The Perceptions They Carried: First-Generation College Students and First-Year Communication Courses as a Site of Transition

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The perceptions they carried:
First-generation college students and first-year communication courses
as a site of transition

by

Susan Beth Peterson Pagnac

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Rhetoric and Professional Communication

Program of Study Committee:
Barbara J. Blakely, Major Professor
David R. Russell
Michael Mendelson
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Warren Blumenfeld

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2013

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DEDICATION

To Aaron, for his unwavering support.

To Dad, for believing in me all along.

To Monica, for her lifelong friendship and support.

...And most importantly, to Darwin, for he is my rock.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 1</strong> INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Scale and Pilot Studies</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 2</strong> LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology and Economics:</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foregrounding Student Expectations</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education: Examining Subsets of Students</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition and Rhetoric:</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considering Communication Courses</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 3</strong> METHODS</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Frameworks</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Positionality</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study One: Student Perceptions of Challenging Circumstances and Communication</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Two: A Renewed Focus on First-Generation Students in First-Year Communication Courses</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4 RESULTS</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagramming, Part I: Making Sense of First-Generation Students’ Coming to College Process</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-College Perceptions and Expectations</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-College Perceptions and Expectations</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagramming: Making Sense of First-Generation Students’ Process</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER 5 IMPLICATIONS</th>
<th>135</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identifying Challenging Circumstances and Their Effects</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparations, Assumptions and Expectations for ISUComm Foundation Communication Courses</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habits of Mind and First-Generation Students</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with and Teaching First-Generation Students</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION</th>
<th>163</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom-Level Recommendations</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional-Level Recommendations</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Avenues of Study</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORKS CITED</th>
<th>173</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX D</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX E</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX F</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX G</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX H .............................................................. 205
APPENDIX I .............................................................. 207
APPENDIX J .............................................................. 210
APPENDIX K .............................................................. 212
APPENDIX L .............................................................. 214
APPENDIX M .............................................................. 218
APPENDIX N .............................................................. 220
APPENDIX O .............................................................. 223
APPENDIX P .............................................................. 226
APPENDIX Q .............................................................. 229
APPENDIX R .............................................................. 232
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Pilot Study Participants</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Initial Fall 2011 Study Codes</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>Expanded Fall 2011 Study Codes</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4</td>
<td>Primary Study Participants and Course</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5</td>
<td>Student Interview Completion</td>
<td>79-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6</td>
<td>Final Study Codes</td>
<td>83-84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7</td>
<td>Challenging Circumstances Codes</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Early Process Diagram</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Second Process Diagram</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Third Process Diagram</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Final Process Diagram</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Progression of Semester</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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My son, Aaron, has supported me unequivocally. His willingness to listen to me talk about this project makes me appreciate what a great young man he has become, and his humor—and frequent reminders to me to not take myself so seriously—helped so much.

Lastly, my husband Darwin deserves a medal of honor for putting up with me through this arduous process. This has been a long process for us, and he has been my tower of strength when it all seemed impossible. Through the laughter and tears, endless hours of discussion and frustration, he has made me realize just how very lucky I am.
First- and second-year communication classes play an important part in a student’s first year of college, a year that is critical to student success because it helps students develop “the college student role” (Collier and Morgan 425). One group of first-year students at risk for struggling with developing “the college student role” is first-generation college students. Like most students, first-generation students harbor certain perceptions about and expectations for college; however, these perceptions and expectations can have a negative impact on a first-generation student’s first year of college. This dissertation reports the results of a primary study of first-generation college student participants, their perceptions about college and their generational status, and how that generational status impacts the first- and second-year communication classroom experience.

First-generation students transition to college differently than continuing- or second-generation college students even though the process of disequilibrium, self-authorship, and self-efficacy they undergo may bear many similarities to those of continuing-generation students. However, negative perceptions, expectations, assumptions, and fears carried to college with them can also weigh them down, making experiences that cause disequilibrium more difficult and self-authorship and self-efficacy less likely to occur. Only through learning to self-author and solve problems can students learn to be successful in college, and for first-generation college students, the types of disequilibrium, self-authoring, and self-efficacy
experiences dramatically impact this process. Through examining a few classroom-level and institutional contexts, we can see different ways to further work with these students in communication classes.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Given the recent economic upheaval across the U.S., more people are turning to what is considered a sure-fire way to increase or change their socioeconomic status (SES): a college degree. A February 2013 Gallup poll estimates that two out of every three Americans agree or strongly agree that earning a college degree is vital for getting a good job (Calderon and Lopez). It is no wonder, then, that our society focuses so heavily on the college degree as a way to improve one’s socioeconomic status. Additionally, college students have a wide range of options for higher education available to them, with nearly 5,000 institutions of higher education and majors ranging from accounting to zoology from which to choose. Interestingly, given the variety of schools and majors available to students, one would expect no commonalities between them. However, within the entire system of U.S. higher education, one course or set of courses, in various forms, is required by many, if not most, institutions of higher education and applies to almost all students: the first-year communication (FYC) course.¹

First-year communication classes serve to teach and reinforce communication skills. “The WPA [Writing Program Administration] Outcomes Statement,” originally published in 1999 and revised in 2008, identifies “the

¹ First-year communication is also known by several other names and acronyms, such as first-year writing (FYW), first-year composition (FYC), first-year experience (FYE), freshman composition (FC), freshman English (FE), first-year seminar (FYS), and freshman interest group (FIG).
common knowledge, skills, and attitudes” or results desired in first-year composition classes (“WPA Outcomes”). By the end of the first-year composition classes, students should be able to analyze the rhetorical situation of a given communication assignment; be able to think, read, and write critically; understand the various aspects of writing processes; demonstrate knowledge of writing and language conventions; and compose in electronic environments (“WPA Outcomes”). The Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing (see Appendix A), jointly written and published in 2011 by the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and the National Writing Project (NWP), further develops these outcomes by identifying “the habits of mind” that are “critical for college success;” these habits are curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition (1). While these skills, strategies, and outcomes are important, first-year communication courses are more than mere writing and communication courses.

Much, much more happens in, and because of, a first-year communication course: first-year communication instructors do not simply teach comma placement and correct citation styles, although that can be a part of what is taught. Additionally, first-year communication implicitly and sometimes explicitly teaches students to assume what Peter J. Collier and David L. Morgan call the “college student role”; they note that “an individual’s understanding of the ‘college student role’ is a critical element in explaining student success at the university” (425-26). Ultimately, first-year communication courses, usually taken early in a student's
time at the university and often being the smallest class, are a site of transition, helping teach first-year students how to become college students. David Bartholomae calls this acclimation process “inventing the university,” in which students learn to “speak our language”; that is, first-year students learn to “try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community” (60). Using Mary Louise Pratt’s analogy of first-year composition as a contact zone, Paul Jude Beauvais argues that first-year composition courses can function as “a particularly important contact zone” for first-year students because “it can serve as an arena for exploring the pedagogical value of several types of first contacts that new students experience in other contact zones of the university” (25, italics Beauvais). Students, through their work in the composition classroom, experience new ideas, places, and people and so learn to better navigate the university as students; in short, they begin to take on the “college student role.” In a September 2012 presentation and discussion at Iowa State University, Andrea Lunsford characterized the function of first-year communication as a place for the “maturation of college writers” who “aren’t necessarily attached to a department yet” (Lunsford). In other words, first-year communication is critical not only to the teaching of writing but also to the development and acclimation of first-year college students to the college experience and the development of some of the attendant skills and habits of mind this acclimation requires. In short, first-year composition and communication
courses not only help students learn to be better writers and communicators but they also help students acclimate to the university as whole.

Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz, in their longitudinal study of student writers at Harvard, describe the importance of first-year writing courses to new college students:

We learn much from first-year students about their common struggles and abilities beyond our classrooms: that freshmen who see themselves as novices are most capable of learning new skills; and students who see writing as something more than an assignment, who write about something that matters to them, are best able to sustain an interest in academic writing throughout their undergraduate careers...On the threshold of college, freshmen are invited into their education by writing. (127)

Furthermore, Sommers and Saltz discovered that “the weaker writers [in their study] often speak with even greater passion about the role of writing in helping them make their transition to college, in giving them the confidence ‘to speak back to the world’” (129). This passage illustrates why first- and second-year communication courses are so critical to new college students: they help students, particularly those students who need additional writing support and practice, transition to college life. Through writing courses, students begin to acclimate to the university environment by exploring themselves and their schools through writing; students begin to learn how to “speak back to the world” in first-year writing courses.
As a result, first-year communication classes play an important part in the larger landscape of a student’s first year of college, a year that is critical to student success. Mary Stuart Hunter, the Director of Administration at the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina—Columbia, asks college instructors and faculty to consider the college culture through an anthropologist’s lens. For new students, college presents a foreign set of norms, traditions, and rituals, and a new language and environment. The high school and the college educational cultures are quite different. It is no surprise that student transition is difficult as well. Making the transition from being a high school student to being a successful college student does not happen instantaneously, and it certainly does not occur by simple osmosis. (4)

Student “self-efficacy directly and indirectly [shows] powerful relationships to academic performance and personal adjustment of . . . 1st year college students” (Chemers, Hu, and Garcia 61). The relative success of that first-year transition is critical to continued success at college. And communication projects are often a part of that acclimation in various ways: meeting deadlines, planning and executing pieces of larger tasks, working with others, seeking help, shaping one’s ideas to a required format, and so on.

It follows that when a student does not make that transition to college successfully, s/he is more likely to quit: the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California – Los Angeles notes that roughly twenty-five percent of
first-year college students leave before their sophomore year (“The First Year”).

While we cannot know every reason a student may leave college before graduation, we can speculate that self-efficacy—“the beliefs [that] influence the particular courses of action a person chooses to pursue, the amount of effort that will be expended, perseverance in the face of challenges and failures, resilience, and the ability to cope with the demands associated with the chosen course [of action]”—likely factors into a student’s decision to quit (Chemers, Hu, and Garcia 55). We can surmise from Chemers, Hu, and Garcia’s statement that, within the large pool of incoming first-year students, are subsets of students who may not be as prepared for the “college student role” as other students and for whom their transition of the first year, including experiences in classes, first-year communication courses among them, is not successful.

Often, these students who struggle with the transition process have dealt with challenging circumstances before college that constrain their access to an education and/or to particular types of knowledge and habits of mind that tend to be associated with successful college experiences. For example, some studies show how students’ race and gender can create differential experiences in first-year communication (e.g. Campbell, Flynn). But race and gender are not the only factors that can cause these differential and sometimes difficult transitional experiences in a college student’s education. First-generation college students are also a subset of students who may be less prepared for the college experience. Their parents or guardians have not attended college or finished a college degree, so these students
are less prepared because they lack parental exposure to and knowledge of the college culture that many other college students already have.

In general terms, first-generation students are those whose parents have not earned a college degree. Most schools, particularly Iowa State University's self-identified peer institutions, use this definition. Anne-Marie Nunez and Stephanie Cuccaro-Alamin, in their 1998 National Center for Educational Statistics report, define first-generation as “those whose parents’ highest level of education is a high school diploma or less”; students whose parents have attended “some college” are classified as second-generation (7). Unfortunately, this definition wrongly assumes that students whose parents have attended some college but did not earn a degree are automatically second- or continuing-generation and, therefore, are presumed to be familiar with college culture through their parents’ experiences.

Fortunately, how ‘first-generation’ is defined seems to be expanding to include those students with parents with some college but no degree. Jennifer Engle, in her American Academic article, defines first-generation students in a more inclusive way: First-generation students are those “students whose parents have not attended college and/or have not earned a college degree” (25). The “and/or” distinction here is important because “or” includes those students whose parents may have taken some college courses but never graduated. Even though those students whose parents may have taken some college courses may have some exposure to college culture because of their parents’ experiences at college, that exposure is assumed to be minimal. Therefore, we cannot assume that they do not
need the same kinds of support—both in and out of the classroom—as other first-generation students whose parents have no experience with college. Clearly, simply defining first-generation is difficult because there are several different ways to do so; for the purposes of this dissertation, I will use Engle's definition.

Another definitional challenge lies in the fact that it is easy to equate first-generational status with low-income, low SES, or working class, and in many cases, these groups overlap (Bui; Engle; Engle and Tinto). In one study of low-income students, 46% of the participants are first-generation (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, and Corvarrubias). Doug Lederman characterizes this combination as the “double whammy of disadvantage” (Lederman). In their 2008 Pell Institute report, Jennifer Engle and Vincent Tinto assert, “For most of the 4.5 million low-income, first-generation students enrolled in postsecondary education today . . . the path will be long, indirect, and uncertain” (2). And low-income first-generation students are four times more likely to leave academia than those students who are not low-income or first-generation (Engle and Tinto 2). Even though Engle and Tinto are focusing on those students who are both low SES and first-generation, we cannot always assume that first-generation equals low SES or vice versa. First-generation students can come from middle or upper class families as well but perhaps do not have a tradition of going to college in their families (“First-Generation Students”). Mandy Martin Lohfink and Michael B. Paulsen note that “FGS [first-generation students] with higher incomes were significantly more likely to persist [to graduation] than those with lower incomes” (418). Socioeconomic status, then, can
be a mitigating factor for first-generation students, but it is not their only characteristic that must be taken into consideration by educators and administrators.

We must also consider that first-generation students tend to have the following characteristics:

- Female
- Older and considered nontraditional students
- Disabled in some way
- Have dependent children and are independent of parents
- More likely to begin at a 2-year school then transfer to a four-year school (Bui; Engle; Engle and Tinto)

Furthermore, the group’s characteristics have changed over time. Corinne R. Merritt notes that thirty to forty years ago, first-generation college students tended to be white, working-class baby boomers whose parents were first- or second-generation European immigrants (45). Clearly, the term ‘first-generation’ describes a very different set of people than it did in the 1970s and 1980s. This is important because group attributes change, and this may lead to differences in definition. Once they reach college, modern first-generation students also tend to live off-campus, socialize off campus, and participate in fewer college organizations (Hertel 6). All of these factors—gender, age, ability, independence, parental status—affect first-generation college students, and educators must be aware of additional
attributes of at-risk students that first-generation students may also have because these issues have also been shown to be mitigating factors for students. But one additional factor is often considered above or in place of these other challenging circumstances in terms of first-generation students: financial needs. Unfortunately, the SES definitional overlap—the “double whammy”—often receives the most institutional attention.

To help ameliorate many students’ financial needs, several programs exist in many colleges and universities across the country that target low-income college students who may also be first-generation for additional financial and academic support. For example, the Federal TRIO programs are targeted towards low-income, first-generation, and other subsets of college students who have challenging circumstances. Several universities also offer additional programs for low-income students, such as the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s Carolina Covenant, the University of Illinois’ Illinois Promise, and more locally, Iowa State University’s Hixson Opportunity Awards Program. However, these programs are often focused heavily on the financial needs of low-income college students. Additionally, while most programs of this ilk offer some form of academic and/or personal support, that support typically ends after the first or second year of college. This approach, while certainly ameliorating a student’s financial obstacles, does not focus directly on classroom support or recognize the role the first-year communication classroom plays in student transition to college.
Ultimately, first-generation students are becoming a larger and larger portion of the number of incoming college students; some estimates figure that as many as one in six students is first-generation (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, and Covarrubias 1179). This is why they deserve analysis and attention: they are a large, and possibly growing, subset of students entering college. To better understand this group of students, I began by investigating scholarship available in education and composition and rhetoric.

Some scholars in the field of education have addressed how first-generation students handle the college experience. Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, and Nora remind us that

\[\ldots\text{First-generation students differ in many educationally important ways from the students higher education has traditionally served. Because of these different characteristics and experiences, they are also a group at risk. They are a group clearly in need of greater research and administrative attention if they are to survive and succeed in college. (20)}\]

Because these students are considered vulnerable, they deserve as much support as a university can offer them, and educators must consider all the various factors that first-generation students bring to a college campus because first-generation students do not necessarily hail from particular socioeconomic classes, races, ethnicities, or genders.

Other education scholars also address various facets of first-generation college students: characteristics and experiences (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger,
Pascarella, and Nora; Nuñez and Carroll; Choy; Bui; Hertel; Pizzolato; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini; Engle; Engle and Tinto); persistence to college graduation (Lohfink and Paulsen); first-generation students’ intellectual development (Collier and Morgan; Pike and Kuh; Morales; Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, and Covarrubias); and their relationships with their families (London, Gofen). However, few scholars have applied what these educational researchers have learned about first-generation students to composition pedagogy and first-year communication classrooms, a site of many first- and second-year academic experiences which are described as being central to college success (“WPA Outcomes,” “Framework”). One scholar in composition and rhetoric, Ann Penrose, conducted a study comparing the preparation, performance, and perceptions of first-generation and continuing-generation college students in verbal and mathematical/scientific skills. She found that first-generation and continuing-generation students have similar levels of preparation but differ greatly in terms of performance and attrition as well as perceptions and expectations. However, no scholar further investigates or connects research conducted about first-generation college students specifically to the communication classroom.

Because scholarship could not fully illuminate the intersection between first-generation college students and the first-year communication classroom, I decided to conduct two small-scale studies of public information and one pilot study. I began the small-scale studies by examining how institutions define first-generation college students with information publicly available from Iowa State
University’s peer universities. The second small-scale study examines postsecondary opportunity programs, or POPs, that several schools have established to help low-income students pay for college. Finally, a small pilot study examines how first-generation students perceive college and the first-year communication classroom.

**Small Scale and Pilot Studies**

Below, I briefly explain the purpose and results of the three small pilot studies conducted in preparation for this larger project; methodologies and more specific results of these studies are detailed further in Chapter 3.

**Institutional Definitions of First-Generation Students**

In the first small-scale study, I investigated how Iowa State University’s self-identified peer land-grant colleges and universities identify and define undergraduate first-generation students for this project because, as we have seen, definitions of this group differ and those differences reveal assumptions about needs and types of support offered; as a result, I examined both institutional research websites and student programs for definitions. I discovered that eight of Iowa State University’s eleven peer institutions use the term “first-generation” to identify those students whose parents do not have a college degree. Half of these schools merely use the term “first-generation” and do not provide any kind of definition of it, but four other schools—the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and North Carolina State University—do offer brief definitions of the
term “first-generation.” Additionally, three schools—the University of Arizona, Iowa State University, and the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities—distinguish students only in terms of their age, using the labels ‘Adult Student’ or ‘Adult Learner’ which would suggest they consider neither parental education nor SES as factors, only the age of the student.

Several implications and further avenues of research arose from this first small-scale study. First, one such area is the definition of parental education. Secondly, perhaps leading from the inconsistency with which universities identify first-generation students is the lack of functional identification of first-generation students at the institutional level. Thirdly, the disconnect between institutional and student program offices is problematic: even if a university or college does not rigorously identify first-generation students, resources must be in place for those students, and those students must be made aware of them. For example, information about student services must be more obviously placed on university websites. A section or page for first-generation students would be ideal; in fact, some schools already offer such a page (e.g. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign).

Researching how schools define and identify first-generation students led me to ask: What are colleges and universities doing, beyond financial aid packages, for first-generation students? What are they doing, for instance, for those students who fit some of the other characteristics I list previously on pages 6-7, or those students who are laboring under Lederman's “doubly whammy” of low SES and
first-generational status? Going beyond Iowa State University’s peer institutions, I felt I needed to further investigate a series of programs I learned of while researching institutions. These programs, called Postsecondary Opportunity Programs, or POPs, are targeted to low-income students.

**Postsecondary Opportunity Programs**

I found that, in total, eight schools of eleven of Iowa State University’s peer institutions clearly identify a POP online. This finding is consistent with the number identified by Elizabeth Stransky Vaade, policy analyst for the Wisconsin Center for the Advancement of Postsecondary Education. She claims that only twenty-two true institutional POPs exist (2). My research indicates that only four out of twelve land-grant schools on a list generated and maintained by the University of North Carolina clearly indicate additional support programs on their websites. The University of Florida, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, North Carolina State University, and the University of Tennessee have all instituted programs with additional academic and social support for their students. In addition, only four public colleges and universities offer additional support programs for their students: the University of New Mexico, the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, the University of Tennessee, and the University of Virginia. I could not confirm any private colleges or universities with additional support programs, and only one school, Stanford University, indicated a possibility of additional support programs. While these programs are excellent for their purpose,

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2 Iowa State University’s Hixson Opportunity Awards Program was not included in Vaade’s analysis.
their target audience is still students who are from low-income families, not necessarily first-generation college students.

Taken together, these two studies reveal that first-generation students are not always identified within the university, suggesting that this group may be assumed to fit within the low SES group and therefore, once their financial needs are addressed, their transition to college is no longer an institutional concern. From their online documents, we cannot assume that schools are minimizing or even ignoring the presence of first-generation students on their campuses, but we can infer that these students may not be a priority for these schools. If this is so, institutional offices and student programs are not clearly advertising the support services available to students, and because of their lack of experience with the college culture, first-generation students are less likely to know what kinds of resources would or could be available to them. These students deserve as much support as any other student at the university, and it is the university’s job to provide that support for them. When a university does not clearly support first-generation students, they are limiting those students’ educational experiences and their ability to further develop their habits of mind. What we see from these two studies, then, is that higher education has much more work to do to balance the scales for first-generation students.

These two small-scale studies did not shed enough light on first-generation college students for me, so I conducted a pilot study in which I talked to several
first-generation college students to learn more about the experience of being a first-
generation college student.

**Fall 2011 Pilot Study**

Conducted in Fall 2011 at Iowa State University, this study examines first-
generation college students’ perceptions and expectations for college, their first-
generational status, and the communication classroom; students also explained if they felt those perceptions and expectations were met. Discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, this study revealed that the factor most participants considered a “challenging circumstance” was financial ability to pay for college. Several students found that being first-generation was a positive force because they felt that it motivated them to work harder. On the other hand, students who viewed their generational status as a challenging circumstance considered it so because they felt it held them back and was a social stigma that blocked them from becoming completely immersed in the campus life. These student perceptions are important when we combine what we know about the importance of self-efficacy to success in college and about the importance of the transitional process to a sense or perception of success.

Through what I learned in these small-scale studies in addition to reading scholarship, I discovered that a gap exists in the knowledge about first-generation college students in the field of composition and rhetoric. Given the central position of first-year communication courses in first- and second-year curricula and its acknowledged role in developing self-efficacy and “inventing the university”—
important factors in developing the “college student role”—this dissertation is my attempt to expand the knowledge available about first-generation college students in first-year communication courses to writing and composition teachers and writing program administrators.

**Research Questions**

I have identified the following research questions for this dissertation:

1. What challenging circumstances do first-generation students identify as affecting them?

2. What effects, positive or negative, do these students perceive from these challenging circumstances?

3. How well do these students feel they are prepared for first-year and second-year (ISUComm Foundation Communication) writing courses?

4. What do these students expect or assume to get out of first-year and second-year communication courses? How does this relate to their expectations for college in general? How do they see their work in first-year communication courses relating to their college work?

5. What habits of mind (as identified by the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*) do first-generation students with challenging circumstances demonstrate? What habits of mind do these students lack? How do first-generation students with challenging circumstances perceive the effects of these challenging circumstances on their habits of mind?
Inasmuch as the first- and second-year communication courses are seen as sites of transition and adjustment to the academic discourse community, what can we do to better work with and teach first-generation students with challenging circumstances in first-year and second-year communication courses?

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. In Chapter One, I have briefly outlined what “first-generation” means, how I came to this project, and my research questions. In Chapter Two, I provide a literature review that illustrates my theoretical framework. Chapter Three discusses the methodology behind the primary study, and Chapter Four explores the results of the primary study. In Chapter Five, I explain the implications of my findings, and finally, in Chapter Six, I conclude with some final thoughts and suggest possible actions that individuals and institutions can take.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

To fully understand and discuss first-generation college students, I have consulted scholars and sources from a range of theoretical fields—sociology, economics, education, and composition and rhetoric—to best theorize this dissertation. By looking at these four distinct theoretical areas, I understand first-generation students from educational, sociological, and economic standpoints more thoroughly, which in turn has guided my research and informed my analysis of data.

**Sociology and Economics: Foregrounding Student Expectations**

The theory of capital is crucial to understanding how social stratification affects society and the fate of people within it. For first-year college students, both social and cultural capital are key components to acclimating to the university; however, studies have shown (as explained below) that cultural capital is much more important for first-generation college students. Not only do these students lack the cultural capital associated with going to college, they also may lack more middle- and upper-class cultural capital, effectively adding distance between them and their peers and adding to a general sense of not fitting in on campus. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu illustrates this phenomenon in his landmark ethnographic study, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu examines French society’s attitudes, behaviors, and
expectations about important cultural knowledge or capital. He surveyed 1217 people in 1963 and 1967-1968; through this study, he establishes “the very close relationship linking cultural practices (or the corresponding opinion) to educational capital (measured by qualifications)” (Distinction 13). In a later essay, Bourdieu defines cultural capital as “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body,” “cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.),” and “academic qualifications” (“Forms”). In the same essay, he characterizes social capital as “membership in a group,” or to put it in a more colloquial phrase, it’s who one knows (“Forms”). In one particularly vivid metaphor, Bourdieu compares society to a casino in which “we gamble not only with the black chips that represent our economic capital, but also with the blue chips of our cultural capital and the red chips of our social capital” (qtd. in Alheit 69). His comments underscore the gap in social and cultural knowledge that may exist between the educational system and student expectations and attitudes.

Like Bourdieu, two economists argue that the perceptions and expectations of an educational system may differ from the perceptions and expectations of its students. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis argue in Schooling in Capitalist America that the U.S. educational system reinforces social inequality in the U.S.; in one study conducted with Peter Meyer and briefly described in their book, Bowles and Gintis prove that inequality is reinforced through examining the types of personality traits valued by both schools and employers. They state, “The educational system fosters and reinforces the belief that economic success depends essentially on the
possession of technical and cognitive skills—skills which it is organized to provide in an efficient, equitable, and unbiased manner on the basis of meritocratic principle” (103).³ Bowles and Gintis’ analysis of ideal student behavior illustrate how the educational system can serve a discriminative function against students who do not exhibit such valued personality traits.

Furthermore, according to Bowles and Gintis, the attitude of student instrumentalism can also stem from the attitudes of parents:

That working class parents seem to favor stricter educational methods is a reflection of their own work experiences, which have demonstrated that submission to authority is an essential ingredient in one’s ability to get and hold a steady, well-paying job. That professional and self-employed parents prefer a more open atmosphere and a great emphasis on motivational control is similarly a reflection of their position in the social division of labor. (133)

Essentially, the parents’ social class determines the type of education they want for their children: working-class parents tend to want their children to learn the skills, such as respecting authority, needed to obtain and keep a good job, while middle-class parents want their children to learn critical and independent thinking.

Both Bourdieu’s and Bowles and Gintis’ comments emphasize that, depending on the social, cultural, and economic environment out of which a student

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³ Bowles and Gintis reconsidered their landmark work in 2002, noting that “today, no less than during the stormy days when Schooling in Capitalist America was written, schools express the conflicts and limitations, as well as the hopes, of a heterogeneous and unequal society” (15).
arrives at college, a student may be predisposed to certain attitudes, behaviors, or expectations for the college experience and therefore may approach college differently than students whose environment and previous schooling experiences have encouraged the habits of mind identified in the “WPA Outcomes Statement” and the “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing.”

**Education: Examining Subsets of Students**

Scholars who study how college students—first-generation as well as other subsets of students—function within the university environment provide insight into their educational experiences. Some scholars offer more generalized assessments of the educational system which can be applied directly to the experiences of first-generation college students because most students can relate to concerns about the process of going to college and being successful there. Scholars who focus on first-generation students address a wide variety of issues, including demographic characteristics, development, attrition, family relationships, cultural capital, and curriculum suggestions.

**General Education**

The importance of feeling a part of the academic community is foregrounded in the work of Louis Attinasi.⁴ Although he studies the transitional experiences of Mexican-American students, many of his participants are first-generation, making his comments relevant to first-generation students. Attinasi describes how

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⁴See also Próspero and Vohra-Gupta; Schmidt and Akande; Graham; Leyva; and Coffman for discussions focusing on particular subsets of first-generation college students.
Mexican-American students perceive college and persist in completing a degree. He defines two concepts that describe how Mexican-Americans view the college experience: “getting ready” describes experiences during college (or prematriculation), and “getting in” describes postmatriculation experiences (225). He finds that a student’s “observations of college-going behavior by siblings and teachers provided insight” into college attendance and matriculation; additionally, “anticipatory socialization” experiences, such as visiting college classes and seeing campus also impact the motivation and persistence to graduation of Mexican-American students. Attinasi valuably illustrates the importance of support and insight from others in a student’s life who already have gone to college.

In addition to positive pre- and postmatriculation experiences, Martin M. Chemers, Li-tze Hu, and Ben F. Garcia explain that a student’s self-efficacy—or the ability of a student to judge how well s/he can complete a task—is critical to a first-year student’s success in the first year. They state, “Self-efficacy acts on a broader level through the more effective use of metacognitive strategies, which involve planning and self-regulation—skills that become increasingly important as an individual progresses through education levels to environments that are less ordered and constrained (e.g., college or university life)” (56). The results of their study indicate that “Students who enter college with confidence in their ability to perform well academically do perform significantly better than do less confident students...The level of self-efficacy that the students reported during the 1st year of university life is a powerful predictor of expectations and performance” (61-62).
Similar to Chemers, Hu, and Garcia, Jane Elizabeth Pizzolato describes how high-risk college students—those at a high risk for dropping out of college—struggle with “self-authoring” or developing the ability to balance the sense of self with “the contextual nature of knowledge” and establish “internal foundations” (797). Self-authorship is “a relatively enduring way of understanding and orienting oneself to provocative situations [that cause disequilibrium] in a way that (a) recognizes the contextual nature of knowledge and (b) balances this understanding with the development of one’s own internally defined goals and sense of self” (798). In short, self-authorship is the ability of a student to process and react to experiences as his or her own person rather than focusing on what others may do or feel in a similar situation. Self-authoring differs from self-efficacy in that self-efficacy implies a measure of confidence on the part of the student.

Pizzolato discerns that disequilibrium and privilege are major factors in the development of the students’ self-authoring process. Students in the study describe experiencing disequilibrium, or doubt about their goals and decisions, in a range of ways which directly affect how quickly those students began to develop their own sense of self: “The level of disequilibrium students experienced affected the degree to which they self-authored” (803). To illustrate this point, Pizzolato quotes one participant, Hollis, who was arrested; the experience of being in jail was strong enough to provoke Hollis into considering college more seriously (803-04). When students come to college, they experience disequilibrium because they perceive that they are outside of their comfort zones or that their expectations have not been
met. How a student processes and reacts to disequilibrium determines how successfully that student self-authors; successful self-authorship allows students to better establish their sense of self-efficacy.

Additionally, college admissions privilege, or the extent to which a student needs to worry about how to pay for college, also affects students’ ability to self-author. Pizzolato’s participants—split into two groups: high-risk students who were “high privilege,” or did not have to worry about how to pay for college; and “low privilege” students who had to worry about paying for college—illustrate that high-risk, high privilege students take longer to “self-author” than high-risk low privilege students because low privilege students face “provocative,” life-changing experiences, such as arrest, drug use, and pregnancy, that caused them to self-author earlier than high privilege students (803-04, 807-08). Without the ability to self-author, students can struggle to acclimate to college life and culture. This is where first- and second-year communication courses become important for first-year college students. Communication courses are ideal sites for self-authorship to begin to develop because they offer students a variety of communication experiences that allow students to explore themselves, their families and friends, and the world around them; such exploration allows students to build self-efficacy both inside and outside the communication classroom.

