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# EXPLORING STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE ENGLISH 101 PORTFOLIO SYSTEM AT SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY CARBONDALE

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EXPLORING STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE ENGLISH 101 PORTFOLIO SYSTEM AT  
SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY CARBONDALE

by

Stephen Eric Johnson

B.A., English, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2006

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Masters of Arts Degree

Department of English  
in the Graduate School  
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THESIS APPROVAL

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Stephen Eric Johnson

A Thesis Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
Masters of Arts  
in the field of English

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Stephen Eric Johnson, for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in MAJOR FIELD, presented on June 23, 2010, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: EXPLORING STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE ENGLISH 101 PORTFOLIO SYSTEM AT SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY CARBONDALE

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Ronda L. Dively

The benefits of using a portfolio system in a writing classroom, according to studies of in-class use starting over a decade ago include the following: allowing students to reflect upon their prior work, to revise their papers so as to demonstrate their improvements over the course of a semester, and also to organize their papers to create a sense of their writing ability. Since there has been little research conducted into the student experience as it relates to the use of portfolio systems, this document seeks to analyze that student experience, at least in the context of Southern Illinois University Carbondale's English 101 courses. Based on student observations from a questionnaire distributed to forty-three students from three separate English 101 classes in the Fall 2009, it appears that the portfolio system at SIUC is providing its intended benefits (as listed above), though there are a few minor issues that still bear consideration so as to better tailor SIUC's English 101 portfolio system to the needs of the local student body.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Writing portfolios have found widespread use in a variety of educational settings, including Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC). The writing program at SIUC makes use of a writing portfolio system as part of its English 101 common syllabus. Additionally, SIUC trains its Graduate Assistants (GAs) in portfolio assessment during the English Department's Pre-Semester Workshop (orientation) and additional classes. The common syllabus and the work in the PSW are all to ensure that there is a sufficient knowledge base and administrative support for GAs as they instruct students on how to get the most out of their writing portfolios. There are three major groups of individuals who are critical to making writing portfolios function effectively in the context of SIUC's English 101 classes: administrators, instructors, and students. In much of the research on the subject of writing portfolios, however, there has been a focus on administrative and instructional matters. College students and their perceptions have been mostly left out of the discussion. This study will hopefully shed light on what aspects of the portfolio system in place in SIUC's English 101 classes seem to be working and what aspects still exhibit room for improvement by focusing on the perspectives and experiences of students as they go through these classes. Beyond the insights this study may provide for SIUC's Writing Program, the results of this study could also have implications for educational institutions with similar demographics and that also make use of writing portfolios, or might do so in the future.

The Development and Recognition of Portfolios in Writing Instruction

Originally, the use of portfolios in education was "a concept taken from the world of architecture and the fine arts, where [a] portfolio constitutes an extensive curriculum vitae with which the artist or architect presents his or her work" (Meeus et al. 134). Soon, scholars with some exposure to the fine arts through creative writing and related fields who were also interested in the teaching of English began to adapt the concept of portfolios into the basic principles upon which writing portfolios were to be based. The earliest writing portfolios, according to Yancey and Weiser, editors of the volume *Situating Portfolios*, were a compromise solution to an ongoing dichotomy in writing assessment. On the one hand, students were required to write essays for their classes, but on the other hand, this method of writing greatly differed from the standardized tests that were (and to a large extent still are) in place to measure student writing ability. Writing portfolios were able to bridge this gap, when effectively implemented, by allowing students to write and then revise their essays, and then to select their best work, presenting this for evaluation. The use of writing portfolios would fulfill the needs for both education and evaluation at the same time, though writing portfolios took some time and much research before they became fairly widely accepted in the field of English education studies. Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff mention starting experiments in implementing portfolios in 1983 and the series of essays that they produced based upon those experiments seem to have gotten the trend started in earnest. However, there were many prior uses of writing portfolios before that time, albeit in far more limited forms and with less documentation of the results (Elbow and Belanoff 21-22).

Under the former system of standardized testing, before writing portfolios became more widespread in use, acts of writing for assessment purposes were simply a single

event on which all of one's prior training would (in theory) rest. This test would be a single essay, or set of essays, delivered in the context of an evaluation exam of some sort. But with the advent of the use of the writing portfolio in the assessment of student writing ability, according to Robert Leigh Davis in "The Lunar Light of Student Writing," this "notion of an autonomous text - language as a freestanding artifact, a verbal icon" was largely rejected by the implementation of writing portfolios in favor of insisting on "reading and writing in context" (35). By using writing portfolios as a tool for instruction, students were able to compile several different varieties of work into a single presentable format. By doing so they could present something substantial for evaluation, thus satisfying the needs of the educational community, while also allowing instructors more flexibility in their grading practices and more validity in the grades that they eventually assigned.

Grading validity had previously been accepted by administrators as coming only from standardized writing testing. According to Elbow and Belanoff, the initial efforts to implement writing portfolios as a method of assessment were an act of open rebellion against the standardized testing and impromptu essays required of students at the time in order to pass their writing requirements in college, the results of which could often openly conflict with the grade that they had received in their basic college writing courses. This battery of exams and impromptu essays was intended to provide a quick overview of a student's ability to present aptitude in understanding and writing in the English language in a highly controlled, artificial testing environment. Because of this artificiality, the results of the test had a tendency to differ at times from what had been previously seen in a student's language development. What Elbow and Belanoff were

looking for was a more reasonable and accurate alternative, one that would allow instructors to better evaluate the writing of their students without reliance upon the tight restrictions imposed by standardized exams.

Writing portfolios, as an alternative, were based on the realization that in order to effectively evaluate a student's writing ability, what was needed from students were "various kinds of writing done on various occasions...Portfolios, by providing different samples written under different conditions, finally went some way towards solving this problem [of discrepancy between English grades and actual performance on standardized essay exams] - giving us a better idea of what we were testing for" (25). To Elbow and Belanoff's way of thinking, the artificial confines of a single impromptu essay, or even a set of essays, set in an artificial testing situation and subject to standardized grading practices hardly represented the full writing range and ability of students. Not only did portfolios provide students with a more natural writing situation, but it also gave them more time in which to demonstrate their writing ability, being allowed to select and revise their best work for final presentation. A writing portfolio, to Elbow and Belanoff, is a collection of a student's best, polished writing, after students have been given the time necessary for reflection and revision (25). Writing portfolios allow students an opportunity to demonstrate their rhetorical abilities in a variety of writing situations. This process is completed with a reflective introduction at the start of the portfolio, allowing students to explain their reasoning, their process of development, and the writing situations that led to their finalized efforts.

In theory, portfolios in the writing classroom would provide an overall more clear and far-reaching perspective for educators on what students learned during the course of

compiling their portfolios, rather than letting students' writing performance be "skewed by the genre, the prompt, the student's mood, health, and so on," as Elbow and Belanoff feared (25). It would also help students to develop a broader range of writing skills through the reflection and revision required during the process of portfolio building. This focus of writing instruction on more natural settings is based on the truism, as pointed out by Huot and Williamson, "that what we choose to evaluate in our students' performances will determine what they attend to in their approach to learning" (48). With this train of reasoning, then, it made perfect sense, instead of teaching towards the narrow requirements of a single examination, that a writing portfolio would be an overall better tool for helping students develop critical writing experience and skill.

Given the potential benefits that writing portfolios could offer, and the break from the rigid requirements of standardized writing testing, it was only a matter of time before writing portfolios became accepted as "an ideal instrument to provide external accountability" (Callahan 57), and a part of the greater trend towards education reform that was active starting in the early part of the 90's, especially in high schools. Portfolios seemed to be perfect for getting the best of both worlds, being able to both let students develop in a more holistic fashion as writers, and also to allow their writing to be assessed in an equally holistic fashion. Using writing portfolios also let school districts manage the various tasks required of them, including the placement and graduation requirements of students, evaluation and reward of teachers and administrators, the allocation of resources, and school certification (Murphy 72). However, some dangers constantly beset the use of writing portfolios, mostly from the administrative end of education. Because of the needs of the districts and state boards of education for the sake

of demonstrable, easily reproducible evaluation statistics, according to Sandra Murphy in "Teachers and Students: Reclaiming Assessment Via Portfolios," "there is pressure to standardize portfolios because traditional statistical kinds of reliability appear easier to achieve when students are asked to submit the same sorts of assignments completed under the same sorts of conditions" (73). As portfolios become a part of school systems, this tendency at both high schools and college writing courses to try and "rein in" the opportunities for reflection that writing portfolios represent can be a serious problem. The worst result of this reduction of reflection opportunities is that it can lead to stifling the voice of students as a part of their education, neglecting their part in the education process. Nevertheless, many high schools successfully implement portfolios as a part of their teaching process.

Going beyond the high school and undergraduate levels of education, writing portfolios have application as a life skill at all levels of institutionalized education and beyond. According to Janice M. Heiges, author of "Portfolio For Doctoral Candidacy: A Veritable Alternative," writing portfolios have the following major advantages as part of an educational setting: they are an established form of national assessment at this time, up to and including assessment at the doctoral level; portfolios tend to be more flexible and comprehensive in their makeup than most other forms of testing, allowing more freedom for those who use them, and more insightful data for those who assess them; and the reflective paper that makes the focal point of most writing portfolios provides an inclusive review of all prior coursework, allowing a thorough picture of the competency of any aspiring learner for those who review the portfolio (129).

All of these advantages are interconnected. As a form of writing assessment,

writing portfolios provide students with more time over to reflect upon their prior writing efforts, rather than only focusing upon the writing itself. Using writing portfolios means that the finished products that students eventually produce for their portfolios have gone through often extensive revisions. Thanks to the flexibility of choice potentially offered by writing portfolios, the papers included as a part of portfolios also tend to be those works that students care the most about, and have spent the most time polishing – the students’ very best efforts, in genres and styles that they feel represent their ability to perform at their writing peak. The reflective introduction to a writing portfolio has several purposes, including (but not necessarily limited to) acting as a guide to readers of the portfolio, letting these readers get a sense of the context in which these acts of writing took place, and also offering students an additional opportunity to reflect upon what choices they made while writing, and why they made them. Thus, writing portfolios can satisfy the needs of both worlds, administrative and educational, by allowing students a chance to turn in well-polished, carefully-chosen papers with a clear, defining purpose behind their placement in the writing portfolio, while also allowing students a chance to engage in metacognition. Writing portfolios give students an opportunity to recognize the qualities of their writing style, and by recognizing them, allows these students a chance to make decisions on how they want to present their writing, rather than simply proceeding in lockstep fashion through their education without considering the overall meaning behind their actions. The improvement in student writing in a measurable fashion and additional opportunities for students to use different genres and styles of writing, in turn, satisfies the needs of administrators for clearly-identifiable improvements in student writing.

Writing portfolios are not a passing phenomenon, nor are they limited to a single developmental or educational stage. In fact, their use is expanding, as is very evident from a 2003 study that indicated that 89% of schools, colleges, and departments of education used some form of portfolio system for assessment purposes (Heiges 129). They are a potential part of anyone's educational experience, with valid use at all levels and in all circumstances of a student's development. After all the prior successful uses of portfolios in other settings, educators would be remiss in neglecting to pay close attention to their importance, and also to their proper implementation.

### *The Importance of the Student Perspective*

As has been mentioned, there has been extensive research into the effectiveness of writing portfolios in preparing students and aiding them in improving their writing ability. Collectively, this research has indicated that portfolios are, when implemented effectively, a positive learning experience for students. At this point, research into writing "portfolios...focus[es] not on portfolios' legitimacy, but rather on issues both pragmatic and theoretical, and frequently on learning" (Yancey and Weiser 2). However, though student opportunities for reflection and improvement are a central point of using writing portfolios, the student perspective in the implementation of writing portfolios has only just barely been scratched. This lack of data on student perceptions creates a potential gap in information that can lead over time to the improper use of writing portfolios. SIUC, like many universities, makes extensive use of writing portfolios in teaching English Composition. How students perceive these portfolios as being implemented at SIUC serves as a possible glimpse into potential points of interest or concern about student perceptions at other institutions as well. As Catharine Lucas

cautioned in her assessment of writing portfolios, the implementation of writing portfolios needs to be continually reassessed at the institutions that use them, so as to avoid "the weakening of effect through careless imitation, the failure of research to validate the pedagogy, and the co-option by large-scale external testing programs" (Yancey and Weiser 3).

Obviously, despite prior successes in other locations, there is still a constant need for evaluation at the local level to ensure that these weaknesses mentioned by Lucas do not overcome the strengths inherent in the use of writing portfolios. Student perceptions of writing portfolio systems are a potentially key point for review and improvement because they are a neglected area of study in efforts to improve the implementation of portfolio systems. The questions of what SIUC's English 101 students experienced while composing and then revising their essays for compilation into their writing portfolios, and if they were understanding the purposes behind what they were doing, are of great interest in determining how well portfolios are being implemented. It is these questions that will be the focus of this study, and most especially on student perspectives, to see what their experiences are in the practical setting of their writing classrooms. This study is a part of the general aim of reviewing and reassessing the use of writing portfolios in SIUC's English 101 classes, with the intention of gaining a better idea of how to overcome their weaknesses, and better capitalize upon their strengths.

The importance of evaluating the student perspective is illustrated by the words of one researcher who had observed weaknesses that sometimes occur in the implementation of writing portfolios, and noted that critics of writing portfolios tended to "focus on the limited time to accomplish the writing, the artificiality of the topics and

assignments, and the restricted genres assessed” (Gearhardt *Whose Work Is It?* 1). These observations from Gearhardt and other critics bring up some of the most basic questions that accompany any course of instruction, including those that are a part of the portfolio system used in SIUC's English 101 classes. Among these questions are some of the following: What prior research has been done on implementing writing portfolios at various institutions? What benefits are derived from requiring students to prepare a writing portfolio? And are those reasons for having students prepare writing portfolios being met? These and other questions will be addressed by this study.

The questions of what prior research has been done on writing portfolios and what benefits derive from their use and proper implementation are critical to providing validity to the practice as a whole. These questions have been addressed in part in this Introduction, and will be further addressed in the Literature review. In the Literature Review, two school districts that unsuccessfully implemented writing portfolios, and one that successfully implemented them, will be reviewed, to illustrate and then analyze the points of weakness that can result in less effective use of writing portfolios, as well as the potential benefits that come from their proper implementation. This analysis will lead to answering the question of if the intended purposes of writing portfolios are being met, and what conditions are necessary for these purposes to be accomplished, with ample demonstrations from real-world scenarios.

Besides these questions, this study will primarily explore the perceptions students at SIUC have of the writing portfolio system in place there, to determine what aspects of writing portfolios are being successfully implemented, and what aspects are being neglected. This study should provide a possible window into ways to better implement

writing portfolios not only at SIUC, but at other institutions that make use of them. As students are the ones who must make use of writing portfolios, their comprehension of and experiences regarding their use can be very insightful on how well writing portfolios are being implemented.

To overview the chapters that follow in this study, the Literature Review chapter will provide an overview of the previous research explaining the value of using writing portfolios and the importance of implementing them correctly. It will then will describe how SIUC implements its writing portfolio system in its English 101 classes, to provide a context for the study that follows. The Methodology chapter will describe the survey methodology used to analyze student perceptions of writing portfolios at SIUC, while the Results section will provide responses from students who participated in the study. These responses will be analyzed in some detail in the Discussion and Conclusions chapter, along with their potential implications, and possible areas of further study. The subject of student perceptions in writing portfolios is an important area of study, because, considering the time and effort it takes to effectively implement a writing portfolio into an educational system, it is a good idea to ensure that as few opportunities for potential problems crop up as possible.

When students are actively engaged in the process of composing writing portfolios, they have an immense opportunity to engage in the sort of self-reflection and metacognition that are the greatest strengths of writing portfolios. However, getting students to tap into this source of great possible strength requires that writing portfolios be implemented effectively, both on an administrative level, and in the classroom. When writing portfolios are implemented effectively, they can provide an excellent opportunity

for reflection. When they are implemented improperly, either through poor applications of attention to student needs, training of instructors, or administrative oversight, then writing portfolios can be more of a chore than a benefit, just another assignment to be completed like so many others, and little different from the standardized testing that they were intended to replace.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

As has been pointed out in the previous chapter, writing portfolios have found wide acceptance among many learning institutions at all levels of education, though primarily their use has centered on the high school and college levels. No matter where they are implemented, however, portfolios require a great deal of careful balancing between the needs of administrators, instructors, and students in order to implement them effectively. On the administrative side, there is a strong push for greater standardization in order to make the recording of results easier, to ensure common departmental goals, and to attempt to make students stretch into areas of education that they might otherwise avoid, among other reasons. But if there is too much standardization, then the creativity of instructors and students can be easily stifled. On the other hand, instructors and students often seek more creative freedom – instructors for course content and students for what they will write. If this creative freedom goes too far, however, then it can result in a lack of focus that might undermine the educational objectives of a class (such as having students develop writing skills in a variety of genres and rhetorical situations). This lack of focus resulting from creative freedom can be especially problematic, given the time constraints that exist in a classroom setting. Thus, effectively implementing writing portfolios is a careful balancing act in order to draw out the advantages of writing portfolios while minimizing their flaws. Examples of how writing portfolios have been implemented, with greater and lesser success, can be found below. Additionally, this Literature Review will describe in detail the rationales behind using writing portfolios as a part of teaching. It will also explore the metacognitive value inherent in the use of

writing portfolios as well as the other skills that can be learned from using a portfolio system. Finally, this chapter will explore how SIUC makes use of writing portfolios in its English 101 classes, relevant to the ideals mentioned in earlier sections.

To clearly see if writing portfolios are being used to their best advantage in a given educational setting, it must be understood what using portfolios as a form of writing assessment really is all about. According to Heiges, instructors need to be aware that writing portfolios are not a simple rehash of old essays, nor an untested fad, nor a personal whim that allows those who use them to be 'different,' or even a way to get out of a comprehensive exam. On the other hand, portfolios are a great many things, including an opportunity to write a reflective essay that organizes prior writings and demonstrates a students' understanding and application of the theories in a course; an opportunity to review and revise former works, to better ensure that their intended lessons are fully absorbed and to allow new insights to be gained; a way to better observe and measure the learning process of students (Heiges 130-131). In the midst of all of these aspects of the process of crafting writing portfolios, however, students must be engaged in the process, and it is critical to keep their interest, and ensure their understanding. As Grosvenor, et al. said well in *Student Portfolios*, a writing portfolio, with “student involvement,” comes alive, becoming a constantly evolving work that “show[s] process, real works in process, key learning moments, progress over time, failed attempts, special efforts, and, of course, pieces of which the students [are] especially proud” until, eventually, “students themselves [define] the uses and purposes of the portfolio” (14). The writing portfolios of actively-involved students are no longer static, dead weights of pages, but instead become a living representation of the progress of a student’s

development as a writer.

