstrates appropriate attention to argument and/or credible, relevant research.	Writing demonstrates basic attention to argument and/or credible, relevant research.	Writing lacks an argument and/or credible, relevant research.
ECOC 2. Construct materials which respond effectively to the needs of a variety of audiences, with an emphasis upon academic audiences.	Writing demonstrates appropriate attention to context, audience, and assigned task.	Writing demonstrates basic attention to context, audience, and assigned task.	Writing lacks minimal attention to context, audience, and assigned task.
ECOC 3. Analyze how the principles of rhetoric work together to promote effective communication.	Writing demonstrates appropriate attention to purpose and to connecting foundational rhetorical elements into a whole project.	Writing demonstrates basic attention to purpose and to connecting foundational rhetorical elements into a whole project.	Writing does not demonstrate basic attention to purpose or to connecting foundational rhetorical elements into a whole project.
ECOC 4. Communicate effectively when participating in small groups and/or making formal presentations.			
ECOC 5. Utilize rhetorical strategies that are well-suited to the rhetorical situation, including appropriate voice, tone, and levels or formality.	Writing demonstrates appropriate attention to foundational rhetorical strategies.	Writing demonstrates basic attention to foundational rhetorical strategies.	Writing lacks minimal attention to foundational rhetorical strategies
ECOC 6. Demonstrate critical thinking, reading, and writing strategies when crafting arguments that synthesize multiple points of view.	Writing demonstrates clear critical thinking and an ability to synthesize various points of view.	Writing demonstrates basic critical thinking and an ability to synthesize various points of view.	Writing does not demonstrate clear critical thinking or an ability to synthesize various points of view.

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[20] Outcomes & Assessment. (n.d.). Retrieved September 25, 2018, from https://www.bgsu.edu/arts-and-sciences/english/general-studies-writing/course-information/outcomes-and-assessment.html

Table B.2

Rubric for GSW 1110 BGP ECOC Learning Outcomes: Reflective Introduction to the Portfolio[21]

BGP Learning Outcomes: English Composition & Oral Communication (ECOC)	GSW Course Learning Outcomes
ECOC 1. Formulate effective written and/or oral arguments which are based upon appropriate, credible research.	**GSW 5:** Engage in the electronic research and composing processes, including locating, evaluating, disseminating, using and acknowledging research, both textual and visual, from popular and scholarly electronic databases.
ECOC 2. Construct materials which respond effectively to the needs of a variety of audiences, with an emphasis upon academic audiences.	**GSW 6:** Demonstrate 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 that values academic honesty, and to recognize the place of writing within learning processes.
ECOC 3. Analyze how the principles of rhetoric work together to promote effective communication.	**GSW 3:** Practice 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.
ECOC 5. Utilize rhetorical strategies that are well-suited to the rhetorical situation, including appropriate voice, tone, and levels or formality.	**GSW 1:** Demonstrate rhetorical knowledge through writing in a variety of academic genres and to a variety of academic audiences. **GSW 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.
ECOC 6. Demonstrate critical thinking, reading, and writing strategies when crafting arguments that synthesize multiple points of view.	**GSW 2:** Demonstrate critical thinking, reading, and writing skills through approaching academic writing assignments as a series of cognitive tasks, including engaging in multiple modes of inquiry, synthesizing multiple points of view, critiquing student and professional writing, and assessing source materials.

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[21] Outcomes & Assessment. (n.d.). Retrieved September 25, 2018, from https://www.bgsu.edu/arts-and-sciences/english/general-studies-writing/course-information/outcomes-and-assessment.html

Table B.3

Rubric for GSW 1120 BGP ECOC Learning Outcomes: Reflective Introduction to the Portfolio [22]