Thus, disequilibrium, self-authorship, and self-efficacy can be important in college classrooms. In her ethnographic study, Rebecca D. Cox describes community college student expectations of college and instructor expectations of their
students. She notes that “students’ fear of the composition course was particularly intense,” leading students to examine their “fear factor” and their choices for coping with it, such as either dropping the class in question or simply doing enough to “get it over” (28, 74-75). Cox’s examination of students’ fear factor illustrates the disequilibrium that students tend to experience in the composition classroom. Cox’s study illustrates why self-authorship in the composition classroom is so important for college students: if students do not learn to cope with writing tasks in college and merely look for ways to do enough to “get it over” with, they are depriving themselves of a chance to self-author—a key function of a liberal arts education—and learn how they can best cope with writing tasks when they occur. They miss opportunities to further their habits of mind necessary for success in postsecondary writing. Without that ability to self-author in terms of communication tasks, students do not develop the self-efficacy they need.

One key component of self-authorship and self-efficacy is faculty – student interaction. Young K. Kim and Linda J. Sax measure the level of student – faculty interactions of students who are traditionally marginalized in higher education. In particular, they focus on student race, gender, social class, and generational status in their study. Generally, they find that more student interactions with faculty—in either a research or classroom setting—resulted in positive benefits for the student: higher grade point averages, stronger degree aspirations, enhanced critical thinking and communication skills, and enhanced satisfaction with the college experience (451-52). However, Kim and Sax discover several exceptions to this
general finding: for first-generation students, course-related faculty interaction did not necessarily predict a higher college GPA (451). Additionally, they find that “first-generation students tend to less frequently assist faculty with research for course credit, communicate with faculty outside of class, and interact with faculty during lecture class sessions than non-first-generation students” (452). How often students interact with a faculty member can help them learn to self-author and thus develop confidence and self-efficacy.

The ideas and theories of these authors are important because they apply to all students, not just first-generation college students. Most college students are fearful of writing courses, struggle to develop self-authorship and self-efficacy, and work to interact meaningfully with faculty. First-generation students, however, tend to have a distinct set of challenges that require more specific and detailed analysis than more generalized scholarship.

**First-Generation Students**

Scholars who address first-generation college students cover a range of issues: characteristics, adjustment, development, persistence, and attrition; first-generation student family relationships; the cultural capital, perceptions, and expectations of first-generation students; and curricular suggestions to consider when working with first-generation students. Taken together, these scholars help paint a comprehensive picture of first-generation college students.\(^5\)

\(^5\) Government-sponsored sources also provide thorough discussions of first-generation students: c.f. Nunez and Carroll; Choy; Engle, Bermeo, and O’Brien; Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, and Yeung; and Engle and Tinto.
Characteristics, Development, and Attrition

In their landmark 1996 study of first-generation college students, Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, and Nora analyze results from the National Study of Student Learning (NSSL) from 1992 to 1995; they find that first-year first-generation students have more differences from and more difficulties in college than their traditional first-year student peers. Such differences—socioeconomic status, race, level of reading and math skills, and experiences with discrimination, for example—“suggest potential learning problems ahead” for first-generation students (16). To ameliorate these issues, Terenzini et. al. suggest “bridge” programs that smooth the transition between high school or work and college and continue such support for first-generation students (17). Additionally, the importance of faculty and staff reaching out to first-generation students and providing what Laura Rendon calls “validating experiences” is key (17). Such validating experiences can aid a student in developing self-authorship and self-efficacy.

In a 2002 study, James B. Hertel compares first-generation college students (FGCSs) and second-generation college students (SGCSs). He finds, in general, that first-generation college students tend to live off-campus, socialize off-campus, belong to fewer college organizations, work more hours per week and suffer from a “lack of ‘structural integration’” to college (6). Additionally, he notes, that first-generation students often feel “conflicting loyalties” between on-campus social support and off-campus social support. In his study, he compares the two groups
using several non-academic factors or variables established in a previous study conducted by Kim Bartels:

- Employment
- Level of college adjustment
- Parental income
- Self-esteem
- Social support
- Values regarding education (Hertel 11)

Hertel finds that, as he expects, second-generation students tend to adjust better to the college environment than do first-generation students (13). In particular, the level of college adjustment, on-campus social support (versus off-campus social support), and self-esteem were the most influential factors in predicting college success. Like Attinasi, Hertel finds that the support a student receives is crucial to that student’s college success.

Like Hertel, Khanh Van T. Bui describes basic characteristics of first-generation college students, stating that first-generation students tend to belong to an ethnic minority, come from a lower socioeconomic status, speak other languages at home, and score lower on the SAT (6). Also, first-generation students tend to go to college to gain respect, bring honor to their family, and help their family out financially; these students also “[feel] less prepared for college,” worry more about financial issues, fear failing, feel they know less about “the social environment at the university,” and have to spend more time studying (Bui 9). Bui’s conclusions
further clarify the Bourdieuan social and cultural capital that first-generation students may be missing when they go to college. By lacking this vital knowledge about the college environment, first-generation students may be more likely to quit college altogether.

Terry T. Ishitani, in his 2003 article, focuses on first-generation college student persistence and attrition. He found that first-generation students are 71% more likely to drop out during their first year of college; additionally, he finds that first-generation students tend to leave college during the first and third years, rather than the second and fourth years, stating “merely offering first-generation student opportunities to attend college may not guarantee them academic success,” so if administrators and educators know “the risk periods and the magnitude of the risks over time,” they can begin to act to work with those students (444, 447). Like Terenzini et al., Ishitani illustrates that support for first-generation students needs to extend beyond the “getting ready” and “getting in” processes.

Continuing the work begun in the 1996 study conducted by Terenzini et al., Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini focus on first-generation students’ second and third years of college in a subsequent study. They argue that “[the] level of parental postsecondary education has a significant unique influence on the academic selectivity of the institution the student attends, the nature of the academic and nonacademic experiences one has during college, and, to a modest extent, the cognitive and noncognitive outcomes of college” (275). In fact, Pascarella et. al. states, “even when presenting academic credentials and a level of
academic motivation equal to that of their peers whose parents graduated from college, first-generation students are at a somewhat greater risk of being academically, socially, and economically left behind,” a disadvantage that continues and “dovetail[s]” into other areas, such as attempted and completed credit hours, hours worked, and living off campus (276).

In their 2005 study of 3,000 national survey participants, Gary R. Pike and George D. Kuh find that “low levels of engagement” in college organizations and living off-campus affect first-generation college students’ persistence in finishing a college degree. Pike and Kuh feel that first-generation college students are not likely to be as engaged because “they know less about the importance of engagement and about how to become engaged. That is, compared to second-generation college students, they have less tacit knowledge of and fewer experiences with college campuses and related activities, behaviors, and role models” (290). Ultimately, their study focuses on overall patterns of engagement and attrition of first-generation students. It is important to note that Pike and Kuh agree that tacit knowledge—or to use Bourdieu’s term, cultural capital—is an important contributor to the success of first-generation college students.

Like Ishitani in “A Longitudinal Approach,” Mandy M. Lohfink and Michael B. Paulsen also examine the persistence of first-generation college students. Focusing on the transition between the first and second years of college, they find that academic performance, high educational aspirations, amount of work-study financial aid, and social life satisfaction were the most important indicators of a
student’s ability to persist from the first year of college to the second year of college (421-22). Additionally, they demonstrate that “precollege achievement variables,” such as college-level courses and entrance exam results had no effect on whether a student persisted to the second year of college (421).

In a study designed to further research from his 2003 study, Terry T. Ishitani focuses on first-generation students, but he considers them in two groups: 1) those whose parents have earned a high diploma or an equivalent degree or less than a diploma/equivalent degree, and 2) those students whose parents have some college but did not finish the degree. He demonstrates that students with parents who had some college are more likely to persist to the second year (871). Further, he considers non-academic factors in this study, such as gender, race, parental education, family income, high school class rank, type of school, and financial aid. Allowing for these variables, Ishitani concludes that “it becomes important for us [as educators] to be aware of diverse precollege characteristics that exist within the group of first-generation students and of the prolonging effects these precollege characteristics have on students’ time to degree behavior” (881). This important study demonstrates, in a longitudinal manner, that first-generation college students are a diverse group with diverse needs; furthermore, these students need more than just first-year support and financial aid; they need support at least through the second year, if not longer.

Jennifer Engle, while agreeing with much of the demographic conclusions of Terenzini et. al., Hertel, and Bui, reminds us that first-generation students and their
parents lack certain “college knowledge,” or information about the college-going process, similar to Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory and Collier and Morgan’s college student role; this lack of college knowledge can contribute to the “disjunction,” or transition, or Pizzolato’s disequilibrium, between high school and college (31, 33). Engle also describes this disjunction in terms of “academic and social integration” and “cultural adaptation” (34-35). Engle does not explicitly state when first-generation students are more likely to drop out; however, she does offer several “possibilities for intervention” with first-generation college students, beginning with precollege planning and preparation—similar to Attinasi’s “getting ready”—and including expanding access to financial aid, easing the disjunction and transition between high school and college, and changing how colleges interact with first-generation college students (38-39).

Finally, Nicole M. Stephens, Stephanie A. Fryberg, Hazel Rose Markus, Camille S. Johnson, and Rebecca Covarrubias explore the “cultural mismatch” that occurs between first-generation college students and the university itself in a series of studies. Reminiscent of Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital, Stephens et. al. illustrate that “American universities are in fact organized according to middle- and upper-class cultural norms or rules of the game and that these norms do indeed constitute an unseen academic disadvantage for first-generation college students transitioning to university settings” (1192). Stephens et. al.’s cultural mismatch theory may be similar to Cox’s college fear factor but also illustrates how a
student’s self-authorship (Pizzolato) and self-efficacy (Chemers, Hu, and Garcia) can be endangered as well.

Understanding the characteristics, development, and attrition of first-generation college students is important but so is understanding their relationships with their families. Often, family can provide much needed support to college students, but for first-generation college students, this is not always the case.

**First-Generation Students and Their Families**

Howard B. London’s 1989 article focuses on the intergenerational dynamics of ethnic minority non-college-going families. In particular, he uses psychoanalyst Helm Stierlin’s modes of separation—binding, delegating, and expelling—to explain the roles that family members assign and how those roles are violated when first-generation college students leave their families for college. He concludes that “It is only when we see that [upward] mobility [through going to college] involves not just gain but net loss—most of all the loss of a familiar past, including a past self—that we can begin to understand the attendant periods of confusion, conflict, isolation, and even anguish that first-generations students report here [in this study]” (168). With this kind of disequilibrium, first-generation college students experience the disconnect from their families detailed in the work of Attinasi.

Similar to Attinasi and London, Anat Gofen illustrates in her qualitative study that, for her group of Israeli participants, the family unit is “a key resource, rather than a constraint” (23). Further, she offers a revised definition of family capital: “The ensemble of means, strategies, and resources embodied in the
family's way of life that influences the future of the children. Family capital is implicitly and explicitly reflected throughout behavior, emotional processes, and core values” (24).

Taken together, London and Gofen illustrate that the family relationships of first-generation college students are not easily generalizable: first-generation college students may encounter family resistance to their going to college, or they may find their family unit supportive of their college aspirations but unable to help in specific ways. What educators need to remember is that first-generation students have unique backgrounds that may help or may impede “getting ready” or “getting in” (Attinasi) in addition to lacking Bourdieu’s cultural capital, causing disequilibrium and possibly impeding a student’s ability to self-author (Pizzolato) and ultimately, demonstrate self-efficacy (Chemers, Hu, and Garcia). Educators also need to be aware of how first-generation college students perceive college, what their expectations are for college, and what kinds of cultural capital they have or do not have. As research conducted by Pierre Bourdieu has shown, cultural capital can matter as much as other kinds of capital to students, particularly in terms of learning to become a college student.

Perceptions, Expectations, and Cultural Capital

Peter J. Collier and David L. Morgan discuss traditional and first-generation students and how well they adopt a “college student role” (425). Collier and Morgan describe the college student role—students’ understanding of their instructors’ expectations and the skills necessary to meet them (much like Cox’s college fear
factor)—as a critical piece of cultural capital that students require to be successful in college. For first-generation students, Collier and Morgan found that time management and prioritizing were problematic as were the level of explicitness in the course syllabus and assignments and a faculty member’s teaching persona (436-39). The authors’ work illustrates how such data can enlighten conversations and discussions about orientation and bridge programs; more importantly, they note that “role mastery, as a form of cultural capital, is an essential component in the social reproduction of the gap between educational ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’” (444-45). By also using Bourdieuan terminology, we can see that Collier and Morgan’s term, “college student role,” also refers to the cultural capital that students need to navigate college, and that often, first-generation students have difficulty learning the complexities of being a college student.

Susan A. Dumais and Aaryn Ward also use Bourdieuan theory. They test Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of cultural capital and habitus6 using quantitative data from the 1988 National Education Longitudinal Study and the Postsecondary Education Transcript Study. Because of general disagreement about Bourdieu’s definition of cultural capital, the authors divide Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital into two areas: strategic interactions, such as parental involvement in college choices and assistance in completing college application materials; and participation in the high arts. They discover any cultural capital students acquire

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6 Bourdieu defines habitus as the “systems of dispositions,” or perceptions, expectations, culture, and lifestyle, of an individual (Distinction 6).
about going to college becomes less important as students continue through a program of study; similarly, “... first-generation status serves as more of a barrier for initial college access than it does for the attainment of a bachelor’s degree or for undergraduate grade point average” (262).

Echoing Bourdieu’s theory of habitus, Russell Lowery-Hart and George Pacheco, Jr., examine first-generation college student experiences through a relational dialectic perspective, the reciprocal nature of relationships and how people navigate the conflicts that occur. In this study, Lowery-Hart and Pacheco focus on three particular dialectics surrounding issues of cultural integration and participation and the use (or lack thereof) of support programs available to first-generation students. They argue, “For FGS [first-generation students] to succeed in higher education, FGS must affirm the certainty of their cultural group. At the same time, if FGS want to academically succeed, they must stop focusing on their cultural identity as first-generation”; additionally, first-generation college students struggle with accessing and using support programs meant for them, but at the same time, “tagging them as FGS only creates resistance from the [FGS] group and hurts their self-confidence” (65). By examining the habitus of first-generation college students, college administrators and educators will be better able to navigate their changing identities. However, we cannot simply examine the college culture that first-generation college students encounter: we must also consider how curricula can benefit or impede first-generation college students.
Curricular Suggestions

Richie Neil Hao offers one program-related solution to working with first-generation college students: critical compassionate pedagogy, “a pedagogical commitment that allows educators to criticize institutional and classroom practices that ideologically place underserved students in disadvantaged positions, while at the same time be self-reflexive of their actions through compassion as a daily commitment” (92). Essentially, Hao advocates a critical pedagogy that disparages repressive institutional obstacles while remaining “compassionate as teachers to help FGS [first-generation students] succeed” (92). Ultimately, he argues, educators need to “serve as mentors to these students” (97).

Another scholar offers a different point of view about educating first-generation students. Erik E. Morales advocates a liberal arts education to help low SES first-generation students acquire missing cultural capital. Morales’ study is important because “statistically speaking first-generation college students are less likely to take the types of liberal arts/humanities courses that can generate valuable cultural capital” and can “derive greater benefits from these courses than others” (501). He found that “a common umbrella theme resulting from exposure and learning within the liberal arts for these students was a sense of being freed from ideological and moralistic limitations and constraints they often only realized they had only after beginning to move away from them (504, italics Morales). Much like Pizzolato’s self-authorship and Chemers, Hu, and Garcia’s self-efficacy, Morales finds that first-generation students are less likely to take the courses that cause the
disequilibrium that engenders self-authorship and self-efficacy and further develop certain habits of mind. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, by avoiding liberal arts courses, these students are depriving themselves of the Bourdieuian cultural capital that can make their college going years a bit easier to navigate and manage.

Considering subsets of first-year college students is vital to teaching college writing, but the majority of sources addressing first-generation college students are from educators. By examining the few sources applicable to first-generation college students in the field of composition and rhetoric, we can see how first-generation students are little considered in the field.

**Composition and Rhetoric: Considering Communication Courses**

Very little scholarship in the field of composition and rhetoric directly addresses first-generation college students, but other scholars and sources provide valuable insights into the purpose of first-year communication courses.

In April 2000, the Council of Writing Program Administrators published the *WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition*. In it, they detail the outcomes that should be the goal of first-year writing courses. These outcomes include the ability to assess and respond to a given rhetorical situation; critical thinking, reading, and writing; the understanding of writing as a process; knowledge of conventions, and the ability to compose in electronic environments (*WPA Outcomes*). This statement, subsequently amended in July 2008, describes the purposes and goals of first-year writing courses for communication instructors and
writing program administrators. This document details the goals that writing
instructors should keep in mind as they plan and teach their communication
courses and that writing program administrators need to keep in mind as they
construct curricula.

These outcomes were further developed and explained in the 2011
 Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing, a document developed
collaboratively between the Council for Writing Program Administrators, the
National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project. In
addition to the five goals or outcomes of first-year writing courses, this document
details the habits of mind that students need to develop to be successful in any
college writing situation. These habits of mind—curiosity, openness, engagement,
creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition—are the
avenues through which students learn to, as Pizzolato puts it, self-author; without
these skills, students have a much more difficult time being successful college
students. Additionally, the Framework updates and expands some of the outcomes
from the WPA Outcomes Statement to account for the impact of technology on the
教学 of writing; for example, “composing in electronic environments” has been
updated to read “composing in multiple environments” (WPA Outcomes, Framework
10). This document is critical because it details not only the goals of first-year
communication courses but also details the habits of mind, “the ways of
approaching learning that are both intellectual and practical,” that students need to
develop and employ in order to be successful in college.
In his classic essay, David Bartholomae describes how first-year students have to “invent the university.” He states, “The student has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways to knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community. Or perhaps I should say the various discourses of our community . . .” (60). He argues, “What our beginning students need to learn is to extend themselves, by successive approximations, into the commonplaces, set phrases, rituals and gestures, habits of mind, tricks of persuasion, obligatory conclusions and necessary connections that determine the ‘what might be said’ and constitute knowledge within the various branches of our academic community” (69, italics mine). What is key here is the phrase ‘habits of mind’—this is what Bartholomae is addressing, that students need to develop and use those habits in order to be successful in college English courses; the WPA Outcomes and Framework both continue and crystalize Bartholomae’s argument about college students and academic discourse needed to successfully complete college writing courses.

Using Mary Louise Pratt’s metaphor of contact zones, Paul Jude Beauvais, in his 1996 article, explains how first-year writing courses are a “particularly important contact zone” because college students are able to use the course as “an arena for exploring the pedagogical value of several types of first contacts that new students experience in the other contact zones of the university” (25, italics Beauvais). Beauvais argues that new college students experience a variety of “first contacts” when they begin college: other students and the representatives of the
institution itself (26). First-year composition courses can “assist students . . . while providing a point of entry into the discourse of the academy, then it can serve a function that is empowering as well as reproductive” (38). Beauvais’ discussion illustrates how first-year students can learn to invent and acclimate to the university.

Lynn Z. Bloom describes, in her influential article, “Freshman English as a Middle-Class Enterprise,” how first-year composition reinforces several middle-class values. She argues, “. . . middle-class standards may operate for the worse, particularly when middle-class teachers punish lower-class students for not being, well, middle-class” (655). Further, Bloom addresses the nature of first-year composition, stating that “. . . freshman composition, in philosophy and pedagogy, reinforces the values and virtues embodied not only in the very existence of America’s vast middle class, but in its general well-being—read promotion of the ability to think critically and responsibly, and the maintenance of safety, order, cleanliness, efficiency” (655). Bloom essentially states that many of the habits of mind we as educators hope to encourage in our students, such as critical thinking, independent and individual thinking and work, and clearly organized documents, are middle-class values. She feels, however, that writing teachers have “an ethical as well as a cultural obligation to respect the world’s multiple ways of living and of speaking” (671). While our diverse students are learning the middle-class values of first-year communication, we should not penalize them for using their own language—the ways of communicating most familiar to them—because that may be
the only way they can learn to self-author and learn self-efficacy. Similar to Stephens et. al., what is important about Bloom’s argument is that she defends students’ rights to their own language even while they struggle to overcome the cultural mismatch that occurs when students are learning a new culture.

Russel Durst addresses the instrumentalist view of some students, stating, “student pragmatism seems particularly understandable these days given the way in which our society increasingly depicts a college education as a required credential for the job market” (176). He argues that writing teachers “can best teach critical literacy by accepting the pragmatic nature of most students’ approach to the first-year writing course”; to do this, he states, writing teachers need to consider student goals in their curriculum design then attempt “to build a reflective, intellectual, politically aware dimension” into their courses (6). Durst’s discussion of student instrumentalism echoes comments made by Bowles and Gintis nearly forty years ago: a college degree is necessary for a good job, and the environment a student comes from can have a major impact on whether that student views college in instrumental and pragmatic ways.

One scholar in the field of composition and rhetoric specifically focuses on first-generation students. In her study of first-year academic literacy skills, Ann M. Penrose addresses first-generation college students’ writing skills, stating that, similar to Cox’s college fear factor, “…the source of FG [first-generation] students’ insecurities may be situated very specifically in composition teachers’ domain of academic concern” (457). Penrose focuses on the consequences of college
experiences on student academics. Penrose argues that “practical constraints” such as finances and time, rather than simply being a first-generation student, more likely impact first-generation student academic skills. Her study, conducted at North Carolina State University, reveals that “FG and CG [continuing generation] students differed little with respect to goals, values, or personal traits” as they began college (452). Instead, first-generation students “[did] not begin to doubt themselves until after they arrive[d],” especially in their verbal skills (457). To solve this problem, Penrose recommends “helping students see themselves as members of the academic community”; such a task “may be the most important challenge faced in the university at large and in writing classrooms in particular” (458).

Echoing Penrose’s comments about first-year academic literacies, Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz report the results of a study of undergraduate writing students at Harvard University. They found that “the enthusiasm so many freshmen feel is less for writing per se than for the way it helps to locate them in the academic culture, giving them a sense of academic belonging” (131, italics Sommers and Saltz). Sommers and Saltz conclude “students who initially accept their status as novices and allow their passions to guide them make the greatest gains in writing development” (145). In other words, if students view the writing process as a learning process rather than as a set of required steps to satisfy their instructor, they will learn the most about academic writing; this idea is reminiscent of Pizzolato's disequilibrium. By accepting that they are writing novices—an idea that
can be difficult for students who were successful in high school—these students are more likely to learn self-authorship, and therefore self-efficacy, as writers. Additionally, Sommers and Saltz demonstrate, like Beauvais, that the first-year communication classroom can be an ideal site for students to examine themselves and their new places at college. Even though Sommers and Saltz do not address first-generation first-year college writers specifically, their study and findings apply to them because they focus on first-year writers, their perceptions, and their experiences.

**Conclusion**

These sources and scholars, considered all together, point to specific needs and concerns of first-generation college students. To be successful in college, students need to learn the “college student role,” to invent the university for themselves; in short, they need to learn the cultural capital necessary for going to college. First-generation students may lack some of that critical cultural capital because their parents did not attend or did not graduate from college, so their ability to self-author and develop self-efficacy is at risk and can be fraught with difficulty. When first-generation students do not acclimate successfully, they experience disequilibrium and a cultural mismatch between their home cultures and those of the college campus. Those moments of disjunction simply serve to impede first-generation students from acclimating to the college environment successfully.
However, first- and second-year communication courses are critical contact zones for first-generation students. Because of their ubiquitous nature, these courses can encourage students to begin those habits of mind needed to successfully complete college. In the next chapter, I will detail the methodology behind the current study.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Qualitative research scholars Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss affirm that “there are many reasons to do qualitative research, but perhaps the most important is the desire to step beyond the known and enter into the world of participants, to see the world from their perspective and in doing so make discoveries” (16). For this project, I employ a qualitative approach to my research to learn about the lived experiences of first-generation college students. In this chapter, I will describe the methodology behind a pilot study conducted in Fall 2011 and the primary study conducted in Fall 2012; both studies took place on the ISU campus. The primary research method is interviewing student participants who volunteered for both studies to gain a first-person perspective of what it means to be a first-generation college student. I use Corbin and Strauss's grounded theory approach to generate theory directly from the data collected in both studies. Additionally, in the primary study, I employ an extended version of Irving Seidman's three-interview structure as an overall interviewing method because it allows me to explore the participants’ experiences and perceptions, not only over time, but also in more depth. In particular, I detail how grounded theory methods helped me to generate and develop coding categories for both studies. To provide context for that material, I first describe the theoretical framework informing both pilot and primary studies’
methodology as well as discuss my researcher positionality toward the research material and the participants.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

Corbin and Strauss remind us that theoretical frameworks “provide a conceptual guide for choosing the concepts to be investigated, for suggesting research questions, and for framing the research findings” (39). For both my pilot and primary studies, I am guided by Corbin and Strauss’s grounded theory approach, as described in the third edition of their classic work, *Basics of Qualitative Research*. Additionally, the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*, a document that details the habits, practices, demeanors, and attitudes students need to develop to be successful in college writing, has also influenced the scope and depth of both pilot and primary studies.

**Corbin and Strauss’ Grounded Theory Approach**

Originally developed in 1967 by Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser, grounded theorists use data drawn directly from participants to generate theory. Strauss and Glaser subsequently disagreed about their method and “split,” causing a sort of schism between those who follow Anselm Strauss’s form of grounded theory and those who adhere to Barney Glaser’s form.7

Strauss, who collaborated with Juliet Corbin, focuses on a systematic approach whereas Glaser advocates an inductive method in which all material is

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7 Other forms of grounded theory have also been developed, most notably the form espoused by Kathy Charmaz. Antoinette McCallin, in an online article, “Grounded Theory...is It for Me?,” details the basic differences between Strauss’, Glaser’s, and Charmaz’s versions of grounded theory.
data that are keyed to a particular framework developed by Glaser. I chose to employ Corbin and Strauss’ approach because, as they note, “people do not invent the world anew each day. Rather, they draw upon what they know to try to understand what they do not know. And, in this way, they discover what is similar and different about each object and thus define them” (75). The only way to really get at both a broader and a more nuanced sense of the experiences of first-generation college students is to talk to them and analyze what they say in a systematic way while still allowing for individual variations. By employing this methodology, I am able to see and hear what the participants find important and use those incidents or topics as themes or categories that emerge from the data rather than forcing themes or categories onto the data.

According to Corbin and Strauss, one way to begin the process of analysis is through theoretical sampling: collecting data from “the places, people, and events that will maximize opportunities to develop concepts” (143). They further note that this method “seems contrary to everything a researcher has been taught about sampling” because “in theoretical sampling the researcher has to let the analysis guide the research” (147). By focusing on particular places, groups of people, or events, researchers using theoretical sampling do not need to control for variables. Indeed, individual variations can enrich the data, for it is what makes each participant unique in her or his experiences yet allows a researcher to theorize more broadly about the experiences of first-generation college students. This concept became important in my research after the pilot study in which I
surveyed, interviewed, and collected the work of students in English 150 courses. In this pilot study, I learned that first-generation college students have particular concerns, or perceptions, about college in general and writing classes specifically, so I refocused my research on that particular group of students and opened up my recruitment to first-semester English 150 and 250 students since first-year students can place into either class as their first college writing course at Iowa State University.

One vital technique I used in both studies—constant comparison—has allowed me not only to explore a particular participant’s experience more deeply as a first-generation college student but also helped theorize more generally about the perceptions and experiences of first-generation college students. Corbin and Strauss explain the process for using constant comparisons:

As the researcher moves along with analysis, each incident in the data is compared with other incidents for similarities and differences. Incidents found to be conceptually similar are grouped together under a higher-level descriptive concept...This type of comparison is essential to all analysis because it allows the researcher to differentiate one category/theme from another and to identify properties and dimensions specific to that category/theme. (73)

By comparing the answers of the participants in the pilot study, I saw that more than just writing-related issues were important to these students. I discovered that first-generation students, more so than continuing-generation students, are more
likely to carry certain perceptions about the college experience with them; this finding is also reflected in the literature (Collier and Morgan, Hertel, Penrose, Terenzini et al., Bui, Stephens et al.). These perceptions can be about college in general, about the influence of their backgrounds on their ability to succeed in college, and about their motivations for coming to college. These perceptions can then impact how first-generation students react to and handle the college writing classroom. Without a constant comparative analysis of the participants’ comments, however, I would have missed how the students’ perceptions impacted how they viewed their college experience in general and the college writing classroom in particular, perhaps more so than their actual experiences. Specific constant comparisons and their development will be explained in more detail below.

**Influence of Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing**

Also guiding my data analysis is the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*. This document, co-written by the Council for Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and the National Writing Project (NWP), details the abilities and habits of mind students need to develop to be successful in writing at the college level. The authors identify eight habits of mind that college students need to develop: curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition (1). The authors further note, “beyond knowing particular facts or completing mandatory readings, students who develop these habits of mind approach learning from an active stance,” the ultimate goal of a liberal arts
education (4). Because most college students take a first- or second-year communication course, those courses are principal sites for students to begin to identify and further develop those habits of mind so critical for success in college. In terms of the pilot study, I wanted to determine how first-year students developed these habits of mind in the communication classroom as a means of transitioning to college and college writing and so asked questions exploring the participants’ experiences with their communication assignments. The Framework offers a specific set of practices and ways of thinking that students need to develop to be successful in college writing, so it operates as a beginning point to access that information within the pilot study. As Corbin and Strauss note, “After studying a topic the researcher finds that a previously developed framework is closely aligned to what is being discovered in the researcher’s present study, and therefore can use it to complement, extend, and verify the findings” (39). And this is what the Framework is doing in these two studies.

**Researcher Positionality**

In any research project, it is important to be aware of and address the researcher’s personal bias that may have brought the researcher to the project in the first place; as Phil Francis Carspecken notes, “it is a good idea to explore your value orientations before entering the field to put a check on biases” (41, italics Carspecken). My biases in this project are tied directly to my community college teaching experiences. One college was located in the suburb of a large Midwestern city and so attracted a diverse population of students while the other community
college was located in a much smaller town with a growing immigrant population. In both places, I often had first-generation college students in my first-year writing courses. These students came to college hoping that a degree would improve their lives, but they also came without much prior knowledge about how college works, what the experience would ask of them, and how it might change them. As someone who takes her students and her teaching very seriously, I did my best to either answer their questions and concerns—about both writing-related and non-writing issues—or direct them to the appropriate person.

During this time, I began to wonder what college writing teachers could do to better help this group of students, to help ease their transition into college life and college writing. I realized that instructors of writing courses—because of the nature of the curriculum, the “threshold nature” of the course in a program of study sequence, and the opportunities for students to interact with each other and the instructor more than in many other first-year college classes—have a unique opportunity to directly impact both writing-related and non-writing-related experiences and perceptions of first-generation college students. Accordingly, my bias is of concern for the participants and a belief that their particular learning experiences are not as well understood as those of other sub-groups of first-year students. Having taught many first-generation students, I have some sense of what kinds of issues and concerns they have, both in and out of the writing classroom, even if I have not lived the experience myself. Most importantly, I recognize that
their perceptions of their college transition experience are not the same as those of continuing-generation students.

**Study One: Student Perceptions of Challenging Circumstances and Communication**

For the pilot study, I focused on students entering college that semester (Fall 2011) and enrolled in English 150. I focused on this group of students for this pilot study since students who place into English 150 typically are not as prepared for college writing as students who place directly into English 250.

**Research Instruments**

Because grounded theory results from building theory out of gathered data, I needed to collect a range of qualitative data from the participants; to do this, I compiled results from a survey, two interviews, and copies of all the major assignments the participants completed for their English 150 class. Beginning with an anonymous survey allowed students to preview and understand my research objectives and the kinds of questions they might encounter without shining a light directly on them as individuals and as first-generation students; if a student felt comfortable answering anonymous survey questions, perhaps she or he would be more likely to meet with me for a face-to-face interview.

Ten instructors allowed me access to their students for the purposes of participant recruitment. Sixty-six students signed the consent form (see Appendix B) and agreed to participate in the study, and all sixty-six allowed me access to their completed work, either through their course Moodle site or directly from their
instructor. I collected approximately 325 papers over the course of the semester. Thirty-one students completed the survey online; survey questions are listed in Appendix C. A total of nine students volunteered to talk further with me. Four students indicated their willingness to be interviewed on their survey but did not return my emails requesting an interview; consequently, I interviewed five students, listed in Table 1 below, all of whom identified as first-generation college students. Interview questions are listed in Appendix D.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These semi-structured interviews occurred twice during the semester, once at midterm and once again during finals week. One student was unable to meet with me during finals week, so he emailed his answers for the second interview to me.