So, to sum up these essential elements of the portfolio process – called a process, because, as Wiener and Cohen point out, “it is an ongoing process of conferences, collaborations, and dialogues” (5) – an effective portfolio has the following features: they are collected in a semipermanent holder, a physical folder or portfolio to keep the pieces within safe and organized; the products within are, in part, a result of constant collaboration between student and teacher, and between students and their peers, but mostly they demonstrate a student’s ownership and reflection of a piece; the works included in the final portfolio should reflect established criteria for assessment, all aimed and organized towards the purpose of fulfilling a specific task as determined by the needs of a particular class; items included in portfolios are a means for students to share their own feelings and interests through the medium of the portfolio, while still conforming to the required criteria for inclusion; finally, portfolios demonstrate a student’s ability to use critical reading, writing, and reflection skills, as well as the course of their learning over the period of time during which the portfolio is collected (4-5). All of these features, however, depend on writing portfolios being effectively implemented in a writing program, in order to best make use of their strengths, especially metacognition, while avoiding their weaknesses.

#### *Examples of Flawed and Successful Portfolio Implementation*

Though writing portfolios have great strengths when implemented effectively, they can also have significant weaknesses when they are implemented improperly, as will be demonstrated below through the studies performed in the Kentucky school system, and to a lesser degree in the Vermont school system. However, the Vermont portfolio

system serves more as an example of a system in transition than a fully improperly implemented portfolio system. Improper implementation often occurs when writing portfolios are made a part of the battery of standardized testing that take place in many schools. These standardized writing portfolios, especially those mentioned by Susan Callahan in "Kentucky's State-Mandated Writing Portfolios and Teacher Accountability," were theoretically designed to allow students to compile and provide "evidence of those writing elements deemed most important in effective communication" by the state board of education (59). The program of using writing portfolios in Kentucky school districts was set up so that students would be able to write various pieces of work over the course of their time in high school, and then revise and compile their best work into a final portfolio that would be used for assessing their writing ability around graduation time.

Unfortunately, these initial efforts to implement writing portfolios to measure student writing ability over the course of their time in high school were largely forced upon English teachers to organize. Such fields as business, social studies, and the sciences often had ineffective, uninformed implementation, without any sort of cooperation or coordination through the school administrations (Callahan 61). Effectively using writing portfolios in other fields, as well as in English classes, requires teachers to be well-trained, and well-informed about the options and possibilities available to them, and how best to motivate and instruct students on how to best make use of their writing portfolios, and thus develop as writers. In too many cases, school districts "[failed] to engage teachers in the kinds of study, investigation, and experimentation required to undertake the multiple challenges" of effectively using writing portfolios as a learning experience for students, and instead these instructors were

put into "'training' programs designed only to expand particular sets of pedagogical practices and skills" (73).

Because of this lack of training, few English teachers knew exactly how to implement writing portfolios in their classes, or how to make assignments that would best provide students with opportunities to write in a range of genres. Additionally, coordination with other teachers was left to the individual teachers did not happen at all, or only minimally, and almost never outside of the English programs of each high school. This was likely the result of insufficient administrative assistance and poor training.

Besides these problems of implementation and training, students involved in this program of using standardized writing portfolios seldom had any motivation to complete the assignment, except in cursory form, because they seldom saw the portfolios used outside of their English classes. Naturally, this lack of writing portfolios in use outside of their English classes led many students to conclude that these writing portfolios were of little use except as another form of standardized testing, and many complained that "doing the portfolio required time they needed for their 'real work' and for writing college applications" (Callahan 65-66). It can be seen from this and other attempts to use writing portfolios that it is a daunting task, not lightly entered into. Using writing portfolios successfully requires extensive "programs which prepare professionals to play informed and active roles in defining the enterprise of education and the work of teaching, and an educational climate in which teacher-professionals not only consume knowledge, but generate knowledge and assess the knowledge claimed by others" (Murphy 73).

A similar series of studies was conducted over several years in Vermont, which started using statewide portfolio assessment systems in 1988. This series of studies was

run from the years 1990 to 1993, with numerous interim reports tracking changes from the start to the finish of the study of the portfolio assessment program, and investigating the use of these portfolios in grades four through eight. These studies used data collected from the experiences of the principals and teachers who used portfolios in their classes, the results derived from a questionnaire intended to track the performance of portfolio assessment in real-life settings as these educators perceived it.

According to the results of these surveys in the first of these reports, the one covering the years 1991 to 1992 (the pilot year of the study, 1990, saw minimal returns of its questionnaires, and so the data available is only cursory), unlike the lack of training found in the above-mentioned Kentucky school systems, essentially all of the instructors who responded to the surveys indicated that they had received formal, state-sponsored training in the proper implementation of the portfolio system. Nevertheless, many teachers still indicated uncertainty on some of the specifics required of them while instructing their students. In this initial study, 70% of responding principals indicated that their teachers had a mixed reaction (25), apparently indicating difficulties in setting up the program and getting sufficient training and administrative support. On the other hand, 80% of responding teachers indicated that their use of portfolios in their classes had changed the performance of their students in a positive fashion (43). The reasons for these positive results were varied, but the usual reasons given were that, for teachers, they felt that they had more control over how to run their classes than they had experienced without using portfolios in their writing classes, while students had more opportunities than they had in more traditional writing classes for review and revision, that greatly enhanced their performance, especially the performance of the lowest-achieving students

(44-45). Despite the forced, standardized nature of the writing portfolios implemented in the Vermont school districts, the positive benefits of using writing portfolios (as well as other forms of portfolios in other classes, especially math) were quickly felt after they were implemented.

According to the results of succeeding years, as compiled by Koretz et al., that include an interim report in 1992, another covering the years 1992 to 1993, and a final one in 1993, besides a concluding set of remarks reviewing all the preceding years' assessments (published in August of 1994), it was determined by the researchers conducting the study that the advantages mentioned in the initial study appreciably increased, and portfolios were likely to be implemented in all subjects, and not just math and writing. However, despite this generally positive response to the use of portfolios as a form of assessment, where most principals reported improvements in student learning (Koretz *Evolution* 32), writing portfolios specifically showed less improvement than was found in the implementation of math portfolios (45). In addition, teachers in the study felt "that the emphasis on reliable scoring is misguided and perverts the original purpose of portfolios as a tool for assessing an individual student's growth" (19), and that there were excessive time burdens placed upon them (Koretz *Evolution* 21). With the passing of time and additional training, however, teachers became familiar with the portfolio system as it was implemented in the Vermont school system. Eventually about half of the teachers indicated that they found the process growing somewhat easier, indicating that familiarity, if also seeming to breed additional contempt, was also aiding teachers in getting somewhat better at implementing these portfolios in their classes. Additional responses from principals corroborate this finding, referring to the satisfaction of their

students and the opinions they had heard from the teachers over which they administered (21-22).

As this example in the case of Vermont's state school system illustrates, while the task of implementing portfolios as a form of standardized writing assessment can be a challenging one, and requires significant effort and training to make it possible, it is nevertheless possible. However, the extensive standardization and mandates from school boards in the cases of both Kentucky and Vermont seem to have placed undue strain on teachers, adding additional work to the curriculums of the classes in which they were used, without providing additional time in which to do them. Still, levels of support from the administration, in the form of training and release time workshops, helped to provide teachers with the training that they needed (Koretz *Evolution* 28-29). Even with this success from an administrative perspective – since most principals of Vermont school districts were pleased with the results – most teachers felt that they were being bullied into using the system foisted upon them, and that it was not tracking what it was supposed to record (19). In other words, the system seemed to be working, but not as well as it could have, and only with a large amount of effort and maintenance on the part of the school system. In fact, forcing the issue could be detrimental overall to the use of portfolios. As Callahan concluded in her article, "if the portfolio remains...an instrument used to assign a numerical score...then it may succeed in requiring teachers to assign more writing and yet fail as an authentic test of authentic writing" (67). Though the use of portfolios itself seems to have been quite positively received by both instructors and students (Koretz *Evolution* 21-22) implementing them as a form of standardized writing assessment seems to be counterproductive.

In contrast to these initial attempts at implementing writing portfolios on a large scale, several school districts in California were able to successfully implement a series of portfolio programs in high schools on a similar or even larger scale than had been attempted in Kentucky and Vermont. These portfolio systems allowed instructors to demonstrate their ability to act as professionals in their fields of specialty. This involvement of instructors resulted, in large part, from the California Learning Assessment System's policy of "'persuasion:' an approach very different from that taken in states where sanctions are imposed on staff in schools" (Murphy 79). This system of implementing portfolios in classrooms in high schools throughout the region worked in large part because it provided instructors with sufficient information to make an informed decision on the importance of using writing portfolios in their classes, and then allowed them to take time to collaborate and develop an effective "framework for...assessment. The framework was specified at the level of broad dimensions, instead of the content or piece level. That is...students and teachers would build sets of evidence to demonstrate students' accomplishments in selected dimensions of learning" (79). Instructors were involved in actively designing and arranging these portfolios across their high school curriculums, while students soon became interested in using these portfolios to their best advantage, now that they were applicable in more than a single course setting. This increase in the emphasis placed on writing portfolios provided students with ample incentive to start improving their writing ability, as well as the freedom to make creative, productive decisions in the eventual contents of these writing assessment portfolios. As Murphy said in conclusion: "The essence of educational reform is the enhancement of both student and teacher growth" (88), and as the California school system, in addition to

several other school systems, managed to expand itself beyond the mandated assessment forms normally associated with school curriculums, they were able to best meet the needs of their students in developing their writing abilities through the use of writing portfolios.

From these specific examples, the advantages of writing portfolios – their allowance for student reflection, naturalness of style and purpose, and use as a source of valid data on the writing progress of students – are clearly visible. However, in the former examples in Kentucky and Vermont, the potential weaknesses of portfolio systems can also be seen, mostly stemming from failures to implement them effectively. For portfolios to work effectively, they must be the dominant system, used within an entire educational system, rather than alongside additional methods of teaching and assessment. Otherwise the different methods of teaching and assessment will conflict.

Administrators, teachers, and students must all be made aware of the importance of using portfolios, and then work cooperatively to create the natural writing settings that make writing portfolios so effective. If there is a lack of proper support for portfolio systems, such as if they are simply imposed upon teachers without their input into the system, instructors are insufficiently trained, or if administrative support is lacking, then students will generally realize that something is amiss, and cease to take their portfolios seriously, undermining the entire system (Callahan 65-66). However, when they are implemented effectively, writing portfolios become an immensely useful resource for instructors in helping students engage in metacognition, critically analyzing their writing processes, and how best to improve them.

### *The Rationales Behind Writing Portfolios in Teaching*

Integrating a portfolio system into any class is a difficult proposition. According to Schulman (quoted by Wetzel and Strudler), “Portfolios done seriously take a long time. They are hard to do” (233). This difficulty stems from the many and various elements that must go into a successful writing portfolio system being applied in an appropriate fashion by both instructors and administrators – not just implementing portfolios, but ensuring that they are adequately supported as instructors plan out their curriculums for each semester. In order for writing portfolios to be implemented effectively, according to Richlin and Manning, instructors cannot do so haphazardly, but must instead be able to, first, identify their values and goals in using a writing portfolio, and the essential developmental information that will allow these goals to be best implemented in the classroom (5). It requires a massive amount of time, effort, planning, organization, and careful training, both of students and of the instructors who will share them with students, in order to implement writing portfolios.

These demands, of course, lead a thoughtful observer of the process to consider if writing portfolios are worth all the hassle, and what sorts of benefits are gained from their effective implementation. The immediate answer to this inquiry is given simply by Tim O’Shei, namely, that “adding portfolios to your curriculum can not only help students reflect on their learning, but also arm you [teachers and administrators] with solid evidence of the successes of your [learning] program” (94). A major focus of using writing portfolios should be on providing students with opportunities to learn and develop as writers, and this is its intended primary benefit. However, ironically, though there are

many studies indicating how effective writing portfolios are in accomplishing the task of aiding students in their process of development as writers, there is also a lack of data that is intended to gauge the reactions of students to the use of writing portfolios, or if they perceive how the training they are supposed to be receiving is taking effect. Before such studies can be effectively pursued, of course, it is important to consider what students are supposed to take away from their writing portfolio experience, to determine if that is, indeed, what they are “getting” from their writing classes that implement writing portfolios.

Graves and Sunstein effectively provide a basic description of what students are intended to do with writing portfolios, namely, that “a portfolio student selects his or her best work during [a period of time], and at term’s end explains the choices” (xi). As it has been said many times by numerous experts on the subject, “[p]ortfolio assessment relies on samples of student writing that reflect what a student can do in response to a variety of assignments” (Bernhardt 333), taking the responses of students to a variety of writing situations, and then allowing them revision opportunities. This quote provides the most basic rationale behind using a writing portfolio system in a class: to provide students with an opportunity to select, revise and showcase their best work over the course of a particular given period of time, and then to provide an introductory essay to the portfolio so that they can reflect upon the meaning behind the inclusion of each writing artifact so chosen. This opportunity allows students to have their writing ability assessed on the basis of what they chose to include after they have had time to revise it for enhanced quality, and their demonstrated reasoning behind these decisions. However, this is only

the start of the reasoning behind using writing portfolios to teach writing. Writing portfolios are able to do far more than just allow students to showcase their best work. And students, naturally, need to be engaged in the process at all points.

When designing a portfolio evaluation system for a class, “[t]he purpose of the portfolio drives the content” (Niguidula 45). In order for both instructors and students to have a clear vision of what is expected from them, attention must be paid to the following principles: vision, or what will be collected; purpose, or why these artifacts are being collected; audience, or who will read the portfolio; assessment, or who will grade the portfolio, and what standard will be used in doing so; and logistics, or how a portfolio will be integrated into a given classroom setting (45, sidebar), with principles of observation and measurement of student development essential at each stage of the development of the writing portfolio. Observing and measuring the progress of students “to demonstrate and assess student learning and thus to map teaching and learning outcomes in accordance with each institution’s established principles of learning” (Jafari 39) is, of course, a major part of writing portfolios, especially in determining a student’s placement in later classes. It is often stated by researchers into writing proficiency that perhaps one of “the most troublesome problems in writing research is that there is no one adequate definition of writing competence” (Mosenthal 217), and yet writing portfolios provide an illuminating collection of artifacts that make such assessment in a variety of genres far more possible than before.

Besides these aspects of using writing portfolios, according to Applebee, referencing the work of Janet Emig, one important part of using writing portfolios successfully is ensuring that acts of writing are seen “no longer as simple processes of

transcription and decoding but, rather, as extended processes of composition and comprehension, during which the understandings of readers and writers develop and change" (687). Writing portfolios are, perhaps, one of the only ways that can truly assess this multilevel understanding of student writing processes. Gearhart, et al. point this element of writing portfolios out with the admission, after extensive research, "that the multiple samples contained within a portfolio provide a more comprehensive basis for judging writing quality" than is found in other methods of evaluation, and that writing portfolios "may provide a context for anchoring judgments" that cannot be found in simple, single essay grading (38). This assessment of the value of writing portfolios in classrooms is corroborated by Fusco, Quinn, and Hauck. These authors list several of the key benefits to using the "multiple sources for reporting information when gathering assessment data" as are found in writing portfolios, such as: ongoing performance evaluation; assessment of a broad scope of conceptual knowledge and range of skills, as well as performance in those various skills; encouragement of more student-centered instruction; more consistency in reporting of results data; and more student involvement (v).

#### *Metacognition – The Most Vital Portfolio Component*

As mentioned before, portfolios are an excellent way to encourage students to reflect on their prior writing experiences, to glean them for new insights. Reflection is an essential skill, since, according to Graves, "students need to learn to evaluate their own work" if they are to develop as writers (85). This development can only come about through learning the rules of writing in various settings, and this learning can only take place as students practice metacognition, reviewing their own works. Though, as Zellers

and Mudrey acknowledge, writing “[p]ortfolios involve more work, both for the instructor and for the student” (420), at the same time they are an important opportunity for students to develop their metacognitive knowledge, or, as Flavell states, "knowledge and beliefs about what factors or variables act and interact in what ways to affect the course and outcomes of cognitive enterprises" (Zellers and Mudrey 421). Writing portfolios can do this because they, like all portfolios, are a permanent artifact, an accumulation of an entire period of time, compiled into a single form. Students involved in such a process of revision and compilation are engaged in a process of observing their own development firsthand, allowing them ample time and opportunity for reflection and metacognition. It can truly be said of portfolios, then, that

[w]ork carries over from class to class, year to year. Work can be stored away for future reference or can be kept close by for continued reflection. Ideas from a previous course or independent work can take on unexpected significance in a future context. From time to time, stepping back and looking over a body of work for a show or presentation can reveal new connections and directions that may not have been apparent before. (Greenberg 28)

It is this station of permanence that portfolios have that makes metacognition among students become a greater likelihood (rather than just in the short-term experience of a single classroom experience). Because of the effort put into a writing portfolio, and the requirements of review and reflection to accomplish the task well, students have a key opportunity before them to investigate the way that they write, and then to review the lessons learned there in times to come. Reflection is a critical part of any writing portfolio, and time must be devoted from other classroom activities to giving students as much opportunity as possible to engage in the essential activity of metacognition (Wetzel and Strudler 233).

As a part of this process of reflection on writing processes, then, attention must shift towards more essential activities that are needed for students to take advantage of the opportunity for reflection afforded by writing portfolios. Perhaps the most common complaint by teachers about the implementation of writing portfolios in their classrooms is the lack of time. Lack of time may not be the actual problem, but rather the fact that teachers of writing classes need to change where they devote their time. As Tierney, et al. point out while discussing the importance of time management, writing “portfolios don’t take any more time, but during the transition [from normal classroom practices to a portfolio-centered classroom] something has to give” (7-8). These constraints of time mean that “managing portfolios involves a refocusing” so that teachers are focusing on individual students and their needs, instead of the class as a whole, helping individuals to learn what is most essential to their development (8).

Part of that refocusing of time, according to Tierney, et al., involves giving students opportunities to “talk about compositions and for teachers to talk about compositions on their terms and not terms that come out of an English grammar book or English language arts book” (11). This interaction is often implemented through regular student-teacher conferences, through peer reviews, through postwrites, and through various other opportunities in class and out of class where students are allowed to discuss what they have written, and what it really means to them as a representation of their writing ability. Postwrites are vitally important for every writing project completed during the course of a semester, because they provide a critical point where students can reflect on what they have accomplished so far during the course of the class. Postwrites are short, reflective pieces intended to have students review what has been completed so

far in the course of their portfolio-based class. After this review, students then analyze what they have learned, and what they intend to do next. Additionally, postwrites make sure that students get a chance to reflect actively upon their writing styles and how their attempts to use rhetoric have been developing.