BGP Learning Outcomes: English Composition & Oral Communication (ECOC)	Exceeds Expectations 2	Meets Expectations 1	Does Not Meet Expectations 0
ECOC 1. Formulate effective written and/or oral arguments which are based upon appropriate, credible research.	Source-supported writing demonstrates appropriate attention to sustained argument and/or credible, relevant research.	Source-supported writing demonstrates basic attention to sustained argument and/or credible, relevant research.	Source-supported writing lacks a sustained argument and/or credible, relevant research.
ECOC 2. Construct materials which respond effectively to the needs of a variety of audiences, with an emphasis upon academic audiences.	Source-supported writing demonstrates appropriate attention to context, audience, and assigned task.	Source-supported writing demonstrates basic attention to context, audience, and assigned task.	Source-supported writing lacks minimal attention to context, audience, and assigned task.
ECOC 3. Analyze how the principles of rhetoric work together to promote effective communication. .	Source-supported writing demonstrates appropriate attention to purpose and to connecting various rhetorical elements into a whole project.	Source-supported writing demonstrates basic attention to purpose and to connecting various rhetorical elements into a whole project.	Source-supported writing does not demonstrate basic attention to purpose or to connecting various rhetorical elements into a whole project.
ECOC 4. Communicate effectively when participating in small groups and/or making formal presentations.			
ECOC 5. Utilize rhetorical strategies that are well-suited to the rhetorical situation, including appropriate voice, tone, and levels or formality.	Source-supported writing demonstrates appropriate attention to rhetorical situation, including tone, language level, and word choice.	Source-supported writing demonstrates basic attention to rhetorical situation, including tone, language level, and word choice.	Source-supported writing lacks minimal attention to rhetorical situation, including tone choice, language level, and word choice.
ECOC 6. Demonstrate critical thinking, reading, and writing strategies when crafting arguments that synthesize multiple points of view.	Source-supported writing demonstrates complex critical thinking and an ability to synthesize various points of view.	Source-supported writing demonstrates attempts at critical thinking and an ability to synthesize various points of view.	Source-supported writing does not demonstrate complex critical thinking or an ability to synthesize various points of view.

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[22] Outcomes & Assessment. (n.d.). Retrieved September 25, 2018, from https://www.bgsu.edu/arts-and-sciences/english/general-studies-writing/course-information/outcomes-and-assessment.html

APPENDIX C: INSTRUCTOR RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear GSW 1110 and GSW 1120 online instructors:

You are invited to participate in a research study I am conducting for my dissertation project. You are not obligated to participate in this study. However, if you do agree to participate in this research, your participation will consist of forwarding a recruitment email [Student Survey – Recruitment Email] to the students enrolled in your Fall 2017-Spring 2018 online GSW courses.

You are receiving this email asking you to complete the linked anonymous electronic survey because you are a current instructor teaching in an online writing course at BGSU. My hope is that this study will offer insight about experiences of students enrolled in online writing courses. This study will benefit students and teachers at Bowling Green State University by offering insight into what students expect and experience in online writing courses and how these experiences shape students' understanding of writing and BGSU. I will survey students enrolled in either GSW 1110 or GSW 1120 online. In addition, online writing students at other universities with course requirements similar to BGSU can benefit from conducting similar research at their institutions.

The survey asks questions about students' expectations for the online writing course they are enrolled in and their experiences in that course. The total amount of time to complete this survey is no more than 30 minutes. Near the end of the survey students will be asked if they would be interested in participating in a follow-up interview. Their participation in this research—both the survey and follow-up contact—is voluntary. If they agree to participate, they will be free to withdraw consent at any time. Their participation will have no impact on their standing with their teacher, their grades, or their success at Bowling Green State University. Students must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at 419-889-4197 or slauren@bgsu.edu or my advisor, Dr. Lee Nickoson, at 419-819-8050 or leenick@bgsu.edu.

I have attached the Student Survey – Recruitment Email to this message for your convenience. If you are willing to participate in this study, please reply to this email indicating your willingness to send the recruitment email to your students.

[Student Survey – Recruitment Email attached]

Thank you,

Lauren Salisbury
Graduate Student
English Department | Rhetoric and Writing
slauren@bgsu.edu | 419-889-4197

APPENDIX D: STUDENT SURVEY RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear GSW 1110 and GSW 1120 online students:

You are invited to participate in a research study I am conducting for my dissertation project. You are not obligated to participate in this study. However, if you do agree to participate in this research, your participation will consist of completing an online survey. At the conclusion of the survey, you will have the opportunity to volunteer to participate in a follow-up interview. To be clear, participating in the survey does not obligate you to participate in the follow-up interview.