The survey questions for this pilot study asked about basic demographic information, levels of education of the student and his/her parents or guardians, expectations of college and writing instruction, and concerns the student had about successfully completing college. Students were able to volunteer for interviews at the end of the survey; not all students who originally agreed to meet with me were first-generation students. Coincidentally, all of the students who did actually meet

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8 All student names are pseudonyms.
with me were first-generation students. At this time, I was as yet unaware of Seidman’s three-interview structure; consequently, I met with the students only twice during the semester. During the first interview, I asked further questions that addressed parental education and social class, student perceptions of writing in general, and student perceptions of and expectations for English 150. In the second interview, I asked follow-up questions regarding student perceptions of writing at the end of completing English 150. Both sets of interviews took place in my office in Ross Hall at times convenient to participants; questions for both interviews are listed in Appendix B. These interviews yielded approximately 3.5 hours of data or 72 pages of transcribed material.

Methods

After I conducted the interviews, I transcribed them. As part of this process, I assigned pseudonyms to all of the students. I first transcribed interviews with Ellie, Justin, and Matt then subsequently transcribed interviews with Ashley and Sandra. I chose to transcribe the interviews in this order because that was the order I met with the students. For this pilot study, I defined ‘first-generation’ to mean any student whose parents did not complete an Associate’s or Bachelor’s/Baccalaureate degree. Although ‘first-generation,’ as a term, can mean various different levels of parental educational achievement, as the discussion in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 of this dissertation shows, I chose this operational definition because I wanted to include all first-generation students who were willing to participate in the study.
Preliminary Analysis

As I began examining the data for the habits of mind as suggested by the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing and demonstrated by the participants, I noticed other concepts emerging that I needed to address along with writing-related concerns because of their importance to the participants. Corbin and Strauss explain, "concepts are derived from data. They represent an analyst's impressionistic understandings of what is being described in the experiences, spoken words, actions, interactions, problems, and issues expressed by participants. The use of concepts provides a way of grouping/organizing the data that a researcher is working with" (51). An important common theme in these five participants' interviews is perceptions, the highly influential nature of the way students understand and think about their experiences and about anticipated events or outcomes. The focus of these perceptions can range from participants' family backgrounds and preparation for college to perceptions about college and college writing. Because the participants found these issues/concepts to be important, I decided to examine—and ultimately code—the data for this and other emerging issues/concepts. As the participants talked, I realized that other things were going on besides the learning of writing and communication skills. These students were bringing preconceptions, in the form of perceptions and expectations, with them into the writing classroom, and I needed to understand those preconceptions and their impact on student learning in the writing classroom.
Because data analysis is a recursive process, I went back through the first three interview transcriptions and identified other issues that needed to be coded along with the habits of mind and perceptions. My initial analysis of the first three transcriptions showed the following emerging themes that link to issues raised in the literature:

- Perceptions of university experiences and the writing classroom
- Challenging circumstances (variously defined from student perspectives)
- Motivation (for completing the communication class and a college degree)
- Instrumentalism (how students viewed higher education)
- Habits of mind (as defined in the Framework)
- Education

Corbin and Strauss define this process as open coding or “breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data” (198). Because I employed open coding when initially analyzing my data, I was able to see how the emerging concepts could stand as codes and therefore become part of the analysis. The Framework was helpful but ultimately the data in the pilot study required more complex coding than simply the habits of mind and student perceptions. At this point, I went back through and recoded the first three interviews; these codes were those used to analyze the final two transcriptions as well. To facilitate coding, I assigned a highlighter color and an alphabetic abbreviation to these preliminary codes, as illustrated in Table 2 below (also in Appendix E).
Table 2: Initial Fall 2011 Study Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preliminary Code</th>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>Pink</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging Circumstance</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>CC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentalism</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habits of mind</td>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>HM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As I began highlighting and annotating text with these preliminary codes, I realized—through constant comparison—all of the interviews addressed education in some form. As a result, the entire transcript would be highlighted entirely in blue, thus not furthering the analysis meaningfully at this stage. Subsequently, I dropped the preliminary code ‘education’ from my coding but left open the possibility that the code ‘education’ could reappear to denote a narrower or more nuanced meaning in students’ responses.

**Microanalysis**

After dropping ‘education’ as a preliminary code, I examined and coded all five transcripts again; on this examination of the data, I began to recognize differences within the five remaining preliminary codes. For example, Ellie’s perception that her first-generation status stigmatized her was a different type of perception from Justin’s assumption that his parents did not have to worry about money as he grew up. Data coding and data collection are iterative, cyclical processes, and at this point, I realized that as I constantly compared student responses, I needed to analyze the data more specifically by assigning sub-codes within the categories. By
identifying distinctions within the larger coding categories themselves, I was able to microanalyze—and thus draw meaning from—the data. Corbin and Strauss state, “microanalysis complements and supports a more general analysis. Whereas microanalysis looks at the detail, general analysis steps back and looks at the data from a broader perspective: ‘What are all these data telling us?’” (60). As I reexamined my coded data, I used constant comparison to determine if a particular piece of data was different from a similarly coded piece of data. If it was different, I noted what kind of difference it was in a list.

These differences were then labeled and coded with an alphabetic abbreviation, as illustrated in Miles and Huberman (cf. pages 58-60). These codes, listed below in Table 3 and in Appendix F, are the ones I subsequently applied to all of the pilot study student transcriptions; these codes were also used to code the primary study transcriptions but with a few modifications that will be detailed later in this chapter. To simplify coding for student habits of mind, I condensed the list included in the Framework from eight to four codes, as seen below, by combining two or three similar habits of mind into one code, reserving the possibility that the fuller set of eight codes may reappear in a later stage of analysis if the data warrant that level of specificity. Each coding category is explained in the next section following the list of codes.
Table 3: Expanded Fall 2011 Study Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions</th>
<th>(highlighted in pink)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumption</td>
<td>P-A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation</td>
<td>P-E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenging Circumstances</th>
<th>(highlighted in orange)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>CC-A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>CC-F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/cultural</td>
<td>CC-S/C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>(highlighted in green)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>M-C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>M-F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>M-P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work ethic</td>
<td>M-WE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrumentalism</th>
<th>(highlighted in yellow)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentalism</td>
<td>I</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Habits of Mind</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity, openness, engagement</td>
<td>HM-COE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity and flexibility</td>
<td>HM-CF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence and responsibility</td>
<td>HM-PR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognition and Reflection</td>
<td>HM-MR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perceptions

Because interviews with these initial five participants revealed the very strong impact of their perceptions on their current and subsequent experiences to the extent that a student perceived that s/he could be at a disadvantage because of her/his first-generational status, that perception became important to understanding much of how that student gauged and articulated his/her experiences transitioning to the university and college writing. Thus, I examined the data for such statements from the participants. The coded transcriptions
indicate that how first-generation students gauge and articulate their experiences at the university is a critical factor in their transition to the university and to college writing because these appraisals form the foundations of their feelings about college life and communication courses. As I coded the interviews for a second time, I discovered three more nuanced iterations/appearances of student perceptions that I have subsequently used as codes:

- P: Perception
- P-A: Assumption
- P-E: Expectation

Perception, then, as a subcategory indicates how a student thinks and feels about his or her experiences in college, including writing and communication courses. However, some of these perceptions take the form of assumptions about or expectations for college and the first-year communication classroom, rather than feelings about them, so these are appraisals or anticipations about the future and about outcomes.

All five of the interviews illustrate this distinction. For example, Ellie perceives, or feels, that her parents’ lack of education negatively affects her college performance:

I think it’s just the fact that all of these other people [whose parents have college degrees] when I say that [my parents don’t have college degrees] are like, oh really? They didn’t go to college? And ... it makes me stand out and not in a positive way ... it’s holding me back. (11.17-19)
Her perception that other students are surprised and mark her as different is articulated as a sincere belief. Because Ellie experienced this stigma firsthand, she is not assuming that her parents’ educational status stigmatizes her with other college students nor does she expect such treatment. Ellie’s description of how “[she] stand[s] out and not in a positive way” is articulated in a way that shows that she believes being a first-generation student is problematic for her.

In comparison, other students relayed their thoughts and feelings as assumptions, meaning that they figured they knew and understood a particular situation without directly experiencing it. For example, Justin presumed that his parents did not have financial problems while he was growing up: “I guess my family . . . has never had issues with money . . . we don’t go on vacations a whole lot but that’s because money is directed towards other things that are needed” (3.28-31). However, Justin did not really know what his family’s true financial situation was as he grew up; he simply felt that he already knew the answer based on his experiences with his parents.

Finally, another kind of perception that the participants demonstrated was expectations, or educated guesses, about the future based on past experiences. Expectations differ from assumptions in that assumptions, as expressed by the students in the study, carry a certain amount of certainty whereas expectations tend to be about the future and thus are anticipatory statements. For example, Matt expected that college would be much different than it really is: “Well, to be honest, it’s kind of easier than I expected . . . I didn’t really have too many expectations for
it, except for that it would be really hard” (9.42-45). These expectations, based on a combination of past experiences and knowledge gained elsewhere, surprised Matt because he felt that college would be much more difficult for him than he found it. These student perspectives resonate with the literature about first-generation students’ experiences and attitudes about college. Differentiating among how first-generation students think about, understand and express their experiences—whether filtered through perceptions, based on mostly untested assumptions, or anticipatory guess about future events—was important in generating a fuller picture of these students and their transition to the university.

**Challenging Circumstances**

Participants identified and described their challenging circumstances; often, these circumstances directly impacted their perceptions of college and college writing. For example, Sandra experienced the pressure of being the first in her family to graduate from high school and go to college: “Like my family’s expectations of me because I’m the first, the first one to graduate or go to college and they expect so much of me, they don’t realize how much stress they put on me” (2.2-4). That pressure, she noted, made her less likely to succeed: “They don’t realize how much stress they put on me and it just makes me want to quit altogether” (2.6-7). More specifically, the codes below illustrate the differences in the types of challenging circumstances that participants articulated:

- **CC-A:** Academic challenging circumstances
- **CC-F:** Financial challenging circumstances
• CC-S/C: Social/cultural challenging circumstances

For example, Justin felt that his main challenging circumstance was academic in nature: “I really wish I would have studied in high school and had those skills down ... like note-taking, too, that’s a big one I wish I would’ve taken care of in high school” (5.29-33). Justin feels that, for whatever reason, he was not as prepared for college-level work as he should have been.

Financial issues were a challenging circumstance for Sandra. Because obtaining financial aid was so important, Sandra chose to attend Iowa State University rather than another university:

Sue: Why are you at Iowa State?

Sandra: ... Out of the 7 schools I got accepted to, the only one I visited, the only one that gave me some type of money, and ...

Sue: So financial aid was huge? Was it a big part?

Sandra: Yeah, and it was actually cheaper than the schools I got into. (11.4-7).

In Sandra’s case, her college options were narrowed drastically because of her financial situation. These challenging circumstances, as articulated by the participants, echo concerns raised in the literature.

Participants also expressed social and cultural challenging circumstances. Ashley described the “big adjustment” that she experienced when she first came to college: “I didn’t realize it was going to be as huge of a change from high school ... it was basically a rude awakening on homework and tests and everything is just at a
much higher level” (4.22-23, 25-26). Most first-year students experience this transition from high school to college; Ashley illustrates how such a transition can be much more difficult for first-generation students.

Motivation

The literature, and these early interviews, attest to the fact that, although first-generation students feel less ready or able to smoothly acclimate to college, they are nevertheless motivated. All five students in the pilot study discussed what motivated them, and their statements reveal the types of motivation that these participants felt, as noted in the codes listed below:

- M-C: Competition
- M-F: Family
- M-P: Personal
- M-WE: Work ethic

There is a distinct difference between the ‘competition’ and ‘family’ codes. For example, Matt joked about competing with his mother to finish college first; he says, “She always says, ‘maybe I’m going to beat you, Matt’ . . . I think she’s doing it as more of an incentive to keep me going” (1.15-18). This statement clearly illustrates both ‘competition’ and ‘family’ subcodes. However, Justin felt that his parents “were kind of leaning into it [college] . . . it was kind of my own decision but I felt like my parents wanted me to go” (2.11-13). The ‘family’ code applies here: it does not indicate competition, so it requires a separate code.
On the other hand, Sandra was personally motivated to get into and attend college. When I asked who or what influenced her decision to come to college, Sandra replied, “Who? Me, myself. Myself . . . But it wasn't like, ‘You better go to college,’ it wasn’t like that, nobody ever had to persuade me to go” (3.31, 3.41-42). Her determination to attend college was due to her own individual drive. Ashley, too, was personally motivated, but her reason was different than Sandra’s: “… I wanted to get an education because I’m very . . . determined to save natural wildlife because of what I’ve seen being done to the environment” (2.1-3).

Ellie, in contrast, felt that her first-generation status impacted her motivation and work ethic: “I think it’s just impacted overall, as a whole, my motivation and my work ethic . . . my work ethic is a lot harder and people wonder why I try harder . . . but it’s just like a lot of people in India where, that’s their only way out, like this is my only way out of the cycle” (12.10-22). We also see motivation and purpose echoed in Ellie’s comments about why she is in college: “. . . but I really like to learn is what it comes down to” (2.24). In this statement, Ellie explains that her main reason for coming to college was her eagerness to keep learning and not because of an instrumentalist view of education.

**Instrumentalism**

Student instrumentalism or pragmatism is a view in which students see their time at the university and their writing class in particular as a hoop to jump through rather than part of a transformative experience that is rewarding in and of itself and which places them on a trajectory for success in college and later in life.
Seitz addresses the instrumentalist approach of some students in his study of four working class students. He defines instrumentalism as “perceiv[ing] knowledge primarily as a means to an end, rather than a questioning and consequent reconsidering of those ends” (211). To indicate student pragmatism or instrumentalism in their purpose for attending college, I used the code below:

- I: Instrumentalism (student view of higher education)

Of the five participants, Justin best exemplifies student instrumentalism when I asked him why he was in college: “I just wanted to get a better education than just high school and I was tired of working at [a home improvement store] at the time…I just wanted to get something better than that” (1.38-39). Matt, too, displayed instrumentalist motives in regards to his chosen occupation:

And then, I guess, even if I wasn’t going to do that [become an orthodontist], I’d still be in school just to get a degree because, my whole life . . . since neither of my parents went to college, growing up they always pounded into my head that you need to go to get that piece of paper no matter what it is, you just need to go to school and get a piece of paper saying that you completed higher education. (3.38-42)

Ashley also stated that a college degree would “get me to where I want to be” as a marine biologist trained to work with orca whales (2.40). Sandra also demonstrated a level of instrumentalism in regards to her major but also in terms of the financial cost of college: “Yeah, my main reason [for choosing Iowa State] because I decided I wanted to do biology, and they have a good biology program,
especially with animals and they gave me money and it was cheap” (11.11-13).

Both Ashley and Sandra articulated a form of instrumentalism in which a higher education is merely another requirement needed in order to achieve their career goals.

For Ellie, however, college is a complicated mix of instrumentalist motives and wanting to learn. She states that she “just love[s] learning really” but then allows that she knows she will “get better pay” if she “has more education” (2.17, 2.21-22, emphasis Ellie). For Ellie, simply learning is important but is tempered with her pragmatic awareness that she would earn more money if she had a college degree.

Habits of Mind

As described both in Chapter 2 and above, CWPA, NCTE, and NWP identify eight habits of mind that college students need to develop to be successful. These codes, which I combined for ease of coding, identify points at which students demonstrated those habits in the interviews:

- HM-COE: Curiosity, openness, engagement
- HM-CF: Creativity and flexibility
- HM-PR: Persistence and responsibility
- HM-MR: Metacognition and reflection

In an example of curiosity and openness, Ellie identifies her love of learning as her main reason for going to college, stating that if she could major “in almost anything,” she would (2.19). Matt’s explanation of his time management skills
exemplifies some persistence and responsibility because it became much more important to him in college than in high school; he states, “I’ll write down what I need to do tonight and normally I’ll try to have it writ[t]en down like I need to have this done by this time so I can start on this and get it done by this time” (9.28-30).

Ashley demonstrated metacognition and reflection when she realized that some conventions of good writing extend beyond English classes in high school: “I was just thinking it [English 150] would be basically what we did in high school, the five-paragraph essay, that kind of stuff but then realized it doesn’t matter how many paragraphs you have as long as you have an intro and a conclusion” (6.7-9).

**After Analysis**

The process of generating these codes constituted the grounded theory that guided my primary study: that being a first-generation college student is about more in the college communication classroom than to what level a student’s habits of mind are developing. This is the crux of the matter: it comes down to more than just objective skill sets as set out in the *Framework*. Ironically, first-generation students seem to assume that their skill set—their own “framework for success”—is less robust and reliable than those of their continuing-generation peers.

After examining and coding the data from the pilot study, I realized that the focus on first-semester college students in English 150 was too broadly defined and could not ascribe particular characteristics to a particular group of students; in other words, even though the five students I interviewed were first-generation, the data I collected were more superficial in terms of their experiences as first-
generation students and as Foundation Communication students. Also, I wanted to include beginning college students who placed into English 250 because it is likely that, if they were first-generation, they might experience the same doubts and concerns as first-generation students in English 150. From the pilot study, I gained the valuable grounding that it is the students’ perception and expectation of experiences, of one or more challenging circumstances, combined with various types of motivation, and an array of attributes from the Framework that create at least an early college self-identity for that student. By examining each student’s multifaceted combination of these variables, we can begin to see where and how students begin to form their “college student” role that will influence the first-generation students’ learning (Collier and Morgan 425). Consequently, I decided to conduct another study in Fall 2012 that asked participants in more specific ways about their experiences as first-generation college students and how that generational status intersects with first- and second-year college communication courses.

**Study Two: A Renewed Focus on First-Generation Students in First-Year Communication Courses**

The data from the Fall 2011 study illustrated to me that a narrower focus was needed as the research went forward, so I focused on first-generation students, their perceptions, expectations, and their experiences in the writing class. For Fall 2012, I modified my existing IRB to allow for investigation into:

- the connection between student perception and challenging circumstances
• how students who identify as having a challenging circumstance(s) feel they may be less able to adapt to and develop “the college student role” (i.e., seemingly not possess the habits of mind) (Collier and Morgan 425-26)

• how students can view English 150 and 250 strictly instrumentally, as a means to an end

• and how English 150 and 250 introduce and begin to develop those habits of mind necessary for a successful college experience.

Participants

To recruit participants, I surveyed English 150 and 250 sections volunteered by their instructors to find first-generation students willing to volunteer their time to talk to me. Sixteen instructors of English 150 and 250 gave me access to their students during class time to recruit participants. When I recruited in classes, I was mindful of Ellie’s feeling that being first-generation was stigmatizing to her. To avoid making students uncomfortable, then, I distributed the consent form, as seen in Appendix G, to the students while explaining who I was and that I was looking for first-generation college students to volunteer for the study. After explaining the basics of the study and their participant rights, I directed students to the back of the consent form and told them that if they were able and willing to volunteer, they could fill out that form and return it to me. If not, then they could leave the form blank. I also walked around each classroom and retrieved the consent form from each student so students would not have to ‘pass’ their papers to a particular spot in the room. In this way, I was recruiting for a particular subset of students without
publicly asking who was first-generation or not, and the privacy of any first-generation student who wanted to participate but did not want to disclose that information to his or her classmates would still be respected. Eighteen students volunteered to participate in the study. Eleven students met with me at least once during the semester, as listed in Table 4 below, for a total of twenty-five interviews, nineteen of which were conducted face-to-face and six of which were conducted via email, totaling approximately 13.5 hours of interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>English Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allie</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheyenne</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payton</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Primary Study Participants and Course

**Research Instrument**

I continued using interviews since they would provide access to the kinds of information that would answer my research questions; I chose to discontinue the surveys because they did not yield very much useful data in terms of first- 

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9 All student names are pseudonyms.
generation student experiences. Additionally, in this primary study, I also chose to talk through each participant’s assignments with him/her so I could better understand his or her experiences with and perceptions about the writing classroom. I split the initial set of interview questions from the Fall 2011 study into three separate interviews spaced at intervals in the semester: one initial interview, one interview at midterm, and another interview during the last 2 weeks of the semester (listed in Appendices H, I, and J, respectively).

This interview sequence is adapted from Irving Seidman’s structure for in-depth phenomenological interviewing. Seidman employs three interviews in his process: the first interview, a focused life history, helps the researcher “put the participant’s experience in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about him or herself in light of the topic up to the present time” (17). The second interview “allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs; finally, the third interview “encourages participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them” (Seidman 17). I employed Seidman’s sequence because it allowed me to better delve into each participant’s experience in a systematic way, allowing for reflection on the part of both the participants and me, while spanning the entire semester.

Although Seidman feels that the structure is most effective when the interviews occur three to seven days apart and within a two- or three-week period (21), for this study, this structure was too confining. Because English 150 and 250 assignments are spaced fairly evenly throughout the semester rather than
occurring in a more condensed period of time, spacing the interviews would allow students the chance to internalize and reflect upon what they learned as their writing course progressed.

I conducted the first interviews—the life history or background, as I thought of it—near the beginning (August-September) of the semester. The second interviews, in which the participant reconstructed his or her experiences and communication work within English 150 or 250, were held around midterm (October-November), and I planned to conduct final, reflective interviews around finals week (December). Unfortunately, the scheduling for the final interview did not work for several of the participants, so students were able to answer the interview questions via email, and several students emailed their answers to me throughout the month of January 2013 as well. Most likely, since the final interviews were set to take place during the last regular week of the semester and finals week, students were simply too busy and preoccupied with finishing their courses and the upcoming winter break to set a time to meet with me.

**Interviews**

The initial interviews with these participants focused on exploring the context of their situation as they saw it. Initial interview questions, listed in Appendix H, did not change significantly from the questions asked in the pilot study; however, I did remove three questions:

- What kinds of reading materials were present in your home as you grew up?
- Do you feel you have something to say?
• If you had to describe your socioeconomic class, how would you describe it?

I chose to omit these questions for this study because of my focus on student-identified challenging circumstances or because the question was too simple. Instead, I added several questions focusing on student-identified challenging circumstances, the land-grant heritage of ISU, and the purpose of a college degree. These questions, I felt, would more precisely address the perceptions and experiences of first-generation college students. After the first three interviews in the primary study, I also realized I needed to ask about the processes for filling out college applications and the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) because of voluntary, unsolicited comments made by the students. Without prior knowledge, those two sets of paperwork can be confusing and difficult for first-generation students and seemed to create either barriers or an expectation of further obstacles as the college experience unfolded.

After the first three interviews, I began to understand that first-generation students undergo a process to become successful college students. As part of Corbin and Strauss’ grounded theory method, diagrams are an integral aspect. As they note, “Diagrams enable researchers to organize their data, keep a record of their concepts and the relationships between them, and to integrate their ideas.... doing diagrams force a researcher to think about the data in ‘lean ways’; that is, in a manner that reduces the data to their essence” (125). Representative diagrams I have generated throughout the process are detailed in Chapter 4 and helped me visualize the process that first-generation students undergo.
In order to understand if first-generation students needed to undergo a process to become successful college students and what that process looked like, I needed to explore how students approached the assignments in their communication class. This is the purpose of the second interview in the three interview series: by interviewing students a second time about their process in writing or creating particular assignments, I could learn how the participants handled communication assignments, including what parts of the process were more successful and went well for them as well as what was difficult and problematic. If a student had a difficulty with an assignment, I wanted to know what that problem was and how she or he solved it. I also wanted to know if the communication tasks the students were assigned were ones they were familiar with from other contexts, such as high school or other college courses. Finally, I wanted to know if a student felt that being first-generation had any impact on his or her performance in the communication class.

For the second interview, I asked students to bring copies of their major assignments from English 150 or 250, either on paper or on flash drive, so we could discuss their writing and how their perceptions impacted their writing process for those assignments. For these questions, I focused almost entirely upon the required assignments for the course; I wanted to know what went well in addition to any difficulties they experienced with their work and how they solved those problems. By beginning with specific events such as the drafting process of their assignments, students could then characterize this process, identify points of difficulty, speculate
why a particular task was easy, difficult or something in between, and how they handled it. I also briefly addressed a few follow-up questions about the students’ goals for their English class and their transition to the university. Finally, I asked students if they thought their generation status had any impact on their work in their English classes. Of the eleven original participants, nine students participated in a second interview with me.

Finally, I set up the final interview with reflective questions about students’ semester, their perceptions, expectations, and assumptions versus the realities of the semester, and how their communication class went. Students could choose to talk with me directly or answer questions via email. However, because this final interview was set to occur during Dead and Finals weeks, the students who participated in the final interview chose to email their answers to me. One student, Daniel, requested a telephone interview but did not get back to me with a date and time that worked for him. Answers from six students dribbled in from December 26, 2012, through January 27, 2013, meaning that roughly 50% of the original participants completed all three interviews. In Table 5 below, I have illustrated which interviews were completed by a particular student.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5: Student Interview Completion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adam</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Allie</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Amber</strong></td>
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Table 5, Continued

<table>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Daniel</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>John</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Laura</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Payton</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Penny</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rachel</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Code Modifications**

Once I had completed and transcribed the first three initial interviews in the primary study, I discovered other important concepts articulated by the participants. Hence, I added three more subcodes to account for those additional concepts that emerged as I transcribed.

- **M–F**: Motivation – financial
- **CC–A**: Challenging Circumstance – Family
- **P**: Perception: Personal

As I listened to the participants talk about their motivations for attending college and completing their writing courses, I realized that another reason existed along with competition, family, personal, and work ethics. That motivation, simply enough, is financial. This particular subcode became apparent to me when I was listening to John describe his parents’ workplace, a factory that processes poultry. He states, “...but my parents really expected me to go to college, too. They were like, ‘you wouldn’t want to work in these kinds of places’ where these other guys
control you and take advantage of you and get a little bigger everyday. They didn’t want me to go through that, so that’s probably the reason why I wanted to go to college” (1.397-401). Essentially, John says, he is in college to avoid those kinds of jobs. To account for this type of motivation, I added a subcode—denoted in the transcripts as M–$—to account for a participant’s financial motivations for attending college and completing a communication class.

Some students also identified their families as a source of difficulty. For example, John articulates his sense of responsibility for his family, and Adam indicates the pressure his family puts on him to “graduate and do great things.” Amber also characterized her family as a challenging circumstance. In particular, due to a recent family crisis, Amber’s presence at home was necessary for family members. Consequently, while she was also trying to participate in her college classes, she was also returning to her family most weekends to provide support. Because these challenging circumstances do not fall into any of the other challenging circumstances codes, I added CC-A to indicate any family challenging circumstances articulated by the student.

Finally, I added a subcode for a different type of perception that some of the participants demonstrated. This perception is a sense of isolation, loneliness, and confusion. More than one student indicated that she or he felt alone or lost in college, but John’s brief outburst during our second interview encapsulates this perception the best: “I have problems enough when I can’t even ask a question to the teacher. That’s when I have problems and can’t figure it out what questions to
ask for a teacher if I need help. When I need help, I don’t know what questions to ask and like, ‘how do you do this? How do you approach this? You got to look it up,’ but when I look it up, I can’t find it” (2.422-426). John clearly feels isolated in terms of asking for help from his English instructor. That doesn’t mean that the instructor is at fault here; what is important is that John perceives that he is unable to ask questions because he does not know what questions to ask to begin with. While he does not directly tie his generational status to his inability to talk to his teacher, he does indirectly tie it to his intelligence compared to his classmates: “I’m a little intimidated because everyone else in the classroom is a just little, way smarter than I am and they’re able to ask questions that I don’t know” (2.491-92). Other participants also indicated this sense of isolation to me, so another subcode was crucial for indicating these perceptions.

Finally, the act of transcription is inherently reflexive. While transcribing these interviews, the core category of instrumentalism seemed less and less like its own unique category; rather, instrumentalism could be considered a form of motivation and thus needed to be treated as a concept within a core category. Those students who display instrumentalism are exhibiting it as a form of motivation: they are motivated to complete their Foundation Communication course and college degree to get a well-paying job or meet other career goals. It only made sense to collapse the instrumentalism category into the motivation category as a subcode. These changes are illustrated in Table 6, below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Code</th>
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<td><strong>Perceptions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Student perceives or has perceived a situation in a certain way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation</td>
<td>P-E</td>
<td>Student has expectations for situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumption</td>
<td>P-A</td>
<td>Student makes assumptions about situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>P-P</td>
<td>Student feels fear, lost, alone, or confused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challenging Circumstances</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>CC-A</td>
<td>Student feels “behind” or less smart in comparison to classmates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>CC-F</td>
<td>Student is motivated by family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>CC-$</td>
<td>Student feels financial strain of college costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/Cultural</td>
<td>CC-SC</td>
<td>Student feels a “cultural mismatch” (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, and Johnson 100) with other students/classmates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>M-C</td>
<td>Student feels s/he must compete with someone else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>M-F</td>
<td>Student feels that family counts on him/her; feels that quitting or failing would disappoint family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>M-P</td>
<td>Student wants to learn for learning’s sake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Ethic</td>
<td>M-WE</td>
<td>Student wants to complete work because it was assigned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentalism</td>
<td>M-I</td>
<td>Student feels college and FYC are hoops to get to future, job, or better life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>M-$</td>
<td>Student is motivated by needing money or finances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6: Final Study Codes, Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Habits of Mind</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity, Openness, Engagement</td>
<td>HM-COE</td>
<td>Student displays curiosity about topic; student is open to new ways of thinking &amp; being in the world; student is invested &amp; involved in his/her learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity and Flexibility</td>
<td>HM-CF</td>
<td>Student is able to use novel approaches; student experiences disequilibrium in a situation &amp; develops ways or solutions to cope or change situation; student is able to adapt to situations, expectations, or demands; student self-authors (Pizzolato 798)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence and Responsibility</td>
<td>HM-PR</td>
<td>Student is able to sustain interest and attention to educational tasks; student is able to take ownership of one's actions and understand consequences; student develops self-efficacy or believes in his/her ability to succeed in specific situations (Chemers, Hu, and Garcia 55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognition</td>
<td>HM-M</td>
<td>Student is able to think about and reflect on their own learning processes; usually leads to self-efficacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is the list of codes I ultimately used to code and analyze the data from the primary study.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have detailed the process by which I analyzed the data. In the next chapter, Chapter Four, I will present my results. In Chapter Five, I will interpret the results and their importance. In Chapter Six, I will share some actions
that can be put into place by institutions as well as actions individual instructors can take in their own classrooms.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS

This chapter details the results of the study about first-generation students’ experiences and perceptions of their transition to college and of the first-year writing class as a site of transition. I have organized the chapter in three sections. The first section details the process first-generation students undergo when first arriving at college, and the diagramming I employed throughout this project sheds light on how this process was generated. The second section presents specific results from the participants, and these tie directly to the codes generated in the pilot study and ultimately used to code the data from the primary study. Finally, the third section puts the two together: by combining the final diagram with the specific results from the students, the final results can be plotted in a graph that helps clarify the process first-generation college students undergo when they first come to college.

Diagramming, Part I: Making Sense of First-Generation Students’ Coming-to-College Process

Even though this process somewhat mirrors Seidman’s tripartite interview structure—the first interview provided background and pre-college perceptions while the second and third interviews focus on the event (the assignments in English 150 or English 250) and reflection—the overall view that emerges is divided into two critical portions in those students’ experiences related to coming
to college: pre-college and at-college. To better understand the process that first-generation students undergo, I consistently diagrammed throughout the process of conducting this study and writing this related dissertation. As Corbin and Strauss note, “doing diagrams force a researcher to think about the data in ‘lean ways’; that is, in a manner that reduces the data to their essence” (125). These diagrams, including a final diagram of the process, are discussed below. In fact, these diagrams provide the over-arching theory behind the process. It is through examining the entire process, not only from start to finish across the chronology of the study but also through examining participants’ perceptions more closely and in relation to those of other participants, that the impact of the participants’ perceptions, challenging circumstances, motivations, and habits of mind are fully appreciated.