Student postwrites can "help writers identify places where a draft doesn't feel right" and can "also help train students how to respond to their peers' drafts" (*Portfolio Teaching* 35). According to Paris and Ayres, postwrites are intended to bring students to "look for improvements in their learning, as shown by work in their portfolios. Then they express those changes in a concise statement on the [postwrite] as a reflection on their learning across a period of time" that can then act as a "guide for discussion and goal setting" as students analyze their habits and behavior, and work to improve as writers (72-73). Postwrites become especially important for the process of forming a writing portfolio because they allow students a chance to engage in metacognition throughout the period of writing their papers, rather than just at the end. When students write their reflective introduction, they will already have a good idea of their progress and the decisions that they have made in the course of their portfolio-based class. The major act of reflection required by the introduction to their portfolio, then, will be more like second nature to students, rather than a sudden addition tacked on at the last moment. As students start to open up and share their thinking behind their writing, they are able to reflect while speaking as well as while writing, with the teacher or fellow students as a listening and reading audience. This reflection, in turn, lets students start to think about what they are going to say, and about what they have said, and about how what they say will influence what they write.

### *Other Skillsets Taught by Portfolios*

Despite the important of metacognition, writing portfolios, when implemented correctly, are also able to give students practice and training in a variety of other skillsets. Sandra Murphy identifies the following skills that writing portfolios in California school systems were supposed to help students develop: awareness of diverse audiences; the ability to communicate for a variety of purposes; the use and control of a variety of distinct voice types; the development of a student's ability to experiment and attempt imaginative or unusual work, or approach topics and texts in an innovative way (81-82).

Attention to audience is an important skill for students to develop in writing, especially since, in essentially all written pieces, especially in classes, there is an explicitly stated audience, and also “a second audience of reviewers and critics who read to evaluate the students’ writing abilities and (sometimes) to offer helpful guidance” (Gearhart *Teachers’ and Students’* ... 26). Besides this “hidden audience,” depending on the exact specifications of a given piece of writing, students might be assigned an audience by their instructor, or else be allowed to construct their own intended audience. However, no matter what a student writes for a portfolio, it will eventually also need to be considered as it will be read by an audience composed of the educators who will review and analyze that student’s writing, and to whom the student must focus all efforts to demonstrate both development as a writer, and understanding and skill in the writing tasks contained within the portfolio. This devotion of focus gives students an opportunity to engage in serious training at analyzing and writing for a very specific audience, with a very specific focus in mind. Portfolios help students to gain a greater focus on audience by requiring them to review their work multiple times in the process of metacognition,

with each additional revision allowing an opportunity for an ever-increasing rhetorical focus.

In developing purpose or focus in a student's writing, as students work on centering their efforts on their intended thesis for each piece of work, and eventually on their overall portfolios, as Gearhart, et al. point out, there are two poles of what "purpose" in writing really means, and how it should be implemented: the ideal-oriented "romantic" view, where "students must write from their own questions and emotions in order to make their own meaning in the world," and the more pragmatic "classical" viewpoint, where "students are taught to analyze many kinds of writing as a grounding for their varied efforts to extend their range and flexibility as writers" (18). Purpose is essential as a skill for student writers to develop because it allows them to develop their work based on appropriate long-term goals. According to the research of Gearhart, et al. into the views of teachers, both of these aspects of the principle of "purpose" are important, vital skills that writing portfolios are more than able to help students learn, by giving them an overarching goal throughout a period of learning, towards which their writing portfolios must be geared. In other words, as students develop the skill of understanding purpose in their writing, they learn how to focus their efforts toward a single, larger goal, tying all their work together in meaning and intent, creating a more complex and intricate set of work rather than a mere collection of individual writing artifacts with only a loose connection.

Portfolios, no matter what their setting, are a matter of rhetorical argumentation, of putting one's best "voice" forward through a collection of artifacts in a given field, and being able to put an effective portfolio together in a writing class gives students practice

in developing similar portfolios for other fields as well. The key to driving the potential inherent in portfolios home, however, comes from “making it real,” or, in other words, helping students to immerse themselves in the subject in the same way that they immerse themselves in learning subjects outside of the classroom, providing ample demonstrations and hands-on activities to allow students to become an integral part of the learning process, giving them a situation of controlled freedom, where they can try out new skills and receive active feedback from instructors and peers (Meeks 74-75). The concept of “making it real” can be even better implemented when students realize that, besides the most immediate uses of these skills in an educational setting, the skills that can be practiced through a writing portfolio also have strong applications in the business world, since portfolios “can also be used to promote or market students for employment opportunities” (Wetzel and Strudler “Issues” 412).

Once students understand the basics behind their writing portfolios, it is only a slight jump of understanding to realize that these same principles apply to essentially all portfolios, in essentially all settings. As an example, business portfolios, according to Greg Berryman, consider similar strategies as are used in compiling writing portfolios, such as being able to “exhibit new ideas and concepts..., develop your point of view, provide clear solutions to complex problems in unique well crafted form” and similar matters of expression and planning based upon the target audience (16-17). Portfolios also find application in a variety of other non-academic settings, and this centering in the principles of the real world can be an excellent motivator to students. It helps greatly if students are constantly made aware of these real-world applications, so that they can better focus on the importance of developing their portfolios. The classroom, then,

becomes slightly less of a place where they will be constantly judged and evaluated (though, of course, this may happen as well), and becomes, instead, more of a place that gives them an opportunity to develop vital skills they will need in their future careers, with the freedom to experiment and try out new things in a controlled, safe environment. This same freedom to experiment carries on into future settings, and gives students a chance to learn how to think in innovative forms, while letting them develop their own voice in writing. These life skills can carry on well past the writing classroom into all aspects of a student's life.

#### *Freedom to Explore and the Active Role of Students*

An integral part of the use of writing portfolios in various classrooms is that there remain in their use a "spirit of exploration" and a continual state of "[expansion] in multiple, complex, and interesting ways" so as to constantly "demonstrate new iterations, raise new questions, [and] help us understand in new ways what and how our students learn" (Yancey and Weiser 3), a spirit of exploration that must be transmitted to students if they are to get the most benefit out of their writing portfolios. Using writing portfolios effectively must be part of a constant, ongoing effort to continually reinvent the process for each new wave of students, so as to prevent stagnation, and, as Campbell and Schmidt identify, there must be ample "opportunities [for students] to explore applications of their theoretical study and to be actively involved in the learning process" (1). This means that, as Lescher identifies in *Portfolios: Assessing Learning in the Primary Grades*, "Portfolios of student work...must be flexible. 'Flexible,' however, does not mean unstructured, spontaneous, or without careful design," but rather that "portfolios have to be conceived with a plan in mind" (14). There must be sufficient creative freedom for

students to actively take part in the class, but there must also be clearly-defined goals towards which their explorations must lead them. Outside of simply designing a portfolio system for a class, however, this creative freedom needs to be stressed at all times to students, so that they understand its vital relevance to their writing practices and development as writers over the course of the class.

For this "spirit of exploration" to take place and find root in the hearts and minds of the students in writing classrooms, these students must become the center of focus in the classroom, rather than the teacher. As one educator noted, "assessment in schools is slowly moving away from" the various activities in which an instructor dominates a classroom with strict "judgment in the strict sense of the word and starting to embrace what is conveyed by the image of teachers and students sitting beside one another during the teaching, learning, and assessment process" (Hilgersom 1). In teacher-centered classrooms, "almost all writing is done on teacher demand, on teacher-set topics, in teacher-designated forms" (John Mayher, quoted in Murphy 84). This standard classroom situation simply requires students to accomplish tasks as they are assigned. On the other hand, student-centered approaches to teaching require students to "assume more responsibility for their education" (Murphy 85), and therefore become active participants in the process of learning. Ideally, as students become actively involved in the process of revising and compiling their writing, they begin to understand the importance of writing portfolios, and become interested in being a part of the process of improving their writing, taking an active interest in the shaping of their portfolios.

Obviously, to obtain this desirable student-centered approach, to make writing portfolios most effective, students must be made an active part of the teaching process as

well as the learning process. In other words, “[s]tudents may be expected to take responsibility for selecting artifacts, making connections to standards, and interpreting their own learning” (Strudler and Wetzel “Issues” 412), and in fact they must do so if they are to take advantage of the full range of freedom and creativity that portfolios can offer to them in developing their learning as writers. The end goal of this method of instruction is a desire for “students to grow to be independent” as writers, to give students a “sense of ownership” of their works, especially the finished work found in the writing portfolio, and to help students to “really care about what it is they’re doing” (Tierney et al. 3-4). Oddly enough, part of helping students develop independence as writers also includes showing them how important it is to draw on the help of others, including their peers in the classroom. Because of this importance of getting outside assistance, peer reviews are an essential part of any system of using writing portfolios, to help bring students to rely on each other as well as on their own judgment.

Though it is important that "instructors...be able to provide useful feedback to students in a timely manner" (Lee and Hare 48), and that they still act as “the guiding force in any classroom” (Tierney et al. 5), the critical key to the use of writing portfolios in a classroom, that will act to bring students to the center of the process of writing and revision, is the use of peer reviews. For classes to get the most out of writing portfolios, they must "center on partnership and collaboration...foster active construction of knowledge, student reflection and self-evaluation, and [foster] community structures in which students and teachers work together as readers, writers, thinkers, researchers, and learners" (Yancey and Weiser 4). For writing portfolios to be effectively implemented, then, there must be "reflective conversation" between teachers and their peers, and

between teachers and students, resulting in "a community of...reflective practitioners" (Murphy 77). In this reflective community, "the teacher...is a part of the team" rather than the center of attention, and "students [should be] working with the teacher to establish goals" and get the basic information that they will need in order to start taking steps on their own (Tierney et al. 5). The ideal setting for this sort of community is a situation where instructors are continually working to educate themselves, so that they can, in turn, better help students achieve the same sort of educational goals of constant improvement. Through this writing community, students are able to better realize the full benefits that can come from a class that uses a writing portfolio, that can often reach far beyond just the class in which that portfolio is used. This realization of benefits is not just a focus on metacognition, which has been discussed before, but rather a focus on developing a learning community, where students understand the importance of the many skills that they are learning, and work together with each other and their instructor to develop into better writers.

If students are to develop this sort of a community in their classroom setting, they need to start thinking about how best to share their work with others, since "sharing [encourages] new experiments and new thinking" by having students interact, and trade their own experiences, efforts, setbacks, and advances. Because of this exchange of ideas, if sharing is "done well, it can keep students in daily contact with new criteria and new ways for evaluating and improving their work" (*Portfolio Portraits* 88). In this effort, the metacognition that is so encouraged by writing portfolios becomes an active part of student interaction, as they each work to help their fellow students think about their work from a variety of perspectives.

Of course, even as students start to catch on to the methods used by other students to write well, many students still “don’t know what elements make up good writing” (*Portfolio Portraits* 90). In order to overcome this difficulty, students need to have a great deal of practice with evaluating the work of others. Because of this need for evaluation practice peer reviews must continue through a class with enough frequency to become routine. Students must also be provided with ample instruction in the various aspects of writing so that they can have a frame of reference, as well as sufficient models for their own peer evaluations. Through this process of peer and instructor interaction, students not only see what standards an instructor will use when grading their work, but they also get to use these same standards themselves as they engage in peer reviews, demystifying the grading process, and learning how to evaluate not only the works of others, but their own works as well, allowing them to better make use of their creative abilities in a constructive fashion for a given set of writing circumstances. They are able to approach the problems of peer reviews, and then their own writing, “guided primarily by pragmatic, problem-solving sorts of concerns” based upon a “sense of shared criteria” that comes with developing proficiency in writing as well as a greater understanding of the group dynamics of peer reviews in their writing class (Lamont 6). As students grow more proficient in such vital activities of the writing process, they will start to realize that they “must judge [their] work on several levels,” taking into account what those who evaluate them are looking for, and how best to demonstrate their quality, style, creativity, and versatility within the constraints of their assignments, and, further, if they have achieved a consistently high level of quality throughout the portfolio, while still noting their continuing room for growth (Metzdorf 14).

Of course, this sort of exploration and use of freedom and risk-taking in the form of student-teacher and student-student interaction does not just happen immediately. Students need to be trained in using creative risk-taking, and that means that instructors must make it clear that this sort of innovation is not only encouraged, but also rewarded. There must be “a general invitation to experiment” (*Portfolio Portraits* 86), with careful interaction between students and instructors to determine “if a student can handle a new experiment” so that, while students may stretch their creative thinking, this “stretching, however, should not be unattainable or unreasonable, or take too much time” (88), but take more the form of “nudging” and invitation rather than forceful pushes and commands. Once again, creative freedom is important, including how fast students want to develop their own creativity and inward reflection on their writing.

#### *A Bridge Between Worlds*

Besides their other advantages, writing portfolios also have a unique ability to “bridge’ across classes, across experiences, between schools, and from school to work” (Yancey and Weiser 4). Writing portfolios can have effects that reach far beyond the immediate concerns of the writing classroom. Once students realize this truly far-reaching impact that writing portfolios can have on not only their writing ability, but also their ability to organize their experiences and learning in a variety of subjects, then their writing portfolios become vastly more important, vital, and real to them. Writing portfolios become a part of their way of learning, a vital skill that will help and stay with them as they work through their schooling, and as they seek careers in years to come. Many universities make use of writing portfolios for the reasons mentioned above, all as a part of the ongoing effort to try and aid their students in developing into more capable,

academically-trained writers. Among the many universities that make use of writing portfolios is SIUC.

As an institution, SIUC's Writing Program requires the use of writing portfolios in its English 101 classes. These classes use a common syllabus, which provides a structured framework in which students are able to work. Within the relatively short amount of time provided by a single semester, students compose a series of required essays, and then take time near the end of the semester to select which of these major works will be included in their final portfolios, and in what order. In this fashion, SIUC's English 101 writing portfolio system attempts to bridge the conflict between standardization and creative freedom. The portfolio system attempts to maintain elements of standardization by keeping students to a carefully-balanced common syllabus and class teaching schedule, so that students have clear assignments, know what to expect when they are being instructed and graded, and receive training in a variety of writing styles and genres. At the same time, the portfolio system attempts to provide students with creative freedom by allowing them some options within the context of their English 101 class, letting students make general choices about their topics of interest and style of approach. The implementation of these classes and the texts that they use as guidelines will be discussed in more detail in the following section. Of especial importance are the theories of writing portfolios that are specific to SIUC as outlined in two of its main texts, namely the books *Portfolio Learning* and *Portfolio Teaching* by Nedra Reynolds and Rich Rice. These texts have specific application in the implementation of writing portfolios at SIUC, and they are best understood when analyzed in the context in which they are used.

### *The English 101 Portfolio System Used at SIUC*

SIUC has been using its current writing portfolio system as a means for assessing the writing development of its English 101 students for four years as of 2010. SIUC uses a common English 101 syllabus and an annual Pre-Semester Workshop, or PSW, to train its instructors – training that includes how to best implement the portfolio system in these teachers' classes. During the PSW, Graduate Assistants are given an overview of this common syllabus, and what is expected of them as they teach their students. One of the highlights of the PSW comes when GAs are exposed to essays written by former students (with the names removed), and required to grade them based on common prompts for each essay (sample prompts provided in Appendix A) as well as common rubrics. In addition, all GAs, the primary teachers of English 101, are required to take a course that provides more in-depth, comprehensive, and personal training in how to teach classes, and especially English 101 with its writing portfolio system. In this class (besides its other subjects of instruction) GAs get a complete rundown of the uses of portfolios in writing courses and their place in writing classrooms, with an especial focus on getting students to brainstorm, work in groups (especially for peer reviews), and compose effective postwrites as tools for facilitating metacognition. Considering this context, it appears that SIUC does a thorough job providing administrative support and training to its instructors, so that they can best implement the writing portfolios required of their students in English 101.

The portfolio system at SIUC relies heavily on two companion volumes by Reynolds and Rice: *Portfolio Keeping: A Guide for Students*, a volume primarily

intended for students as they prepare their writing portfolios; and *Portfolio Teaching: A Guide for Instructors*, a volume aimed at teachers as they work to get students ready to present their portfolios at the end of the semester, with their finalized, polished pieces of writing. These are textbooks rather than studies, which is why the information presented within them, while informative on basic information about writing portfolios, is not brought up before this point. Additionally, the writing portfolio system used in SIUC's English 101 classes is based on a series of five units, with each unit being capped with an essay that students can later revise and finalize for inclusion in their final writing portfolio. (The course itself is capped with a final exam where students demonstrate their ability to rhetorically analyze an article, much as they do in the third unit). The five portfolio units are intended to build upon each other, culminating in the final unit, the fifth, which is actually the portfolio itself, coupled with a Reflective Introduction that allows students to meld the components of the portfolio together into a single rhetorical piece, as well as providing them the necessary opportunity for reflection and metacognition that is allowed by using writing portfolios. As students complete their assignments, they are allowed to “drop” one of them from inclusion in the final portfolio, giving them some leeway of choice and variety when they begin the process of revising and compiling.

From the start of an English 101 class at SIUC, and on the very first page of the volume *Portfolio Keeping* (the primary handbook at SIUC for instructing students in the use of writing portfolios), students are informed of what the purpose behind a writing portfolio is intended to be, namely, that it is supposed to be a collection of "artifacts...that demonstrate a writer's thinking and learning processes" and that will "showcase a writer's

best work" (1). Students are counseled from the start of the class to never, at any time, throw anything away (12), because it could be highly useful to them at some point in the future of the class, as a part of the process of reflective learning. Reflective learning, according to *Portfolio Keeping*, is one of the primary purposes behind keeping a writing portfolio over the course of a semester, so that students can "focus on [their] own writing and learning patterns, habits, and preferences. The goals [behind using a portfolio] are to identify what doesn't work well [as a writing strategy], repeat what does, and develop strategies for addressing or overcoming the parts of writing that are frustrating or puzzling" (1-2). Perhaps most importantly, however, *Portfolio Keeping* informs students of the three most important principles of preparing good portfolios from their work over the course of a semester: choice, variety, and reflection (5-6).

Choice, according to *Portfolio Keeping* and as taught to students in the course of the English 101 semester, is the principle of allowing students to select for themselves what they will include in their portfolios, where they will put it, and how they intend to arrange what they include in the final, finished product. Variety is the concept of diversity and versatility. Students composing their portfolios should use this opportunity to compose and then include works that will show their ability to perform writing tasks in many different genres and under many different writing situations. Finally, the principle of reflection is an opportunity for students to engage in metacognition, or, as *Portfolio Keeping* characterizes it, "to think about [their] own thinking" (6).

Choice and variety play out in SIUC's English 101 classes as students compile their final portfolios to turn in at the end of the semester. Throughout the semester, students complete unit assignments and submit them, and all related assignments, inside

of a working folder, or temporary writing portfolio. This working folder eventually will house the essays that students finally decide to turn in for a grade at the end of each unit of the class. Additionally, it will also hold all their various writing assignments done up to that point, such as in-class assignments and homework. At the end of the semester, then, students will have collected a variety of different genres of writing, and then can make a selection of which ones they wish to include in the final portfolio, and in what order. The Reflective Introduction allows students to explain their choices, for while students can only drop one essay, and are required to include one of the Units, their reasons behind their choices can be quite different, making this introductory essay a necessity in defining the purpose behind the writing portfolio.