You are receiving this email asking you to complete the linked anonymous electronic survey because you are a current student enrolled in an online writing course at BGSU. After reading the informed consent document, which is the first screen of the survey, you will indicate your consent to participate in the study by clicking on the hyperlink at the close of this email and continuing beyond the informed consent page to complete the survey. My hope is that this study will offer insight about experiences of students enrolled in online writing courses.

If you complete this survey you will have the opportunity to be entered in a drawing to win a $25.00 gift card. Students who submit their contact information and complete the survey have a 1 in 250 chance or better of winning the gift card. This information will also be kept confidential.

This study will benefit students and teachers at Bowling Green State University by offering insight into what students expect and experience in online writing courses and how these experiences shape students' understanding of writing and BGSU. I will survey students enrolled in either GSW 1110 or GSW 1120 online. In addition, online writing students at other universities with course requirements similar to BGSU can benefit from conducting similar research at their institutions.

The survey asks questions about your expectations for the online writing course you are enrolled in and your experiences in that course. The total amount of time to complete this survey is no more than 30 minutes.

Near the end of the survey you will be asked if you would be interested in participating in a follow-up interview consisting of 8 questions and lasting no more than 30 minutes. Your participation in this research—both the survey and follow-up contact—is voluntary. If you agree to participate, you will be free to withdraw consent at any time. Your participation will have no impact on your standing with your teacher, your grades, or your success at Bowling Green State University. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at 419-889-4197 or slauren@bgsu.edu or my advisor, Dr. Lee Nickoson, at 419-819-8050 or leenick@bgsu.edu. To continue to the survey, where you will find an informed consent document, please click the link below:

<u>https://bgsu.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_1AYj0itaOuauDDn</u>

Thank you,

Lauren Salisbury
Graduate Student
English Department | Rhetoric and Writing
<u>slauren@bgsu.edu</u> | 419-889-4197

APPENDIX E: STUDENT SURVEY PROTOCOL

Cluster 1: General and Demographic Information for Classification Purposes

1. Informed Consent

2. What is your gender identity?
    a. Male
    b. Female
    c. Trans male/Trans man
    d. Trans female/Trans woman
    e. Genderqueer/Gender non-conforming
    f. Different identity (please state):

3. What is your ethnicity?
    a. Caucasian
    b. Latino/Hispanic
    c. Middle Eastern
    d. African
    e. Caribbean
    f. South Asian
    g. East Asian
    h. Mixed
    i. Other

4. Are you currently enrolled in either an online General Studies Writing (GSW) course (e.g. GSW 1110 or GSW 1120)?
    a. Yes
    b. No

5. What is your current level in your undergraduate degree?
    a. Freshman (first year)
    b. Sophomore (second year)
    c. Junior (third year)
    d. Senior (fourth year)
    e. Fifth year or later
    f. College Credit Plus/Postsecondary/pre-freshman
    g. Nontraditional/returning student

Cluster 2: Student Experience with Writing Courses and Online Learning

6. Have you previously enrolled in a writing course at Bowling Green State University (BGSU) or another institution? Select all that apply.
    a. Yes, GSW 1100
    b. Yes, GSW 1110
    c. Yes, GSW 1120
    d. Yes, a first-year writing course at another institution
    e. Yes, a college writing course taught at a high school or middle school
    f. No/None

7. Have you previously enrolled in an online course at BGSU or another institution?
    a. Yes
    b. No
        i. If you responded "Yes", what course(s)?

8. Why did you enroll in an online section of GSW 1110/1120 rather than a face-to-face/on-campus section?

9. What differences did you expect/do you expect to experience between an online section and face-to-face/on-campus section?

Cluster 3: Spaces and Contexts for Student Learning in Online First-Year Writing Courses (OFYWCs)

10. Describe the physical spaces you work in, visit, or inhabit while working on your online writing course. Why are these the spaces you work in or write in?

11. How have the physical spaces you work or write in been influenced by the online setting of this course?

12. Describe the digital and/or online spaces you work in, visit, or inhabit while working on your online writing course. Why are these the spaces you work in or write in?