Very soon after I began transcribing the interviews for the pilot study, I began to see evidence that first-generation students undergo a particular coming-to-college process that is unique to them. My initial thinking about the process they undergo was fairly simplistic: I imagined that first-generation students’ challenging circumstances blocked their ability to develop habits of mind, as detailed in the crude hand-drawn Figure 1 below.
This drawing is clearly too simplistic because it implies that any challenging circumstances that a first-generation student experiences automatically blocks development of habits of mind. However, this graphic does not account for a student’s flexibility to solve problems; a habit of mind outlined in the Framework is flexibility. It assumes that any disequilibrium experienced by students will block habits of mind with no opportunities to experiment with possible solutions. So I needed to begin to consider individual students and their particular perceptions and experiences as I diagrammed.

As noted in Chapter 2, like all first-year students, first-generation students need to undergo what Pizzolato calls disequilibrium, or the experiences that cause disjunction. As I listened to the participants explain their perceptions and
experiences, I heard them express fear and frustration as well as drive and enthusiasm for the college transition process. I listened to their stories and anecdotes about the process, and I realized that they undergoing disequilibrium was critical to their self-authoring and begin developing the habits of mind needed to be successful. However, the participants also articulated connections between their difficulties and their generation status. At that point in the study, then, I felt the process would look like the one represented in Figure 2, below.

![Figure 2: Second Process Diagram](image)

However, as I kept working through the data and began to see the complexities and layers within as well as between participants’ stories and experiences, I realized that the process was not that formulaic: all the students brought pre-college perceptions with them that colored how they viewed college. Additionally, each student’s process of coming and acclimating to college differed because of his/her individuality.

Once the data gathering and initial analysis had occurred, I diagrammed the process again to account for the individuality of each participant’s experience. This diagram is more directly tied to the literature (e.g. Chemers, Hu, and Garcia; Pizzolato) as well as accounts for each individual student’s process, as illustrated in Figure 3, below.
In Figure 3, we see, to the far left, that when a first-generation student comes to college, she or he ends up following one of two separate paths. On both paths, the student experiences disequilibrium, but what differs between the paths is a distinction between tying problems directly to the generational status rather than attributing it to the first-year experience itself. However, this diagram does not account for any challenging circumstances, in addition to generational status, that may impact a student. It also appears that both paths can lead students to the desired habits of mind they need to be successful in college. Hence, another diagram was in order.
Several more factors needed to be accounted for when first-generation students come to college, such as the perceptions they bring with them in addition to the challenging circumstances they perceive as impacting them. As I finished my transcription and began analyzing my data, I realized that some students in the primary study did not seem to be—or at least did not articulate feelings of being—affected by their first-generation status. For them, it was another personal quality, attribute, or feature they had. These students’ experiences and stories—Adam, Allie, Brian, Cheyenne, and Laura—will be further detailed in this chapter. Other students—Amber, Daniel, John, Payton, Penny, and Rachel—all articulated their first-generational status as having a negative impact in some way during the semester that manifested as some type of challenging circumstance; their stories, too, will be detailed later in the chapter. But their stories and experiences illustrated the process they were going through or had gone through. A more finalized version of this diagram is below in Figure 4.

![Figure 4: Final Process Diagram](image-url)
What we see in Figure 4 is a first-generation student coming to college on the far left. That student is carrying a knapsack of pre-college perceptions, expectations, and assumptions. As that student begins college, we see that, depending on the student’s experience, that knapsack either begins to get weighed down with more perceptions, expectations and assumptions or is lightened by the lack of negative perceptions and perceptions that are not realized. It is this knapsack of perceptions that determines how well a first-generation student transitions to college and begins to develop the habits of mind necessary for success in college. If this knapsack is weighed down by more and more negative perceptions, that student is less likely to be able to cope with any experiences that cause disequilibrium and therefore is less able to self-author and essentially solve the problem or issue presented in the disequilibriative experience. The first-generation student knapsack of perceptions becomes too heavy to lift or the disequilibriative experiences too difficult to overcome, as illustrated in Figure 4 by the bottom two figures. To appropriate Peggy McIntosh’s idea of a knapsack of privilege, the first-generation student’s knapsack can become the knapsack of “dis”-privilege. Thus, by looking at the diagram, we can see that a continuum or range of experiences occurs during this process; these experiences range from least difficult to most difficult.

If a student does not experience strong instances of disequilibrium during the first month or two of college, she or he is less likely to learn to self-author as

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10 For the purposes of this dissertation, I am coining the term ‘disequilibriative’ as an adjective to describe experiences that cause disequilibrium.
quickly. As Pizzolato notes, “The level of disequilibrium students experienced affected the degree to which they self-authored . . . as students experienced higher levels of disequilibrium they appeared more likely to feel compelled to alleviate the dissonance by committing to new goals” (803). Even though Pizzolato’s participants are all considered high-risk in a variety of ways, this concept still applies to the students in the present study because they still need to learn to cope with difficulties in college. While these difficulties may not be as extreme as joining a gang or living on the streets, these students are still making a crucial choice and taking an action that no one else in their family has done before: they are going to college.

By the same token, students who experience more and more difficult amounts of disequilibrium are more likely to self-author and therefore develop self-efficacy and useful, college-appropriate habits of mind sooner. If a student does not experience disequilibrium as strongly, s/he will struggle to learn to self-author and develop self-efficacy. This may explain some of the responses from some students in the first interview because they hadn’t really had to cope with adversity by that point in the semester. Instead, they merely continued living their lives as if everything was fine. The question is: when they finally hit that brick wall, will they be able to self-author and get through it? Even though Pascarella et. al. describe a study conducted on the other years of college, we cannot know for certain, without additional research, what happens when first-generation students do not experience disequilibrium and learn to self-author. By examining the process by
which a first-generation student perceives a challenging circumstance, we can begin to work with that student to ameliorate that challenge or meet it and surmount it. It is through the lived experiences of the participants that this process comes to light.

Now that we can see the theoretical process that first-generation students undergo when they first come to college, we can begin to analyze more specific results provided by the students in the interviews. The logical place to begin is with the pre-college perceptions and expectations that students brought with them. Along with these expectations of college, students also shared how they felt about their generational status. The students made these statements within the first month or two of classes.

**Pre-College Perceptions and Expectations**

In this section, I will describe results that address the pre-college perceptions and expectations of these students; in particular, I explain why they are in college, how they perceive college in general terms, and how their expectations of college measure up to the reality of college. Within this section as well are the students’ perceptions of their first-generation status as well as their perceptions of their support systems. These results connect directly to the codes I developed to make sense of the data. The statements below indicate representative or striking results for the entire group of students. In the transcripts, they are indicated by one or more of the major categories of subcodes—motivation (M), perceptions (P), and
challenging circumstances (CC)—generated during the pilot study and explained in Chapter 3.

**Motivation for Coming to College**

All eleven participants felt that it was necessary to finish their college degrees but for different reasons. Most students identified a specific career or field they wanted to go enter and often, they would state that a degree in a particular major was necessary for a particular career or job or for additional graduate or professional education. Additionally, students also cited watching their parents struggle as part of their goal for earning a college degree. Khanh-Van T. Bui, in her study, identified sixteen different reasons indicated by her participants as the reason or reasons for coming to college, with the first three reasons being rated the most important:

- Gaining respect/status
- Bringing honor to their family
- Helping their family out financially after they are done with college
- Siblings or other relatives were going (or went) to college
- Wanted to move out of their parents' home
- Friends were going to college
- Parents expected them to go to college
- High school teachers/counselor persuaded them to go
- Achieving their career goals
- A better income with a college degree
- Liked to learn
- Provide a better life for their own children
- Gain their independence
- Acquire skills to function effectively in society
- Get out of their parents' neighborhood
- Avoid working immediately after high school (7)
Reasons offered by the students in the current study mostly fall into the list generated by Bui with one exception: those students who cited watching their parents struggle to make ends meet as motivation for coming to college.

Cheyenne perhaps illustrates the strongest instrumentalist goals of all the participants. She states that she is in college “[b]ecause I want to make more money than people at McDonald’s do . . . that’s what I grew up being told, if you don’t get a job, you’re going to work at McDonald’s for the rest of your life” (1.51-53). For Cheyenne, it is simple: she can either work at McDonald’s or go to college, earn a degree, and make more money.

On the other hand, Daniel, while also being instrumentalist, is almost resentful of the necessity of a college degree. He states that he’s in college “[t]o get a better education, that’s the textbook answer” but then admits that “to be completely honest, I’d rather just skip the education part of it and go straight into the work force because…the only thing I’m going to mainly learn in college is stuff to get me prepared for the workforce” (1.122-130). Daniel clearly views college in instrumentalist terms, as a means to an end. Further, if he could, Daniel would not go to college at all but would begin working. Other students in the study did not articulate the same aversion to coming to college to earn a degree for a particular job, but they still espoused instrumentalist aims nonetheless. Students also articulated family as motivation for coming to college.

For example, John identified his family as his main reason for coming to college: “Primarily it’s…not for myself…the reason why I’m in college is basically to
help my parents out” (1.308-310). Even though John may also feel that college will be beneficial for him, he recognizes that assisting his parents is his motivation for coming to college. Other students cited the struggles of their parents as their motivation for coming to college. Allie explains that she is in college “to better myself, I guess. ... [My dad is] a single parent so he always struggles and I’m always there to watch it and so I don’t want to have to do that when I have kids” (1.80, 92-93). Again, Allie does not want to labor like her own father did in the process of supporting a family someday. Allie does not want to perpetuate the family cycle of not going to college and what she has seen in her immediate family as its result, so she is earning a college degree herself.

**Expectations for College: “Hollywood-ifying” College**

Most Americans, thanks to portrayals of college life in popular media in addition to word-of-mouth tales, harbor certain expectations of college life. These study participants are no different: often, their expectations of college do not match the reality that they experience. Specifically, several participants voiced surprise at the transition between high school and college coursework. As discovered by Braxton, Hossler, and Vesper, “first-generation student expectations about the college environment were less congruent with what they had actually experienced” (qtd. in Kuh et. al. 37). Examining the pre-college expectations of the participants, then, is vital to understanding the process they undergo. Specifically, students addressed time management, class expectations, stereotypes of college, and social expectations.
The results reported below again tie directly to codes used to code the data. Results in this section were identified in the data with one or more of the following major categories of subcodes: perception (P), including perception-expectation (P-E), perception-assumption (P-A), and perception-personal (P-P); challenging circumstance (CC) plus the subcodes for academic, family and social/cultural challenging circumstances; and motivation (M), including all six motivation subcodes—competition, family, personal, financial, work ethic, and instrumentalism (M-C, M-F, M-P, M-$, M-WE, M-I). By considering what types of expectations these students brought with them to college, we can begin to see the trajectory of their individual acclimation processes.

Time Management

Several students articulated difficulties with time management, and these instances were coded as academic challenging circumstances (CC-A) in the data. As Jeffrey Howard notes, it is “a significant challenge” for first-year college students because they are leaving an environment in which someone reminded them of assignments and deadlines from day-to-day to an environment in which students are expected to manage their own time, assignments, and deadlines (15). Brian declared, “I was not prepared for the amount of studying… And I’m not complaining because I thought it was going to be time-consuming and tedious” (1.313-14). Brian further explained to me that because he was highly involved in his fraternity, he had regular activities scheduled for most nights of the week in addition to recurring fraternity activities such as chapter meetings (1.198-204).
Collier and Morgan observe that “[i]ndeed, several first-generation students volunteered that they were advised to be more realistic about time commitments, but they still tended to overcommit” (436). Such is the case with Brian.

Class Expectations

Of the eleven students in the study, only five—Adam, Allie, Brian, Laura, and Payton—expressed on record that they expected college classes to be more difficult than high school classes. Other students, however, were surprised by the difference between the two; both types of reactions were coded as academic challenging circumstances (CC-A) and/or as a type of perception (P, P-E, P-A). Brian admits that he expected my classes to be much more “[h]igh-school like . . . and I would say . . . how specific they get . . . but now that it’s in hindsight when I kind of look back and I think . . . that’s what college is. You’re supposed to [go] in depth and you’re supposed to get this greater understanding” (1.349-52).

John also expressed his dismay and surprise at the level of difficulty of his coursework compared to his high school work: “[College] felt like a jump from high school . . . all of the sudden there’s four or five times that amount of work you got to do in half [the time and] . . . on your own . . . High school was easy because you got to memorize this, you got to memorize that . . . it was very straightforward” (1.509, 521-525). He realizes, however, that his college coursework requires more effort: “You kind of think more outside the box or a little more clever than what you do . . . Yeah, there’s a certain way to do [the work] but you got to find the parts to it to solve the problem . . . that’s the brain breaker or squisher” (1.525-26, 528-29, 533).
John’s explanation of having to “be a little more clever” in order to cope with his coursework, as we can see, is reflected in the comments of most of the participants. Clearly, these students did not expect college coursework to be as difficult as they perceived it to be. Other students articulated expectations of college that are commonly thought of or found in popular media.

**Stereotypes of College**

Students in this study also anticipated more common college images, like large lecture courses, unfriendly professors, and student drinking. These data were coded with a combination of perception, expectation, and assumption codes (P, P-E, P-A) as well as some academic or social/cultural challenging circumstances (CC-A, CC-S/C). Like the other students in the study, Daniel also anticipated that he would have to take large lecture courses, but he did not expect his professor’s statement on the first day of class: “I expected [lecture classes] but I didn’t really expect them to be that big and the first [lecture] class I walked into . . . [the professor] said, ‘Do not email me, call me, don’t talk to me before or after class’ . . . and you’re like, ‘wow! How am I supposed to ask for help . . .?’” (1.199-200, 204-05, 209-10). Not only was the level of the coursework surprising for Daniel, but he also found the professor’s outright refusal to help his students shocking.

Rachel’s expectations of college also invoke some common college tropes: “. . . you always hear about college kids getting drunk and all the parties and stuff, so I would always think of that. Otherwise, I thought of huge lecture halls, big classes, scary professors . . . I was really, really nervous” (1.208-210). Not only does
Rachel thinks of the stereotypical setting for college courses—lecture halls—but she also expects that she will encounter “scary” professors as well.

**Social Expectations**

Other students harbored expectations that revolved around the people they would meet. Cheyenne imagined college in such a way: “I thought it would be a lot more of hanging out with friends and I don’t drink so not partying, but I thought it was going to be more of that and my roommate would become like my sister. And it would just be awesome” (1.151-52, 164-65). But Cheyenne admits that she was glorifying the college experience: “I wouldn’t say it’s a disappointment . . . I knew I was probably, I was basically Hollywood-ifying college so I knew it wasn’t going to be exactly like that but that’s what I pictured. So it wasn’t so much a disappointment as just a realization” (1.196-200). Cheyenne admits that her expectations were influenced by an unrealistic view of college life. Brian, too, also expected a change in his social life. He expected more friends and fun: “I don’t think I was really sure what to expect because I thought . . . I was going to branch out extremely easily, it was going to be a lot of fun . . .” (1.304-08). He admits that college has been fun thus far, but he is still surprised by the differences between high school and college in terms of how easily he can or cannot make friends.

As we can see from these results, students in the study anticipated certain college stereotypes, many of which did not materialize. These expectations also extended to their English classes, as we will see in the section below.
**English Course Expectations**

I asked students what they expected their English course to be like and what they expected to learn in their English courses. These participants all offered varied explanations of their expectations for their English courses, but a few themes ran consistently through their responses. These responses were coded with a combination of codes ranging including academic challenging circumstances (CC-A) and perception, expectation, and assumption codes (P, P-E, P-A). Generally, participants expected to read books and write about them; however, a few participants expected something a bit different.

**Reading Books**

One theme centered on reading books and writing about them. Adam explains, “I thought it was just going to be reading books . . . I like reading so I really like really focusing on different literature and stuff and not actually writing . . . but its not, it's about writing, so it's like whatever” (1.241-43). Adam's expectation is grounded in his experience with primarily literature-based English classes in high school; in many classes, he had to read a book then write about it. Rachel states, “I imagined a lot of writing and essays, like research papers . . . Just a ton of that and then reading books and writing papers over them” (1.304-06). These two students were not the only students who felt that college English courses would focus on reading and writing about literature. Other students, like Cheyenne, held less realistic expectations for college English.
Along with her other expectations of college, Cheyenne offers a clichéd view of her English 150 class. She states, “I honestly thought it would be more papers, and a lot longer papers, but I also thought we’d have more freedom with what we wrote about . . . I expected it to be, ‘oh my God, I have to write a research paper, I’m going to die’ type research papers” (1.525-26). Cheyenne’s anticipated English class involves much more writing and writing more difficult assignments. Interestingly, Cheyenne is the only participant to anticipate choosing her own topics for her papers.

Personal and Creative Writing

Two students found the level of personal and creative writing uncomfortable; for Penny, it was not enough, and for Brian, it was too much. Penny’s expectations grew out of her experience with taking online college courses rather than the courses she took in high school: “I expected it to kind of be a coasting course . . . I figured it would be like my English classes in the other [college], they were mostly personal stories and very easy writing” (1.558-59, 589-90). While Brian offered several expectations—such as expecting a lecture course and expecting an introductory course that prepared students “for what everybody else is going to want to expect,” his main expectation revolves around the tone of the assignments in English 150: “I didn’t think it was going to be this much creative writing . . . our first assignment, it kind of startled me because we had to talk about what’s home and where is home. And I did that as best as I could, but I did it formally. . . . in most of the majors besides creative writing, you don’t write creative
papers” (1. 557-563, 603-04, 616-621). How students perceived and experienced their communication course is important for understanding how students perceived an impact from their generation status.

**Generational Status: Multiple Views**

The participants viewed their generational status in a wide range of ways; my findings are consistent with Mark P. Orbe’s findings about how important being first-generation is to a group of first-generation college students. Like the participants in Orbe’s study, some students in the primary study found that it was either positive or not particularly important to them as students; either way, these statements were coded using a combination of the perceptions codes (P, P-E, P-A), the motivation codes (M-C, M-F, M-I, M-$), and challenging circumstances codes (CC-$, CC-SC, CC-A). These students—Adam, Allie, Brian, Cheyenne, and Laura—all felt that their generational status could be a motivational factor, or more neutrally, as Allie stated in her second interview, “I don’t think of it like that” (2.546). Other students experienced their first-generation status negatively at some point and articulated those perceptions and feelings to me during our interviews. These students—Amber, Daniel, John, Payton, Penny, and Rachel—all describe some sort of negative impact of their generational status at some point during their first year of college.

A few students found being first-generation a motivating factor for either themselves or family. Brian hopes that being the first college student in the family will inspire other family members to go: “I’m kind of hoping I’m setting a bar for . . .
future generations that, if he can do it, and he’s in the same situation we are, I can do it” (Brian 1.988-94). Brian’s hope that his going to college will inspire his relatives to go and stick with it is important because we can see how a student can feel a sense of stewardship for younger family members and how that stewardship can motivate a student into coming to college and persevering.

During the recorded part of her initial interview, Payton stated that she also feels that her generational status can be motivational: “... Being a first-generation student, I feel like that’s a good thing to me, I feel proud that I am. ... I think it’s motivation to do good and be successful in life, because if I don’t have this college degree in my life, I feel like I’m going to go nowhere” (Payton 1.232-56). However, as Corbin and Strauss note, “... participants sometimes offer some of the most interesting data as soon as the tape recorder has been turned off” (28). Such was the case with Payton. After the recorder was turned off, Payton stated that her friends whose parents did go to college were “more intelligent” than she was. She also feels she needs to “do extra” to catch up to her peers. Why Payton waited to disclose her true feelings about being a first-generation college student until after I turned off the recorder isn’t known, but we can surmise from her two responses that she may have needed to consider the question a bit longer before revealing her true feelings, she did not want to “go on record” as criticizing her generational status, or she needed to talk through her feelings before getting to a more basic “truth” for herself. Regardless of the reason, Payton’s dualistic feelings about being first-generation indicate the conflict she feels about it. Because she did not
complete the full series of interviews, we cannot know if that conflict was resolved in any way during the semester.

Those who felt neutral characterized their first-generation status as simply another personal attribute. For example, Cheyenne characterized her first-generation status as “pretty neutral” even though, she admitted, it caused a bit of “culture shock” but “doesn’t really affect how we socialize with people or anything;” interestingly, she could not tell if it affected her coursework: “I don’t know if it affects coursework because I don’t really compare mine to people that have second-generation or whatever. So I wouldn’t really know if it affects coursework, but socially I haven’t noticed a difference” (1.322-326). Cheyenne’s admission of the culture shock of going to college may be as much due more to being a first-year student as being a first-generation college student, however. Again, because Cheyenne did not complete the full set of interviews, we do not know if she did feel the impact of her generational status later in the semester.

Both Amber and Penny feel that being first-generation can be both positive and negative. Penny states, “It has a positive and a negative, because like I said, it’s really hard for them [her parents] to be supportive, like my mom . . . she wants to go here this week, and I can’t . . . she gets very upset” (1.511-13). Penny clearly feels that her family, particularly her mother, does not understand the commitment Penny has made to earn her degree. However, she also refers to “the sense of pride that they have, they really do want to be there, they’re very excited about it and my mom’s very happy that my other two sisters graduated and I’m going to . . . The
pride that you get from it is worth it” (1.515-17). For Penny, being a first-generation student is a double-edged sword: in some ways, it can be a problem, but it can also be source of gratification.

Orbe notes that his findings indicate “The centrality of [first-generation college] student identity was largely influenced by situational context . . . and type of campus” in addition to whether or not the student was also part of another minority group (144). The participants in the study somewhat corroborate these findings. While I do not discuss any student’s membership in any other minority group, a few students who did articulate a negative perception of their first-generation status could also claim membership in another minority group. By the same token, a few students who did not articulate negative perceptions about their status also belonged to a minority group. As part of explaining their perceptions of their generational status, students also described their support systems, family or otherwise.

Support Systems

Students also talked to me about their support systems. A critical part of being a successful college student, first-generation or not, is a support system. All but one of the participants felt that their parents were supportive of their goal to earn a college degree, and for the most part, the students felt, in general, that their families supported their efforts to earn a college degree even if they had no experience with college themselves. As Anat Gofen notes, “… the families of first-generation students are often a key resource, rather than a constraint” (23). The
students in the study, with the exception of one, viewed their families in this way. Codes used in for these data include any codes related to family, such as family challenging circumstances (CC-F) or family as motivation (M-F). The motivation-competition code (M-C) was also used to code data.

While other first-generation college students may feel their family supports their goals, this feeling can be tempered by a sense of responsibility to the family or family pressure to succeed. John feels that he cannot let his family down. He believes that his family supports him but that he also owes them: “Their support is there, it’s always there, they’re very supportive emotionally. But am I going to fail them? I mean, I accept their support and everything. They can get me through it, but it’s me that is the one I’m having trouble with going through. It’s just me” (1.565-570). John’s sense that he is beholden to his family affects how he feels about the support he feels from them.

Similarly, Payton feels a combined sense of pressure and competition from her family. When asked if she felt she has support from her family, she simply states, “Oh yeah, they see my grades, they want me to do good” but then, after a pause, explains her feelings about the complicated mix of familial pressure and competition: “I feel like I have to live up to my brother because . . . my parents both didn’t go to college but my brother was on the Dean’s List every semester, and he’s going to grad school right now. I feel they’re pushing me more to be like him, but he’s a genius” (1.270-273). Payton’s sense that her parents are urging her to be more like her brother seems to check how much support she feels from them. Even
though she feels she has their support, her pause before explaining her parents’ pressure to be more like her brother illustrates her tempered sense of support from them. Like John, she feels support, but she feels it brings some pressure with it.

On the other hand, Daniel feels he does not receive any support from his family. When asked if he felt he had their support, he simply states, “Nah, not really” (1.291). Forced to look outside his family for support, Daniel has developed other support systems: “... I find friends here to push me along, give me a kick in the butt” (1.301). Daniel’s other support systems also include two on-campus organizations: “I’m involved in [the Student Support Services Program], and the [Multicultural Vision Program] ... it’s like a family outside a family” (1.310, 314).

Because his parents cannot or will not provide the support he needs, Daniel has built support systems outside of his family to help him get through college. Howard London characterizes Daniel’s situation well: “It is only when we see that mobility involves not just gain but loss—most of all the loss of a familiar past, including a past self—that we can begin to understand the attendant periods of confusion, conflict, isolation, and even anguish that first-generation students report” (168).

For Daniel, choosing to earn a college degree also meant choosing to turn to others for the support he needs to finish that degree.

These pre-college perceptions indicate the frame of mind these students were in when they arrived at Iowa State University. While participants addressed a few perceptions while discussing their communication assignments—the results immediately following this section—their reflections on these perceptions mostly
occurred at the end of the semester. Thus, to preserve the timeline orientation of my results, I will address student perceptions from the end of the semester later in this chapter. At this point, however, it is important to note that these students carried perceptions and expectations with them as they began college. What we will see below is whether or not those perceptions and expectations would be confirmed, refuted, or partially borne out.

**At-College Perceptions and Experiences**

This section is divided into two main portions: at-college experiences and at-college reflections. This organization parallels the order of the interviews using Seidman’s approach. However, not all the results in the at-college experiences section were actually discussed during the second interview, and not all at-college reflections occurred during the third interview. The codes used for the following results were a combination of perceptions codes (P, P-A, P-E, P-P), challenging circumstances codes (CC-A, CC-F, CC-$\text{CC}$-SC), motivation codes (M-C, M-F, M-I, M-WE) and habits of mind codes (HM-COE, HM-CF, HM-PR, HM-M).

**At-College Experiences**

The organization of this section follows the process of disequilibrium to self-authoring to self-efficacy. All the students who completed the first and second interviews articulated experiences in their English courses throughout the semester that can be tied to this process.
Disequilibrium

The majority of students in this primary study expressed a sense of disequilibrium—or feeling unsure about what one is doing or the decisions one makes—at some point during the semester (Pizzolato 803). The statements below are most representative of articulated student experiences; by no means are the following results exhaustive; these examples were chosen to illustrate the breadth and depth of responses from the participants. A combination of all four major code categories (perception, challenging circumstances, motivation, and habits of mind) were used with these experiences.

As noted in the first interview, Brian felt that his English 150 course was quite a bit of “creative writing” which he was not comfortable with, in addition to being unfamiliar with campus. Consequently, he experienced some difficulty choosing a topic for the first graded assignment in the campus place-based curriculum: “I got something and ran with it. There’s no rhyme or reason to why I chose it” (2.37-38). Once he thought of a place to write about, he had difficulty determining his audience: “I wanted to do that little spot but I wasn’t sure how to put it into context and then I thought of this idea” to write to “potential students talking about how I came from a small town but going to a bigger city can seem overwhelming but Iowa State still tries to give it that feeling of that you’re still back at home” (2.37-39). His instructor encouraged the students to consider why the audience should care about the students’ places on campus, “And so I thought ‘well, nobody is really going to care, it’s just this little plot of area that I think is really
kind of cool, so I kind of had to think of an audience that would... want to care” (2.72-80).

Adam also struggled with this first graded assignment consisting of a map of campus and a letter written to someone at home (see Appendix M for assignment sheet). He characterizes it as “pretty bad”; first, he had difficulty with choosing a topic; finally, he settled on a particular building: “[I] drew the map and tried to point it towards the music hall... because it reminds me of home” (2.23, 27-28, 32). However, choosing a topic was only part of the problem: Adam also experienced difficulty with feeling like he needed to keep up with the other students in the class: “I saw other people’s maps and theirs wasn’t very detailed either, so it was like, ‘maybe I shouldn’t make mine so detailed... I read other people’s [papers] and theirs wasn’t like mine, so I just specified on one building but they did maps of which buildings meant the most to them” (2.140-42, 182-84). For Adam, choosing a topic and completing the assignment became an anxious process comparing his choices and interpretations of the instructions to others—and feeling like his must be “wrong.”

Often considered one of the more difficult assignments in English 250, the textual analysis—also popularly known as the rhetorical analysis—asks students to analyze the author's context, substance, organization, style, or delivery (see Appendix N for assignment). Often, students do not know how to approach the assignment because it is unlike any genre they've encountered before: this was Amber's problem with the assignment. She says, “I just had a lot of problems, I just
didn’t know what to write, I didn’t know where to start or how to talk about a strength or this structure ... and I tried to do something that didn’t work for me, but that’s an embarrassing paper” (2.1059-1062). Amber’s struggle to determine what to write for her textual analysis illustrates the disequilibrium discussed by Pizzolato. Amber even notes that the introduction and conclusion weren’t problematic for her; it was the body paragraphs that she had difficulty with: “[M]y conclusion and introduction weren’t bad ... I just wrote about how this supported the factual evidence ... and I could write that, but when it came to actually writing about the evidence ... I was like, ‘uh, I don’t know what to write’ so I have a good beginning ... but I don’t know how to finish it off” (2.1162-1167). To cope with this disequilibrium, Amber wrote other parts of the essay hoping that she would write her way into something that worked for her.

Daniel also struggled with this assignment but for a very different reason. He still did not have his textbook when the instructor assigned the analysis: “I started very, very late on this assignment because I didn’t have the book and I didn’t have the article. It was just like a time crunch for me for this one”; however, once he did get one of the articles for the assignment from his instructor, he experienced further difficulties: “... giving, getting all this information down to little bit, little bit insight and everything. That was the hardest part” (2.173-75). For Daniel, his struggles with the assignment were not just academic but also financial in nature. When he explained his predicament to his instructor, he got a copy of one of the article options for the assignment. His instructor continued to be a source of help
with this assignment: “This was actually one you could go talk to her in her office about, but I didn’t get to do that. And when I did go talk to her, it was about how to write this paper, not ‘here’s my paper, gimme some tips on it’” (2.263-65). Daniel dealt with his disequilibrium through communicating his difficulty to his instructor, who in turn assisted Daniel in getting the assignment and then helping him understand how to write it.

Students in English 150 also complete a formal in-class presentation, usually on the visual analysis assignment (see Appendix 0 for copy of assignment sheet). John’s reflection about his oral presentation indicates the strength of his initial response to the situation itself: “I was really nervous, and I thought I’d be bad at [the] visual analysis presentation, I did so bad. People actually liked my speech, and I can’t even remember what I did, that’s how nervous I was” (2.96-100). However, upon reflection, John was able to better describe how he approached his visual analysis presentation: “… so when I got up there I pretended everyone was just a friend of mine” (2.119-120). John used a technique that helped him deal with the disequilibrium he experienced.

These disequilibrative experiences, as articulated by the participants, all illustrate points during their English classes in which the students felt unsure about their decisions and/or their sense of purpose in relation to their communication assignments. However, students also shared experiences with disequilibrium that contained an element of self-authoring as well.
Disequilibrium/Self-Authoring

These experiences, which contain elements of both disequilibrium and self-authoring, illustrate how students experienced disequilibrium with their communication assignments and how they solved it through self-authoring. Essentially, these are examples of problem-solving in action. These experiences were coded also with a combination of all four major code categories: perceptions (P, P-E, P-A, P-P), challenging circumstances (CC-A), motivation (M-P, M-WE, M-I), and all four habits of mind codes (HM-COE, HM-CF, HM-PR, HM-M).

For her second assignment in English 150, a profile of a campus organization (See Appendix P for copy of assignment), Allie chose to profile Reiman Gardens because it “is big on campus” (2.322). She felt that the easiest thing about completing this profile was “The information on it, because Reiman Gardens pretty much has all the information on one website, so it was pretty easy to search there” (2.349-50). She also felt that “describing [Reiman Gardens] was pretty easy” (2.283). However, one difficulty lay in finding other sources: she explains that “… finding a variety of sources without using Wikipedia and things like that” was difficult; when I asked her how she coped with this problem, she simply stated that she just “kept searching” for other sources (2.366).