Reflection, or metacognition, is probably the most important aspect of the writing portfolio, at least as it is presented in English 101 at SIUC, because the principle of reflection is the guiding principle behind both of the others, choice and variety. It is only through reflection that students are able to effectively "make sound choices for [their portfolios]" (*Portfolio Keeping* 17). It is only with this constant process of reflection, driven home with regular postwrites and other assignments, that students are able to not only perform tasks, but understand why they have performed these tasks the way that they have, and make conscious decisions to change their performance. In this same vein of thought, reflection allows students to think through what they have written before, and that in turn provides them with an opportunity for revision and corrections. This opportunity for revision is generally the reason that most students are expected to like the idea of writing portfolios: they allow students to make up for poor effort in previous papers by polishing them up and turning them back in as part of a larger work, the writing

portfolio. Besides the principles of learning that these revisions can give students, these revisions can mean an improvement in their overall class grade, provided that students are able to take best advantage of the opportunity afforded to them by the chance to reflect and revise.

In order to take that best advantage, as previously mentioned, students will have to learn and apply the other principles inherent in using a portfolio system effectively, namely, prior planning, proper organization, and the ever-essential need for peer reviews. To plan ahead, students are counseled right from the start of their English 101 class to consider how best to demonstrate through their work their progression in the class; their persistence in being able to complete their tasks over an extended period; their flexibility in writing in different genres, voices, and styles; their creativity in taking assignments and making them their own; and their independence in being able to function on their own, taking the suggestions of their peers and instructor, and then going beyond just the bare minimum given to them (*Portfolio Keeping* 9-10).

Good planning, however, requires good organizational skills, since "[o]rganized people generally have an edge in portfolio keeping" (*Portfolio Keeping* 11). Once again, throughout the class, both the manuals and the instructor stress the ever-important principle to "*keep everything*" (12), and to store all of the work completed in the class in an appropriate system that will best help a student to find it again and then make use of it when the time comes. The idea behind this organization is to better create a portfolio that will allow students to show off all their best work, and also allow them to demonstrate how they developed over the course of the semester. If they have all their work in the class, both the major papers, and all of the additional work that goes with it, then students

will have more resources upon which to draw while compiling their final portfolio. Through this process of collection, students can demonstrate their process of learning, and use what they have collected to reflect upon all of the past lessons that they learned throughout the class when they compose their Reflective Introductions to their portfolios.

Part of this process of reflection and learning, of course, is having an active audience engage with the texts being written. The presence of an active audience is largely the role of peer reviews, where fellow students read over each others' papers and make comments intended to assist another student in improving the work that is being done, as takes place on a regular basis at SIUC, at least once per unit assignment, and sometimes more, depending on the personal scheduling and tastes of each English 101 instructor. For peer reviews in this context to work best, there are two principle elements: the student whose work is being reviewed, and the student doing the reviewing. This is not to imply that only a single pair of students might engage in peer review, but only that there are two major roles played by each student involved in a peer review session. In the case of the student whose work is being reviewed, in order for that student to make the most of the commentary on the papers being reviewed, that student must "track [the reviewer's] reactions, comments, and suggestions" right away, when the thought is still fresh in the mind of the student whose paper is being reviewed, making notes of what was written and said during peer review, so as to actively engage in the process, and learn in a proactive fashion. The second part of this peer review process is the reviewer, who is supposed to engage with the student whose work is being reviewed in an equally active fashion, since "[b]eing a responsible member of a writing team, response group, or workshop classroom means being prepared to do your share of the work" (*Portfolio*

*Keeping* 24). These reviewing peers, ideally, should be as actively engaged with the work of others as they are with their own work, using the same reflective learning skills that they should be using to make their own work better on their peers' writing. Not only does this process of peer review help students to get more feedback on their papers, that can provide them with essential improvement, but it also gives the students who review papers an opportunity to put their skills into practice. In other words, by helping others to improve their writing, students in SIUC's English 101 also have an opportunity to reflect upon their own writing practices.

Besides these basic principles of portfolio keeping - choice, variety, reflection, planning, organization, and peer reviews - the companion volume to *Portfolio Keeping*, *Portfolio Teaching*, lists three more essential skills: collection, selection, and reflection (v). After reviewing the basic principles mentioned in *Portfolio Keeping*, *Portfolio Teaching* then reviews how artifacts should be collected by students as they form their final portfolios, namely, according to principles based strongly on the ideas of choice, variety, reflection, purpose, and audience. While the first three of these factors have already been covered in depth, the considerations of purpose and audience are also very real.

One's purpose is a guiding factor in any writing effort, and portfolios need an overarching and underlying thesis that defines its purpose most fully, to say nothing of the requirements from each unit assignment for a suitable individual thesis. In the SIUC writing classroom, common theses for writing portfolios, as found in their Reflective Introductions, might include a demonstration of one's best work, how a student has progressed over the course of a semester, what rhetorical abilities the student has begun

to recognize and develop, how a student has grown as a writer, and so forth. Audience is closely tied to purpose, since knowing who is going to read a portfolio changes the language choices and level of formality immensely. Potential audiences for the writing portfolio at SIUC, as focused upon by its Reflective Introduction, of course, are the student her- or himself, the instructor of the class, and the student's peers. Students also need to pay attention to their audiences and purposes for each of the individual unit assignments, tying these together in their Reflective Introductions to provide a comprehensive work intended to demonstrate their ability to write for a variety of situations.

Selection is the natural stage following collection, since "[n]o matter how much time has been spent collecting, at some point portfolio keepers have to select which of the collected materials best represents their learning, their best work over a period of months...or whatever it is that addresses the portfolio's purpose" (*Portfolio Teaching* 20). This is the point in the process of creating a portfolio where some of the most significant rhetorical concerns are taken into consideration. The first of these rhetorical concerns is the setting in which the writing takes place. Setting, in this case, means the English 101 class, and the factors of time and audience that are inherent to that environment. Most especially, the time factor can strongly influence what is written, and how it is written, since there is only so much available time in a single semester to write essays, revise them, and then compile them into a portfolio for final assessment. Besides the time factor, elements of situation are "affected as well by the program's policies for presenting and assessing portfolios, the content or emphases of the course, and the particular style, preferences, or personality of the teacher" (21). To help students handle this process of

selection, during the Unit 5 segment of class, teachers and students engage in scheduled mini-conferences, that allow students to explain their thinking, and to receive instructor input, allowing them to start reflecting on their writing at the same time that they work to select their best, most representative works for inclusion in the final portfolio.

Also relevant to the selection process are the habits and responsibility of the writer, or the student's portrayed ethos, hard work, and dedication to the class; self-presentation, or how a writer comes across through the arrangement of the portfolio as a whole piece of work; the arrangement of the pieces within the portfolio; and, of course, the audience, who must always be considered so as to ensure that a student uses an appropriate tone and level of formality, and that the works presented within the portfolio are interpreted correctly (*Portfolio Teaching* 22-25). These factors are all addressed by in-class activities, homework, and reading assignments at SIUC, and if students engage in these various assignments to the fullest, they will demonstrate their ethos and also have a chance to learn the other principles and demonstrate them as well through their writing of the major essays that will be included in their final writing portfolios.

During the course of the semester, all of the instruction and practice that students receive is geared towards helping them develop the skills needed to effectively write their five portfolio unit papers. Because of the central nature of these writing assignments, then, they will be reviewed here. Each of these five unit assignments can be found in their original form in Appendix A. The first major writing assignment that students will engage in during the course of a semester is a "Literacy Narrative." This assignment, the Unit 1 assignment as it is commonly called, is intended to give students a chance to stretch their mental faculties, allowing them to start off the semester by writing about

something from their personal lives, and how they developed a particular “literacy” that allowed them to fit into a particular community. The specifics of this assignment vary according to the semester. However, regardless of the specific community chosen, this first unit assignment requires students to analyze some of the communication skills, or forms of rhetoric, that they had to develop in order to fit into a given community, or in order to function in a certain environment. This assignment is the most “open form” of all the assignments in the class (Ramage et al. 546), in terms of formality and general vocabulary, mostly because its primary purpose is to demonstrate to students that there does not have to be a single way to write prose, but rather that writing is made of a series of choices that must be made in establishing the validity of the argument being made by a paper’s rhetoric. The Literacy Narrative makes for an excellent opportunity for students to enjoy a “safe haven” at the start of their writing class, “havens in which writers are free to record observations and experiences, to invent, to debate, to explore inner thoughts, to daydream, to vent emotions, to heighten understandings, and so forth, without the trappings of literary form or structure” (Jenkins 55). Not only is this initial work a chance for students to see different methods of conveying their persuasive efforts, but it also gives them a chance to start out the semester with an introductory metacognitive activity.

Following the completion of Unit 1 and the postwrite activity for that assignment, students then enter the Unit 2 phase of their class. In this part of the class, students are required to analyze and evaluate the rhetoric of an advertisement taken from a magazine, shifting their focus from the rhetoric of a community of their own choosing, as was the case in Unit 1, to the specific rhetoric employed in advertising in Unit 2. In Unit 2,

students are required to assess how rhetoric is used in a given situation, and how it should be used effectively, based upon the intended audience of the given advertisement, which students must also analyze. The assignment itself takes on business formality, with students writing as though they were composing a report for an advertising agency that wants them to assess the effectiveness of the competition, making it more “closed form” than Unit 1 (Ramage et al. 546-547), but still allowing students to address their supervisor in first person. Of the first four unit essays – those that are not the introductory essay to the final writing portfolio, or the writing portfolio itself – Unit 2 is the only one that is required to be in the final portfolio, because of its evaluative nature, requiring students to make value judgments of the quality of rhetorical work, very similar to the same sort of value judgments that they will have to perform when compiling Unit 5 (see Unit 2 and Unit 5 in Appendix A). Unit 2 requires students to focus on the skill of analysis, especially visual analysis, giving them a concrete piece of work to practice their analysis skills upon, and also seeks to help students learn to consider the specific discourses of a community when they gauge the effectiveness of a text.

Unit 3, a Summary and Rhetorical Analysis essay, builds upon Unit 2. After having completed their business report, this is the first essay in the class where students have to write in a highly formal, academic style. Students in the class are given a choice from a series of articles, and are then allowed to select one that they will first summarize, and then analyze, to first break it down into its component parts, and then to see how those parts seem to work in the rhetorical context that generated the focal piece. The progression of these unit assignments is as follows, with the intention of tying each of them together: in Unit 1, students describe their entry and placement in a community

from their pasts; in Unit 2, students then analyze the rhetorical expectations of persons belonging to another community (the intended audience of the magazine), and how these expectations were addressed by the advertisement that they analyzed. In Unit 3, then, students are expected to take part in a new community, the academic community, while at the same time further exploring how rhetoric is a significant part of making any argument.

Following this order of progressively more complex rhetorical situations, students are then required to write Unit 4, which is a Literature Review and Synthesis paper. In this assignment, students do library research, and then must make an argument of their own based upon that research, with the general topic for this research essay based upon the theme of a given semester. Maintaining the academic tone of their Unit 3 essay, students must review three articles from among those that were available for use in Unit 3, and also collect two additional, academically acceptable articles (as approved by their instructor) through their own efforts and researching abilities. Unit 4 might be said to be the culmination of the essays completed over the course of the English 101 semester, barring the writing portfolio itself and its accompanying Reflective Introduction, because it is the final demonstration of a student's ability to not only assess the rhetorical qualities of given works, but also to make use of their arguments and claims to prove the student author's own arguments and claims. If Unit 4 were the last paper in the semester, it would make an excellent capstone to the preceding major assignments, and a strong positive note for students as they progressed into further writing experiences in later semesters and other classes.

English 101 at SIUC does not end with Unit 4, however. Rather, there is the final

unit assignment, Unit 5, which is the revision and compilation of unit assignments to be included in the final writing portfolio, and the Reflective Introduction. There are two principle purposes in this Reflective Introduction, as were discussed above. The first is for students to select which of the four unit essays that they want to include in their final portfolio and, then, explain their reasoning behind these choices. As students are required to include three of the four previous assignments, and Unit 2 is required to be one of the three essays included, this makes the choices involved relatively simple in theory.

However, the order in which students include their works and the reasons for including them can vary greatly. The crafting of their portfolios is an opportunity for students to demonstrate their own rhetorical ability in designing a writing portfolio to show off their best work, and also to show their development over the course of the semester, which is the second major purpose behind the writing portfolio and its accompanying Reflective Introduction. Now students are able to engage in metacognition as the primary focus of the assignment, rather than just one focus of many. This tighter focus means that they are able to demonstrate that they “know beyond [their] own knowing” and can “take a careful look at [their] own work to identify [their] patterns, strengths, and preferences for negotiating writing tasks, for learning new skills, and for putting those skills into practice” (*Portfolio Keeping* 6).

Table 1: A quick summary of each unit assignment at SIUC

<b>Unit</b>	<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Description of student tasks</b>	<b>Open/Closed Form</b>	<b>Genre</b>
Unit 1	Literacy Narrative	Narrative taken from student's life.	Open Form	Creative nonfiction essay
Unit 2	Advertisement Analysis and Evaluation	Rhetorical analysis of a visual image and its context.	Partially Closed Form	Analytical business report
Unit 3	Summary and Rhetorical Analysis	Summary and rhetorical analysis of an essay, selected from a provided list.	Partially Closed Form	Academic summary-analysis essay
Unit 4	Synthesis	Research and synthesis of articles into an academic essay	Partially Closed Form	Literature Review
Unit 5	Reflective Introduction and Portfolio Assembly	Revision and compilation of prior units into a writing portfolio. Metacognitive analysis of growth and development as a writer during the class.	Partially Closed Form	Metacognitive Analysis

In all of this effort to implement writing portfolios, however, at SIUC and elsewhere, there is a great irony that seems quite prevalent. This irony is that, as was established earlier, though there is a great deal of focus upon the student-centered approach to classrooms, and it is widely acknowledged that the primary focus of portfolio keeping is to allow students to engage in metacognition, and so have a chance to review their writing ability and its progression, there is almost no literature that directly assesses student perceptions of how they are being influenced by the portfolio system of

instruction, or how much of the process they understand. Koretz et al., in their various studies, comes close to looking at the student perspective by briefly mentioning the comments made by principals about what they had heard that their students did and did not enjoy. Callahan's study of Kentucky high school students' perceptions comes even closer, though it limits itself solely to a high school perspective. In the end, then, the perceptions of college students over how writing portfolios most influence them is a largely untapped area of study. This study attempts to explore the student perception in the context of SIUC's English 101 portfolio system, through the distribution of a questionnaire near the end of the Fall 2009 semester to assess students' perceptions of the writing portfolios they were just then completing. While this study is only an initial step, it will begin to fill the large gap of information regarding the experiences and perceptions of students in the literature on writing portfolios. The next chapter will explain how this questionnaire was composed, how it was distributed, and then how the data that was collected was analyzed in the hopes that the methodology used can be an effective model for future research.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Construction of the Questionnaire*

Writing portfolios, as a method for assessment in classrooms, according to Courts and McInerney, are designed to “include students in the conversation, to better examine what it is that they are learning, how they believe they learn, and what components of the educational system assist or prevent them in coming to know” (27), and so it makes good sense to gather and assess students’ reactions to what they have been taught, and how effective that teaching was from their point of view. By doing so, student needs can be better evaluated, and so can the question of if these needs are being met. To evaluate the perceptions of students’ experiences with writing portfolios in SIUC’s English 101 courses, this study employs survey methodology.

In forming an evaluation of the effectiveness of writing portfolios as they are used at SIUC, one must realize that there are some limitations to what numbers can tell an observer. After all, according to Catherine Lucas, “those who cling to the illusion that only what can be measured or counted is worth doing will find the effects of portfolios...not only resistant to measurement but initially resistant even to definition” (quoted in Yancey and Weiser 8). Some research, however, is still vital to develop a base from which assessment can take place. Since there is so little information available on this subject at this time, this study focuses on the student perspective, especially the English 101 student perspective at SIUC. Or rather, it focuses on how students themselves perceive their writing portfolios to have been of use to them, after they have been through and experienced what these portfolios can offer to them in a classroom

setting. This study is based in part upon another study conducted in 1993 by Jean S. Ketter, in form if not exact function, to evaluate the responses of both students and teachers “to the implementation of the portfolio method of evaluation in a high school classroom and what factors appear to influence a teacher’s successful implementation of this innovation” (51). This prior study had a different focus than the present study, that focus being a psychological evaluation of instructors as they implemented writing portfolios, their thoughts and feelings on the subject. However, it had a questionnaire inside of it titled “Basic Issues in the Use of Portolio Evaluation” (203-204), that was of especial value because it addressed similar issues to those being sought in relation to student perceptions. Though it focused more upon a teacher perspective than a student perspective, with some modification to focus upon a student perspective, many of its basic principles and some of its questions proved worthy of inclusion in the questionnaire (described below) for distribution to students at SIUC.

Another study that informed the methodology for this study of SIUC’s portfolio system is an investigation by Callahan into the implementation of writing portfolios among students in her own school system, an investigation that also closely mirrors the rough design of this study, as will be explained further below. Callahan's method of acquiring data into the effectiveness of the portfolio system in the Kentucky school districts was to go to the students themselves, those who had just finished their portfolios, and provide the entire graduating class with a questionnaire so that they could let her know how effective they had observed the writing portfolio required of them to be in helping them develop as writers (63-64). Unlike Ketter’s study, which was largely a psychological evaluation of individuals who used writing portfolios, and mostly focused

on the teacher perspective, Callahan's focused upon how well writing portfolios were being received by both students and teachers, besides what changes in writing quality had taken place in the school districts where writing portfolios were used. However, Callahan's study was limited only to high school students within Kentucky school districts, making it of value in investigating this area of study, but narrow in scope. Because of its direct relevance, then, it also served as a useful model upon which to build the questionnaire discussed below.

Taking a cue from the aforementioned studies, to build up data on student perceptions of the effectiveness of the English 101 portfolio system used at SIUC, a questionnaire was developed to directly assess these perceptions so that data on the subject could be better accumulated for later review and analysis. This questionnaire was composed of open-ended questions, though several of these were prefaced with a simple yes or no question to start the discussion, allowing students to provide their perceptions in their own words. Many of the questions were taken directly from the studies by Ketter and Callahan, modified to make them appropriate for use at the college-level setting at SIUC. Several others were based upon principles taken from *Portfolio Teaching*, to determine if those principles had made their way into student perceptions. The purpose of this questionnaire was to provide as complete a picture of what English 101 students experienced while initially composing their essays, and then, later, revising these papers for compilation into a single, comprehensive portfolio, as well as to provide a reasonably clear picture of what students thought of these experiences and how much they were comprehending of the purposes behind their efforts. A complete copy of the questionnaire is provided in Appendix B of this document.