13. How have the digital and/or online spaces you work or write in been influenced by the online setting of this course?

14. Are there any spaces—either physical or digital/online—that you have been required to or assigned to work in?

15. How do you think these various spaces influence your work and writing in the course?

Cluster 4: Students' Perceptions of College Writing and the University

16. How would you have described or defined "college writing" before taking this course?

17. How would you describe or define "college writing" after taking this course?

18. How would you describe your perception or experience of Bowling Green State University before taking this course?

19. How would you describe your perception or experience of Bowling Green State University after taking this course?

Cluster 5: Invitation for Follow-Up Interview

20. If you would consider participating in a follow-up 30-minute interview, please provide your contact information here. Students who participate in a follow-up interview will earn a $10 gift card to Amazon. No more than ten students will be interviewed. Students will be contacted in the order in which they respond to this survey question. Students responding first will be given first preference for participating. Including your contact information does not mean you are required to participate in an interview. You may withdraw consent for participation at any time.
    a. Name:
    b. Email address:

21. Thank you for completing this survey. Your responses are important and will no doubt add richness to this study. To be entered for the $25.00 gift card please provide your contact information here.
    a. Name:
    b. Email address:

APPENDIX F: STUDENT INTERVIEW RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear GSW 1110 and GSW 1120 online students:

You are invited to participate in a research study I am conducting for my dissertation project. You are not obligated to participate in this study. However, if you do agree to participate in this research, your participation will consist of completing an online survey. At the conclusion of the survey, you will have the opportunity to volunteer to participate in a follow-up interview. To be clear, participating in the survey does not obligate you to participate in the follow-up interview. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a current first-year writing student enrolled in an online section of either GSW 1100 or GSW 1120 at Bowling Green State University and you indicated in the survey part of this research that you were interested in being interviewed about your responses. My hope is that this study will offer insight about experiences of students enrolled in online writing courses.

This study will benefit students and teachers at Bowling Green State University by offering insight into what students expect and experience in online writing courses and how these experiences shape students' understanding of writing and BGSU. I will survey students enrolled in either GSW 1110 or GSW 1120 online. In addition, online writing students at other universities with course requirements similar to BGSU can benefit from conducting similar research at their institutions.

If you complete this interview you will earn a $10 gift card to Amazon. Students will be contacted after their participation in the survey portion of this study. No more than ten students will be interviewed.

The interview will consist of 5 questions with the potential of follow-up questions to your responses. It will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. Once you complete the interview your participation in this research is complete.

Your participation in this research—both the survey and follow-up interview—is voluntary. If you agree to participate, you will be free to withdraw consent at any time. Your participation will have no impact on your standing with your teacher, your grades, or your success at Bowling Green State University. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at 419-889-4197 or slauren@bgsu.edu or my advisor, Dr. Lee Nickoson, at 419-819-8050 or leenick@bgsu.edu.

If you wish to participate in a follow-up interview please respond to this email indicating your interest.
Thank you,

Lauren Salisbury
Graduate Student
English Department | Rhetoric and Writing
slauren@bgsu.edu | 419-889-4197

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND RELATED RESEARCH QUESTIONS

(This is a loose semi-structured script of the follow-up interview. Actual questions depended on the student's answers to the survey questions and the flow of conversation. The interview was recorded with participant permission for transcription.)

Table G.1

Protocol for Follow-Up Student Interview and Corresponding Related Research Questions

Question	Related Research Questions
Tell me more about your reasons for enrolling in an online General Studies Writing (GSW) section.	1.1, 1.2
Tell me more about your expectations of an online GSW section	1.1, 1.2 2.3
Tell me more about the physical spaces you worked in, visited, or inhabited while working on your online GSW section.	2.1, 2.3 3.1
Tell me more about the digital and/or online spaces you worked in, visited, or inhabited while working on your online GSW section.	2.2, 2.3 3.2
Tell me more about when and why you worked in, visited, or inhabited these various spaces.	2.1, 2.2, 2.3 3.3
Tell me more about how these spaces influenced your work and writing in the course.	2.1, 2.2, 2.3 3.1, 3.2
Tell me more about your definition and perceptions of college writing.	2 3.2
Tell me more about your perceptions of Bowling Green State University.	2 3.3