Interest was also important for Laura. For her campus profile assignment, she chose to profile the Art on Campus program because “I really like art and art shows and stuff… then walking around campus, you always wonder, you’re like, ‘Why is that here? What does that signify?’ and so I just, I thought it would be really
interesting to do Art on Campus” (2.490). Despite her interest in art, Laura encountered difficulties with the assignment: namely, tying the program to the land-grant heritage of Iowa State University, as the assignment requires: “It was really difficult to tie in . . . the mission statement and land-grant because I couldn’t find any information on the art related to that, and so that was kind of difficult . . . I didn’t know what else to talk about besides what’s on campus and the museums and everything like that” (2.581-82, 586-87, 591-92). However, once she solved that problem, Laura felt the assignment went more smoothly: “. . . after I had all the information . . . it’s easy to go intro, history, and then background and then details and then land-grant and stuff like that. You just kind of put it in the order” (2.603-610). Once Laura solved the problem of connecting the land-grant heritage to the Art on Campus program, the rest of the assignment was easily organized.

Amber described her English 250 visual analysis assignment to me, saying “it wasn’t hard . . . I just feel like I knew what I was talking about, as in all the stuff that was going on in the ad . . . it all made sense” (2.686, 690-693). She does not articulate any difficulties with the analytical and writing processes. Here, Amber demonstrates her self-authoring because she felt she knew what she was doing in analyzing the ad. This sense of self-authoring fades, however, when she discovered how her classmates handled the assignment: “When people did their presentation . . . holy cow, a lot of people didn’t do ads . . . out of [a] magazine . . . they were fancy . . . I wonder where they found those ads, just online searching or something, but [I thought] ‘oh, people aren’t using the kind of ads that I thought’ . . . I just thought,
‘oh, we got to find a magazine ad” (2.621-630). Amber’s surprised reaction to her classmates’ artifacts and analysis illustrates how a sense of competition and peer pressure also influenced Amber. Like Daniel, she immediately thought of using a physical magazine ad for the assignment, rather than exploring other options, such as a commercial or an internet ad. Daniel’s and Amber’s impulse to find a physical ad may imply a lack of familiarity with technology as well or simply basing their approach on something they had done in high school.

Rachel, too, chose a physical artifact—rather than something from the internet—for her English 250 visual analysis. For her assignment, she chose to analyze an advertisement she found in a magazine insert for the Iowa State Daily. Rachel also struggled with the assignment in that she felt was not qualified to analyze her chosen ad: “. . . I’ve never taken any kind of graphics classes or anything like that, so it was kind of hard to pick out . . . colors and stuff are obvious but I don’t really know anything about placement or that kind of stuff . . . I’ve taken plenty of writing classes before so I could pick out stuff (2.334-337). Rachel feels that she is qualified to analyze any words or text on the ad, but she is not sure where to begin in terms of the visuals. Rachel does figure out a way to deal with it, however: “I started thinking, ‘why do I like this ad?’ because I thought about these . . . old-style advertisements, so I could kind of write about the style that it’s in. And then I thought, ‘well, there’s cardinal and gold and ISU students on it and that’s me, that’s easily relatable, so I wrote about how it was relatable” (2.455-63). With this assignment, Rachel exemplifies the disequilibrium and self-authorship necessary
for a successful college experience. Even though she is unfamiliar with basic visual analysis—perhaps in spite of reading the appropriate pages in the *ISUComm Student Guide*—she still figures out a way to cope with her problem.

John also struggled with the textual analysis assignment in English 250 to the point that he procrastinated writing it until the day it was due (2.395). He found that “[j]ust understanding the essay” was difficult for him: “What the author is trying to reach out to who, to whom … basically the author is trying to reach out to the parents and kids and people’s perspective of tattoos, really. I mean, if a person has a tattoo it doesn’t mean they’re a bad person …” (2.51-54). This last passage illustrates a larger difficulty John struggles with throughout the semester. In our conversations, John would often veer off topic, like in the passage above. However, these tangents may indicate a larger issue he tries to cope with. He does not really know where to begin working on this essay and so defaults to summarizing it and taking a stand on its thesis. Like Amber, he would prefer a model to help him understand the purpose of the assignment: “I wanted to basically read someone else’s essay at least try to get an example of how it should be and not … I’m not a very good writer in general. I would probably need someone else’s work to study for myself” (2.64-73). John’s need of a model to help orient him to the assignment also indicates disequilibrium. However, unlike Amber, John coped with the disequilibrium through procrastination while looking for a model, and one could argue that John is self-authoring because he does find a way—albeit an unproductive one—to cope with it.
Rachel was also successful with the final major written assignment in English 250, the documented essay (see Appendix Q for a copy of the assignment). For her topic, she chose to write about a subject that she had had personal experience with, but she also ensured that she chose a topic that could be easily researched: “I picked this topic with plenty of good sources on it so that really helped” (2.260). Her process for writing the essay, then, came a bit easier for this assignment: “I ... made like an outline of where I wanted to go with it. And then I had my thesis already so I kind of went through and looked at sources that would maybe fit ... my little outline ... And then I went through and took notes on the sources and ... organized my little notes into paragraphs” (2.261-67). Rachel’s success with the assignment is attributable to her choice of topic as well as her note-taking and outlining processes. Her description of her disequilibrium and how she self-authors is an excellent example of three habits of mind codes: (HM-COE, HM-CF, HM-PR). Rachel demonstrates openness, creativity, and flexibility by using of an outline to determine how she should organize her essay. Then, she illustrates persistence and responsibility as she fills in the outline and begins building paragraphs from it.

As we can see in the above examples, students describe a moment, a task, or a process that gave them pause. Perhaps they did not know what steps to take next, or perhaps they were second-guessing the decisions they had already made. Either way, through experiencing disequilibrium, these students were able to describe how they solved that particular problem. These examples, different from those that
illustrate just disequilibriative or self-authoring experiences, indicate that
disequilibrium is necessary for self-authoring.

Self-Authoring

In this section, I report experiences from the students that simply indicate examples of self-authoring, or the ability to make meaning as an individual instead of relying on others to make meaning. Inherent in these examples, then, is a sense of gaining confidence. The students all illustrate confidence in their own decisions and abilities to handle a task or an assignment. All three examples were again coded using a combination of perception (P, P-E, P-A), challenging circumstances (CC-A), motivation (M-P, M-WE, M-I), and all four habits of mind codes (HM-COE, HM-CF, HM-PR, HM-M).

Allie’s first graded assignment in her English 150 course—the letter home and accompanying map—focused on her sorority. For her map, she explains that its contents are “just pretty much my dorm, anything that was, the streets, and the way I take to Chi Omega . . . And then some surrounding, like sororities and frats and things . . . it was pretty much just to show placement, and when describing something you wanna say what’s around it” (2.112-13, 117, 123-24) When I asked her why she chose not to write about her dorm, she stated, “. . . it’s kind of boring to write about . . . in a paper, I feel it’s kind of inappropriate because a dorm is inappropriate . . . [the dorm and Seasons are] like an everyday routine, so this is more new” (2.197-98, 211). For this assignment, then, Allie felt that she needed to address something that not every student would discuss; she felt she wanted to
write about something “more new” to her than her dorm room or her dining center. Allie’s decision to write about something “more new” illustrates creativity and flexibility habits of mind (coded as HM-CF). She was also directed to turn the letter into an essay (2.98-100), so that directive may have compelled her to write about a place that was less personal and “inappropriate.”

For her English 150 analysis of a building or piece of art on campus, Laura explains that “[o]rganization actually was not super easy” (2.836, emphasis Laura). In class, her instructor asked students to cut up their essays with scissors and put the paragraphs back in the correct order, a technique which was useful to Laura: “I couldn’t even figure out how to put it back together, so I had to put a huge revision on it... so I just took out some stuff and put some in and then combined it and mixed it so it made more sense... I think I just had so many ideas and everything flying around that I didn’t know how to organize it very well” (2.845-51). This technique taught Laura to better organize her essay as well as helped her see where her ideas were within the essay itself and is a good example of the creativity and flexibility habits of mind because Laura was confronted with a situation that caused disequilibrium—having to cut up her essay with scissors then piece it back together—and she ultimately self-authors when she realizes that she cannot put her own essay back together and so performs “a huge revision” of her essay.

In English 150, Adam chose his analysis of a building or piece of art (see Appendix R) on campus assignment to repurpose for his visual communication (see Appendix S), and his choice was guided by fairly pragmatic goals: “[I p]icked my
brochure on the one that fits me best . . . because obviously I’ll get a better grade
grade on it if I do one that I know better . . . ” (2.851-53). He admitted to me that
even though the assignment seemed “simple,” he ran into the problem of “trying to
fill up space . . . I guess a poster would’ve been easier but a brochure you can have
more information” (2.840-41, 892, 922). Adam’s purpose in his brochure was
simply to get a good grade; while he is not trying anything new, he is still self-
authoring because he is able to determine which previous assignment—the campus
organization profile or the analysis of a campus building or artifact—would work
best for his visual communication assignment. He is also reflecting, another habit of
mind. By choosing an essay he was already interested in to repurpose for another
assignment, Adam is demonstrating persistence and responsibility habits of mind.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy, as defined by Chemers, Hu, and Garcia, is one’s perceived
ability to succeed in specific situations. From data collected for this study, it is
clearly different from self-authoring, and because self-authoring, as represented by
these participants, is more reflective, whereas self-efficacy looks forward. Inherent
in self-efficacy, too, is a sense of confidence. But the student already possesses this
confidence as she or he begins a task or assignment rather than acquiring it as a
result of a disequilibrative experience. In all of the data from these first-generation
students, only two examples were clear examples of student self-efficacy.

One example of self-efficacy is Daniel’s reaction to his English 250 visual
analysis oral presentation. In fact, he looked forward to it: “Just knowing that we
had to do oral presentation afterwards, that was fun. And get me motivated because I get nervous in presentations, but I love doing them, for some reason . . . it gives me a chance to show me . . . in a educational environment” (2.373-375). Unlike many other students—and people who fear public speaking—Daniel looked forward to sharing his visual analysis with his classmates in a more public way because he felt confidence in his speaking abilities. We can see, from Daniel’s example, that multimodal communication is not only important as 21st-century literacies, but it also allows students to be successful in various ways and with various modes. For first-generation students, possessing such confidence is crucial to overcoming disequilibrium and learning to self-author.

The other example of self-efficacy was Brian’s description of his oral presentations for his visual communication in English 150. When I asked Brian how his presentation went, he stated, “Excuse my French, but I kicked ass . . . I’m a very good presenter . . . I’ve always been a natural speaker and able to speak in front of people and so I had my laptop and my PowerPoint was going, and all of the sudden, my computer dies . . . and I’m like, ‘whatever, I’m going to keep going’” (2.529-538). Brian’s confidence in his speaking skills illustrates the self-efficacy discussed by Chemers, Hu, and Garcia. Self-efficacy is one’s belief in one’s ability to succeed in specific situations, and Brian’s confidence in speaking led him to keep going even when his computer failed to work, a clear example of self-efficacy. This self-efficacy differs from self-authoring, then, through the student’s sense of confidence.
These results—focused on examples of disequilibrium, disequilibrium/self-authoring, self-authoring, and self-efficacy within the data—illustrate that students go through a process when they begin college. They must undergo disequilibrium to experience self-authoring, from which they develop self-efficacy. And this is a process that is necessary for all students regardless of generation. What makes this process unique for first-generation college students are the perceptions they carry and develop during that same time period. If those perceptions weigh down a student and act as a knapsack of negativity, that student is more likely to experience disequilibrium more strongly, more negatively, and is less likely to successfully self-author. And if a student cannot cope with—or at least have a plan to learn to cope with—any academic or social/cultural issues, those issues can just amplify any disequilibrium.

At-College Reflections

In this section, I will explain student perceptions of and reflections upon the semester.\textsuperscript{11} For this section, I have organized it similarly to the results section for the pre-college perceptions and expectations section. For these results, all four major categories of codes were used: perceptions (P, P-E, P-A), motivation (M-I, M-C, M-F, M-P), challenging circumstances (CC-A, CC-F, CC-$, CC-SC), and all four habits of mind codes (HM-COE, HM-CF, HM-PR, HM-M).

\textsuperscript{11} As noted in Chapter 3, only a handful of students completed the final reflective questions at the end of the semester.
Challenging Perceptions

I asked students to name and discuss any challenges they felt were still affecting them at the end of the semester. Given the confidence they expressed in the later interviews by most of the students, I was not surprised when the majority of them—with the exception of one student—identified only financial issues as still challenging them. In terms of social and cultural challenges, only one student perceived that “being behind” was still a problem: “I still feel behind in classes kind of like I’m always playing catch up with other kids. I don’t think I’ve overcome that feeling, it’s something I’ve always had but I just work through it and study harder” (Rachel 3.Q1).\(^{12}\) Rachel is still carrying the perception that because of her first-generational status, she is behind the other students in her classes. However, this feeling does not extend to all of her classes: “after I began writing for the newspaper and started some of the first papers in English 250 I felt a lot more confident. I kind of shook that feeling of being behind in English 250 just because of all my experience with writing” (Rachel 3.Q2). So, while Rachel has conquered her perception of being behind her classmates in her English class, she still struggles with it in her other, non-English classes. This example indicates self-efficacy, too, as Rachel explains how she “shook” the feeling of being behind in her English class because of her out-of-class writing experience.

\(^{12}\) Because these answers were not transcribed but were collected in written form from the participants, I did not assign line numbers to them. To cite them, then, I cite the student, the interview number, and the question number (e.g. John 3.Q1).
Support Systems

Students felt that the support from their family and friends either had not changed or had grown throughout the semester. Unfortunately, this increased support also carries a negative side for Adam: “I think that the support of my friends and family has only grown. They expect me to graduate and do great things. They have always supported me but it seems like the longer I am in college the more they expect from me and the more they support me” (Adam 3.Q8). While Adam did not explicitly state that his family's support had turned into a negative pressure, he implies that the pressure from his family to “graduate and do great things” presents a bit of a paradox for him. This is another example of a negative perception held by a first-generation college student that potentially can have adverse consequences for that student. Like Rachel’s perception that she is still “behind” her classmates, even though she may not actually be so, Adam’s perception that he must graduate “and do great things” becomes a negative perception that can weigh him down.

Expectations About College: Still Hollywood-ifying?

When students first come to college, they are going to carry expectations with them about college. The question, however, is whether or not those expectations are realistic and how students subsequently cope with the reality or the expectation being realized. Kuh et. al. explain the results of the College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSXQ) conducted by Indiana University in the late 1990s, stating that “the finding confirmed the freshman myth phenomenon, or the
tendency for students to expect that they would do more of a wide range of activities and overstate the academic challenges college presented” (38). From the results below, we can see how this “freshman myth” impacted students in this study.

Of the six students who replied and emailed me their answers to my final set of questions, half felt that their expectations about college had been met. Some students, in addition, further explicated their answers in some way. Rachel said, “My expectations of college have not really been met. I was afraid of incredibly difficult classes and intimidating professors and lecture halls. However, that is not really the case. Classes were easier than I anticipated and lecture halls have actually been a good environment for me to learn in” (Rachel 3.Q10). In her answer, we can see how Rachel believed that college would be a more difficult and more “alien” environment; in other words, she exemplifies the “freshman myth” because she expected her classes to be more difficult than they were and her adjustment therefore to be rockier than it was.

Amber also qualified her answer by explaining how her view of college changed over time:

College isn’t as scary as I thought it was. Of course, you’re on your own, you don’t really know anyone, and it may seem like maybe one of the worst ideas ever. But once you get your group of friends, you’re comfortable, you know where buildings are, how the bus works, college can be pretty great! It’s stressful and there are nights when I cry and think, man, this is hard work, I
don’t know if I can do this, but I remember why I’m here, who I’m here for and college ends up being worth it all the ‘blood, sweat, and tears’” (Amber 3.Q10).

Both these students explained how their fears of college were eventually assuaged. Both students had believed in the freshman myth phenomenon, and both realized that it was false.

**Time Management**

One perceived difficulty that students addressed several times during the semester was time management. Several participants struggled with coordinating classes, coursework, and other activities. Brian had identified time management as his greatest challenge in college thus far; upon reflection, he explained that his solution was “[b]eing around people older than me, and [who] were able to help me through difficult aspects of college (like time management), is what helped me overcome them” (Brian 3.Q10). Brian perceives that his difficulties with time management has been, for the most part, solved through seeing what other, more experienced students do to manage their time. Students also shared whether or not their perceptions of and expectations for their communication class were confirmed, denied, or partially borne out.

**English Course Expectations and Perceptions**

For the most part, participants felt that their expectations for their English class were not quite met. As discussed earlier in the chapter, students expected to read books and write on them or write more personal essays. However, that was
not the case. For example, Laura felt that “it wasn’t like what I thought it would be with what we wrote about but the work and thought put into it was close to what I thought it would be like” (3.Q13). In her first meeting with me, Laura explained what she expected English 150 to be like: “...you’re getting projects, you write about it, you go and revise them, you go and look into different aspects of papers ... and you try to put it all together ... kind of how it was last year for me, but last year was different because it was reading and then writing about it” (1.605-607, 611-613). Laura’s pre-college expectation that English 150 would involve reading books then writing about them was not met, yet she did perceive that the experience of English 150 was still similar in that she is writing and revising assignments. Laura’s comments indicate that in terms of her English class, she did not believe the freshman myth.

Rachel, however, did believe the freshman myth and experienced nothing like she expected: “I expected a big lecture class with a lot of really long writing assignments. In that sense, the class was nothing like I expected. However, we learned a lot of what I expected like learning about style, revision, etc.” (Rachel 3.Q13). Like Laura, Rachel’s expectations for her English class were not quite met, not quite what she anticipated, yet the work within the course—writing and revising—was expected.

Assessment of Writing Skills

I also asked students to assess how they felt about their writing skills since they had completed their writing course. Most felt their writing could still use
improvement or had improved. On the other hand, Brian felt that his writing skills had taken a turn for the worse: “It’s become more creative, which I do not like in particular. Hopefully it won’t be hard to switch back over to ‘formal report’ mode” (Brian 3.Q12). As noted above, Brian felt that the kind of writing required in English 150 was creative writing, and his answer here certainly reflects that belief. I should also note here as well that Brian had transferred out of a major in the hard sciences to a major in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, so even though the types of writing he would do for his classes would change, he still felt that his English course was creative writing.

Adam felt that he was writing at the level he was supposed to be at because he felt he had figured out how writing assignments in college would be structured: “I think that college papers have a certain format and because of that I believe that my writing is still at college level” (Adam 3.Q12). What is interesting about Adam’s statement is that he equates success in his writing with finding a “structure.” Like Amber and John, Adam places heavy importance on a model or template on which he can pattern his own work.

Considering the range of perceptions and responses students carried throughout the semester gives us the ability to see how accurate their pre-college expectations and perceptions truly were. At this point, then, we can begin to visualize the progression of the semester for these students.
Diagramming, Part II: Making Sense of First-Generation Students’ Process

By returning to diagramming—a technique inherent in Corbin and Strauss’ grounded theory—we can begin to visually represent the semester for these participants. By graphing the representative examples as stated by the students, we can begin to see when during the semester students experience disequilibrium, self-authoring, and self-efficacy, or a combination of them. As illustrated in Figure 5, below, each student’s at-college perception and experience discussed in the middle of this chapter can be graphed, providing a snapshot of the semester. Each student’s experience, differentiated by color and listed in the key, illustrates where that example falls during the semester.

Figure 2: Student At-College Perceptions
Some students—Adam, Brian, Daniel, and Laura—progressed from disequilibrium to self-authoring or even self-efficacy throughout the course of the semester. For the most part, the experiences that caused disequilibrium tended to occur in the first month or two of classes but some occurred later in the semester. Other students—John and Rachel—tended to stay on the line between disequilibrium and self-authoring. Both Allie and Amber progressed downwards from self-authoring to disequilibrium during the semester; their progress “downwards” may seem unusual in that most students tend to improve—or at least stay consistent—throughout the semester. For Allie, however, the opposite occurred. Likely, this happened because her first assignment was describing a place on campus she felt comfortable in and was important to her. For the next assignment—the campus organization profile—Allie had to choose a topic from a list of topics, none of which seemed interesting to her. Her “downwards” progression indicates how important interest is for students. If a student is not interested in any of the topics available, then it is likely that he or she will not do as well on that assignment.

Amber’s case is different, however. Amber so keenly felt her first-generational status that it seemed, when we talked, that every assignment caused disequilibrium. Much like a runner running hurdles, each hurdle—or assignment—caused disequilibrium. For Amber, it seemed that self-authoring was almost impossible when she was struggling to successfully complete the assignments in the first place. Essentially, Amber articulated a sense of urgency towards her
communication assignments because as she talked, she articulated a lack of confidence in her ability to cope with her coursework.

What this tells us, then, is that first and foremost, each student experiences the semester differently. While this is not new information, it is important to note this because it is easy to generalize for an entire group of people when each person has his or her own individual experiences even though the size of the participant pool is such that generalizing about the entire population can be risky at best and dead wrong at worst. We can also see that, for the most part, students’ perceptions of their communication assignments and their performance in the class either improved or, at the very least, stayed fairly even. This is not to say that other things didn’t cause disequilibrium in these students, or that some tasks were not easily handled or even anticipated. We are getting a snapshot of these students’ experiences in their first semester with a focus on their English class, and we can see a fairly general progression of experience and perception. By examining these representative perceptions and examples this way, we can begin to see that, perhaps, first-generational status may not have as strong of an effect on a student as some have previously thought.

Thus, we can begin to see how some first-generation students perceive and experience their first semester of college and their first college communication course. We can begin to see that disequilibrium, self-authoring, and self-efficacy can be tied to a particular assignment, as in Figure 2 above, or to more generalizable perceptions and experiences that are much more difficult to represent visually.
Conclusion

These participant responses—ranging throughout the semester—illustrate these students’ growing awareness of the realities of college life. For the most part, in their first interviews, these students characterized college life in positive terms; however, as the semester progressed, the realities and disequilibrium began to occur to them. Not all students experienced a rough transition to college, but those who did realized that the workload and course expectations were different than they expected, that “Hollywood-ifying” college life was inaccurate, and that they would need to develop ways to deal with problems as they arose. In the next chapter, I will detail why these results prove that first-generation students need additional support in the first- and second-year communication classroom.
In this chapter, I will explain the implications of this primary study in the context of showing how the study answers the research questions posed at the outset. I have repeated my research questions below and will use them as the overall organizing strategy for this chapter.

1. What challenging circumstances do first-generation students identify as affecting them?

2. What effects, positive or negative, do these students perceive from these challenging circumstances?

3. How well do these students feel they are prepared for first-year and second-year (ISUComm Foundation Communication) writing courses?

4. What do these students expect or assume to get out of first-year and second-year communication courses? How does this relate to their expectations for college in general? How do they see their work in first-year communication courses relating to their college work?

5. What habits of mind (as identified by the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing) do first-generation students with challenging circumstances demonstrate? What habits of mind do these students lack?
How do first-generation students with challenging circumstances perceive the effects of these challenging circumstances on their habits of mind?

6. Inasmuch as the first- and second-year communication courses are seen as sites of transition and adjustment to the academic discourse community, what can we do to better work with and teach first-generation students with challenging circumstances in first-year and second-year communication courses?

A major takeaway from this dissertation is that, for first-generation students, it is all about perception. As Ann Penrose notes, “It is not just their initial differences in background and academic preparation that set [first-generation] students apart but also the choices they make and the experiences they have as a consequence of those differences” (443). In other words, the key word here is perception: how students perceive their situations and courses can dramatically impact the reality of those situations and courses.

**Identifying Challenging Circumstances and Their Effects**

In this section, I will explain what I have discovered in answer to my first and second research questions: 1) What challenging circumstances do first-generation students identify as affecting them? and 2) What effects, positive or negative, do these students perceive from these challenging circumstances? To help answer these questions, we must return to the words of the participants and what they identified as a challenging circumstance. In Chapter 3, I described and explained the challenging circumstances that were identified in the pilot study.
Ashley, Ellie, Justin, Matt, and Sandra recognized three basic challenging circumstances: academic challenges, financial challenges, and cultural/social challenges. These terms were used to code the transcripts from the pilot study, and they did not change between the pilot study and primary study. Thus, I ultimately used four codes to identify student challenging circumstances, as illustrated in Table 7, below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenging Circumstances</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>CC-A</td>
<td>Student feels &quot;behind&quot; or less smart in comparison to classmates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>CC-F</td>
<td>Student is motivated by family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>CC-$</td>
<td>Student feels financial strain of college costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/Cultural</td>
<td>CC-SC</td>
<td>Student feels a “cultural mismatch” (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, and Johnson 100) with other students/classmates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to note that these challenging circumstances are presented as the participants articulated them, regardless of the reality of the situation.

**Academic Challenging Circumstances**

These challenging circumstances, as defined by the participants, indicate generalized academic challenges as well as specific writing and communication challenging circumstances. One such academic challenge lies in comparing oneself with one’s classmates. We see this in John’s narrative: “I’m a little intimidated because everyone else in the classroom is just a little, way smarter than I am and they’re able to ask questions I don’t know” (2.490-91). Asking questions is an important part of being a college student. John articulates how perceived lack of
tacit knowledge about college life is an academic challenge as well as a cultural challenge. It is difficult enough to go to college and enter a new world with new people, places, and expectations; to do so as a first-generation student who is missing some or all of the tacit cultural knowledge necessary to be successful makes college even more frustrating and difficult. Ann Penrose notes that “[first-generation] students do not bring these insecurities with them to college; they do not begin to doubt themselves until after they arrive” (457). The important point here is that students develop these feelings of inadequacy after they begin college, not before. This is important to note because if students develop such feelings after they arrive at college, then faculty and those who work with college students are in a much better position to help those students.

John identified one particular coping mechanism to deal with his feelings of inadequacy. He began to talk to one particular classmate about the class: “I do like it that I sit next to a person who gotta A on his papers, like all the time. Smart guy, and I would ask him basically to help grade my paper and... clear things up for me” (2.174-176). John did not articulate any other effects from feelings of inadequacy; however, he does state in the final interview that he “always hated English class, unless there is free of the mind [sic] writing and debating” (3.Q2). John’s intense dislike of his English course may stem from his inability to connect personally with his instructor, for he does describe a math professor that he was comfortable asking questions of, but only after taking three of his courses (2.506-08). Perhaps, for John, a key factor is longevity: the longer he knows a professor, the more
comfortable he is and is better able to communicate with that instructor.

Unfortunately, the nature of the university is such that he is not likely to have the same instructor for multiple classes until he begins his core coursework for his major. John's difficulties in communicating with his instructor and classmates partially answers research question #1.

Another challenge articulated by these participants is “feeling behind.” Rachel discusses this feeling in her interviews. As noted in Chapter 4, she explained how she felt “behind” the other students in her class after the recorder was turned off for the second interview. In the second interview itself, she describes how she uses her resources—a phrase I heard quite often from Laura—but in the final interview, she explains that feeling behind is still a problem. This academic challenge illustrates a cultural mismatch—perceived or actual—of sorts between Rachel and her classmates.

In the third interview, Rachel articulated how she deals with her feelings of being behind: “it’s something I’ve always had but I just work through it and study harder” (3.Q1). Daniel, who also stated a similar point of view in the first interview, argued, “I figure if I work hard or do a little bit extra than they do, I can be on the same level they can” (1.192-93). Adam stated in the second interview that “I want to believe that everybody’s on the same page, but I feel behind . . . obviously I’ve got to do something better or I’m doing something wrong” (2.1100). For these students, working harder was key to conquering the feeling of being behind; their articulated experiences partially answer research question #1.
Other academic challenging circumstances the participants experienced revolve around writing and the communication classroom. Although, as Ann Penrose explains in her own study, “FG [first-generation] students performed as well as the CG [continuing-generation] group in the required first-semester composition course,” the participants did struggle with certain aspects of the writing and communication classroom (450). In particular, students cited finding and using sources appropriately as a major issue for them. Not only did they experience difficulty with finding enough sources for a particular assignment, they also struggled with citing them correctly, either in text or on a reference page. To cope with these problems, students “just kept searching” (Laura) or looked in their textbooks (Rachel) for the answers, as noted in Chapter 4. Students also struggled with the visual portion of the course, particularly the visual communication. Two students—Amber and Daniel—identify using magazines to find ads to analyze in their courses; when they realized that most of their classmates had gone elsewhere for their ads, they realized there were many more options for a topic than they had originally considered. Finally, students also struggled with more generic writing issues, such as organization and content.

These specific communication issues are not part of the literature, however, in terms of first-generation students specifically. Many students, first- and continuing-generation, struggle with finding and using sources, choosing topics, and determining organization and content for an assignment. As Penrose notes, “[first-generation] students’ self-assessments indicate that, on average, they have
less confidence in their verbal abilities than [continuing-generation] students, even though the performance data demonstrate that this concern is unwarranted” (457). Essentially, then, what we’re talking about here is perception: these students perceive that they have additional difficulties from their classmates in these tasks, even if it is not so. While none of the participants identified these difficulties as being directly attributable to their generational status, a few participants, like Brian, stated that their generational status affected their coursework, although they could not articulate specifically how to me.

However, a few students did articulate specific writing-related coping mechanisms that helped them progress through either English 150 or English 250. One such technique was the use of outlines by Daniel and Rachel. Both students used outlines to help deal with the sheer amount of information and argument for their documented essays in English 250. Another technique was cutting up and putting an essay back together. Laura’s instructor asked students to complete this task, and Laura realized, through completing this task in class, that her organization and content for that particular essay were a problem.

**Family Challenging Circumstances**

As Howard B. London notes in his landmark 1989 study on first-generation college students and their families, “It is not only when we see that mobility involves not just gain but loss—most of all the loss of a familiar past, including a past self—that we can begin to understand the attendant periods of confusion, conflict, isolation, and even anguish that first-generation students report here”
I saw these same feelings reflected in the narratives of Daniel, Penny, and John in particular, as described in Chapter 4. All three of them expressed feelings of conflict and anguish in terms of their families. Daniel experiences anguish by the lack of family support he experiences, Penny experiences torn feelings between the support from her college-going family members and her non-college-going family members in addition to her careful consideration of her children’s future, and John feels a sense of conflict between his helping family and going to college. This is a rather classic view of a family challenging circumstance: the family that does not support the first-generation student or, in John’s case, causes him anguish because he feels he need to be there to help (London, Gofen). Their experiences help resolve research question #1 as well.

However, a more recent study illustrates how other types of family support can be challenging circumstances. Anat Gofen, in her study, finds that the family of first-generation students can often be “a key resource, rather than a constraint” (23). In several ways, she argues, the family operates as a means of family capital for first-generation students (24). In particular, she adapts Weber’s ideal types into two types of families that succeed in sending a member to college: “make a dream come true” and “do not become me” (26). We see both of these families, or a mix of the two, in the narratives of the participants. In fact, we see a mix of these two types in each student’s perceived family reaction. For example, Amber describes how it was “a big deal” for her to go to college and achieve her dream of becoming a
veterinarian, but we also see in her narrative that there is an element of “do not become me” present as well.

Clearly, family is a major influence on first-generation students. It can serve as a motivational factor, both positive and negative. While few of the participants articulated any serious negativity from their families—Daniel and Penny are the only two—the rest experienced a mix of positive and negative motivation. Thus, all eleven participants can identify their families as a challenging circumstance because, while not offering outright negativity, they do offer challenges, such as a sense of competition, an sense of insensitivity to issues that arise in college life, or a sense of determination to finish what one starts. All of these are described in Chapter Four and clarify a response to research questions #1 and #2.

The effects of the outright negative or absent family interactions experienced by Daniel and Penny were very different. Daniel became involved with two campus organizations specifically meant for at risk students; in addition, he cites his friends as being able to “kick him in the butt.” On the other hand, Penny considers the impact of her education as more important for her children and their future than for her parents. Even though her father has always been supportive, her mother has not offered consistent support (1.511-17). However, for Penny, ensuring her children have a better future is most important and to ensure this, she is willing to risk upsetting her parents.

In John’s case, we see a different kind of challenging circumstance. He still claims a sense of responsibility and obligation to his family through the final
interview: he describes his brother (and by extension, the rest of the family) as “counting on him” and he’s “more than happy” to pay them back (3.Q8). His sense that his family depends on him negatively impacts his performance because he is concerned about repaying them.