There were two parts to the questionnaire, which was four pages in total, the first part being a permission sheet followed by a demographic information sheet. The permission sheet briefly explained the purposes of the survey to the respondents, mentioned that participation in the study was voluntary and would not provide any incentives, and then provided contact information for both the author of the study and that author's supervisor. The demographic information gathered included the respondent's year in school, the respondent's gender, and the respondent's date of birth, so as to get a general idea as to whether the students who were answering this questionnaire were fairly typical of the population of SIUC, and especially SIUC's English 101 classes, based upon their age and experience thus far in school. The second part of the questionnaire was also divided into two parts, the first to identify those students who had already had exposure to using portfolios in prior classes at the university or high school level, and what those prior experiences had been like, and the second part to identify the experiences students had while they went through SIUC's English 101 portfolio system, and their impressions of that system. The questions included in the survey were as follows:

Prior Portfolio Experiences

1. Have you had any prior experiences with portfolios (Work/School/Etcetera)? Yes/No
2. What were those experiences, and what was their purpose?
3. Were your prior experiences generally positive or negative? Please explain.

Reactions to SIUC's Portfolio System

1. Which of your papers in English 101 did you select for inclusion in your final portfolio and why?
2. When and how often did you revise your papers, and what sort of revisions did you do?
3. What work did you do with your peers and/or instructor when revising your papers?

4. What advantages do you see in using a portfolio system?
5. Did you take full advantage of these advantages? Why or why not?
6. What disadvantages or problems did you see or experience in using the portfolio system?
7. How effective do you feel that the portfolio system is? Why do you feel this way?
8. What alternatives to the portfolio system in English 101 do you think would work more effectively?

The first set of questions in this questionnaire, sought to determine if students had been exposed to portfolios in the past, first by asking outright if they had prior experience with portfolios, and then what those experiences were and what was their purpose. These questions also sought to identify how much prior training in the use of portfolios that students had received, and also to identify any previous biases that students might have towards portfolios, especially those that might influence their answers to later questions, by asking if prior experiences were generally positive or negative.

In the second section of the questionnaire, the first question asked students what essays they finally decided to include in the final portfolio, and why they included them. In general terms, this question sought to identify such issues that students might encounter, and developing patterns that might arise, such as their freedom and flexibility of choice, which essays were most popular, and if the reasons for their selection were fairly uniform or had great variance by student. Additionally, the answers that students gave might also identify some of the metacognition that students performed while compiling their final portfolios, a significant aspect of the reasoning behind having writing portfolios in the first place.

The next two questions asked when and how often students did their revisions, what sort of revisions they did, and what work they did with peers and/or their instructor

while revising their papers. These questions were geared towards identifying student practices in the process of revision, as well as the role of peer reviews and instructor interaction in the process. Three questions followed, asking what advantages that students saw in using a portfolio system during their English 101 class, if they felt they took full advantage of these advantages, and what disadvantages or problems they might have seen or experienced in using the portfolio system. These questions were intended to identify the basic thoughts and feelings of students about the system as a whole, shifting their attention from the local (their individual papers) to the global level (their portfolios and the English 101 class itself).

Continuing this line of inquiry into students' perceptions of the more global issues involved in their portfolios and in the class as a whole, the final two questions asked students how effective they felt that the portfolio system was and why they felt that way, and what alternatives to the portfolio system at SIUC they thought would work more effectively. These two were the least closed of all the questions, because they required students to make their own definition of what effectiveness in English 101 might be, and then consider alternatives. This open form gave students an opportunity to freewrite on the subject of the portfolio system at SIUC and how it was implemented in their classes, which might also allow them to engage in free thinking.

#### *Selection of Respondents and Distribution and Collection of Questionnaires*

In order to collect as complete a sample of students of English 101 as possible, and from as wide a variety of class types, after appropriate permission was obtained from SIUC's Human Subjects Committee, a request was made to all available instructors of English 101 at SIUC through the in-house mailing list for the department that they might

allow their students to participate in this study. Due to time constraints on various faculty at the end of the semester, including this researcher, this request was only made once, which likely explains the limited response that resulted from it. Four instructors of English 101 responded to this request for assistance in distributing the survey (though one later dropped out, citing time constraints), and each of them was provided with twenty survey forms, the number being equal to the cap on attendance allowed in SIUC's English 101 classes. These forms were delivered by the author of this document in sealed envelopes to the participating instructors' mailboxes in the SIUC English Department, along with a cover sheet explaining that they were to distribute these questionnaires to their students, and allow the students to decide whether or not to respond.

On a day of their choosing, shortly before students turned in their final portfolios, the three participating instructors were instructed to explain the voluntary nature of these questionnaires to their students, as well as the other information provided on the permission form on the top. They were also instructed to distribute the questionnaires to their students during their regular class periods, allowing students time taken from normal class time to complete the questionnaires, ensuring that students completed the questionnaires with greater frequency than if they had taken them home, as well as providing a regulated environment for the completion of the questionnaires. The students were informed by the written information on the permission form on the top of the questionnaire (and by their instructors if the instructors read the instructions to the students) that all participation in the study was voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time they chose, with the contact information of this researcher and his supervisor in the department provided to allow them the option of opting out of the study even beyond

the class period. Thus, students in these three classes were allowed to decide for themselves if they wanted to participate in the study, with blank questionnaires taken as a negative response to this request for participation. From the classes of these three instructors, forty-three out of an available sixty students chose to respond to the questionnaires, that were then collected by the instructors and returned to this author in sealed envelopes through the mailboxes in the SIUC English Department, all within a period of a week after they had been initially distributed by the author of this document.

### *Analysis of Data*

After the questionnaires were returned to this researcher, the first step in analyzing the questionnaires was to tally the demographic data, so as to get a basic idea of the background of the students, providing a general impression of what sort of students tended to take English 101, and how they compared to the overall population of SIUC, to see if they were at least somewhat representative, despite the scarcity of responses. Of those students who chose to respond to the questionnaire, many left questions blank, and so, when compiling answers to each question, these blank response sections were not counted. Thus, not only was the number of questionnaires recorded, but also the number of responses to each individual question, so as to identify individual impressions to the questions that seemed most important to students.

Unanswered questions aside, the responses to the questionnaires were generally open-ended in nature, and answers to a single question could thus also be used to respond to later questions. Many students, recognizing this, would often refer to their previous answers when responding to later ones on the questionnaire. Because of this, when analyzing the accumulated data, responses with similar themes and purposes were

grouped together, and then tallied for their general content. Themes, then, were the most important issue when analyzing student responses, and each response was broken down according to these themes, so that recurring trends could be identified among the respondents. The exact themes that were identified are covered in more detail in the Results and Discussion section of this document. Most responses of students fell into the following four categories: students identifying the metacognitive process that they went through while selecting and revising their papers for inclusion in the final portfolio; students identifying what they perceived as the value in using a writing portfolio system in English 101; students' overall impressions of the class and its effectiveness in helping them to develop as writers; and any weaknesses that students identified as they reviewed their experience over the course of the semester spent in English 101.

Because of the limited scope of this initial study, with only 43 responses, compared to the numbers of students that take English 101 each semester, this present study only makes an initial investigation into student perceptions of the English 101 writing portfolio, as a base upon which additional studies might be built. According to SIUC's Institutional Research and Studies webpage, maintained by Linda Benz, about 1,500 students took English 101 in the Fall 2009 semester, out of approximately 3,500 freshmen enrolled in the university overall. Instead of a comprehensive study, then, this study is intended to identify basic themes present in the perceptions of students in the writing portfolio system as implemented in its English 101 classes, their general impressions of the system, and understanding of the principles involved by the end of the class. While the numbers involved are not a comprehensive overview of the English 101 student population at SIUC, they still indicate trends that bear additional investigation.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### *Demographic Analysis and Prior Portfolio Experiences*

With only one exception, who was a thirty-year-old Junior, and excluding one respondent who did not provide any demographic information, all of the students who took part in this study were Freshmen between the ages of nineteen and twenty, or 95% of the total. Of the forty-three respondents, fifteen identified themselves as male (36.6%), and twenty-one as female (51.2%), with the rest withholding this information. Thus, the makeup of this group of respondents seems, upon initial perusal, to be roughly in keeping with the demographics of students at SIUC (*SIUC – Transfer Student Guide*), though slightly skewed towards females. This demographic information is important because it indicates how generally representative this admittedly small sample is compared to the student body as a whole at SIUC. Unfortunately, the sample size of this study limits the ability to make generalizations, though it provides a guide and rationale for future research.

With regards to the percentages listed, since many of the questions in the questionnaire were open-ended, some of the percentages below may add up to more than 100%, since students sometimes provided more than one answer to a given question. Of the forty-three students who responded, eighteen (41.9%) had prior experiences with portfolios, and of those students, only two (11.1%) had negative experiences. Most students had only positive things to say about their prior experiences, such as that the portfolio compiled was important because it “meant something to me, represented me, and made me who I am today,” or that ““It helped me remember the skills I obtained

through the writing process."

In the case of the negative experiences, one of the students said that this negative experience resulted from personal failure in assembling content for the portfolio, in the form of insufficient effort and procrastination. The other said that the problem came from having a writing portfolio as a part of a math class, and the student failed to understand the point of using portfolios in math classes except as a source of endless retries on problems. All of these experiences came from a variety of sources, though the vast majority – twelve of the eighteen, or 66.7% – came from high school English classes, either during the Senior or Junior year. Of the rest, two came exclusively from previous university classes, two from middle school classes, and two from professional settings (11.1% of the eighteen each) – a modeling career and a job portfolio for high school student employment. Though exposure to prior portfolio systems seems to be fairly common, keeping in mind the limits of this study's sample size, English 101, for SIUC students, still has a fairly high chance (51.8%) of being the first exposure that many students have to using a portfolio system.

Based on the specific comments by students on the questionnaire, seventeen of the eighteen students (94.4%) mentioned how their prior portfolio experiences prepared them for writing at the next stage of their education (either high school, or college), that included one of the two who had a negative first experience with portfolios in high school. Based on the comments by the eighteen who had had prior portfolio experiences, commonly stated reasons for this perceived improvement in writing ability and preparation for higher-level classes included: practice and improved ability in personal organization and goal-setting (seven respondents, or 38.9%); improved paper quality

through reflection and revision (eight respondents, or 44.4%); a good introduction to the sort of writing they would do at higher levels (four respondents, or 22.2%); and a chance to earn extra points and improve their grades (four respondents, or 22.2%).

### *Reactions to SIUC's Portfolio System*

The questions regarding students' prior experiences with portfolios did not apply to over half of the survey group, but the questions about their present experiences with English 101's portfolio system were more pertinent to these students' present situation, and so received a much greater response. In responding to the question of why they had included certain essays completed during the semester in their final portfolio, of the forty-three respondents, the most common answer, totaling twenty-seven out of the total (62.8%), was because the essays selected were the ones with the best grades, and the ones the students felt required the least amount of revision in the time they had available. As one student put it, "I felt that these were the papers I had done the best on." Eleven out of the forty-three respondents (25.6%) also felt it important to mention, usually as a parenthetical comment, that they only included one of the essays (Unit 2) because it was required by their instructor and the arrangement of the system of essays at SIUC.

Despite this initial response from students, the second most common reason that students included papers in their portfolios, mentioned by eighteen of the forty-three respondents (41.9%), was because the essays revised and included in their final portfolios were what the students felt would help improve their writing ability the most, and then demonstrate that improvement. For example, one student said that she included the Unit 4 paper "because it was the paper I struggled most with. It really tested my abilities." Another cited reason for why students chose to revise and include certain papers over

others, stated by six of the forty-three students (14%), was that the chance to compile a portfolio inspired the students to work harder and make their papers more acceptable for college-level writing. Finally, thirteen of the forty-three students (30.2%) noted that they revised and included certain essays over others because the essays they included were the ones from which the students felt they had learned the most while writing them, that also included the student, quote above, who included the best papers for grading. This student also mentioned that, besides choosing the best works, he also selected papers for inclusion based on if "I feel that I have learned and gained new knowledge through these papers." Additionally, ten of the forty-three students (23.3%) also explained that they chose to include the papers they did because their arrangement of papers within the portfolio provided a sense of organization and order to their work during the semester, and also acted as a way to show their overall improvement during the course, not only to their instructor, but to themselves. Through the act of compiling their work into a portfolio, and then writing a Reflective Introduction, students seemed to have gained a greater appreciation for the gradual building of interconnected skills that they had developed over the course of the semester.

As students answered the question of how much and what sorts of revisions they did, several trends appeared. First of all, of the forty-three students, twelve (27.9%) said that they did minimal to no revisions. Of these twelve students, however, four said that they did not engage in revision because they only included papers in their final portfolios that already had high grades on them. Another four of this twelve said that their failure to revise came from procrastination on their parts, while the other four did not go into details except to say that they revised one time. Besides this initial twelve, an additional

nine students of the forty-three (20.9%) did only those corrections that were pointed out to them by comments from their instructor or from their peers, or as one student put it, “I made revisions from peer review comments only, mainly a lot of grammatical errors,” and twelve (27.9%) focused the majority of their efforts on correcting grammar, spelling, and word choice errors. Ten students of the forty-three (23.3%), indicated that they started work on revisions of each of their essays as soon as they got them back, and eight (18.6%) said that they did multiple revisions. One of this last group of students provided one of the most detailed accounts of what she did to get the most out of her papers: “I revised at least three times, fixing common errors in grammar and punctuation. I also try to use a higher vocabulary by looking in the thesaurus and by also changing my sentence structure.”

Breaking down the methods that students used in order to get assistance with their revisions, seventeen (39.5%) said that they primarily got assistance in revising their papers from peer reviews, twelve (27.9%) said that they got assistance from peer reviews and instructor comments combined, and ten (23.3%) said that their most important source of revision assistance was from meeting with their instructor directly. A final four (9.3%) claimed that they did minimal to no revision work with anybody, whether their instructor or their peers. Of those who got help from their peers and instructors, many positive comments were made, such as one student who said that “I asked my instructor for help and [the instructor] showed me how I went about writing my paper the first time was wrong; [the instructor] helped me develop new key points and a new thesis. One of my peers helped me construct all new paragraphs. Another student stated, referring to peer reviews, “We did a lot of peer editing in class. I used my peers' notes, as well as the

instructor's notes to revise my papers,” and still another stated that “The peer reviews were most helpful - even more so when we used two peer reviewers.”

When asked what they thought were the most important advantages of the portfolio system used at SIUC, students responded in a variety of ways, though most on a certain number of primary themes, with some overlap because of the broad nature of the various responses that causes the percentages to sometimes add up to more than 100%. The single most important advantage that seventeen students out of forty-three (39.5%) saw in the portfolio system was the chance that it gave them to engage in thoughtful reflection on their past writing, and to improve upon it. As one student put it, “A student learns that their work is never perfect, and there are always revisions to make. Instead of writing a paper and then being done, you have to review mistakes and revise it.” One student mentioned that “I liked that we got to choose our best works, and had the time to go back and revise them,” while another said that writing portfolios let the student “See if [the student had] made any changes [in writing style],” and “learn how to correct [the student’s] mistakes.” This response was closely related to the second most common response, given by twelve of the forty-three students (27.9%), that writing portfolios give students an opportunity to demonstrate to their instructor and to themselves that they have improved over the course of the semester, or, as one student put it, that portfolios provide “tangible evidence of growth.”

After considering what advantages were possible from using portfolios in their writing class, students then revealed whether or not they felt that they had indeed taken full advantage of what a portfolio system could offer them, and what that meant to them as they went through their English 101 classes. Of the students who responded to this

question, an overwhelming thirty out of forty-three (69.8%) said that they felt they had indeed taken full advantage of the portfolio system, though the reasons why students felt this way were varied. Seven of the forty-three (16.2%) said that they did not take full advantage of the portfolio system, while four (9.3%) were unsure or otherwise answered with something besides yes or no, and two (4.7%) did not respond at all. Of those four who had a different answer than just yes or no, one stated the answer to the question by saying “Yes and no – I clearly see my mistakes, now I need to structure a way to not make the same mistakes.”

Nineteen out of the thirty positive respondents (63.3%) said that taking full advantage of the portfolio system meant making full use of it as a chance to take advantage of commentary from their instructor and peers, and also to review the various skills they had reviewed previously in the class, and then improve upon what had been done before, improving their writing skills, and being able to demonstrate that improvement. As one student said, “I want others to see how my hard work paid off within my final product.” The second most common answer, cited by eleven of the thirty with positive responses (36.7%), was that taking full advantage of the portfolio system meant improving their grades. Third among the answers (used by five of the thirty positive respondents, or 16.7%) was that taking full advantage of portfolios meant that they had a chance to organize their work, viewing the course of the semester as a process of building skills, one upon another, while two (6.7% of the thirty) felt that taking full advantage of the portfolio system was an excellent opportunity for them because it meant that they were developing a professional skill that they would likely use while hunting for a job once they left school.

The seven students from the sample (16.3%) who admitted they did not take full advantage of the portfolio system also provided explanations for why they had not done so. Three of this group of seven felt that they hadn't had enough time to do all the revisions necessary, while another two openly admitted that they had procrastinated too much during the course of the semester. One student hated writing papers, and a final student claimed to be utterly exhausted by the end of the semester, and to have lacked the energy needed to make a proper final portfolio with its introductory essay.

Tying into these negative reactions were the reactions of students when they were asked what disadvantages they saw in the portfolio system. Slightly over half of the students who responded to the survey (twenty-two of the forty-three total respondents, or 51.2%) were unable to identify any flaws in the portfolio system, did not feel that there were any disadvantages in need of fixing, or simply left the answer blank. However, the rest of the respondents (twenty-one of forty-three, or 48.8%), including many who had an otherwise positive response to the portfolio system and felt that they had done well with it, identified flaws that they felt were present. One of the two most commonly-identified flaws that students saw in the portfolio system as it was presently constituted, noted by six of the twenty-one (28.6%), was that there was a great danger of getting a "double whammy." In other words, because there was so much weight resting on a single large project (fifty percent of the total grade in English 101 according to the Fall 2009 syllabus), if students did not take immediate and full advantage of the portfolio system (what one student called an "all or nothing" situation), or had too much growth and revision to do in too short a time, or failed to pull their work together for whatever reason, then they could end up getting a terrible grade on their papers twice in a row. In

the words of one student, “If someone lost a couple of papers before they turned in their portfolio, it could really hurt their grade.”

The other most commonly mentioned problem that students saw with the portfolio system, also from six of the twenty-one (another 28.6%), was that there was a lot of work to be done in the last segment of the semester and that, as one student put it, “It was difficult to focus on revising previous papers while you are focusing on the current paper.” Another five (23.8%) complained that the process of revision was boring and repetitious. Finally, three of the twenty-one (14.3%) respondents who mentioned disadvantages and flaws in the portfolio system pointed out that the present organization of the set of assignments didn't allow for much creativity in their assignments, and two of these three also mentioned how much they disliked having the single required essay (an Advertisement Analysis paper in English 101). One final student of the twenty-one (4.8%) also mentioned that it was hard knowing where to make revisions on papers that already had good grades.