Financial Challenging Circumstances

For most college students, finances are an issue, and the participants are no different. In fact, financial issues are well established in the literature about first-generation college students and is naturally part of the answer to research question #1. But perhaps the most surprising example of a financial challenging circumstance articulated by one of the participants is Daniel’s inability to purchase his English 250 textbook. Due to a delay in financial aid, Daniel was not able to buy his textbook until much later in the semester. In fact, Daniel noted that this was such a problem for him, as well as for other classmates, that his instructor put a copy of the textbook on reserve at the library for students to use. In this case, his financial challenging circumstance prevented him from obtaining the book he needed when he needed it; as a result, he notes, he probably would have chosen different assignment options than he did if he’d had the book. Daniel’s financial aid troubles are part of the college experience for most students, and he was not alone amongst the participants with having financial aid difficulties.

A key ingredient in procuring financial aid for all U.S. college students is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or the FAFSA, as it is commonly called. For many, filling out and filing the FAFSA is a yearly rite that must be undergone to
qualify for federal scholarships and grants, work-study, and loans. I questioned each of the participants about the FAFSA process, and one of the most telling examples of a financial challenging circumstance comes from Rachel.

When I initially asked her how filling out the FAFSA went for her, she immediately teared up and said, “It was horrible... It was honestly the most frustrating thing I've ever been through” (2.181-182). When I asked what was so difficult about it, she explained that it was so confusing that she had to “fill it out a million times... and we're still having problems with it” (2.187-188). Rachel's difficulties with the paperwork for financial aid definitely illustrate a financial challenging circumstance. Other students described additional difficulties and incidents with the FAFSA to me: for example, Allie mistakenly filled out the wrong form of the FAFSA—she initially filled out the one that required payment—which caused problems with her financial aid as well (1.425). The ubiquity of the FAFSA process in modern college life is such that most students, first-generation or not, would identify it as a challenging circumstance.

What makes it a key factor for first-generation students, however, is their lack of “college knowledge,” as Jennifer Engle puts it: “...first-generation students and their parents often lack ‘college knowledge’ about the process of preparing, applying, and paying for college due to the lack of postsecondary education in their families” (31). Because these families do not have a tradition of going to college, they lack the knowledge necessary to successfully navigate the maze of paperwork
required to obtain financial aid. The process of obtaining financial aid can be problematic and is an important part of the answer to research question #1.

**Social/Cultural Challenging Circumstances**

In terms of social/cultural challenging circumstances, it is helpful to consider again the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu divides social and cultural capital into two distinct forms, even though they work in concert to become academic capital (*Distinction* 23). Social capital, for Bourdieu, is “membership in a group” (*Forms*). For the participants, being first-generation college students was a type of membership they were not necessarily prepared to handle. For example, during the pilot study, Ellie explained how being a first-generation student “marks you out” as an object of fascination and/or disbelief on the part of her peers. In the primary study, other students felt similarly and felt that there were negative effects to being a first-generation student.

Cultural capital, loosely defined, is the level of familiarity with the knowledge, customs, norms, and rules of a culture; embodied cultural capital is “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body” (*Forms*). Bourdieu, in his classic study *Distinction*, analyzes cultural capital in 1960s France and defines it as participation in elitist culture; however, cultural capital is also “strategic interactions” or “a ‘feel for the game’” (Dumais and Ward 246). For this study, cultural capital includes all the tacit knowledge students need to be successful in college. Even though four students in this study identified being first-generation as a problem and subsequently struggled with the tacit knowledge necessary for
success, other participants in the study who did not articulate that being first-
generation was problematic also struggled with learning the types of cultural
capital needed for success in college. In many ways, the cultural and social
challenging circumstances are influenced by and influence the academic
challenging circumstances because many of these challenging circumstances
directly impact how a student performs in the classroom.

Ultimately, people use cultural capital to gain a third, lesser discussed type
of capital: educational or academic capital. In Distinction, Pierre Bourdieu defines
academic capital as “the guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural
transmission by the family and cultural transmission by the school (the efficiency of
which depends on the amount of cultural capital directly inherited from the
family)” (23). It is this type of educational or academic capital the participants are
seeking: a college degree that confers cultural (and possibly even social) capital.
But if they are challenged in the tacit cultural capital necessary to succeed in
college, they struggle, and these kinds of cultural challenges occur with these
students. The examples included below, then, shed light on research questions #1
and #2.

Three challenging cultural circumstances articulated by the participants are
communicating with one’s instructor, feeling like classmates are smarter, and time
management. For example, when I was asking John to characterize how the textual
analysis went for him in the second interview, he burst out with an interesting
statement that I hadn’t considered before:
I have problems enough when I can’t even ask a question to the teacher. That’s when I have problems and can’t figure it out what questions to ask for a teacher if I need help. When I need help, I don’t know what questions to ask and like, ‘how do you do this? How do you approach this?’ You gotta look it up, but when I look it up, I can’t find it. (2.422-36)

John is clearly uncomfortable with approaching his instructor for help. John does not make a distinction between email and face-to-face contact; nevertheless, he is clearly frustrated. This is an example of a social/cultural challenging circumstance: when a student needs help but is confused or lost enough that she or he does not even know where to begin asking questions. Young K. Kim and Linda J. Sax note, “first-generation college students tend to less frequently assist faculty with research for course credit, communicate with faculty outside of class, and interact with faculty during lecture class sessions” (452). Further, as Terenzini et. al. discovered in their 1996 study, first-generation college students are “…less likely to perceive faculty members as concerned for student development and teaching” (10). Essentially, it is entirely possible that the participants who perceived an inability to talk to their instructors did so because they felt distant from their instructors and that divide seemed too large to cross.

Peter J. Collier and David L. Morgan explain that the inability to ask questions is a common problem with first-generation students: “First-generation students also reported a unique concern about student-teacher contacts, noting that how a professor spoke to the class during lecture directly influences how
willing they were to approach the professor with a question” (438). In particular, students who felt their professors used too much discipline-specific jargon or a higher level of vocabulary were less likely to ask questions (438). We see this reticence to ask questions in John’s narrative. John attributes his inability to ask questions to his nature as “a very quiet person,” but it’s also possible that his feelings of inadequacy are also a factor. John copes with this inability to talk to his professor through talking to his classmate about the coursework.

Time management is another key cultural norm that first-generation students may not be aware of. Brian and John in particular articulated difficulties with time management and self-regulation, an issue discussed often in the literature (Byrd and MacDonald; Chemers, Hu and Garcia; Collier and Morgan; Terenzini et al.). While many college students struggle with time management (also known as self-regulation), this may be particularly pertinent for first-generation students who often struggle to correctly assess the time needed to complete tasks and master material. Collier and Morgan note that “faculty members also reported that this prioritization was one of the expectations that was hardest for first-generation students to accept” because they tend to overcommit (436).

This is Brian’s problem: in all three interviews, he identifies it as a problem and addresses his difficulties with time management. The phenomenon of Brian’s over-commitment is particularly apparent in the first and second interviews. In the first interview, he explains that he is part of a fraternity and so is committed almost every night of the week to some regularly scheduled activity in addition to
attending class and doing homework while struggling to juggle more personal activities, such as sleeping (1.198-204, 208). In the second interview, he explains that he is trying to maintain those same activities while adding a girlfriend to the mix; he characterizes his schedule as “going in 10 different directions at once” (2.906-13). For Brian, one of the cultural challenges of college is learning to balance between all the activities he wants to participate in.

In the third interview, Brian explains how he learned to cope with time management: “Being around people who are older than me, and were able to help me through different aspects of college (like time management), is what helped me overcome them” (3.Q1). For Brian, seeing how other, more experienced students managed their time and self-regulated was key in learning how to do this himself.

These four challenging circumstances, as articulated by the participants, answer the first research question: What challenging circumstances do first-generation students identify as affecting them? Within these challenging circumstances, participants also articulated various perceptions of those challenging circumstances, both positive and negative; this range of experiences answers research question #2: What effects, positive or negative, do these students perceive from these challenging circumstances? These challenging circumstances and their perceived influence—positive or negative—on the participants directly affects how they perceived and experienced their first- and second-year writing courses.
Preparation, Assumptions, and Expectations
for ISUComm Foundation Communication Courses

In this section, I will answer research questions #3 and #4: 3) How well do these students feel they are prepared for first-year and second-year (ISUComm Foundation Communication) writing courses? and 4) What do these students expect or assume to get out of first-year and second-year communication courses? How does this relate to their expectations for college in general? How do they see their work in first-year communication courses relating to their college work?

First-generation students, by and large, are generally characterized as being under-prepared for college work (Terenzini et. al.; Pascarella et. al.; Penrose; Hao; Engle, Bermeo, and O’Brien; Choy). Roughly half of the participants in the primary study identified as feeling behind or having to “do extra” to keep pace with the other students. For example, after I shut the recorder off at the end of the second interview, Rachel described how, for her, figuring out problems is a “matter of pride.” She further explained that she feels like she’s playing “catch up” compared to other classmates; she feels that she has to do “extra work” to catch up to classmates on assignments in addition to completing assignment tasks. Because of her extra effort, she feels she should get better grades and is disappointed when her grade isn’t as high as she expected, considering she had to put extra time into a particular assignment. Other students who expressed similar feelings were Adam, Daniel, John, and Payton.
The majority of the participants generally expected their English course to be similar to previous English courses, either high school or earlier college courses. Often, students felt that they would read several books then write about those books or write research papers; these kinds of assignments were common expectations and assumptions for the participants. Other students explained that they either expected their courses to be more challenging than high school (Allie) or had no expectations at all (Laura). These responses answer research question #4: What do these students expect or assume to get out of first-year and second-year communication courses? How does this relate to their expectations for college in general? How do they see their work in first-year communication courses relating to their college work?

While some scholars address student expectation in general (Terenzini et al.; Pizzolato), only Penrose, Collier and Morgan, and Cox address writing expectations in particular. Cox, in writing about first-generation students at a community college, notes, “Students’ fear of the composition course was particularly intense,” a sentiment we see reflected by some of the participants, Amber in particular (28). Collier and Morgan note that “[in] particular, first-generation students expressed a great deal of frustration over the more mechanical aspects of their written work . . . first-generation students felt that they could not do their best work unless the professors were specific about how the work should be done” (438). This comment reflects some of the feelings articulated by some of the participants, particularly those who wanted a model of a paper.
Students articulated a range of preparation levels for their first-year and second-year writing courses in answer to research question #3: How well do these students feel they are prepared for first-year and second-year (ISUComm Foundation Communication) writing courses? In answer to research question #4—What do these students expect or assume to get out of first-year and second-year communication courses? How does this relate to their expectations for college in general? How do they see their work in first-year communication courses relating to their college work?—they also articulated a range of expectations that, for some students, had a direct impact on their perceptions of the course and its usefulness to subsequent coursework. Most importantly, roughly half the participants felt their generational status negatively impacted their performance in their English course. In combination with participants’ expectations and assumptions about first-year and second-year communication courses, roughly half of the first-generation students in this study articulated feelings of being “behind” their classmates in some way. These negative perceptions, unmatched expectations, and false assumptions led those students who already felt a negative impact from their generational status impeded these students from further developing their habits of mind as much as they could have in the course.

**Habits of Mind and First-Generation Students**

In this section, I will answer research question #5: What habits of mind (as identified by the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*) do first-generation students with challenging circumstances demonstrate? What habits of
mind do these students lack? How do first-generation students with challenging circumstances perceive the effects of these challenging circumstances on their habits of mind?

As identified in the co-written Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing, the habits of mind that successful college students need to develop are curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition (1). When the participants discussed their perceptions and expectations for and experiences with their communication classes as well as explained their processes for completing assignments, they were illustrating the development of their habits of mind to me. All the habits of mind were not demonstrated by all students all of the time, but every participant demonstrated at least one habit of mind to me at some point in our conversations. Two habits of mind that participants articulate quite clearly are responsibility and persistence. They all recognized that it was up to them to earn their college degrees and to persist in doing so. However, students also illustrated habits of mind through their work in their English classes. Simply because of the nature of the English 150 and 250 curricula, students were required to illustrate flexibility because they needed to repurpose information from one assignment for another assignment. Other students—Brian, Cheyenne, Laura, and Penny—expressed a sense of curiosity about something in particular on campus. These responses partially answer research question #5.
However, some students maintained aloofness towards their communication assignments and topics. For example, Allie stated that “Once these [assignments] are done, I don’t really look at them...once [my assignments] get graded, I might look at the grade and comments and stuff, but it kind of takes a while for that to happen” (2.246, 268-69). Allie is not making what Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz call the “paradigm shift” that can and should happen—but does not always occur—to first-year writers. They state, “Students who continue to see writing as a matter of mechanics or as a series of isolated exercises tend never to see the ways writing can serve them as a medium in which to explore their own interests. They continue to rely on their high school idea that academic success is reflected in good grades” (14). This “high school idea” was seen often in the conversations with the participants: they often characterized how “good” or “bad” an assignment was by the grade they earned on it. In other words, their perceptions of the assignments influenced how they felt about the assignments, rather than taking advantage of the assignment to learn more about campus in English 150 or further explore argument in English 250. Students, like Laura, who viewed English 150 or 250 instrumentally, as merely a credit required for graduation were less likely to illustrate to me that they were making the paradigm shift; these responses, too, also help answer research question #5.

Students who successfully navigated the murky waters of the paradigm shift and disequilibrium were able to begin developing self-authorship and self-efficacy, two key characteristics inherent in the habits of mind. Jane Pizzolato defines
disequilibrium as provocative experiences “that challenged students’ current ways of knowing and conceptions of self” (803). We see each of the participants perceiving disequilibrium during their English courses. For example, when Amber shares her reaction to her classmates’ choices of visual ads to analyze, she is expressing her sense of disequilibrium in that circumstance. While other students may have had physical ads as well, Amber felt that she was alone in using a physical ad and that perceived isolation strongly affected her. While she did not connect her disequilibrium directly to her generation status, Amber did learn that there were other ways to find an advertisement to analyze.

How first-generation students with challenging circumstances perceive the effects of those challenging circumstances on their habits of mind depends on the challenging circumstance and the student. For instance, all the participants perceived finances as a challenging circumstance. All of them felt that applying for financial aid and working through that process was necessary to attend college in the first place. However, when financial issues constrained Daniel’s choices for assignments, we see that he perceived a different kind of disequilibrium: he had no choice but to use the readings he had access to for his assignments. We could argue that contacting his instructor to relate the problem is a form of self-authoring. Pizzolato defines self-authoring as the ability to balance the sense of self with “the contextual nature of knowledge” and establish “internal foundations” (797). This is one example in which a financial challenging circumstance directly affected a student’s ability to develop certain habits of mind. Because Daniel’s choices were
constrained, he was unable to experience curiosity, engagement, and even creativity with those particular assignments: he simply had to use what he had access to and make the best of it. Even so, Daniel’s ability to persist, be responsible, and be flexible does illustrate that he was able to experience the further development of those habits of mind through those assignments. These responses also shed light on research question #5.

Students who identified a different type of challenging circumstance—family—as impacting them either found “replacement” support systems, like Daniel, or still straddled the line between college and family, like John. John noted to me several times that he felt he owed his family, that he was responsible for helping them out once he finished his college degree. Here, we see John enacting two habits of mind: persistence and responsibility. Because of his perceived responsibility at home, John recognized that he needed to persist and be at school in order to fulfill his further responsibilities at home. However, as noted in Chapter 4, John felt that he “wanted to learn finally” about writing and how to improve. Here, we see John illustrating a sense of metacognition or reflection, and perhaps, even the beginnings of curiosity, engagement, and openness, all habits of mind identified in the Framework. The connection between a family challenging circumstance is not clear; however, we can infer that if a student articulates that his or her family is a challenging circumstance, then that student is, at the very least, concerned about the family and not putting as much energy into coursework as she or he could be.
However, the other two challenging circumstances perceived by the participants—academic and social/cultural challenges—are much more pervasive amongst the students. All of the students perceived some level of academic challenging circumstance. Often, the most common challenges—finding, using and citing sources and finding a topic—affect student ability to further cultivate responsibility (by finding, using, and citing sources) and their ability to further develop curiosity, openness, and engagement. For example, Amber’s perceived lack of awareness about using other resources for her visual analysis topic directly affected her creativity. Because she felt constrained, she was experiencing disequilibrium and struggled to self-author and further develop her curiosity and creative habits of mind with that assignment.

Perceived social and cultural challenging circumstances can also have negative consequences for a student’s development of the habits of mind. For example, if John feels he cannot approach his instructor with questions, then that effective silencing of John negatively impacts his development of habits of mind. If he does not know how to do an assignment, he is not able to use that assignment to further develop his curiosity, engagement, or any other habits of mind. These final results also help answer research question #5: What habits of mind (as identified by the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing) do first-generation students with challenging circumstances demonstrate? What habits of mind do these students lack? How do first-generation students with challenging
circumstances perceive the effects of these challenging circumstances on their habits of mind?

Most importantly, we cannot assume that first-generation students automatically inherit the problems specified in the literature just because of their generational status. As Ann Penrose notes, “... there is as yet little evidence with which to evaluate the assumption that [first-generation] students’ experiences in college put them at a disadvantage with regard to academic literacy or other domains of knowledge” (444). In other words, we cannot simply assume that a student who is first-generation will automatically perceive the challenging circumstances discussed above as particularly affecting him or her, and we see this in the present study. Even though financial aid is fairly universal throughout the college experience and all of the participants identified it as a challenge, it is entirely possible that some first-generation students do not need to worry about obtaining financial assistance at all. Perhaps, then, one of the most succinct statements about working with and teaching first-generation students that faculty need to be aware of is their inherent similarities to traditional college students: “First-generation students face all the anxieties, dislocations, and difficulties of any college student, but their experiences often involve cultural as well as social and academic transitions” (Terenzini et. al. 2). When working with first-generation students, then, we must bear that assertion in mind.
**Working with and Teaching First-Generation Students**

In this section, I will answer research question #6: Inasmuch as the first- and second-year communication courses are seen as sites of transition and adjustment to the academic discourse community, what can we do to better work with and teach first-generation students with challenging circumstances in first-year and second-year communication courses?

As noted in Chapter 1, the percentage of the college student population that is first-generation is growing, and learning how to better work with and teach them is imperative. According to Erik E. Morales, “The more we know about how this population experiences college, the better we will be to facilitate their success” (500). And he is right. Of course, there are myriad ways to improve the teaching of first-generation college students.

Some of those ways are institutional in nature. Russell Lowery-Hart and George Pacheco, Jr., offer several suggestions for colleges and universities wishing to strengthen ties with their first-generation students. They suggest that colleges make a stronger effort to communicate with parents of first-generation students, offer opportunities for first-generation and continuing-generation students to meet and intermingle, offer training for faculty, and reevaluate programs that “isolate and shine an uncomfortable spotlight” on first-generation college students (65-66). While all of these suggestions are excellent for institutional contexts, the perspectives of the participants in the current study tell me that faculty and instructors can do more.
For example, for those students who felt they could not approach their professors, instructors need to make themselves more approachable to students. Offering office hours is one thing, but making personal contact with students is much more helpful. As previously noted, first-generation students tend to perceive their instructors as intimidating, and any steps that an instructor can take to open the lines of communication will help those students develop those habits of mind faster.

More importantly, however, is keeping the perceptions and perspectives of first-generation students in mind. For example, if Amber’s and Daniel’s instructors had spent time in class explaining and demonstrating different options for the visual analysis, perhaps Amber and Daniel would not have felt that they needed to purchase a magazine for the assignment. In that case, both students could have further developed their creativity. All of these suggestions answer the final research question: Inasmuch as the first- and second-year communication courses are seen as sites of transition and adjustment to the academic discourse community, what can we do to better work with and teach first-generation students with challenging circumstances in first-year and second-year communication courses?

As Ann Penrose notes, “Helping students see themselves as members of the academic community may be the most important challenge faced in the university at large and in writing classrooms in particular” (458). Helping first-generation
students better acclimate to the first- and second-year communication classroom should be first and foremost for faculty.

**Conclusion**

Through examining the relevant literature within the context of the participants’ articulated experiences, we can see that perception is the key word in working with and teaching first-generation college students. This group of students may or may not necessarily be as prepared as continuing-generation college students, but it is their perception of disparity that influences them the most. By understanding this, faculty and instructors of writing can be better prepared to work with first-generation college students.

In the final section of this dissertation, I will conclude by providing some final thoughts on this study and its implications for further research.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Through examining the perceptions and experiences of first-generation college students, we can see how this group of first-generation first-year students perceives college and their communication class. As Terenzini et. al. note, “First-generation students face all the anxieties, dislocations, and difficulties of any college student, but their experiences often involve cultural as well as social and academic transitions” (2). This study confirms Terenzini et. al.’s statement, for the participants indicated, through describing their perceptions and experiences to me, that academic transitions are not the only challenging circumstance they struggle with. They also struggle with a possible lack of social and cultural knowledge expected of new college students. Feeling able to ask questions and communicate with one's instructor are key components of the college student role. If a student is unable to adapt to and learn that role, she or he is more likely to drop out of college altogether. As Collier and Morgan state, “...role mastery, as a form of cultural capital, is an essential component in the social reproduction of the gap between educational 'haves' and 'have nots'” (445).

To help bridge that gap, we must consider what writing and communication instructors can do, then, to better work with first-generation college students. While the following suggestions are not exhaustive, they are an appropriate place to begin. These suggestions indicate actions that instructors can take in their own
classrooms. These ideas also exclude any issues with financial need, since programs already exist, such as the Hixson Opportunity Awards at Iowa State University, to help ameliorate the need for first-generation students in addition to loans, scholarships, grants, and on-campus work-study jobs.

**Classroom-Level Recommendations**

These suggestions focus on the classroom and the instructor. These ideas build upon other best practices that may already by in use in the classroom. It is important to note, however, that because first-generation students are a fairly diverse group of students, what may work in one classroom or for one instructor may not work in another classroom or for another instructor. Ultimately, then, it is imperative to remember that, like continuing-generation students, first-generation students are individuals first who are the best resource for learning how to work with them.

**Explain Available Resources**

To paraphrase Laura, students have to use their resources. And instructors can be one of the first people to fully explain what resources exist on a particular campus. For example, many campuses have study skills centers, writing centers, or other types of tutoring available. These centers, often subsidized with student fees and so are already “paid for,” exist to help students and faculty.

Another option for instructors is to offer a programmatic statement to students. One example is the *ISUComm Foundation Courses: Student Guide for English 150 and 250*. This Guide offers a comprehensive programmatic overview for
students. It addresses multimodal communication, describes common assignments in English 150 and 250, and offers students information about additional support on campus: touchstones that students can use to find further support. Creating and compiling such a guide for students is one option for instructors, and many writing and communication programs already have some sort of programmatic statement that could be made available to students.

Get Trained

One option available to most instructors is additional professional development. For example, many colleges and universities have centers for learning and teaching that offer seminars and classes on pedagogy. As Erik E. Morales states, “...when working with students with the unique needs of first-generation college students, very often more deliberate and structured teaching strategies may be necessary” (515). Faculty who do not feel adequately prepared to work with first-generation college students can take advantage of these programs to inform their teaching methods.

Recognize Identity

An important consideration is addressing the diversity within our classrooms. As Mark P. Orbe argues, classroom teachers need to “acknowledge the diversity within your class beyond that which is most obvious in terms of race, gender and age. This translates into giving attention to both the visible, and less visible, aspects of each student’s identity” (146). It behooves us, then, as instructors and teachers of writing to consider all the facets of diversity in our classrooms.
Lynn Z. Bloom reminds us that writing teachers have “an ethical as well as a cultural obligation to respect the world’s multiple ways of living and of speaking” (671). By doing so, first-generation students can see that their identities are included and important to the class as a whole, rather than being marginalized. While it may be easier to focus on more visible aspects of identity and diversity in the classroom, creating and maintaining a classroom atmosphere of inclusion for all identities is crucial.

In addition, instructors can also help first-generation students “invent the university” more readily through exploring ways to encourage first-generation students to discover and develop their identities as writers and members of an academic community. Ann Penrose states, “Writing teachers and researchers need to continue to explore pedagogies that will concentrate their efforts not just on validating personal identity or on demystifying the conventions of academic communities but also on helping students forge identities as members of those communities” (459). By showing first-generation students how they already are members of an academic community, these students can begin to see themselves in that college student role.

**Mentor First-Generation Students**

But creating such an atmosphere is not enough. We, as instructors, must also work one-to-one with our students, and first-generation students in particular need to feel comfortable with their instructor. As noted above, first-generation students are less likely to work with faculty on research projects (Kim and Sax, Terenzini et.
One way faculty can better connect with first-generation students is by acting as a mentor to first-generation students. As Richie Neil Hao argues, “Because there are so many unwritten rules of the academy that FGS [first-generation students] must learn on their own without the parental or family guidance that their peers typically have, we must serve as mentors to these students” (97). As communication instructors, we are already working closely with our students when we conference with them. These moments are prime opportunities for mentoring in which instructors can let students know they are available for other types of questions as well. Even if an instructor does not know a particular answer, he or she is likely able to point the student towards the person or office who can help.

**Make It Relevant**

Instructors need to make course content relevant for our students. If students do not understand the purpose behind a particular assignment, they may feel as if they are completing “busy work.” As Moisés Próspero and Shetal Vohra-Gupta remind us, “if students perceive their coursework is an unnecessary barrier to their financial goal [of a higher paying job], appropriate study habits may be easily replaced by other activities such as playing video games or working outside the college” (973). By connecting course content to students’ lives—or helping students make the connections themselves—instructors help students see beyond the assignments and tests that dot the landscape of a semester to the larger picture.

Additionally, by making course content relevant for students, instructors can possibly increase a student’s interest level in the course; otherwise, the student can
adopt a more instrumentalist view towards the course and treat it as another chore
to be completed rather than making connections and further developing habits of
mind. We saw this attitude in several participants in the primary study. For
example, some students, such as Brian and Payton, did not see the purpose behind
their English 150 course or its place-based curriculum. My intent here is not to fault
their instructors; rather, I mean to offer a more general statement about student
interest in course content. And we saw with Brian that as soon as he was able to
connect his personal history to his communication assignments, his interest level
increased dramatically. This increased interest caused Brian to research his topic
more and, more importantly, further develop certain habits of mind, such as
creativity, curiosity, flexibility, and persistence.

These are not the only suggestions that can be used by instructors. While
all these suggestions are, generally, best practice for teaching all students, it is
important to emphasize them specifically for first-generation students. Of course,
other suggestions address institutional contexts more specifically.

**Institutional-Level Recommendations**

These suggestions consider the larger picture and context of the university.
Rather than focusing on specific actions that instructors can take, these
recommendations affect the university as a whole. While instructors can certainly
be involved in these possible solutions, such as encouraging first-generation

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13 Attinasi suggests students draw a “cognitive map” of campus to help them emphasize and connect
important places on campus (271); this technique is already part of the standard English 150 place-
based curriculum at Iowa State University (cf. Blakely and Pagnac)
students to get involved in the Student Support Services Program (SSSP), the general aim of these ideas is larger than the individual classroom.

**Encourage Participation**

For some students, like Daniel, meaningful contact outside the classroom is just as important, if not more so. The Federal TRIO programs, such as Upward Bound for high school students and SSSP for college students, offer necessary and real aid to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. As LaKresha Graham notes in her narrative, “TRIO programs exist for students like me—desiring higher education, but needing guidance through the academic systems that exist” (33). Encouraging students early to consider college and take advantage of these programs can be transformative.

Other programs that colleges and universities can offer focus on first-generation students themselves. By offering programs, groups, and clubs for first-generation college students, colleges and universities help develop and establish a possible means of support for these students. Khanh-Van T. Bui argues that “[g]iven that the demands at a four-year university are usually rigorous, first-generation college students can use all the help that their university can give them to persist and graduate” (10).

Another option suggested in the literature also addresses first-generation students, but from a different source: admissions offices. Gary R. Pike and George P. Kuh suggest that “[a]dmissions officers could design presentations and publications specifically for first-generation students that emphasize the behaviors common to
successful first-generation students who have graduated from the institution (291). Creating and using specific material targeted towards first-generation students can also help those students begin to see themselves at college and help them begin to realize the habits of mind necessary for success in college.

Finally, learning communities are also an option for colleges and universities. Rashné Rustom Jehangir details an eight-year-long study of a low-income, first-generation multicultural learning community at the University of Minnesota. She notes, “[h]aving safe spaces to make sense of their social and academic identity development is a powerful precursor to their ability to engage meaningfully with all students in their college experience” (184, italics Jehangir). The efficacy of learning communities is well known, but establishing learning communities for first-generation students is an area that lies outside this dissertation and is ripe for additional research.

**Further Avenues of Study**

As I was completing this study and analyzing the results, I also discovered, quite by accident, that parental level of education seems to be a key factor in how a first-generation college student transitions to the university. Students whose parents had some college but no degree seemed to acclimate better than students whose parents had no college at all; this phenomenon is mentioned by both Ishitani (“Studying”) and Pike and Kuh. Additionally, students who had exposure to college culture through other means, such as extended family, seemed to acclimate better. While this is merely incidental to the study described here, it is an avenue of
research that needs to be explored further. Only by understanding exactly how
certain levels of pre-college exposure to college culture impact first-generation
students can we begin to fully understand them and thus better adjust our teaching
methods and programmatic offerings.

**Conclusion**

By talking and listening to the participants of the study, I have learned that
first-generation students carry particular perceptions with them as they come to
college, and these perceptions can affect how first-generation students transition to
college. The process they undergo—and the perceptions they carry with them to
college—may bear many similarities to those of continuing-generation students.
However, for some first-generation students, the process is much more difficult and
fraught with multiple instances of disequilibrium. In addition, perceptions,
extpectations, assumptions, and fears brought to college with them can also weigh
them down, making self-authorship that much more difficult. Only through learning
to self-author and solve problems can students learn to be successful in college, and
for first-generation college students, the types of disequilibrium, self-authoring,
and self-efficacy illustrate the uniqueness of their process. Through examining a
few classroom-level and institutional contexts, we can see different ways to further
work with these students in communication classes. It is hoped that through this
dissertation, that communication instructors and those who work with college
students can begin to recognize this process in their own first-generation students.
and help those students remove some of the weight from their knapsacks of “dis”-privilege.
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APPENDIX A

FRAMEWORK FOR SUCCESS IN POSTSECONDARY WRITING
Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing

Developed by

Council of Writing Program Administrators
National Council of Teachers of English
National Writing Project
The **Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA)** is a national association of writing professionals with professional responsibilities for or interests in developing and directing postsecondary writing programs in two-year and four-year institutions. Members include full- and part-time writing instructors; directors of writing, writing/communication across the curriculum programs, and writing centers; and department chairs, division heads, and deans. CWPA advocates, and helps its members advocate, for writers, writing teachers, and effective writing programs and provides mentoring, research, and resources to those administering postsecondary writing programs.

www.wpacouncil.org

The **National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)** is a professional association of educators in English studies, literacy, and language arts. NCTE is devoted to improving the teaching and learning of English and the language arts at all levels of education. NCTE promotes the development of literacy, the use of language to construct personal and public worlds and to achieve full participation in society, through the learning and teaching of English and the related arts and sciences of language.

www.ncte.org

The **National Writing Project (NWP)** is a network of educators working together to improve the teaching of writing in the nation’s schools and other settings. NWP provides professional development to teachers in a variety of disciplines and at all levels, from early childhood through university. Founded in 1974, NWP is a network of more than 200 university-based sites located in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. NWP serves more than 130,000 participants each year.

www.nwp.org

*Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (2011) by the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and the National Writing Project (NWP) is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.
Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing

Developed by
Council of Writing Program Administrators
National Council of Teachers of English
National Writing Project
Executive Summary

The concept of “college readiness” is increasingly important in discussions about students’ preparation for postsecondary education.

This Framework describes the rhetorical and twenty-first-century skills as well as habits of mind and experiences that are critical for college success. Based in current research in writing and writing pedagogy, the Framework was written and reviewed by two- and four-year college and high school writing faculty nationwide and is endorsed by the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project.

Habits of mind refers to ways of approaching learning that are both intellectual and practical and that will support students’ success in a variety of fields and disciplines. The Framework identifies eight habits of mind essential for success in college writing:

- Curiosity – the desire to know more about the world.
- Openness – the willingness to consider new ways of being and thinking in the world.
- Engagement – a sense of investment and involvement in learning.
- Creativity – the ability to use novel approaches for generating, investigating, and representing ideas.
- Persistence – the ability to sustain interest and attention to short- and long-term projects.
- Responsibility – the ability to take ownership of one’s actions and understand the consequences of those actions for oneself and others.
- Flexibility – the ability to adapt to situations, expectations, or demands.
- Metacognition – the ability to reflect on one’s own thinking as well as on the individual and cultural processes used to structure knowledge.

The Framework then explains how teachers can foster these habits of mind through writing, reading, and critical analysis experiences. These experiences aim to develop students’

- Rhetorical knowledge – the ability to analyze and act on understandings of audiences, purposes, and contexts in creating and comprehending texts;
- Critical thinking – the ability to analyze a situation or text and make thoughtful decisions based on that analysis, through writing, reading, and research;
- Writing processes – multiple strategies to approach and undertake writing and research;
- Knowledge of conventions – the formal and informal guidelines that define what is considered to be correct and appropriate, or incorrect and inappropriate, in a piece of writing; and
- Ability to compose in multiple environments – from traditional pen and paper to electronic technologies.
Introduction

The ability to write well is basic to student success in college and beyond. Students can become better writers when they have multiple opportunities to write in classes across the curriculum throughout their education—from elementary school through university.

Students’ abilities to enroll in credit-bearing, college-level courses are increasingly associated with the idea of “college readiness.” This document, written and reviewed by two- and four-year college and high school writing teachers nationwide, describes habits of mind and experiences with writing, reading, and critical analysis that serve as foundations for writing in college-level, credit-bearing courses. Students who come to college writing with these habits of mind and these experiences will be well positioned to meet the writing challenges in the full spectrum of academic courses and later in their careers.

This document takes as a central premise that teaching writing and learning to write are central to education and to the development of a literate citizenry. Writing development takes place over time as students encounter different contexts, tasks, audiences, and purposes.

Audience for the Framework

The primary audience for this Framework is instructors who teach writing and include writing in their classes at all levels and in all subjects. Additionally, because writing is of concern for those inside and outside education, audiences beyond the classroom—including parents, policymakers, employers, and the general public—also can use this document.

Context for the Framework

To describe the habits of mind and experiences that are central to success in college and beyond, this document uses language and ideas from research in academic fields such as composition and rhetoric, writing across the curriculum, and English education that focus on the development of writing, reading, and analysis abilities inside and outside of school. This Framework is also informed by statements from national organizations representing English language arts and writing instruction, K–college, including the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), and the National Writing Project (NWP). This Framework thus seeks to connect expectations across educational levels and institutions.

Because this Framework is concerned primarily with foundations for college-level, credit-bearing writing courses, it is based on outcomes included in the CWPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year
Composition. Adopted (or adapted) by hundreds of two- and four-year institutions nationwide, the CWPA Outcomes Statement was developed by postsecondary writing instructors and scholars. (More information about the CWPA Outcomes Statement can be found at http://wpacouncil.org/positions/outcomes.html.) The Outcomes Statement expresses what students should know and be able to do at the end of a first-year composition or writing course, a common general education requirement at most two- and four-year institutions. This Framework identifies the habits of mind and the kinds of writing experiences that will best prepare students for success as they enter courses in which they will work to achieve those outcomes.

The responsibility for preparing students for college writing is shared by teachers, schools, students, and families. This document emphasizes what teachers and schools can do to foster and reinforce the habits of mind and experiences described on the following pages. At its essence, the Framework suggests that writing activities and assignments should be designed with genuine purposes and audiences in mind (from teachers and other students to community groups, local or national officials, commercial interests, students’ friends and relatives, and other potential readers) in order to foster flexibility and rhetorical versatility. Standardized writing curricula or assessment instruments that emphasize formulaic writing for nonauthentic audiences will not reinforce the habits of mind and the experiences necessary for success as students encounter the writing demands of postsecondary education.
Habits of Mind

Habits of mind—ways of approaching learning that are both intellectual and practical—are crucial for all college-level learners. Beyond knowing particular facts or completing mandatory readings, students who develop these habits of mind approach learning from an active stance. These habits help students succeed in a variety of fields and disciplines. They are cultivated both inside and outside school. Teachers can do much to develop activities and assignments that foster the kind of thinking that lies behind these habits and prepare students for the learning they will experience in college and beyond. These habits include:

Curiosity – the desire to know more about the world.
Curiosity is fostered when writers are encouraged to
- use inquiry as a process to develop questions relevant for authentic audiences within a variety of disciplines;
- seek relevant authoritative information and recognize the meaning and value of that information;
- conduct research using methods for investigating questions appropriate to the discipline; and
- communicate their findings in writing to multiple audiences inside and outside school using discipline-appropriate conventions.

Openness – the willingness to consider new ways of being and thinking in the world.
Openness is fostered when writers are encouraged to
- examine their own perspectives to find connections with the perspectives of others;
- practice different ways of gathering, investigating, developing, and presenting information; and
- listen to and reflect on the ideas and responses of others—both peers and instructors—to their writing.

Engagement – a sense of investment and involvement in learning.
Engagement is fostered when writers are encouraged to
- make connections between their own ideas and those of others;
- find meanings new to them or build on existing meanings as a result of new connections; and
- act upon the new knowledge that they have discovered.

Creativity – the ability to use novel approaches for generating, investigating, and representing ideas.
Creativity is fostered when writers are encouraged to
- take risks by exploring questions, topics, and ideas that are new to them;
• use methods that are new to them to investigate questions, topics, and ideas;
• represent what they have learned in a variety of ways; and
• evaluate the effects or consequences of their creative choices.

**Persistence** – the ability to sustain interest in and attention to short- and long-term projects.
Persistence is fostered when writers are encouraged to
• commit to exploring, in writing, a topic, idea, or demanding task;
• grapple with challenging ideas, texts, processes, or projects;
• follow through, over time, to complete tasks, processes, or projects; and
• consistently take advantage of in-class (peer and instructor responses) and out-of-class (writing or learning center support) opportunities to improve and refine their work.

**Responsibility** – the ability to take ownership of one's actions and understand the consequences of those actions for oneself and others.
Responsibility is fostered when writers are encouraged to
• recognize their own role in learning;
• act on the understanding that learning is shared among the writer and others—students, instructors, and the institution, as well as those engaged in the questions and/or fields in which the writer is interested; and
• engage and incorporate the ideas of others, giving credit to those ideas by using appropriate attribution.

**Flexibility** – the ability to adapt to situations, expectations, or demands.
Flexibility is fostered when writers are encouraged to
• approach writing assignments in multiple ways, depending on the task and the writer’s purpose and audience;
• recognize that conventions (such as formal and informal rules of content, organization, style, evidence, citation, mechanics, usage, register, and dialect) are dependent on discipline and context; and
• reflect on the choices they make in light of context, purpose, and audience.

**Metacognition** – the ability to reflect on one's own thinking as well as on the individual and cultural processes and systems used to structure knowledge.
Metacognition is fostered when writers are encouraged to
• examine processes they use to think and write in a variety of disciplines and contexts;
• reflect on the texts that they have produced in a variety of contexts;
• connect choices they have made in texts to audiences and purposes for which texts are intended; and
• use what they learn from reflections on one writing project to improve writing on subsequent projects.
Experiences with Writing, Reading, and Critical Analysis

Particular writing, reading, and critical analysis experiences contribute to habits of mind that are crucial to success in college. These experiences include the following:

Developing Rhetorical Knowledge

Rhetorical knowledge is the ability to analyze and act on understandings of audiences, purposes, and contexts in creating and comprehending texts.

Rhetorical knowledge is the basis of good writing. By developing rhetorical knowledge, writers can adapt to different purposes, audiences, and contexts. Study of and practice with basic rhetorical concepts such as purpose, audience, context, and conventions are important as writers learn to compose a variety of texts for different disciplines and purposes. For example, a writer might draft one version of a text with one audience in mind, then revise the text to meet the needs and expectations of a different audience.

Teachers can help writers develop rhetorical knowledge by providing opportunities and guidance for students to

- learn and practice key rhetorical concepts such as audience, purpose, context, and genre through writing and analysis of a variety of types of texts (nonfiction, informational, imaginative, printed, visual, spatial, auditory, and otherwise);
- write and analyze a variety of types of texts to identify
  - the audiences and purposes for which they are intended,
  - the key choices of content, organization, evidence, and language use made by their author(s),
  - the relationships among these key choices and the ways that the text(s) appeal or speak to different audiences;
- write for different audiences, purposes, and contexts;
- write for real audiences and purposes, and analyze a writer’s choices in light of those audiences and purposes; and
- contribute, through writing, their own ideas and opinions about a topic to an ongoing conversation.
Developing Critical Thinking Through Writing, Reading, and Research

Critical thinking is the ability to analyze a situation or text and make thoughtful decisions based on that analysis.

Writers use critical writing and reading to develop and represent the processes and products of their critical thinking. For example, writers may be asked to write about familiar or unfamiliar texts, examining assumptions about the texts held by different audiences. Through critical writing and reading, writers think through ideas, problems, and issues; identify and challenge assumptions; and explore multiple ways of understanding. This is important in college as writers are asked to move past obvious or surface-level interpretations and use writing to make sense of and respond to written, visual, verbal, and other texts that they encounter.

Teachers can help writers develop critical thinking by providing opportunities and guidance for students to

- read texts from multiple points of view (e.g., sympathetic to a writer’s position and critical of it) and in ways that are appropriate to the academic discipline or other contexts where the texts are being used;
- write about texts for multiple purposes including (but not limited to) interpretation, synthesis, response, summary, critique, and analysis;
- craft written responses to texts that put the writer’s ideas in conversation with those in a text in ways that are appropriate to the academic discipline or context;
- create multiple kinds of texts to extend and synthesize their thinking (e.g., analytic essays, scripts, brochures, short stories, graphic narratives);
- evaluate sources for credibility, bias, quality of evidence, and quality of reasoning;
- conduct primary and secondary research using a variety of print and nonprint sources;
- write texts for various audiences and purposes that are informed by research (e.g., to support ideas or positions, to illustrate alternative perspectives, to provide additional contexts); and
- generate questions to guide research.
Developing Flexible Writing Processes

Writing processes are the multiple strategies writers use to approach and undertake writing and research.

Writing processes are not linear. Successful writers use different processes that vary over time and depend on the particular task. For example, a writer may research a topic before drafting, then after receiving feedback conduct additional research as part of revising. Writers learn to move back and forth through different stages of writing, adapting those stages to the situation. This ability to employ flexible writing processes is important as students encounter different types of writing tasks that require them to work through the various stages independently to produce final, polished texts.

Teachers can help writers develop flexible processes by having students

- practice all aspects of writing processes including invention, research, drafting, sharing with others, revising in response to reviews, and editing;
- generate ideas and texts using a variety of processes and situate those ideas within different academic disciplines and contexts;
- incorporate evidence and ideas from written, visual, graphic, verbal, and other kinds of texts;
- use feedback to revise texts to make them appropriate for the academic discipline or context for which the writing is intended;
- work with others in various stages of writing; and
- reflect on how different writing tasks and elements of the writing process contribute to their development as a writer.
Developing Knowledge of Conventions

*Conventions* are the formal rules and informal guidelines that define what is considered to be correct (or appropriate) and incorrect (or inappropriate) in a piece of writing. Conventions include the surface features of a text such as mechanics, spelling, and attribution of sources, as well as more global concerns such as content, tone, style, organization, and evidence. Conventions arise from a history of use and reflect the collected wisdom of the relevant readers and writers about the most effective ways of communicating in that area.

Conventions facilitate reading by making material easier to comprehend and creating common expectations between writer and reader. As multimodal texts become more prevalent, teachers will also need to attend to the evolving conventions of these new forms, developing appropriate conventions with new students and colleagues.

Correct use of conventions is defined within specific contexts and genres. For example, a novice's grasp of a disciplinary documentation style is different from that of an advanced student's, and a writer's grasp of conventions in one context (such as a lab report for a chemistry class) does not mean a firm grasp in another (such as an analytical essay for a history course). The ability to understand, analyze, and make decisions about using conventions appropriate for the purpose, audience, and genre is important in writing.

Teachers can help writers develop knowledge of conventions by providing opportunities and guidance for students to

- write, read, and analyze a variety of texts from various disciplines and perspectives in order to
  - investigate the logic and implications of different conventions,
  - practice different conventions and analyze expectations for and effects on different audiences,
  - practice editing and proofreading one's own writing and explore the implications of editing choices,
  - explore the concept of intellectual property (i.e., ownership of ideas) as it is used in different disciplines and contexts, and
  - identify differences between errors and intentional variations from expected conventions;
- read and analyze print and multimodal texts composed in various styles, tones, and levels of formality;
- use resources (such as print and online writing handbooks), with guidance, to edit drafts;
- practice various approaches to the documentation and attribution of sources; and
- examine the underlying logic in commonly used citation systems (e.g., MLA and APA).
Composing in Multiple Environments

Composing in multiple environments refers to the ability to create writing using everything from traditional pen and paper to electronic technologies.

All forms of writing involve technologies, whether pen and paper, word processor, video recorder, or webpage. Research attests to the extensive writing that students produce electronically; composing in or outside of school, students and instructors can build on these experiences. As electronic technologies continue to spread and evolve, writers (and teachers) need to be thoughtful, effective users who are able to adapt to changing electronic environments. For example, a writer might be asked to write a traditional essay, compose a webpage or video, and design a print brochure all based on similar information.

While many students have opportunities to practice composing in electronic environments, explicit and intentional instruction focusing on the use and implications of writing and reading using electronic technologies will contribute to students’ abilities to use them effectively.

Teachers can help writers develop as thoughtful, effective users of electronic technologies by providing opportunities and guidance for students to

- use a variety of electronic technologies intentionally to compose;
- analyze print and electronic texts to determine how technologies affect reading and writing processes;
- select, evaluate, and use information and ideas from electronic sources responsibly in their own documents (whether by citation, hotlink, commentary, or other means);
- use technology strategically and with a clear purpose that enhances the writing for the audience;
- analyze situations where print and electronic texts are used, examining why and how people have chosen to compose using different technologies; and
- analyze electronic texts (their own and others’) to explore and develop criteria for assessing the texts.
APPENDIX B

STUDENT INFORMED CONSENT – FALL 2011 PILOT STUDY

Investigator: Susan Pagnac (641-750-4654; spagnac@iastate.edu)

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION
The purpose of this study is twofold: 1) to explore the apprehensions, needs and expectations of first-year college students in writing classes; and 2) how a multimodal, placed-based curriculum connects to/with first-year college students. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a student in English 150 at Iowa State University. You should not participate if you are under age 18.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a short survey about your and your parents/guardians’ standard of living and education, attitudes towards writing, and career goals. The survey will take 15-20 minutes to complete.

If you choose, you may volunteer for further research. Further research includes two (2) interviews over the course of the semester with Susan Pagnac; additionally, I will collect clean, ungraded copies of your major assignments. Interview questions will explore your attitudes towards writing, your career goals, and your family’s socioeconomic status. Interviews will be audio-recorded for accuracy will last roughly an hour. Interviews will take place on the Iowa State University campus. Student work will be analyzed for patterns inherent in the writing of first-year college students. Analysis of your work will not affect your grades in this course, and I will not share my findings with your instructor until and unless final semester grades are submitted.

RISKS
While participating in this study you may experience emotional discomfort.

BENEFITS
If you decide to participate in this study there may be no direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by discovering the impact of student socioeconomic class on writing preparation and attitude; this information will be used to further change and refine college writing curriculums.
COSTS AND COMPENSATION
You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can skip any survey and interview questions that you do not wish to answer.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: paper surveys will be kept in a locked file cabinet in a locked office; interview transcripts and notes will be kept on a password-protected computer; and access to data is limited to Susan Pagnac. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS
You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

For further information about the study contact: Susan Pagnac (641-750-4654; spagnac@iastate.edu) or Barb Blakely (515-294-3217; blakely@iastate.edu).

If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

********************************************************************

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE
Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will
receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant’s Name (printed) ____________________________________________

_________________________  ______________________
(Participant’s Signature)     (Date)

Email ________________________        Phone _____________________________

Best time to reach you ________________________________
APPENDIX C

SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR FALL 2011 PILOT STUDY

1. What is your sex? (Choose one)
   Male
   Female

2. What is your age range? (Choose one)
   Under 18 years old
   18-24 years old
   24-35 years old
   35-50 years old
   50+ years old

3. What is your student enrollment status? (Choose one)   Full-time    Part-time

4. Please describe your standard of living in 10 words or fewer:

5. Please describe your parents' or guardians' standard of living in 10 words or fewer:

6. What level of education do you currently have? (Choose one)
   Some high school
   High School diploma
   GED
   Some college
   Bachelor's degree
   Certification or certificate
   Other (please explain):

7. What level of education does your father/male guardian currently have? (Choose one)
   Some high school
   High School diploma
   GED
   Some college
   Bachelor's degree
   Certification or certificate
   Other (please explain):

8. What level of education does your mother/female guardian currently have? (Choose one)
Some high school
High School diploma
GED
Some college
Bachelor’s degree
Certification or certificate
Other (please explain):

9. How are your college courses being paid for? (Choose one)
   Me
   Parents/guardians
   Someone else
   My job/company
   Scholarships
   Grants
   Loans
   Other (please explain):

10. Why are you going to college? (Choose one)
    Better pay
    Qualification for career
    Promotion/Pay Raise
    Well-rounded education
    Other (please explain):

11. Please describe your family background, educational preparation, or anything else that concerns you about completing your college courses successfully:

12. Please describe your attitude towards writing in general (not a specific class) in a few sentences:

13. Is writing important to your career? (Choose one)
    Yes
    No
    Don’t Know
    Don’t Care

14. If you are willing to meet with the principal investigator, Susan Pagnac, twice this semester for short, informal interviews, please put your name and contact information below.
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR FALL 2011 PILOT STUDY

1. How many classes are you taking?
2. What are your future goals?
3. Why are you in college?
4. Did anyone or anything influence your decision to come to college? If so, who or what?
5. What jobs did your parents/guardians have? Did they require a 2 year or 4 year degree or some other kind of education or certification?
6. If you had to describe your socioeconomic class, how would you describe it?
7. Do you feel you have enough support from your family and friends to succeed in college?
8. What kinds of reading materials were present in your home as you grew up?
9. When you were assigned homework in high school, how important was it to you to get it done? Has that changed since you began college?
10. What did you expect when you began college? Have your expectations been met?
11. So far, what was the most surprising part of college for you? Is college what you expected? Why or why not?
12. What is a good writer?
13. Is writing important to your chosen career?
14. Do you feel you have something to say?
15. What kinds of writing assignments are frustrating for you? What kinds of writing assignments are easier for you?
16. What is your writing process?
17. How good of a writer are you, do you think? Why? What makes you think that way?
18. What do you expect from English 150 in general? When you envision your English 150 class, how do you envision it? What kind of classroom atmosphere do you see? What is your reaction to your imagined atmosphere?

19. Do you feel this class can help you achieve your goals? If so, how?

20. What kinds of writing do you expect to do in English 150?

21. What do you think you will learn about in English 150?

22. What were your goals for English 150 class at the beginning of the semester? Have you met those goals so far/yet?

23. Has English 150 met your expectations so far? If yes, how so? If not, what was different? How have you coped with that difference?

24. Do you feel your writing process has changed since the beginning of the semester? If so, how? If not, why not?

25. Now that you have been in English 150 for most of a semester, what do you think of your writing?

26. So far, has English 150 meet your expectations for a first year college writing class? If so, how? If not, why not?

27. Do you think English 150 will help you get to your goal of (getting a job, earning a degree)? If so, how? If not, why not, do you think?

28. Do you think there are things that should be covered in English 150 that weren’t covered in your class?

29. So far, what is the best/most useful thing about your English 150 class?

30. So far, how are the writing assignments going for you? What is easy about them for you, if anything? What is difficult about them for you, if anything? What could you do differently for your next assignment?
APPENDIX E

INITIAL CODES FOR TRANSCRIPTION

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EXPANDED CODES FOR TRANSCRIPTION

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APPENDIX G

STUDENT CONSENT – FALL 2012

Investigator: Susan Pagnac (641-750-4654; spagnac@iastate.edu)

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION
The purpose of this study is twofold: 1) to explore how first-generation college students in multimodal communication classes perceive college and communication courses; and 2) how a multimodal communication curriculum connects to/with first-generation college students. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a student in English 150 or 250 at Iowa State University. You should not participate if you are under age 18.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in three (3) interviews over the course of the semester with Susan Pagnac. Interview questions will explore your perceptions of and experiences with college in general and multimodal communication courses in particular. Interviews will be audio-recorded for accuracy and will last roughly an hour. Interviews will take place on the Iowa State University campus. I will not share anything you say with your instructor.

RISKS
While participating in this study, you may experience emotional discomfort.

BENEFITS
If you decide to participate in this study there may be no direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by discovering how first-generation college students perceive and experience college and multimodal communication courses; this information will be used to further change and refine college writing curriculums.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION
You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.
PARTICIPANT RIGHTS
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can skip any interview questions that you do not wish to answer.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: paper surveys will be kept in a locked file cabinet in a locked office; interview transcripts and notes will be kept on a password-protected computer; and access to data is limited to Susan Pagnac. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS
You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

For further information about the study contact: Susan Pagnac (641-750-4654; spagnac@iastate.edu) or Barb Blakely (515-294-3217; blakely@iastate.edu).

If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

******************************************************************************

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE
Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.
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<th>Participant’s Name (printed)</th>
<th>Participant’s Signature</th>
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<td>Email</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
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Preferred pseudonym (fake name) for research purposes
APPENDIX H

INITIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – FALL 2012 STUDY

1. How many classes are you taking this semester?
2. What are your future goals?
3. Why are you in college?
4. How important is it to you to finish your college degree?
5. What is the purpose of a college degree, do you think?
6. First-generation status: Good thing? Bad thing? Just a thing, like having big feet or blue eyes?
7. Do you feel you have enough support from your family and friends to succeed in college?
8. Do you feel there are any challenges or obstacles to your completion of your college degree? If so, what are they? How are these obstacles or challenges stopping you in general?
9. What did you expect when you began college?
10. So far, what was the most surprising part of college for you? Is college what you expected? Why or why not?
11. How did filling out the FAFSA go for you? What about the college applications?
12. What jobs did your parents/guardians have? Did they require a 2 year or 4 year degree or some other kind of education or certification?
13. Did anyone or anything influence your decision to come to college? If so, who or what? Was this something you heard life-long?
14. What do you expect from English 150 in general? Before you came to Iowa State, when you envisioned your English 150 class, how did you envision it? What kind of classroom atmosphere did you see?
15. What kinds of writing do you expect to do in English 150? Have you done those kinds of writing before?

16. What do you think you will learn about in English 150?

17. How important is it to you to finish this writing course?

18. What is the purpose of your writing class, do you think?

19. Do you feel there are any challenges or obstacles to your completion of this writing class? If so, what are they? How are these obstacles or challenges stopping you?

20. English 150 students: The majority of the assignments for this course (English 150) are based on the land-grant heritage and history of Iowa State. Is there anything you’ve heard about Iowa State or seen on campus that you’d like to learn more about? If so, what? If not, what kinds of things would be interesting to you to learn about Iowa State?

21. What is a good writer?

22. Is writing important to your chosen career, do you think?

23. When you were assigned homework in high school, how important was it to you to get it done?

24. How good of a writer/communicator are you, do you think? Why? What makes you think that way?
APPENDIX I

SECOND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – FALL 2012 STUDY

150 Questions:

1. The second major assignment is a deep map of campus and a letter home.
   • How did you go about deciding what to draw on your map? What would you add now?
   • How did you decide who to write to?
   • How did you decide what to focus on?
   • Are other parts of campus important to you? Which ones? If so, where are they and why are they important?
   • Did you have any difficulties with this assignment? If so, what were they and how did you cope with them?
   • What went well for you on this assignment?
   • If you could go back, would you choose a different topic? Why?

2. For the profile of a campus organization or program, what did you choose to write about?
   • Why did you choose to write about ____?
   • What did you find out about ____?
   • Did you have any difficulties with this assignment? If so, what were they and how did you cope with them?
   • What went well for you on this assignment?
   • If you could go back, would you choose a different topic? Why?

3. Which did you choose for the art or building analysis?
   • Why did you choose that piece of art or building?
   • Did you have any difficulties with this assignment? If so, what were they and how did you cope with them?
   • What went well for you on this assignment?
   • If you could go back, would you choose a different topic? Why?

4. Which topic did you choose for the visual communication?
   • What options for delivery (e.g. brochure, website, poster) did you consider?
   • Why did you choose the option you did?
   • Did you have any difficulties with this assignment? If so, what were they and how did you cope with them?
   • What went well for you on this assignment?
   • If you could go back, would you choose a different topic? Why?
5. So far, how are the writing assignments going for you?
   • What is easy about them for you, if anything?
   • What is difficult about them for you, if anything?
   • Would you say some assignments have been easier/harder than others? Why?

6. How has your transition to the university gone so far?

7. Was your instructor willing to help you if you needed it?

8. Has being FG impacted your work in your English course?

250 Questions:

1. The first major assignment is a summary.
   • How did you decide which article to write about?
   • Did you have any difficulties with this assignment? If so, what were they and how did you cope with them?
   • What went well for you on this assignment?
   • If you could go back, would you choose a different reading? Why?

2. The second major assignment is a visual analysis.
   • How did you decide which artifact to write about?
   • Did you have any difficulties with this assignment? If so, what were they and how did you cope with them?
   • What went well for you on this assignment?
   • If you could go back, would you choose a different topic? Why?

3. For the rhetorical analysis, what did you choose to write about?
   • Why did you choose to write about ____?
   • Did you have any difficulties with this assignment? If so, what were they and how did you cope with them?
   • What went well for you on this assignment?
   • If you could go back, would you choose a different reading? Why?

4. What topic did you choose for your documented essay?
   • Why did you choose that topic?
   • Did you have any difficulties with this assignment? If so, what were they and how did you cope with them?
   • What went well for you on this assignment?
   • If you could go back, would you choose a different topic? Why?
5. What topic did you choose for the visual communication?
   • What options for delivery (e.g. brochure, website, poster) did you consider?
   • Why did you choose the option you did?
   • Did you have any difficulties with this assignment? If so, what were they and how did you cope with them?
   • What went well for you on this assignment?
   • If you could go back, would you choose a different topic? Why?

6. At the beginning of the semester, you said your goal(s) for English 150/250 were ____. Have you met those goals?

7. So far, how are the writing assignments going for you?
   • What is easy about them for you, if anything?
   • What is difficult about them for you, if anything?
   • What could you do differently for your next assignment?
   • Would you say some assignments have been easier/harder than others? How so?

8. How has your transition to the university gone so far?

9. Was your instructor willing to help you if you needed it?

10. Has being FG impacted your work in your English course?
APPENDIX J

FINAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – FALL 2012 STUDY

1. When we first talked, you may have identified money/finances and/or feeling “behind” as a possible challenge/challenges to your ability to complete your college degree. Do you find those items to be a challenge/challenges for you? What happened that helped you overcome this challenge, if anything?

2. When we first talked, you may have identified money/finances and/or feeling “behind” as a possible challenge/challenges to your ability to complete English 150/250. Do you find those items to be a challenge/challenges for you? What happened that helped you overcome this challenge, if anything?

3. Now that you have a full semester of college completed, how important is it to you to keep practicing your writing skills? Why or why not? How will keep practicing these skills?

4. Now that you have a full semester of college completed, how important is it to you to finish your college degree?

5. Now that you have a full semester of college completed, do you think the purpose of a college degree has changed for you?

6. Now that you have a full semester of college completed, do you think the purpose of English 150/250 has changed for you?

7. Now that you have a full semester of college completed, do you think your writing process has changed? If so, how? If not, why not, do you think?

8. Now that you have a full semester of college completed, do you think amount of support from your family and friends has changed?

9. Now that you have a full semester of college completed, has how you did homework change?

10. Have your expectations about college been met?

11. Do you feel your writing process has changed since the beginning of the semester? If so, how? If not, why not?
12. Now that you have been in an English class for a semester, what do you think of your writing?

13. Did your first semester English class meet your expectations for a first year college writing class? If so, how? If not, why not?

14. Do you think your first semester English class will help you get to your goal of earning a degree and/or getting a job? If so, how? If not, why not, do you think?

15. Do you think there are things that should be covered in your English class that weren’t covered? If so, what are they?

16. What was the best/most useful thing about your first semester English class?
## APPENDIX K

### FINAL CODES FOR TRANSCRIPTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perceptions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Student perceives or has perceived a situation in a certain way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation</td>
<td>P-E</td>
<td>Student has expectations for situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumption</td>
<td>P-A</td>
<td>Student makes assumptions about situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>P-P</td>
<td>Student feels fear, lost, alone, or confused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challenging Circumstances</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>CC-A</td>
<td>Student feels “behind” or less smart in comparison to classmates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>CC-F</td>
<td>Student is motivated by family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>CC-$</td>
<td>Student feels financial strain of college costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/Cultural</td>
<td>CC-SC</td>
<td>Student feels a “cultural mismatch” (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, and Johnson 100) with other students/classmates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>M-C</td>
<td>Student feels s/he must compete with someone else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>M-F</td>
<td>Student feels that family counts on him/her; feels that quitting or failing would disappoint family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>M-P</td>
<td>Student wants to learn for learning’s sake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Ethic</td>
<td>M-WE</td>
<td>Student wants to complete work because it was assigned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentalism</td>
<td>M-I</td>
<td>Student feels college and FYC are hoops to get to future, job, or better life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>M-$</td>
<td>Student is motivated by needing money or finances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habits of Mind</td>
<td>HM-</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity, Openness, Engagement</td>
<td>COE</td>
<td>Student displays curiosity about topic; student is open to new ways of thinking &amp; being in the world; student is invested &amp; involved in his/her learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity and Flexibility</td>
<td>CF</td>
<td>Student is able to use novel approaches; student experiences disequilibrium in a situation &amp; develops ways or solutions to cope or change situation; student is able to adapt to situations, expectations, or demands; student self-authors (Pizzolato 798)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence and Responsibility</td>
<td>PR</td>
<td>Student is able to sustain interest and attention to educational tasks; student is able to take ownership of one's actions and understand consequences; student develops self-efficacy or believes in his/her ability to succeed in specific situations (Chemers, Hu, and Garcia 55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognition</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Student is able to think about and reflect on their own learning processes; usually leads to self-efficacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX L

ENGLISH 150 ASSIGNMENT #2:
SHARING EXPERIENCES: LETTER-AS-ESSAY AND MAP

Date Due ________________
Peer Response (complete rough draft and map ready) ________________

“To be at all—to exist in any way—is to be somewhere, and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place...We are surrounded by places. We walk over and through them. We live in places, relate to others in them, die in them. Nothing we do is unplaced.”
(The Fate of Place, Edward Casey ix)

Using your visual representation of a place at ISU (your map, below) as brainstorming and as a guide, analyze an ISU campus place for its significance to you. Your goal here is to visually depict, describe, and explain the part of campus (perhaps a building, a portion of landscape, a piece of art, some plantings) for its meaning to you. What does it represent to you and how does this resonate with ISU campus history, particular location, and its educational mission? You will need to refer to information on the ISU website about the ISU mission, its status as a land grant university, the vision its founders had for it, and how the campus has been designed and developed over the years to reflect these.

In particular, the letter-as-essay example and discussion (pp. 112 – 117 CW) has the purpose of writing to share meaningful experiences with an audience. As John Trimbur, the author of The Call to Write says, “By re-creating experiences from the past and exploring their significance, [writers] identify the continuities and discontinuities in their own lives. Writing [letters]...is at least in part an act of self discovery ... (129). Be certain that you are positioning the campus place and how, as a place, it is influencing you right now, as the primary subject in this project.