After having a chance to explain what they saw as the advantages and disadvantages of a portfolio system, and if they had used their portfolios to their full effect, students then responded to how effective, overall, the portfolio system at SIUC was, based on their experiences in the class. Most students approved of the use of portfolios as a part of the curriculum in English 101, with thirty of the forty-three respondents (69.8%) agreeing that portfolios were very effective for them, and a positive experience overall. Outside of this positive response, however, ten more (23.3%) said that portfolios were not effective, and three respondents (6.9%) did not provide any information on this question at all.

Of the thirty respondents who felt that portfolios were a positive and effective learning tool, a variety of reasons why they felt this way were provided. Twenty-five of this set of thirty (83.3%) believed that portfolios were effective because they allowed students an opportunity to revise their work, and to review their prior efforts. Comments such as "I think it's really effective. I would say so because it enables the student to really realize his/her writing abilities and to realize what they have learned and what they need to improve" were common. Writing portfolios, according to these students, let them reflect on what they had done before, and gave them a chance to actively develop their writing skills. It also let them observe and track their progress during the class, something that their instructor could also do, and take into account while looking over their essays, both past and present. As one of these students said, "The portfolio system is effective because it allows a reader to see someone's best work," and that "It's like a time capsule" on the past efforts of a student, giving a chance to take a look into things that had passed before, and learn from them. Also from this set of thirty students, ten respondents (33.3%) felt that, besides its effects on grades or writing improvement, the use of portfolios also helped build confidence, helping students to get used to the idea of writing in college, and to stop being afraid of the process or feel that they were ineffective writers. Three more (10%) felt that knowing how to compile portfolios was an "essential skill," necessary for professional settings beyond college, two (6.7%) noted the practice at organization skills that the portfolio system offered, and one respondent noted that portfolios were effective because they could minimize the damage from a bad grade during the course of the semester.

Of those ten students who felt that portfolios were ineffective as a tool in the

English 101 classroom, five of them felt this way because compiling a portfolio was, in their words, boring, not enjoyable, or too repetitive. An additional three of the ten had an answer that seemed to relate to this more common one, in that they felt that portfolios were ineffective because peer reviews and personal revisions should be enough, rather than having to compile all former work into a single portfolio. One other student felt that all the effort of putting together a portfolio was "demeaning, like being in high school again," while a final student (10%) added the comment that it was a waste of time, with no inherent value except to provide jobs to graduate students. Also according to this last student, the only reason that this student did the work on the writing portfolio required of all students at the end of the semester was because this student liked the instructor of his particular English class, and "wanted to humor" that instructor. This student went on to explain that he had "not been shown any value inherent in the [portfolio] system" except as a means to provide "an employment opportunity for those teaching it by stretching out the semester."

The survey question that received the fewest comments was the last one, which asked the responding students what alternatives or improvements to the portfolio system at SIUC they felt would work more effectively. Seventeen students out of the forty-three (39.5%) responded that they liked the system as it was and saw no changes that needed to be made, or could not think of any changes right then, while eight (18.6%) simply left the answer area blank. However, eighteen students of the forty-three (41.9%) did respond to this question with a significant degree of detail. Four students of this eighteen wanted to do away with portfolios in English 101 completely, and two of these four wanted to replace the entire final portfolio with a reflective essay that would serve to

review everything accomplished over the course of the semester, rather than having to revise each paper individually. Another four students wanted more options in what papers they would be allowed to write over the course of the semester, and more freedom in choosing what they could include in their portfolios. Three students liked the idea of a "running working folder," as one of the four called it, where students would be constantly revising their papers throughout the semester, and only the final copy that they turned in on the last day of class would count for their final grade in the class, rather than having a graded paper at first followed by a graded final portfolio. Besides these responses, two students wanted more time, while another two thought that a good addition to the class would be a final presentation in front of their classes of the work that they included in their writing portfolios. The remaining three of the eighteen made suggestions that had little to do with the portfolio system and more to do with the specifics of their individual classes, such as requesting changes in how their papers were posted to their class webpage, changes in the course materials, or requesting more and clearer explanations from their instructor.

As an initial step into observing the perceptions of students as they work to make the best use of the writing portfolio at SIUC as it is taught to them, the present study provides some initial insights into trends on a small scale, that bear further investigation on a larger, more representative scale. Student perceptions and comprehension are a part of the end "product" of the instruction provided to them, a way of identifying how much students are actually picking up from their classes, and what issues might be giving them difficulty. Because of the importance of student perceptions as they engage in creating writing portfolios and other educational tasks, it is highly important to fill the presently

existing gap of information about the experiences of students. Filling this gap will hopefully ensure that students, like administrators and instructors, are an active part of the process of continual improvement of the writing portfolio system used at SIUC.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In considering the conclusions made below, it needs to be understood that they are based upon a sample of only three English 101 classes, and hence, while general impressions and themes might be observed, and the observations are indicative, they cannot be considered necessarily representative. These results are especially vulnerable to the data being skewed because of the tendency for student attitudes to mirror those of their instructors. Nevertheless, these conclusions, based on the available data, may prove useful in creating further studies into the subject of student perceptions of writing portfolio systems of a more comprehensive nature, and perhaps in different contexts or institutions.

As mentioned in the Introduction, according to Reynolds and Rice's work, *Portfolio Teaching*, there are three primary stages and three principles, that intersect in the course of compiling a portfolio: "collection, selection, and reflection" and "choice, variety, and reflection," respectively (v). These stages and principles summarize the instructor perspective, and what it is hoped students will take from the class. However, standing as the second half of a dichotomy of desires between instructors and students, judging from the responses of students to the questionnaire, one major motivation of students is to get good grades in their writing classes. Whether grades actually measure a student's improvement, growth, or skill in a subject is a matter for other studies, but as they are important for the sake of record keeping and class standings at SIUC, it makes sense, then, that the need for good grades should be given weight in deciding the value of

a writing portfolio system in this university setting. It should be noted, however, that many students in this study also identified their interest in and understanding of the reflective opportunities offered by writing portfolios, and on this point, the desires of students and instructors mesh well.

Based on the demographic data and on what the student respondents to the questionnaire claimed about their prior experiences with portfolios, and as has already been mentioned, slightly over forty percent of the students had been exposed to some form of portfolio collection system before entering English 101, generally during their high school years, and most often about a year to a year-and-a-half before they took their English 101 class. This result means that portfolios, in many cases, are not something completely new and unexpected for many students. In conjunction with peer reviews, where students can share what they know with each other, this means that this knowledge is able to spread, so that instructors of English 101 are not alone in having to share information about how to compile and prepare portfolios for their classes, but can very likely rely on the prior experiences of their students as well. Since almost all of the students who had prior portfolio experiences reported positive results (and those who did not have positive results admitted to having special circumstances that would nevertheless still likely mean that they had valuable information on how writing portfolios worked), it is likely that their input into the class could be very valuable indeed in assisting other students, and in helping the instructor by means of in-class commentary and peer review assistance. However, since these students still account for less than half of the students surveyed, the chance of having a student in a given class that has had previous experience in the use of portfolios is still fairly uncertain. So, if through the

near-random placement of students during the registration process, a class happens to have no students at all that have had prior portfolio experiences, an instructor would have to start from scratch.

Based on these considerations, then, it seems that it would be wise for instructors to start off their English 101 classes by checking to see if they have any students who have compiled writing portfolios in the past, to see what sort of student knowledge resources are already available. If this is the case, then it means that instructors of English 101 will have a base upon which to build. However, even if there are students in the class who have experienced portfolios in the past, because of the length of time that passed between their last writing class - usually in high school - and their English 101 basic composition class, it would be wise for instructors to spend some additional time refreshing the memories of their students, so that they could best make use of their prior experiences.

Looking through the responses of students to the questionnaire's sections on which essays they chose to include in their final portfolios, SIUC's writing portfolio system seems to be working just fine as far as the two purposes of variety and reflection are concerned, but is less adept at allowing students to explore the principle of choice (*Portfolio Keeping* 5-6). Many students pointed out how they appreciated the opportunities that having a portfolio system allowed them, so that they could look back on their prior efforts and learn from their mistakes, as well as to "take a careful look at [their] work to identify [their] patterns, strengths, and preferences for negotiating writing tasks, for learning new skills, and for putting those skills into practice" (*Portfolio Keeping* 6). The skills in question that students most focused upon, judging from

students' responses to the questionnaire, focused on those that allowed them to present themselves with rhetorical strength, and those that created a more natural flow of writing, of which the rules of grammar and punctuation played a part. At the same time, many students also referred to how they were allowed to demonstrate their ability to write in a variety of settings and situations, and also organize their work to best show their process of development. In the perceptions of these students, all of these principles are apparently strongly tied together during the process of revising their papers and compiling their portfolios, rather than being considered completely separate skills.

At the same time, slightly over one-fourth of students also mentioned that they felt restricted in their choices of what to include in their writing portfolio, and almost always mentioned this restriction in a negative light. As Reynolds and Rice point out, if students "are simply told what to include and how to arrange and present each artifact" then they "won't learn much beyond following directions" (*Portfolio Keeping* 5-6).

While these students might not articulate their concerns in quite those words, they do seem to understand that their personal choices are being limited, and they are often being forced to include work that they feel is not their best for the sake of the requirements of the administration and their instructors rather than on their personal preferences. On the other hand, according to administrative design, this restriction of students to writing in certain genres, especially the Advertisement Analysis of Unit 2, forces students to stretch themselves from their comfort zones and work in genres that they might otherwise avoid. These principles of student choice and administrative requirements might both be met by offering students a wider variety of types of similarly-themed assignments to choose from, while only requiring them to complete a certain number.

The state of revision practices for the students who responded to the questionnaire is inconclusive in showing if these students were making the most of the time provided to them to revise their papers to better show their best work. The results, in fact, seem fairly evenly split between those who engaged in multiple drafts and got to work as soon as possible, and those who tended to slack off and do minimal revisions or none at all. However, it should be pointed out that, of these students, a significant number indicated that they did not make the best use of the time that they had available, for whatever reason.

Ensuring that students do revisions and other work on their own is an uncertainty largely outside the control or observation of instructors, but, according to the aforementioned responses to the question about what work students did on revisions with their peers and instructors, most students took the assistance that they received in these contexts to heart. As about sixty-seven percent of the respondents to the questionnaire indicated, peer reviews were considered valuable primary sources of revision information, and where most of them got a large portion of the commentary that they needed in order to polish up their essays for inclusion in their final portfolios,. Direct assistance from their instructor, mentioned by fifty-one percent of the students who responded, was also considered vitally important, perhaps more so than their class lectures, with most students reporting that their instructor's written commentary provided them with the bare essentials that they needed to make informed corrections and improvements to their essays, and to their writing in general. Visits to the office hours of instructors and other personal conferences were slightly less common, but also considered of vital importance to students who wanted to excel in their writing class by

those who made use of this direct, personal interaction.

Because many students in the study failed to engage in sufficient revision, and since so many students reported that they based a large part of their revision process on peer reviews (as the responses to the question about what work students did with their peers and instructor indicate), there may be some merit in having instructors use a little more time giving students instruction on how to revise their papers. Instructors might also focus more time on letting students practice those basic principles in the course of their classes in partnership with their peers rather than on other activities, with teacher instruction and supervision to guide their learning. In this setting, instructors would spend most of their time in class explaining the focus of writing exercises each day, so that students understood what was expected of them, before allowing students time to put into practice the concrete, essay-focused exercises of the day.

Judging from the responses that students gave to the question of what advantages they associated with the use of writing portfolios as part of the English 101 classroom, these students who responded seem to understand the basic principles that are supposed to be taught through the use of a portfolio system. Not only did students identify that writing portfolios were supposed to allow them time to review and improve on their past efforts, give them an opportunity for organization and selection of the best available work, and also provide them with a chance to demonstrate their writing skills in a variety of settings, these respondents largely agreed that they had taken as full advantage of these benefits as was possible for them at their current level of writing ability. The vast majority of students in this study, as evidenced from their positive response to taking advantage of the chance to compile writing portfolios, and the reasons that they gave for

this revision, firmly believe that portfolios do provide them with a means to practice and then to improve their skills in a format that can be visibly assessed, not only by their instructors, but also by themselves. Grades were still close to the most important reason for students to want to use portfolios in their writing classes, but if grades are said to be a gauge of progress, as many students are led to believe, then it immediately becomes apparent that most students, in this study at least, greatly appreciate writing portfolios for the chance that it gives them to improve in all ways, taking advantage of the chance to review and revise.

Reviewing student comments on the disadvantages or problems that they saw in the use of writing portfolios, now that they had gone through a semester of using them and could speak from their personal experiences, two significant flaws came to light. The first of these is one that, perhaps, is unavoidable, and so should be taken into account by instructors, namely, that if students do not take full advantage of the chance to revise their papers, select their best work, and organize it appropriately, then there is a very real possibility that these students will be hit that much harder by a second grading of their papers in portfolio form. This possibility is made especially troublesome because students are under a great degree of pressure from other classes besides English 101. Many times, assignments from several classes are required at almost the same time, causing students to become overworked and overwhelmed, especially considering the time requirements of writing portfolios to effectively revise and compile the works contained within them.

It seems reasonable that the best way to counter this danger of students being overwhelmed, judging from the importance that students responding to the questionnaire

placed on peer reviews and instructor assistance, is to have additional in-class peer review work, and also more chances for interaction with and commentary from their instructors, as discussed above. This additional assistance is likely to safeguard against the very real danger of having one's grade doubly destroyed by insufficient preparation and revision, especially that brought on by the time constraints of the semester. In other words, by having students bring their work on improving their papers into the classroom, where the instructor can control the flow of work somewhat, students are more likely to develop themselves actively, rather than leaving them to their individual devices.

The second significant problem with the writing portfolio system as presently found at SIUC that might be identified based on student responses is the freedom to choose what will go into the portfolios. The arrangement of the assignments felt, to over a third of the students (38%) who identified problems with the effectiveness of writing portfolios at SIUC on the questionnaire, too lockstep, boring, and stifling. In other words, these students felt confined by the constraints of their assignments, not only in selecting which of their assignments they would include in their portfolios, but also in the choice of what assignments they would do in the first place. This finding could be considered a significant worry about the manner of teaching writing portfolios at SIUC, because one of the dangers of this method of teaching, as specifically pointed out by Catherine Lucas, as quoted by Yancey and Weiser, "is that portfolios will become merely the newest vehicle to perform the old task, with the result that portfolios will become standardized" that will result in "restrictive conditions governing the writing of the texts in the portfolio" and eventually "limit learning by restricting curriculums to what is most easily and economically measured" (13).

Despite these flaws, as pointed out by students, it should again be noted that most students (70%) in this study nevertheless felt that writing portfolios were an effective system for arranging and organizing a writing class, including those students who mentioned the problems considered above, especially the problem of standardization and lack of creativity. The standardization of the syllabus and assignments in their classes was, by and large, considered a positive experience, because it kept things orderly, and helped them to know what was taking place, and what their standing in the class was.

#### *Suggestions for Future Research*

Based on these initial findings, it makes sense that minimal changes should be made to the use of writing portfolios as they are presently in place at SIUC. However, it might be of some value for administrators and instructors to consider ways that students might be given more options for their writing portfolios, so that they could make more active decisions not only in just how and where they will arrange their portfolios, but in what will go into them, while still allowing them a reasonably wide array of different genres to choose from. As a suggestion for additional research, then, studies that gather a more comprehensive sampling of the student body would be of key importance, while a focus on specific student perceptions would be an ideal goal of further studies in the context of SIUC.

Among these perceptions that bear further investigation are such possibilities as: what methods of instruction best help students to recognize the importance of metacognition and make best use of it through writing portfolios; what might be the role of peer reviews and instructor interaction as aids to metacognition in constructing writing portfolios; what essays do students prefer to include in their final portfolios, and for what

reasons; and what limits to creativity exist in the design of the SIUC portfolio system, and how can these limitations be effectively circumnavigated without disrupting the learning of students during their English 101 courses?

Assessing student comprehension and appreciation of metacognition opportunities presented through the use of writing portfolios would likely be best gathered through a combination of a similar questionnaire as the one used in this study, though with a much larger sample size. The results of this study indicate that students seem to appreciate and understand the opportunities for reflection and revision offered them by the portfolio system. However, there were some students who saw little or no value in writing portfolios, and at least one who actively hated them and wanted them removed from the curriculum. Further research into student comprehension and appreciation of writing portfolios' reflective opportunities, then, could give greater insight into where students might be missing some key data, and what complaints they might have that could potentially be addressed.

Because so many students in this study identified peer reviews and instructor assistance as keys to their success in using writing portfolios effectively, a comprehensive study of how these two sources of student assistance help students reflect upon their writing, what changes result from this reflection, and why students make these changes would be most enlightening. Additionally, because peer reviews have the potential to be so vital, it would be useful to identify the training that instructors receive in how to implement peer reviews in their writing portfolio-based classes, what improvements in that training might be made, and what methods already work most effectively. For a larger, more in-depth study, a comprehensive comparison between classes that use

extensive peer reviews and those that use little to none could identify their true value to students, as well as the circumstances under which peer reviews are best implemented.

In the SIUC portfolio system, there is a series of five unit assignments, as has been discussed in the Literature Review section. Students are required to include Unit 2, an Advertisement Analysis, in their final portfolios because of its importance in teaching them critical analysis skills and to identify the conventions of discourse in a specific community, but they must still select two other unit assignments (excluding the requisite Reflective Introduction) to include in the final portfolio, and the order in which to arrange these assignments. The decisions students make in the selection process, their decisions while arranging their essays within the portfolio, and the reflection that these decisions require while composing the Reflective Introduction to the portfolio are all fields ripe for analysis to better identify areas where students might need additional support, and how best to encourage students to make these important decisions in an informed fashion. These metacognitive tasks might be analyzed through questionnaires and interviews after each unit, and then after the students have compiled their finished portfolios, to identify their impressions of each unit assignment, and how they change over time along with their writing style. Analysis of the postwrites that these students produce might also provide valuable data on the subject.

Much mention was made in this study of the lack of creativity that the present SIUC portfolio system causes with its limited range of choices for essays to include in the final portfolio. This limitation makes sense from an instructional standpoint, because of its impression on students of areas they need to study most. It also makes sense because of its ability to keep students from being overwhelmed with choices within the limited

time constraints of their English 101 classes, and because it requires students to use different styles of writing that they otherwise might not. However, there may be alternate setups for English 101 classes that allow students to have additional choices, while still keeping them within a narrow enough range so as not to overwhelm either students or their instructors. Some experimentation into allowing students additional options on what essays they want to write in each Unit assignment might yield interesting results, and even better satisfy the needs of students, instructors, and administrators without detracting from the already-present benefits of the writing portfolio system currently used at SIUC.

#### *Summary and Final Word*

Since their initial use as a means to beat the trend towards standardized testing, writing portfolios have proven to be a potential blessing or curse to students, instructors, and administrators where they are put into use, depending on their specific implementation. At their worst, as their implementation in the Kentucky and Vermont school systems indicated, writing portfolios can become just another tool for gathering proficiency data of dubious quality, a requirement by the administration. In this worst-case scenario, students might enjoy the opportunity to revise their work, and administrators might enjoy the simplicity of data collection that portfolio systems provide. However, because teachers usually have no part in the original implementation of these writing portfolios or the form that they will take in the classes where they will appear, they tend to find steadily increasing dissatisfaction due to their disconnection from the decision-making process, the end result being little different from any other form of standardized testing.

When effectively implemented, as in the California school system, writing portfolios can provide a great degree of freedom to both teachers and students to express themselves, while still satisfying the needs of administrators for data on improvement, and allowing students to engage in active reflection and learning of other key writing skills. Key to this proper implementation is flexibility and inclusion, letting teachers take part in the decisions of administrators, and letting students take some part in the decisions of teachers, always in the end making sure that the classrooms in which writing portfolios are implemented become and remain student-centered, rather than instructor-centered.

Some of the most basic principles of writing portfolios include the following: collection, selection, reflection, choice, variety, planning, organization, and peer and instructor review and reactions. These must be implemented into all classes that make use of writing portfolios in order to best take advantage of all that writing portfolios can offer to the learning environment of these students. It is a careful balancing act in any class to ensure that no one of these principles outweighs any of the others in importance, except for the principle of reflection, or metacognition, which is the single most important aspect of writing portfolios, and provides the basic principle that makes them work as well as they can. From these principles, students using writing portfolios are able to review their prior works, and revise them with an informed, critical eye, rather than simply relying upon a single, largely non-negotiable deadline for each of their pieces of writing. In this way, students are able to demonstrate their ability to identify and improve upon their weaknesses, their skill in a variety of different genres of writing, and their capacity for organization, planning, and rhetorical argumentation, not only in individual writing artifacts, but through the arrangement of their writing portfolios as

well.

SIUC makes use of writing portfolios in its English 101 classes, as has been described. The writing portfolios used in these basic composition classes are intended to allow students to demonstrate their best, polished work in several different genres, and at the same time give them a chance to show how they have progressed as writers over the course of a semester. Thus, these portfolios are intended for assessment and for learning, both of these principles being important in determining the final grades for students at the end of a semester.

Because writing portfolios allow so many opportunities for review and revision as students work to present their best work, these metacognitive opportunities are one of the primary advantages that writing portfolios offer to students. However, because there is so much of a focus on personal reflection in implementing writing portfolios, the actuality of how effective writing portfolios really are in a class depends in large part on how they are received and used by the students to whom they are assigned, as student attitudes towards their writing portfolio can determine the entire focus of their work. Since students are the principle subjects of the writing portfolios that are used in instruction at SIUC in its composition classes, it makes sense that their perceptions would be of key importance in determining the effectiveness of the classes they were taking. If they were indeed engaging in reflective work, and had the principles of writing portfolios taught to them in such a manner that they were an important part of the class, taking up sufficient time for students to grasp these essential concepts of writing portfolios, then students should indeed be able to make reasonable informed comments on the quality of learning that they received through the use of writing portfolios. These comments would likely be

even more insightful if students had been given previous exposure to portfolios in the past, and so could better identify what benefits they had gained in the past, if any, and if they were still in effect in their present writing classes.

From this initial study, student perceptions of the implementation of writing portfolios appear to be a potential source for valuable insight into how well a portfolio system is being taught in a given curriculum. This finding applies not just to SIUC, but to any institution that might employ writing portfolios. At SIUC, weighing the findings of this study, it seems as though the system is working well at present. Students are indeed having ample opportunities to think metacognitively, and seem to be making good use of the chances to revise their papers. However, the seeds of potential stifling of creativity resulting from too much standardization are visible, and this poses a significant danger of causing the writing portfolios presently in use to lose the ability to perform their basic function. In other words, while the standardization of a common syllabus might be useful for training new GAs, and also useful for helping students remain focused on tasks, it can also make it very easy for students to avoid doing any critical thinking of their own. Studies such as this one are important because they might uncover those areas where students are no longer making best use of the benefits of writing portfolios, and simply writing because it is what they were told to do in order to get a good grade. By uncovering such deficits of metacognition, studies like this one can then identify how best to get students back on course, by returning to the core principles of writing portfolios. Through this constant state of reflection and revision, administrators and instructors can make the necessary adjustments required by any system of instruction to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of its students.

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## APPENDICES

**APPENDIX A**  
**SIUC ENGLISH 101 UNIT ASSIGNMENTS FOR FALL 2009, BY CHRIS COSTELLO**  
**AND RONDA DIVELY**

**ENGLISH 101—FALL 2009**

**UNIT 1: LITERACY NARRATIVE**

Working Folder Submission Date:

**Assignment**

For an audience constituted of members of your English 101 class, compose a “Literacy Narrative” in which you discuss and analyze the development of your literate practices relevant to a particular creative activity. Commonly, the term “literacy” is used to refer to reading and writing abilities. In this case, however, you should conceive the term more broadly as referring to your understanding of the rules and conventions of a particular creative activity—for example, sculpting, listening to music, playing a sport, or building a scale model of Faner Hall for your architecture class. In the context of this assignment, then, consider your “literate practices” to be defined as your capacity for performing relevant to a given creative activity.

To focus your essay, it would be best to choose a specific situation or focal event that illustrates how you became an apt performer relevant to this creative activity. Because this paper is a personal narrative, it should proceed more like a story than a traditional essay. More specifically, it should make use of a subtle thesis that establishes the significance of the focal event (as opposed to stating the thesis at the end of the first paragraph or announcing it as the “moral of the story” in the narrative’s final paragraph), and it should relay the importance/meaning of the experience for you and/or for a larger community.

For example, if you were to acquire literacy relevant to sculpting (such as the use of various tools and materials), then your literate practices might involve your ability to skillfully use these tools to create a bronze statue for the Carbondale town square and to make a living doing so. Similarly, if you played high school basketball, you certainly must have gained a literacy of the game (dribbling, passing, shooting, court-vision, etc...) and must have learned to apply this literacy in order to perform at a level high enough to play on the team, which may have led to your popularity in school, community pride in a winning team, or your ability to pay for college.

For further explanation of how you might think about this assignment, please refer to the **Contexts, Definitions, and Rationales section**.

Suggested page-length: 3-5 pages double spaced, 12 pt. font, 1” margins.

**Genre**

Personal-narrative, creative-nonfiction essay

**Some Useful Models\***

Douglass, *The Narrative*, Chapters 6-9

Ehrenreich, "Serving in Florida," *Mercury Reader*, Unit 1  
Eighner, "On Dumpster Diving," *Mercury Reader*, Unit 1  
Ellison, "Living With Music," *Mercury Reader*, Unit 1  
Klass, "Learning the Language," *Mercury Reader*, Unit 1  
Malcolm X, "A Homemade Education," *Mercury Reader*, Unit 1

*\* While some of these models are focused on reading and writing practices, the implied reflective practices and presentational strategies are readily applied to investigations of literacy or literate practices more broadly defined.*

## **Readings**

<i>Allyn &amp; Bacon Guide</i>	Chapter 1, "Thinking Rhetorically About Good Writing" Chapter 7, "Writing an Autobiographical Narrative" Chapter 19, "Composing and Revising Open-Form Prose"
<i>Mercury Reader</i>	Unit 1, Minot, "Theme: What's Your Point?" Unit 1, Minot, "Creating Structure" Unit 1, Minot, "Literary Concerns: Style, Tone, Suggestion"
<i>Portfolio Keeping</i>	pgs. 1-16, introduction to portfolios and working folders pgs. 24-31, working with other writers in a community
<i>Writer's Resource</i>	pgs. 42-48, "Exploring Your Ideas" pgs. 61-62, descriptive language pgs. 140-142, "Personal Essays" pgs. 189-191, memos pgs. 417-431, active verbs and precise language pgs. 478-489, pronoun usage pgs. 489-495, adjectives and adverbs

## **Working Folder Components**

A substantial draft of Unit 1 essay  
Informal exercises to be specified by the instructor

## **Portfolio Inclusion**

Optional

## **Contexts, Definitions, and Rationales**

The term *literacy* has traditionally been used to refer to reading and writing. But, *literacy* can be

used to characterize a broad range of abilities or practices that allow humans to act effectively within various environments. For this unit, you should write a personal narrative that 1) tells the story of a particular experience or focal event that influenced your literate practices relevant to a creative activity, and 2) analyzes an understanding of these practices and of the larger, broader implications of your ability to perform relevant to a particular activity.

Writing this *narrative* will assist in heightening your composing flexibility by requiring you to use what Ramage, Bean, and Johnson (*Allyn & Bacon Guide*) refer to as “open-form prose,” which may violate the conventions of essays you’ve been assigned to write in the past. Indeed, much of the writing that you practiced in high school (and will practice in college) is what Ramage, Bean, and Johnson refer to as “closed-form prose,” which has an explicitly stated “thesis supported with effective points and particulars arranged hierarchically into unified and coherent paragraphs” (546). This course aspires to establish that writing is not a formulaic enterprise, that there’s no blueprint or recipe for college-level writing, no “right way” to compose a given piece to which your ideas must conform. Rather, writing is a process of understanding available models of communication (and their benefits and disadvantages), solving problems, and making meaning for a given audience, which sometimes is merely the self. As we move during the semester toward different types of “closed-form” prose, which present more constraints than “open-form” prose, you will see that there is still plenty of room for the active, creative mind to maneuver. In fact, effective writing will demand that it do so. As the authors of the *Allyn & Bacon Guide* remind us, “writing exists on a continuum from closed to open forms” and “many features of open-form prose can appear in primarily closed-form texts” (546). For example, the dominant composing strategy of this assignment—narration—is often applied to closed-form writing, even “academic” writing.

A final issue to consider as you are composing and revising your literacy narrative is the importance of addressing the significance or implications of the selected focal event. Addressing these implications will involve analytical skills that you will use in future 101 assignments. The implications of the event that you narrate for this unit could be for you personally: How did this event alter you and/or your life? How do literate practices specific to a particular activity serve to improve living in some sense? Or, these implications could be for humans in general: What does your performance in the context of a particular activity suggest about your relationship to the world outside of that activity? How did your ability to perform relevant to that creative activity affect your ability to perform within other such activities or within society at large?

### **Literacy Narrative Guidelines**

A. The completed narrative should be submitted in a file folder (your working folder) with (1) a copy of the assignment, on which you have placed your initials next to each guideline, thereby indicating that you’ve read the guidelines, (2) all the informal exercises required by your instructor for this unit, and (3) the peer review you received along with any comments from your instructor. Additionally, email or post to Blackboard (as directed by your instructor) a digital copy of your narrative as a rich-text-format (RTF) document; label this file with your first initial, your last name, a hyphen, and “Unit 1” (e.g., RSmith-Unit1).

B. The narrative should explore an event that exemplifies your literate practices relevant to a

given creative activity.

C. The narrative should have a thesis, which addresses the importance of this literacy event either for you personally or for people generally. Preferably, this thesis will be subtly developed (rather than explicitly stated).

D. The narrative should have a title and an introductory paragraph that promote interest.

E. The narrative should support claims about your literacy through vivid description and analysis of the focal event, the activity you took part in, and the people involved.

F. The narrative should have effective transitions (between sentences, paragraphs, and larger sections).

G. The narrative should be free of mechanical, grammatical, and usage errors. Pay particular attention to the following:

- pronoun clarity
- gender inclusive language
- precise language

## ENGLISH 101—FALL 2009

### UNIT 2: ADVERTISEMENT ANALYSIS & EVALUATION

#### Working Folder Submission Date:

#### **Assignment**

Assume the role of an advertiser working for a firm that specializes in the promotion and support of arts and entertainment. One of the firm's creative directors, Sloan Landry, has asked you to contribute to the development of a new ad campaign by evaluating a competitor's marketing strategies. At this point in the campaign's development, Ms. Landry would like you to 1) analyze how another advertiser uses visual and verbal rhetoric to promote a competing product in a particular magazine and 2) evaluate how effectively the ad connects with that magazine's readership. Your task, then, is to select an advertisement that promotes an event or product related to the creative arts or entertainment and to evaluate this advertisement based on your analysis of its use of visual/verbal rhetoric and how effectively it connects with the magazine's audience. Ms. Landry expects you to convey this information in a carefully organized report, accompanied by the ad you analyze.

For further explanation of how you might think about this assignment, refer to the **Contexts, Definitions, and Rationales** section.

Suggested page-length for draft: 5-6 double-spaced pages, 12 pt. font, 1" margins.

#### Genre

Analytical business report

#### Useful Models

*Allyn & Bacon Guide* 311-13 (analysis model)

*Allyn & Bacon Guide* 269-74 (analysis model)

*Allyn & Bacon Guide* 275-84 (analysis model)

Cave, "Generation O Gets Its Hopes Up," Unit 2 (profile)

Cole, "Generation X," *Mercury Reader*, Unit 2 (profile)

Drogin and Reston, "How the Election was Won—and Lost," *Mercury Reader*, Unit 2, (evaluation)

Thomas, "Gibson's Movie on Jesus Greatest Story Ever Filmed," *Mercury Reader*, Unit 2 (evaluation)

Oliu et al., "Formal Reports," Blackboard

Oliu et al., "Informal Reports," Blackboard

#### Readings

*Allyn & Bacon Guide* Chapter 5, "Seeing Rhetorically"

Chapter 11, “Analyzing Images”  
Chapter 15, “Making an Evaluation”  
Chapter 18, “Composing and Revising Closed-Form Prose”

*Mercury Reader*

Unit 2, “Elements of Effective Layout”  
Unit 2, “Advertising’s Fifteen Basic Appeals”  
Unit 2, “Making the Pitch in Print Advertising”

*Writer’s Resource*

pgs. 21-27, reading critically, including visual texts  
pgs. 93-101, effective report design  
pgs. 189-191, report format  
pgs. 403-406, parallelism  
pgs. 424-432, 417-419, language precision, including verbs  
pgs. 446-459, sentence boundary issues  
pgs. 501-514, commas

**Working Folder Components**

A substantial draft of the Unit 2 report, with a copy of the focal advertisement and written approval of that advertisement

Informal assignments as designated by the instructor

**Portfolio Inclusion**

Mandatory (must be one of the four revised pieces submitted at semester’s end)

**Contexts, Definitions, and Rationales**

The Unit 1 essay (Literacy Narrative) required you to engage in a number of analytical activities, which, according to Ramage, Bean, and Johnson, require one “to divide or dissolve the whole into its constituent parts, to examine these parts carefully, to look at the relationships among them, and then to use this understanding of the parts to better understand the whole—how it functions, what it means” (*Allyn & Bacon Guide* 285). In the Literacy Narrative, you analyzed how a particular experience/event relevant to a creative activity affected the development of your literate practices relevant to that activity and, in some way(s), affected how you operated in the larger world. In Unit 2, analysis will be used to evaluate a primarily visual text—that is, a magazine advertisement that promotes a product of the creative arts or entertainment in such a way that appeals to the magazine’s readership.

When you draft and revise this analysis, you will examine the “parts” of the advertisement—its various visual and linguistic appeals, as they create an overall rhetorical effect on the intended audience. Of course, all evaluation requires criteria or standards of judgment. For instance, the

quality of a car is determined by how well the car meets certain standards (e.g., of fuel efficiency, cargo space, or horsepower). *But criteria are themselves determined by a “user” profile.* If you’re not concerned with gas mileage, then the fuel efficiency of a vehicle is probably less important to you than cargo space and horsepower. In this assignment, therefore, you will have to determine how well the ad meets the criteria implied by a profile of the readers of the magazine in which the ad appears. The standards by which you judge this ad will be determined largely, then, by the readers of the magazine (not by you).

In order to establish these standards of judgment, *you* will have to determine who reads the magazine and what these individuals are like. You will develop a profile of the ad’s intended audience by examining the magazine itself. Your role is to explain how this ad does *or* does not meet these readers’ presumed expectations. You will have to explain 1) how the ad works rhetorically, 2) how the ad fits *this particular* magazine, and 2) how the ad connects with the magazine’s *particular* audience. In short, you will explain how the advertisement sells this particular product by connecting the advertised product with the people reading the magazine. You are not merely analyzing the ad’s composition and evaluating it on its own merit; you are analyzing the ad as a rhetorical act and how effectively that act speaks to an audience’s interests.

### **Advertisement Analysis and Evaluation Guidelines**

A. The completed report should be submitted in a file folder (your working folder) with (1) a copy of the assignment, on which you have placed your initials next to each guideline, thereby indicating that you’ve read the guidelines, (2) a copy of the focal advertisement and the written approval of the advertisement, and (3) all informal exercises required by your instructor for this unit. Additionally, email or post to Blackboard (as directed by your instructor) a digital version of your report as an RTF file. Label the file with your first initial, your last name, a hyphen, and “Unit 2” (e.g., RSmith-Unit2).

B. The report should clearly communicate a description of the ad so that the firm’s creative directors can visualize it without seeing it. The ad *or* a color copy should be submitted with the report. (If the original ad is submitted, it should be neatly mounted on a sheet of paper.)

C. The report should provide a clear and detailed analysis and evaluation of the advertisement. The report should identify the thesis of the ad and explain how the ad supports that thesis; the report should explain how well the ad persuades its audience to accept this thesis.

D. The report should support the analysis and evaluation with evidence. The support must be clear and logical.

E. The report should have an introduction that (1) introduces the topic and (2) provides a thesis statement about the ad’s approach *and* effectiveness. The introduction should be concise, but it should be written so that the firm’s creative directors could read only that portion of the text and understand the ad’s approach and your evaluation.

F. The report should be divided into appropriate sections labeled with appropriate headings. Each section should have its own introductory paragraph that makes a claim, and each section’s “body” should support that claim.

G. The report should comprise sentences and paragraphs that logically develop your evaluative argument. The transitions between sentences, paragraphs, and sections should be clear.

H. The report should be free of grammatical, mechanical, and usage errors. Pay particular attention to the following:

- parallelism
- language precision, including verbs
- commas
- sentence boundaries

## ENGLISH 101—FALL 2009

### UNIT 3: SUMMARY & RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

Working Folder Submission Date:

#### Assignment

For a general academic audience, compose an essay in which you 1) summarize one of the approved readings on creativity or innovation and 2) analyze the rhetorical strategies used by the author to support her or his argument. Many of the essays you composed in high school may have asked you to read an article and to react to the opinions of the author in a personal way. In contrast, a rhetorical analysis asks that you identify the rhetorical techniques that the author employs and to explain how these techniques seemingly support and/or undermine the author's apparent purpose(s). Analytical commentary might focus on the perceived effects of any or all of the following: rhetorical appeals of ethos, pathos and logos; elements of form; figurative language, vocabulary, etc.—basically any feature of the writing itself that might persuade readers to accept the author's ideas.