As part of your planning, you will create a map reflecting your personal interactions, pathways, priorities, and strongest impressions right now at ISU. Consider your audience and what you are trying to accomplish: Why would you want to share this place and map with an audience? What might others gain from it? What do you gain from it? How can you select and organize information so that your intentions are met with this audience? How does your visual enhance the letter-as-essay?
Planning and Drafting
Use Writing Assignment (bullet) #4, page 117 in *The Call to Write*—a letter to a younger relative, a family member, or a friend not at ISU right now—as the basis of your context, purpose, and audience for this project. After making your map, consult pages 118 – 123 CW (Invention, Planning, Working Draft, Peer Commentary, and Revising for Chapter 4). Your text identifies several qualities of effective writing about experiences (in this case, you are writing about experience with *place*), from thinking about purpose, to selecting detail and thinking about arrangement of that material, to writing beginnings and endings of this paper. It is especially important to be clear about your purpose (why you have chosen to share *this* map, rendered in *this* particular way, and its representation of the place’s *meaning* to you?). Answer the “So what?” question, in other words.

Mapping your Place
All that we experience happens in some place. Creating maps of the places we inhabit can provide tangible representations of how places shape our perspectives and how our current perspectives shape how we see our places. Most importantly, maps of our places can provide a wealth of ideas for what to write about.

To help “invent” or brainstorm ideas for your paper, you need to draw a map of your current experience as a student at Iowa State University. Locations to place on your map might include:

- The place on campus or in Ames where you live
- Common routes of travel (to your classes, to lunch, to club meetings, etc.)
- Locations of people who are important in your life right now
- Favorite places for entertainment, studying, exploring, relaxing
- Places where memorable things happened
- Landmarks, bodies of water, physical features of the place

Make sure to consider the scope and scale of your map. Is all of campus or Ames important to you, or just certain places? Does your map extend past Lincoln Way, into the cemetery in the northwest corner of campus, or into the library basement? If it is necessary to map the interior of a place, you might consider including an “inset” map to show more detail. **Try to provide the most accurate representation of your campus place as YOU see it.**

Evaluation Criteria
At a minimum, your paper needs to satisfy these criteria. However, the grade is based not just on whether a feature is present or not, but on how well it has been integrated into your paper. Also see your ISUComm *Foundation Courses Student Guide, 2010 – 2011* about evaluation of individual projects.
Context
• Thoughtful and perceptive treatment of topic; original approach; scope sufficiently narrow
• Purpose for writing is clear (educate, entertain, persuade) and consistent throughout the paper. The "So what?" question is answered
• Clear sense of audience and consistent attention to audience’s needs. Introduction engages audience's interest

Substance
• Content is fully developed, relevant, and substantial; detail carefully chosen and specific

Organization
• Focuses on a precise, interesting and insightful point or thesis that guides development and organization
• Introduction provides overview of organization. Conclusion sums up key points
• Sequence follows a logical arrangement for this material appropriately organized into paragraphs. Relationship among ideas is clear; coherent; transitional devices used to guide reader

Style
• Expression is clear and concise. Good choices in use of dialogue, details, visuals
• Vocabulary is precise, vivid and appropriate word choice
• Conventions/Correctness: Writing is free from sentence-level errors and word choice errors

Delivery
• Consistency in typography, headings. Visuals appropriately integrated into text
• Map is understandable with useful labels
APPENDIX M

ENGLISH 250 ASSIGNMENT #4:
RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF A WRITTEN TEXT

A rhetorical analysis examines how a text works—how its words, its structure, its ideas connect—or don’t connect—with a given audience. Your analysis is to show how a text fulfills its purpose for a particular audience. Because this purpose is fairly open-ended, you’ll need to focus your analysis on certain kinds of elements the author uses to achieve his or her purpose.

To assist your readers in understanding your analysis, be sure to

• include a clear thesis statement and forecasting statements to guide the readers.
• explain the context (historical background, original audience, etc.) and its connection to the essay.
• analyze how the author’s specific writing choices help fulfill the author’s purpose.
• use quotes or paraphrase portions of the essay. If you write about the “example in the second paragraph,” the readers will not understand the reference.

Planning and Drafting
The following sequence of steps is designed to help you plan and organize your ideas before you write. Because not all writers plan their writing in the same way, you may want to modify the sequence to suit your own way of planning an essay. All of the points in the sequence, however, will help you produce an effective communication, so all points should be considered at some stage in your planning and writing.

1. Select a text from the choices given to you.
2. Select a strategy—context, substance, organization, style, delivery—that you wish to analyze in the text.
3. Review the text and questions on the handout, deciding which questions apply to the text. Steps 1 through 3 should allow you to focus your analysis and formulate a thesis statement.
4. Review the essay. Write what you think are the text’s purpose, audience, and context. The following questions should help you generate this information.
   • Context: Where and when did the essay originally appear? What historical background is important in defining this context? What does the background tell us about reader expectations and reading conventions?
   • Purpose: What does the writer want the readers to be able to do, think, feel, or decide after reading the text? What does the text enable readers to do while reading—compare facts, apply information, implement an action, etc.?
   • Audience: Who are the intended readers? What does the text imply about readers’ knowledge or feelings about the subject? What sort of relationship does the
writer establish with the readers?

5. Review the text and the appropriate questions on the handout. Use these guiding questions to help you generate ideas for your analysis.

6. Think about connections between the strategies you find in the text and the text’s Purpose and audience. Steps 4 through 6 should enable you to generate the content for your analysis. Step 6 should help you avoid simply summarizing the essay.

7. Think about your audience (instructor and classmates) and purpose for your analysis. Create a thesis sentence that provides an overview of your entire paper. Step 7 should help you decide the detail, words, sentences, and organization you want to use in your own writing. Although Step 7 will be useful to you before writing, it will also help you later as you revise and polish your analysis.

Now that you have prewriting notes, you are ready to write a rough draft.

**Evaluation Criteria**

The rhetorical analysis should

- focus on one of the strategies used by the writer (e.g., context, substance, organization, style, delivery, or a more defined area within one of these categories).
- analyze rather than summarize the essay (again, assume your reader has already read the essay).
- contain a well-supported thesis.
- contain paragraphs that enable readers to follow your ideas.
- have few, if any, errors in correctness.

**Questions to Help You Focus Your Rhetorical Analysis**

The following questions can help you focus your rhetorical analysis.

**Context**

1. What does selection of details tell you about the writer? What do these details tell you about the writer’s assumptions about the knowledge and experience of the readers?
2. How does the author convey the purpose of the text?

**Substance**

1. What kinds of evidence—facts, statistics, anecdotes, quotations)—does the author use? How does the selection of supporting evidence help fulfill the purpose of the text?
2. How does the writer use supporting evidence or examples to appeal to the audience? Are these appeals logical and rational? Emotional? A combination of the two?
Organization
1. How does the organization of the text help fulfill its purpose? For example, if the author puts the thesis in the concluding paragraph, how does that strategy help persuade readers?
2. What cueing devices, such as transitions or headings, does the author use to emphasize important points and to guide the reader through the essay?
3. Is the information clustered/segmented in a way meaningful to readers and compatible with purpose? Does the clustering of information follow established patterns (e.g., classification, description, comparison, problem/solution, others)?

Style
1. How does the language of the text help the text fulfill its purpose for the readers? How do the following uses of language influence the text?
   • concrete versus abstract words
   • level of technicality (Does the writer assume readers understand certain terms, or does the writer provide definitions of certain terms?)
   • formality (e.g., highly formal, use of slang, etc.)
2. How does the writer use language to establish a certain tone in the essay? Is the tone well suited to the audience and purpose?
3. What kinds of sentences does the writer use? Does the writer vary sentences for emphasis? How readable are the sentences? Does the writer use topic sentences or forecasting statements to guide readers? Does the writer include transitions to move smoothly from one sentence to the next?

Delivery
1. Are visuals (photos, cartoons, images, drawings, charts, maps, etc.) included in the essay. How does the inclusion or omissions of visuals add to or detract from the essay?
2. Do visual cues—headings, spacing, listing—help organize the text for the reader, or emphasize (or de-emphasize) certain points?
Today the average person in the United States is saturated with advertisements—on television, billboards, buses, and buildings and in magazines and newspapers. While advertisements are used for non-profit reason (to promote a charity or support political leaders, for instance. And, of course, they are used to sell commercial products. Think of all the products you use in a day: toothpaste, cereals, tissue paper, shampoo, blow dryers, jeans, t-shirts, soft drinks, bottled water, radios, computers. The list goes on and on. How many of these products do you absolutely need? How many of these products feature brand names? Why do people want Calvin Klein’s name on their underwear, "Levi's" on their back pocket, or a favorite team logo on their caps?

Because advertising works by appealing to viewers’ sometimes-unconscious values and beliefs in order to persuade us to buy or support something, it is crucial that today’s informed citizen carefully analyze the strategies used in advertisements. Through the critical analysis of all kinds of commercial communication, the informed citizen can address fundamental questions like these:

- What is the ad really trying to “sell”? This goes beyond the product or service being advertised to a set of values associated with a lifestyle or aspirations viewers are judged to hold in common. (Remember that you may or may not be a member of the actual target audience, so you will have to think beyond simply whether the ad works for you.)
- What visual and verbal strategies are used to convey the ad’s message?
- Are the message and its rhetorical means both honest and ethical?

The audience for this paper will be your teacher and classmates, and the purpose will be to explain how the ad helps to sell the product.

Planning/Prewriting
Locate a magazine ad that you would like to analyze. Colorful, full-page ads will be easier to describe. You might consider ads for vehicles, cosmetics, food, clothes, alcohol, or charities.

- Jot down notes that describe the ad.
- Since the customer’s eye goes immediately to the visuals, think about how the advertiser has used visuals: people or places in the ad, uses of color, choice of font, movement of customer’s eyes, etc.
• Examine the brand name (and its display), the product’s slogan, and other print information and analyze why this slogan was chosen.
• Consider the types of emotional appeals that are meant to entice the customer.
• Consider the overall impact of the ad and decide upon a thesis sentence for your upcoming paper.

Drafting
After these prewriting activities, you can judiciously decide which types of information you will use to support the claim within your 3-page paper. Be sure to orient your reader by identifying the name and date of the magazine, describing the ad itself, and providing a thesis sentence about the claim you are making about the ad. If you write, "The Mustang advertisement in Time sells freedom," your reader won’t know what you mean unless you describe the man standing alone by his car with a brown desert in the background. You will also need to explain how that image represents freedom in U.S. society. Remember to support your statements with specific details. If you state that the ads rely on the male model’s physical beauty, describe the physical characteristics such as wind-swept hair, muscular arms, deep-set eyes, etc.

Using Sources
Cite the source of your ad under the visual and on the bibliography.

Visual Design of Your Paper
• Within your paper, you could use headings or choose appropriate font sizes/styles to fit this type of ad.
• You might be able to find the ad on the Internet and import it into your paper.
• You could scan the ad into the paper and have your text flow around the ad. Scanners are available in the computer labs—just ask a lab monitor for assistance.
• You could take a digital photo of the ad and insert the photo in the paper.

Note: Placing the ad within the paper is more effective than placing it at the end. Including the ad does not mean that you can be less thorough in your commentary because showing the ad itself does not make your argument. You will still need to describe the ad and explain which parts of the ad are significant and why.

Evaluation Criteria for the Essay
The visual analysis should

• orient the reader by identifying the magazine, its date, the target audience, and purpose
• contain a clear and interesting thesis supported by specific, concrete details
• address the ethical dimensions of the ad
• provide sufficient description of and insightful comments about the ad being analyzed
• use secondary sources appropriately and cites these sources appropriately
• integrate text and visuals effectively
• avoid errors that distract reader’s attention
• cite the source of the ad and any other materials you used
APPENDIX O

ENGLISH 150 ASSIGNMENT #3:
EXPLORING A CAMPUS PROGRAM OR ORGANIZATION:
PUBLIC DOCUMENT AND PROFILE

Date Due _____________________
Peer Response (rough draft ready) _____________________

This project is your opportunity to explore an Iowa State University campus program or organization. It should help you clarify your thinking about the experiences you can have at Iowa State and the groups and places you may interact with using genre information from Chapters 6 and 7 in CW. Important to this project is an inquiring attitude and the ability to provide useful and relevant information efficiently. Unlike Assignment #2, in Assignment #3 you will not be relying solely on your personal experience as the primary material and support for your main points; you will be seeking outside background information to help you explore a campus program or organization.

Planning and Drafting
This assignment has two steps: examination of the available public documents and the firsthand collection of information to write a profile of the campus program or organization.

1) An analysis of the public documents pertaining to your university program or organization, including what the documents say about roles, goals, and the larger university within which the program or organization exists. As Trimbur notes, “Public documents can tell us a lot about the culture we're living in . . . public documents reveal how writing links individuals to social institutions” (CW 173).

2) A profile of the program or organization to deepen understanding of it. You will be working to provide a “particular and coherent sense of [the] subject” (CW 215) based on some observation and interaction with that place or organization.

The following are choices for you to write about:

- Art on Campus
- GSB (Government of the Student Body)
- Intramurals
- Lectures Program
- Leopold Center
- Live Green! Initiative
• Reiman Gardens
• University Archives

You will first examine the public documents (a website, a brochure, a mission statement) about a campus organization or program to determine how these documents present the people and the practices of that organization. Be sure to examine the mission statements of all of these examples. For instance, look at the information on the ISU website about the Live Green! Initiative, Art on Campus or Lectures programs, the university archives in Parks Library, or Reiman Gardens. What picture of these entities do their public documents provide of them?

Then visit a couple of the art pieces or one of the actual museums on campus (the Farm House, the Brunnier, the Christian Peterson Art Museum); take a tour of University Archives with several members of your class; investigate what the Live Green! Initiative is doing; go to one of the early Lectures, or look at the descriptions of several upcoming lectures and describe how they fit the mission of the program; or visit the Leopold Center or Reiman Gardens. Working from one or two dominant impressions, select and arrange your material following some of the ideas on pages 240 – 241 in CW. Naturally, you will want to think about how a visual (or visuals) can help you accomplish your goals with your audience.

Ask yourself these questions to help you explore your topic:
• Why would my audience be interested in reading this paper? How can I engage them?
• What details will help my audience understand my campus place or organization?
• What visuals would help my audience understand my campus place or organization?

Evaluation Criteria
Your paper needs to satisfy these criteria. The grade is based not just on whether a feature is present or not, but on how well it has been integrated into your paper. Also see your ISUComm Foundation Courses Student Guide, 2010 – 2011 about evaluation of individual projects.

Context
• Thoughtful and perceptive treatment of topic; original approach; scope sufficiently narrow
• Purpose for writing is clear (explore or inform) and consistent throughout the paper
• Clear sense of audience and consistent attention to audience’s needs
• Introduction engages audience's interest in knowing more about the topic or making use of information

Substance
• Content is fully developed, relevant, and substantial; detail carefully chosen and specific
• Includes a visual, if appropriate, to interest and engage readers

Organization
• Focuses on a precise, interesting and insightful point or thesis that guides development and organization; introduction provides overview of organization; conclusion sums up key points
• Sequence follows a logical arrangement for this material appropriately organized into paragraphs
• Relationship between ideas is clear; coherent; transitional devices used to guide reader

Style
• Expression is clear and concise; good choices in use of details and visuals
• Vocabulary is precise, vivid and appropriate word choice
• Conventions/Correctness: Writing is free from sentence-level errors and word choice errors

Delivery
• Consistency in typography, headings. Visuals are integrated within text
• Appearance of document adapted to needs and expectations of audience

Notice that this assignment includes a peer response activity one class period before the paper’s due date. This activity must be completed and your notes and comments from your partners turned in with your finished draft in order to receive full credit on this assignment.
APPENDIX P

ENGLISH 250 ASSIGNMENT #5 AND #6:
DOCUMENTED ESSAY AND POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

Assignment
Now that we have read and discussed issues related to a specific topic, you should
be ready to write a paper in which your goal is an argument of mediation. As a
class, we will brainstorm specific issues you might address in your paper.

Note: Even though this is the longest paper of the semester, you'll need to narrow
your focus. Even in a 5-page paper, you simply can't address a large, complex topic.
Remember, less is more when it comes to your topic.

You must use at least four sources for your essay. If you use sources on the Internet
or from texts we have not read, you must attach a photocopy of these materials to
your essay. **You may not use a paper or portion of a paper that you have
written for another course.**

Planning and Drafting
This assignment, more than any other this semester, requires careful planning. To a
large extent, the success of your paper will depend on how thoroughly and
diligently you carry out the writing process. Below are some suggestions for getting
started.

1. **Restrict your topic to an area of the subject that you can handle in a short
   paper.** State your topic in the form of a question and then decide whether or
   not you can answer it within the limited scope of your paper. If you tightly
   restrict your topic, you’ll find that you can construct a much more complete
   and satisfying paper.

2. **Once you’ve focused your topic, collect your evidence from readings in our
   class and possible other sources, and formulate a preliminary thesis.** As you
   write your draft or outline, test your thesis and, if necessary, modify it as
   you go.

As you can see, you need to complete several preliminary steps before you begin
writing in earnest. Between composing your rough draft and your final paper, you'll
need to keep several additional things in mind.
1. Consider your readers. How much do your readers know about your topic? Are they interested in it? Do they have strong opinions about it? Do not assume that your readers have read the sources you have read.

2. Keep in mind your purpose (e.g., to persuade your readers to accept your position and perhaps to act on it).

3. Interweave your sources into your paper to substantiate your thesis. Be careful not to rely exclusively on one source. Verify the accuracy of your information and quotations. Miscues can undermine the credibility of your thesis.

Documentation
In documenting your sources you may use the MLA, APA, or other style used in your discipline. MLA is used widely in the humanities and APA in the social sciences. For examples, see your handbook or articles written in your field.

Be careful not to plagiarize. If you use exact words from a source, be sure to use quotation marks, in-text citations, and a Works Cited page. Also, check to see that you haven't used too many quotations in the paper; paraphrase or summarize the information instead.

Evaluation Criteria
Since this is your last out-of-class essay (except for the revision paper), you will want to demonstrate that you can employ the strategies and techniques we've talked about in the course. Some of them are listed below:

- a focused topic with a thesis that goes beyond the points made in the essays we read
- relevant, concrete details that support your thesis
- a logical pattern of organization; transitions form one idea to the next that guide your reader through your material; unified
- paragraphs, language and tone adapted to your subject, purpose, and audience.
- a variety of sentence types (not short, choppy sentences)
- accurate, well-documented use of sources (including paraphrasing and quoting)
- few or no errors in correctness that distract the reader

Creating a PowerPoint Presentation based on Your Documented Essay of Mediation
Having written a documented essay in which you argued for a position of mediation, now you will synthesize and re-purpose your material into a
presentation that provides a general overview of these topics. Because this is a PowerPoint presentation, you will have a chance to combine written, oral, visual, and electronic media.

**The Assignment**
Since PowerPoint allows for a limited amount of text, you will need to incorporate visuals. Finally, you will develop a 5-7 minute oral presentation of your PowerPoint that you will deliver to the class.

**Purpose**
This assignment allows you to integrate written, oral, visual, and electronic elements, which will prepare you for many of the communication challenges you will meet throughout the rest of your academic career.

**Audience**
The immediate audience for these PowerPoint presentations will be your teacher and your classmates.

**Criteria for evaluation**
In many ways, this assignment is the summary of our work this semester. Therefore, all the criteria for clear and effective communication are in effect, but PowerPoint also has its own specific criteria as listed below:

**Research and collaboration**
Is your presentation informed by your research? Do you analyze your data? Is your preparation and practice evident in your presentation?

**The presentation**
- Do you clarify the context and purpose of your work and its various parts?
- Are the audience's needs addressed in both oral and visual formats?
- Is the visual display appealing and readable?
- Does the presentation balance verbal and visual information?
APPENDIX Q

ENGLISH 150 ASSIGNMENT #4:
ANALYZING CAMPUS BUILDING OR ART

In his book *The Campus as a Work of Art*, Thomas Gaines lists Iowa State University as one of the most beautiful campuses in the nation and says this about a well-designed and attractive campus in general: “the college campus has an ambience all its own . . . it is a place we want to go to, to be in, identify with; there is a there there” (x).

Iowa State Campus, 1893
http://www.public.iastate.edu/~isu150/history/campusimage.html

In Assignment #2, you described one place on campus that currently means a lot to you and how it connects to the overall ISU mission. In Assignment #3, you profiled a campus program and its placement and purpose at ISU. **to produce an analysis of a building or piece of art on the ISU campus.** In this assignment, you will be analyzing a part of campus you may have seen but do not know much about. Of course, you should choose a piece of art or building that you have not previously written about.

**Getting Started**

To choose a focus for this place-based analysis, first decide if you’d like to write about a piece of art or a building on campus. You may choose any public piece of art on campus or one of these buildings:
- Beardshear Hall
- Catt Hall
- Curtiss Hall
- Parks Library
- Landscape Architecture
- Morrill Hall

Your personal experience with your chosen piece of art or building is not necessary for this paper; however, you will need visit your art piece or campus building.
several times to fully analyze it, its placement on campus, and how it contributes to the ISU campus atmosphere.

**Planning and Drafting**

As you take notes on the building or artifact you're focusing on in Assignment #4, also think about the following:

- something about it that “grew on you,” or
- something about the piece that attracted your attention immediately, or
- something about it that you didn't notice at first or that came to mean something different to you the more you looked at it and thought about it,
- something particularly fitting about its placement in the campus landscape,
- or something that you find puzzling but interesting.

Finally, when you visit your chosen focus, take a photo or two to include in your paper, so your readers know specifically what you are looking at, analyzing, and commenting on. Include at least one image of the object or place. Integrate the image within your text rather than placing it at the beginning or end. Label the picture, and then refer to the picture when you first describe it and, if appropriate, elsewhere in your paper.

Keep these basics in mind about effective analytical and interpretive writing: it describes the subject and its parts in sufficient detail that the later analysis makes sense; it examines how the parts of the subject interact with each other; it uses some research; it uses a logical and easy-to-follow organization; it offers an interesting insight on the topic; the conclusion summarizes the whole (Chapters 8 and 9 CW). You will need to draw on the language in the several different sources available to you (see list of possibilities below):

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**Art on Campus**

- University Museums' Visual Literacy and Learning [http://www.museums.iastate.edu/VisualLiteracy1.htm](http://www.museums.iastate.edu/VisualLiteracy1.htm)
- Art on Campus Fact Sheets [http://www.museums.iastate.edu/AOCFactSheet.htm](http://www.museums.iastate.edu/AOCFactSheet.htm)
- Digital Art on Campus Projects [http://www.museums.iastate.edu/DAOC/home.html](http://www.museums.iastate.edu/DAOC/home.html)
The Buildings of Iowa State

- University Museums’ Visual Literacy and Learning http://www.museums.iastate.edu/VisualLiteracy1.htm
- From Prairie Sod to Campus Cornerstones: Building Our Campus History Exhibit http://www.lib.iastate.edu/spcl/exhibits/buildings/index.html
- History of Iowa State: Campus Buildings http://www.public.iastate.edu/~isu150/history/campus.html
- H. Summerfield Day’s The Iowa State University Campus and Its Buildings (also available on moodle in pdf form) http://www.lib.iastate.edu/spcl/exhibits/150/campus/campus.html

Evaluation Criteria
Your paper needs to satisfy these criteria. The grade is based not just on whether a feature is present or not, but *how well* it has been integrated into your paper. Also see your ISUComm *Foundation Courses Student Guide, 2010 – 2011* about evaluation of individual projects.

**Context**
- The lead paragraph introduces the audience to the place or feature (e.g., building, artwork) and reveals the interesting focus that emerged in your analysis and commentary

**Substance**
- The paper shows relevant insights about this part of the ISU landscape and is not simply a collection of descriptive facts about the place
- The paper contains carefully chosen, specific information about the place, its history, its campus context and is developed with sufficient detail

**Organization**
- The paper is organized clearly around the key points made about the place or feature, its history, and its campus context. Specifically, you introduce your thesis about the place or feature in the first paragraph and don’t just present a name and location
- The paper is appropriately organized into paragraphs and uses transitions to link one idea to the next

**Style**
- If the paper includes either direct quotations or paraphrases from the ISU websites or other sources, you provide in-text citation (no need for Works Cited in this paper)
- Problems with grammar and mechanics do not detract from the paper

**Delivery**
- Page layout makes the paper easy to read
APPENDIX R

ENGLISH 150 ASSIGNMENT #5:
DESIGNING, PRESENTING, AND REFLECTING ON VISUAL COMMUNICATION:
BROCHURE OR POSTER

Date Due ______________________
Peer Response (rough draft ready) ______________________

You will summarize the highlights of your exploration, informational, or analysis project (Assignment #3 or 4) by composing a form of visual communication such as a brochure or poster.

- The purpose of your visual communication is to summarize what you learned and to convey that understanding to others in a form that is visually interesting and appropriate for your topic.
- You will also write a short reflective paper about the design decisions you made and the rationales for them in the course of creating your visual communication.
- Finally, you will make a short presentation to the class in which you share your visual communication and the highlights of your decisions.

Remember the old adage about a picture being worth a thousand words? Andrea Lunsford, author of your Everyday Writer text, agrees and connects this to the communicating realities of the 21st century: “Creating a visual design is more likely than ever before to be part of your process of planning for a completed writing project. Visuals can help make a point more vividly and succinctly than words alone. In some cases, visuals may even be your primary text” (32 EW). The most important idea to keep in mind here is that visual communication, like verbal, is rhetorical: its effectiveness depends on a good fit between audience, purpose, and material. Excellent and important content can be totally undermined by a bad visual presentation of it. Similarly, snazzy visuals will not overcome a weak argument or a poor organizational plan.

Whether you choose a brochure or brochure will depend on the nature of your topic and of the information you need to relay to your audience. Posters depend more on visual text than written text, and on being read from a distance.

Planning and Drafting

This assignment sheet contains instructions for constructing a brochure. Constructing a poster also requires that you think carefully about placement, color, text, and typography. Whichever visual form you choose, keep track of the
decisions and rationales you make along the way in its construction (about text and graphic elements) as you will share these with us in a 5-minute presentation the week Assignment #5 is due. These will also be part of the reflective paper you write to accompany your visual communication.

Because everyone’s project will differ, it will be important that you refer to Chapter 4 in *The Everyday Writer*, to Chapter 19 in *The Call to Write*, and to your ISUComm *Student Guide*. These materials will help keep you on the right track with your visual communication.

**Brochure Design Principles**

The instructions and criteria below are for a brochure; together, in class, we will adapt some of these to fit a poster and a website.

Your brochure will present material from one of your earlier papers, developed as a two-sided, three-paneled brochure. Select the most relevant details to include and consider how the design of the brochure and visual support can highlight the most important information. I will ask you to bring examples of brochures from local business or campus organization so that you can see how panels complement one another.

Below is a representation of the two sides and six panels of a brochure:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Left inside</td>
<td>Middle inside</td>
<td>Right inside</td>
<td>Folded inside</td>
<td>Back outside</td>
<td>Front outside</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**First Side**

**Second Side**

When you design your brochure, you’ll need to keep in mind how people will unfold it so that the panels will work together.

- #6 needs to make sense by itself because it acts as a kind of title page; however, when the entire brochure is open, #6 also needs to work with #5 and #4.
- #1 needs to work with #4 because people will see them together when they turn back #6. When the entire brochure is open, #1 also needs to work with #2 and #3.
Once you have selected a topic, find a minimum of three visual images that will help readers understand and interpret the information in the brochure. Cut or crop the images neatly so they provide only information necessary for your purposes. Place them carefully in the brochure so that they are near the written text they support. Add brief, helpful captions. If you are working with color images, find a color photocopy machine to make your final copy.

The written material in a brochure is single-spaced. Choose two different type fonts appropriate to your subject and purpose: one for headings, perhaps, and another for the text.

**Documenting Your Sources**

It is important that direct quotations be brief and attributed in the text. Paraphrasing should also be acknowledged. Consult EW, pages 181 - 186 on summarizing, paraphrasing, and the use of quotations. Brochures normally do not include the extensive documentation required for academic writing; however, for this assignment, you must provide a reference page separate from the brochure and document all the sources you used, including visual images. For web sites, include the URLs, as shown in your EW.

**Evaluation Criteria for the Brochure**

At a minimum, your project needs to satisfy these criteria. However, the grade is based not just on whether a feature is present or not, but on how well it has been integrated into your project. Also see your ISUComm *Foundation Courses Student Guide, 2010 – 2011* about evaluation of individual projects.

**Context**

The front of the brochure (panel 6) identifies the subject, focus, and purpose of the brochure and engages the interest of likely readers.

**Substance**

The brochure focuses on the specific topic introduced and delivers relevant information and conclusions, rather than including material for its own sake.

The brochure contains sufficient material from a range of sources to support readers’ confidence.

**Organization**

The brochure panels are organized clearly around key points that support your focus.

Material on each panel highlights what is most important to your readers.

The brochure uses transitions and repetition of key ideas/images to hold and guide your readers’ attention.
Style
The brochure acknowledges the sources of text, images, and key ideas. Problems with grammar and mechanics do not distract or undermine your readers’ confidence.

Delivery
Layout, formatting, and type choice make the brochure easy to read. Design decisions take into account the various combinations of panels readers are likely to view. Images are clearly visible and appropriately placed.

Reflective Paper and Presentation
After you complete the visual communication, write a paper of about 350 words in which you explain the rhetorical decisions you made in the creation of your brochure or poster. Essentially, you will be explaining how you matched your content to the audience and purpose of your communication using elements of visual design. You will need to be specific here, using information from Chapters 3 and 4 in The Everyday Writer and from Chapter 19 in The Call to Write. Be sure to explain major decisions like the following: genre selection (brochure, poster, website); image selection (e.g., photographs, figures) and placement; color choices; typography choices; and amount and placement of text. Writing “I chose blue for the background because I thought it looked nice” is not a rhetorical decision. “I thought this was a cool picture” is not enough, unless you explain how this particular image fit your audience and purpose in your poster or brochure.

You will also make a five-minute presentation to the class in which you share your experience with your topic and your visual communication product. As you think back over your experience of gathering information for your exploration, informational report, or analysis and subsequently developing the brochure or poster, note the insights you’ve gained into the topic you investigated and into your design and selection process as you chose sources and visuals and developed them for specific audiences. In addition, share with us what you were most surprised/interested to discover about yourself as a communicator/designer.

Use the suggestions in Chapter 3 The Everyday Writer and Chapter 20 in The Call to Write to guide your planning of the presentation.

Provide visual support for your presentation audience
Use your brochure or poster itself as visual support for your presentation, but be sure that in the case of the brochure, it is projected in a large enough size that your
class can see it. This will probably mean using individual panels from the brochure and creating slides for your laptop or an overhead transparency. Simply passing the brochure around the room while you talk will not work: you can’t direct our attention to specific areas of interest (color, typography) this way, and the passing of the brochure will be a distraction.

**Evaluation Criteria for Presentation**

At a minimum, your presentation needs to satisfy these criteria. However, the grade is based not just on whether a feature is present or not, but on *how well* it has been integrated into your presentation. Also see your ISUComm *Foundation Courses Student Guide, 2010 – 2011* about evaluation of individual projects.

**Context**
Your introduction identifies the purpose and focus of your presentation and establishes its interest for you and for your audience.

**Substance**
The presentation focuses on your insights in and reflections on the area you investigated and on design and communication decisions.
The presentation delivers relevant information and conclusions rather than including material for its own sake.

**Organization**
The presentation is organized clearly around key points that support your focus.
The presentation uses transitions, reminders, and forecasting to guide your audience’s attention.

**Style**
Language choices are suited to your purpose, reflecting about earlier work to an audience of your peers.
Language choices sustain audience attention.

**Delivery**
Volume and rate of speaking allow audience to understand content.
Gestures, eye contact, expression and posture maintain audience interest and confidence.
You are not just reading your presentation.