For further explanation of how to think about this assignment, refer to the **Contexts, Definitions, and Rationales** section.

Suggested page-length for draft: 5-6 double-spaced pages, 12 pt. font, 1" margins.

#### Genre

Academic summary-analysis essay

#### Approved Articles for Summary/Analysis

Bayles, "Body and Soul: The Musical Education of the Youth," *Mercury Reader*, Unit 3

Bloom, "Music," *Mercury Reader*, Unit 3

Berger, "The Comics," *Mercury Reader*, Unit 3

Bettelheim, "Fairy Tales and Modern Stories," *Mercury Reader*, Unit 3

King, "Why We Crave Horror Movies," *Mercury Reader*, Unit 3

Hempel (with Lehman), "The Myspace Generation," *Mercury Reader*, Unit 3

Ross, "This Eminem May Melt Your Ears," *Mercury Reader*, Unit 3

Williams, "Hate Radio," *Mercury Reader*, Unit 3

#### Readings

*Allyn & Bacon Guide* Chapter 2, "Thinking Rhetorically about Your Subject Matter"  
Chapter 3, "Thinking Rhetorically about How Messages Persuade"  
Chapter 6, "Reading Rhetorically: The Writer as Strong Reader"  
Chapter 14, "Writing a Classical Argument"  
Chapter 22, "Incorporating Sources into Your Own Writing,"

<i>Portfolio Keeping</i>	pgs. 17-23, “Becoming a Reflective Learner”
<i>Writer’s Resource</i>	pgs. 255-265, 525-531, effective incorporation of quotes and paraphrases
	pgs. 261-265, 275-283, correct attribution and citation
	pgs. 406-411, 413-417, clear use of modifiers
	pgs. 459-466, subject/verb agreement
	pgs. 283-309, 322-323, works-cited page

## **Working Folder Components**

A substantial draft of Unit 3 essay  
 Informal assignments as designated by instructor

## **Portfolio Inclusion**

Optional

## **Context, Definitions, and Rationales**

For the first unit of this course, you began exploring your own literacy through “open-form” prose—or, more specifically, a Literacy Narrative. Not only did this assignment provide you the opportunity to practice writing in response to a subject with which you are probably quite familiar (i.e., yourself), but it likely heightened your consciousness about the importance of literacy for human beings. As you reconsidered the acquisition of a particular literacy, you probably became more aware of the benefits of literacy—particularly how an understanding of literacy in a certain context allows people to function effectively within that particular environment and often as a member of a defined group of human beings. In Unit 2, you then explored the relationship between literacy and group identity by examining how an advertisement used a specific language to sell a product by demonstrating a familiarity with the audience and its standards.

In Unit 3, you will continue to consider the relationships among group identity and language, but, for this assignment, you will use your writing as a way of participating in a community’s conversation (rather than describing how a community works). In this unit, you will join a conversation of a particular community, an academic community, by analyzing and critiquing an argument about a topic with which you undoubtedly have had considerable experience: creativity, broadly conceived. For this essay (a relatively closed-form text), you will summarize the content of a published author’s article and analyze the rhetorical strategies employed by that author.

For the summary portion of the text, you must convey *in your own words* the thesis of the article and its supporting points. To summarize the text effectively, you must radically reduce the length of the author’s argument (to approximately 200 words), but this reduction must accurately and coherently present the author’s argument and the manner

in which he/she supports it. The key to composing this summary is to imagine that you will be writing for an interested reader who will not read the article but who needs to use the information that the article contains. In other words, you must make sure that you convey the thesis and explain the most important supporting points that the author makes.

In addition to composing a summary, you will compose a rhetorical analysis of this article. This analysis is especially significant for your future success in many venues, as it prepares you to participate in the critical discussions that occur in all disciplines. Regardless of the discipline to which you belong, you will be expected to read others' texts and respond to them critically. This analysis must not only address the author's argument but also "how [the] text is constructed, what rhetorical strategies it employs, and how it appeals to *logos, ethos, and pathos*" (Ramage, Bean, and Johnson 122).

The second portion of this analysis is particularly important for your work in English 101, asking you to identify and explain the workings of the rhetorical techniques you've studied all semester, describing *how* the author *presents* his/her ideas, *how* he/she appeals (or attempts to appeal) to a particular audience, and *how*, in the language of the second unit, he/she *sells* these ideas to the audience. By analyzing how the author makes an argument, you will begin to develop your own academic literacy, which means that you will be able to understand how the conventions of academic language operate and how you can, in turn, use them to present your own ideas to other members of the academic community. As Ramage, Bean, and Johnson note in the *Allyn & Bacon Guide*, rhetorical analysis requires that you locate "a few rhetorical points that you find particularly intriguing, important, or disturbing to access or probe" (122). The authors do not exaggerate the pervasive importance of this form of analysis and communication in education (and business). In some form or other, you will compose such a text in nearly every class: you will write analyses of other authors' texts as distinct assignments *or* incorporate such analyses in larger compositions (like sustained scholarly arguments) or literature reviews (English 101's fourth unit).

### **Summary and Analysis Guidelines**

A. The completed Summary-Analysis must address an approved article from *The Mercury Reader*. The Summary-Analysis should be submitted in a file folder (your working folder) with (1) a copy of the assignment on which you have placed your initials next to each guideline, thereby indicating that you have read the guidelines, (2) all the informal exercises required by your instructor for this unit, and (3) the peer review you received and all comments from your instructor. Additionally, email or post to Blackboard (as directed by your instructor) an RTF copy of the Summary-Analysis; label the file with your first initial, last name, a hyphen, and "Unit 3" (e.g., RSmith-Unit3).

B. The Summary-Analysis should have an interesting title that identifies the subject and suggests a focus.

C. The introduction of the Summary-Analysis should have a lead that captures your

reader's attention and prepares the reader for the discussion. The introduction should be concise but should identify the author, the text's title, the author's subject and thesis, and it should provide an encapsulation of your analysis. Your reader should be able to read only the introduction and know the subject author's thesis and your overall assessment of his/her text.

D. The Summary-Analysis should clearly summarize the argument of the article. The summary portion should be concise and accurate. It should present the article in your own words.

E. The Summary-Analysis should clearly convey your analysis of the article's rhetorical purpose, form, and techniques.

F. The Summary-Analysis should effectively integrate material from the article with your own writing. The Summary-Analysis should include at least one quote. The Summary-Analysis should distinguish between the claims made by the author of the article, on the one hand, and claims made by you, on the other hand. The article's material should be carefully attributed to its author, and the material must be properly cited using MLA guidelines.

G. The various points that you summarize should be effectively connected to your rhetorical analysis. The transitions between sentences, paragraphs, and larger sections should be clear and establish the relationships between ideas for your reader.

H. The Summary-Analysis should be logically developed. The critical assessment of the article should be clearly argued, and claims must be supported with textual evidence that is properly cited.

I. The Summary-Analysis should be free of mechanical, grammatical, and usage errors. Pay particular attention to the following:

- clear use of modifiers
- effective incorporation of quotes, paraphrases, and summaries
- correct attribution and citation

## ENGLISH 101—FALL 2009

### UNIT 4: LITERATURE REVIEW (SYNTHESIS)

#### Working Folder Submission Date:

#### **Assignment**

John Frank, a professor of Education, has been asked to present a paper at a professional conference for a panel session entitled “Creative Arts and the American Spirit.” In preparation for this event, Professor Frank has asked you, his research assistant, to gather and synthesize information on *some aspect* of this topic into a literature review that might assist him in locating a viable focus for his presentation. To help expedite the process, he has provided you with a list of articles on the topic (see below), but he also wants you to locate a few sources on your own. Professor Frank has asked that your literature review take the form of an academic essay, and, therefore, he expects it to be written in a voice and style appropriate for scholarly exchange. In addition, he is careful to remind you that the purpose of synthesizing or reviewing literature is not merely to inform; rather, it is to forward, based on the material you’ve read, some specific observation or assertion about the status of knowledge on the focal issue. This essay should draw from a *minimum* of five sources (three from *The Mercury Reader*—see the list below—and two from credible venues of your own choosing and which are approved by your instructor). These texts must be cited and carefully attributed to their respective authors.

For further explanation of how you might think about this assignment, refer to the **Contexts, Definitions, and Rationales** section.

Suggested page-length for draft: 5-6 double-spaced pages, 12 pt. font, 1" margins.

#### Genre

Literature Review

#### Preparatory Literature Review/Synthesis Models

Raloff, “Researchers Probe Cell Phones’ Effects,” *Mercury Reader*, Unit 4

Gould, “Sex, Drugs, Disasters, and the Extinction of the Dinosaurs,” *Mercury Reader*, Unit 4

Lance, “Gender Differences in Heterosexual Dating: A Content Analysis of Personal Ads,” *Mercury Reader*, Unit 4

MacAulay, “Technology’s Peril and Potential,” *Allyn & Bacon Guide* 352-55

#### Focal Articles Provided by Professor Frank

Bayles, “Body and Soul: The Musical Education of the Youth,” *Mercury Reader*, Unit 3

Bloom, “Music,” *Mercury Reader*, Unit 3

Berger, “The Comics,” *Mercury Reader*, Unit 3

Bettelheim, “Fairy Tales and Modern Stories,” *Mercury Reader*, Unit 3

King, “Why We Crave Horror Movies,” *Mercury Reader*, Unit 3

Hempel (with Lehman), “The Myspace Generation,” *Mercury Reader*, Unit 3

Ross, “This Eminem May Melt Your Ears,” *Mercury Reader*, Unit 3

Williams, “Hate Radio,” *Mercury Reader*, Unit 3

## Additional Readings

<i>Allyn &amp; Bacon Guide</i>	Chapter 13, “Analyzing and Synthesizing Ideas” Chapter 20, “Asking Questions, Finding Sources” Chapter 21, “Evaluating Sources” Chapter 22, “Incorporating Sources Into Your Own Writing” pgs. 187-190, information on annotated bibliographies
<i>Writer’s Resource</i>	pgs. 204-219, locating and managing resources pgs. 226-234, evaluating sources pgs. 275-310, MLA reference section pgs. 525-530, quotation marks pgs. 531-537, “specialized” punctuation marks pgs. 549-552, italics, underlining pgs. 552-554, hyphens

## **Working Folder Components**

A substantial draft of Unit 4 essay

Copies of sources consulted/cited beyond *The Mercury Reader* selections, with instructor’s written approval

Annotated bibliography

Informal exercises as designated by instructor

## **Portfolio Inclusion**

Optional

## **Contexts, Definitions, and Rationales**

Synthesizing information from various sources—while also integrating it with one’s own observations—is an especially demanding yet relatively common composing challenge to be faced in your college courses and in the professional world. Academics engage in synthesis and/or generate literature reviews based on published research to establish the status of knowledge about a given topic and to sort out the accepted truths, gaps, flaws, and spaces for elaboration or refinement with regard to that knowledge base. In the business world, employers frequently expect staff to synthesize various data on a given product or service and to forward recommendations about the future of that product or service based on what the data reveal. The unique nature of the challenge stems from the fact that it is highly complex, requiring the writer to tap numerous composing strategies and skills (summary, analysis, response, assertion and support of major and minor claims, attribution and citation of sources) and to merge them in the context of generating a single document. Of course, the good news is that you have already practiced many of these strategies and skills in English 101, so you should be up to the challenge.

Though a general topic for this essay is assigned, you will need to spend considerable time on invention as you work within a broad subject matter area to appropriately narrow your focus (an aspect of a specific issue relevant to that which the professor has assigned) for a five-to-six-page paper. In light of this challenge, your instructor will be guiding you through invention exercises that will be crucial to future college writing experiences. To be sure, many assignments encountered in college will ask you to locate a viable focus within broad parameters. Building

the skills required for doing so requires a clear understanding of strategies for selecting and narrowing a topic and plenty of practice at applying those strategies.

Reading the sources required for this essay will help you focus your topic and will also serve as the objects of your synthesis. While you will be able to use the internet to conduct some additional research for this project, you will be expected to understand and apply strategies for locating academically respectable sources and for judging their credibility. Because this assignment is more dependent than others on the use of external sources, you will be reading additional textbook selections that reinforce source attribution strategies and rules for accurate MLA citation. Along these lines, as you are composing the Unit 4 essay, be sure to consult the quick reference guide to MLA documentation in your course handbook—*A Writer's Resource*. That section will provide answers to most of the questions that you have relevant to citing sources for this assignment.

Perhaps the most important principle to emphasize in this overview of the Unit 4 essay assignment (because it points to a very common source of confusion) is that a synthesis or literature review is not to be regarded as merely informative, a piece in which the author simply summarizes or collects in “cut and paste” fashion what others have had to say about the focal issue. Rather, the synthesis or literature review requires you to forward a thesis, or a comprehensive assertion about the material that you have gathered and analyzed. In other words, based on the sources you have studied (and will be integrating in this essay), you will offer an interpretation of where the authors in question stand on the issue and/or will offer some evaluation of their thinking about or attitudes toward it.

### **Literature Review Guidelines**

- A. The completed literature review should be submitted in a file folder (your working folder) with (1) a copy of the assignment, on which you have placed your initials next to each guideline, thereby indicating that you've read the guidelines, (2) all the “preliminary” exercises required by your instructor for this unit, and (3) the peer review you received along with any comments from your instructor. Additionally, email or post to Blackboard (as directed by your instructor) an RTF copy of the literature review; label the file with your first initial, your last name, a hyphen, and “Unit 4” (e.g., RSmith-Unit4).
- B. The literature review should address the broad topic designated in the assignment prompt.
- C. The literature review should synthesize information from at least five external sources, three from *The Mercury Reader* and two from credible venues of your own choosing. *The two self-selected sources must receive written approval before the submission date, and that written approval must be included in the working folder.*
- D. The literature review should have a title and an introductory paragraph that promote interest.
- E. The literature review should contain an explicitly stated thesis that comments on the current status of knowledge regarding the focal issue. That thesis should reflect your understanding of and/or reaction to current knowledge regarding the focal issue.
- F. The literature review should provide adequate support for all claims about the focal issue and/or the status of knowledge on the focal issue.
- G. The literature review should have a logical organization aided by effective transitions between sentences, paragraphs, and larger sections.

H. The literature review should demonstrate thorough, accurate, and stylistically effective attribution of source material (and should demonstrate the ability to use both attributive tags and parenthetical citation)

I. The literature review should be free of mechanical, grammatical, and usage errors. Pay particular attention to the following:

- citation of sources
- use of quotation marks
- attributive tags
- sentence boundaries

## English 101—Fall 2009

### UNIT 5: REFLECTIVE INTRODUCTION AND PORTFOLIO ASSEMBLY

#### Portfolio Submission Date:

#### **Assignment**

For an audience of college-level instructors and students, compose a Reflective Introduction for your course portfolio. In this essay, you will apply your understanding of rhetoric and your own writing processes to discuss (1) the texts that the portfolio contains (particularly the rhetorical choices that you made with regard to their initial composition, the revisions you made to them, and your reasons for including them in the portfolio) and (2) your development as a writer (or lack thereof if that was your experience of English 101). For further explanation of how to think about this assignment, refer to the **Contexts, Definitions, and Rationales** section.

Suggested page-length for draft: 5-6 double-spaced pages, 12 pt. font, 1" margins.

#### Genre

Metacognitive analysis

#### Preparatory models

Finger (student) "A Single Reflection on an Exploratory Essay," *Allyn & Bacon* 687

Urbanik (student) "A Comprehensive Reflective Letter," *Allyn & Bacon* 688-689

Scott & Plumb, "A Case Study of the Writing Experience" (Blackboard)

James, "Preface" to *The Ambassadors* (Blackboard)

#### Portfolio Inclusion

Mandatory

#### Readings

<i>Allyn &amp; Bacon Guide</i>	Chapter 25, "Assembling a Portfolio and Writing a Reflective Essay"
<i>Portfolio Keeping</i>	pgs. 32-60
<i>Writer's Resource</i>	pgs. 73-93, tips for revising and editing pgs. 101-103, tips for compiling a portfolio

#### **Contexts, Definitions, and Rationale**

During the course of the semester, you have been studying rhetoric as both an act of persuasion and a science of persuasion. You have learned about theories of communication and have evaluated texts based on those theories—including *your own* texts. Above all, in responding to the English 101 essay assignments, and in interacting with your instructor and your peers throughout the paradigmatic composing process, you should have learned that effective, sustained, formal writing is ordinarily well planned and involves considerable effort.

Though much of the work in this class involved investigating others' writing, considering the

reasons for their choices, and assessing the efficacy of those choices and the resultant communicative acts, the focus of this class has been your own rhetorical endeavors. You have studied rhetoric and others' use of rhetoric in order to improve your writing processes and, in turn, the compositions to which you direct those processes.

To demonstrate your growth as a writer, your understanding of your composing processes, and your appreciation of rhetorical choices (particularly your own), you will compose a portfolio of your revised and polished work (3 of 4 units), what Reynolds and Rice refer to as a "presentation portfolio" (4-5). Certainly, a most important component of this presentation portfolio is a *new* composition, the Reflective Introduction, which provides an overview of your revised work and comments on the processes and feedback that have contributed to its current status.

The Reflective Introduction's importance in your portfolio derives from its status as a metacognitive composition—a text in which you demonstrate, according to Reynolds and Rice, that you "know beyond your own knowing" (6). Herein you will write about your own writing—the assignments that you had, the original choices that you made, the comments that you received, and the consequent choices that you made during revision. This introduction to the portfolio will indicate that you have become a "reflective" writer, that you can "take a careful look at your own work to identify your patterns, strengths, and preferences for negotiating writing tasks, for learning new skills, and for putting those skills into practice," particularly in response to the demands of different rhetorical contexts (*Portfolio Keeping* 6).

Neither the process nor the substance of this text is foreign to you. You have been engaging in similar work all semester, as the material in your working folder will indicate. For instance, after each unit assignment, you composed a postwrite in which you explored your experience with each assignment, from your initial reaction to the guidelines, to the challenges you faced while drafting in response to self assessments and peers' responses. Even the unit assignments have prepared you for composing this Reflective Introduction. In Unit 1, you composed a piece about an incident in your (literacy) education, and in the portfolio introduction you will write about your (rhetorical) education. In Units 2 and 3, you analyzed and assessed the rhetorical choices that another writer made, a form of rhetorical criticism you will now apply to your own compositions.

The second unit is particularly useful to consider because of its evaluative nature. As you did in the ad analysis, in the Reflective Introduction you should make clear judgments. In this case, those judgments will be of *your writing processes and their end results*. These judgments should culminate in some overall (self) assessment of your performance and, more importantly, your growth as a writer during this semester. Most of you will likely give yourself a positive assessment. And you should. But the actual assessment is not as important as the text by which you convey that assessment. Even if you judge yourself to have performed poorly and to have minimally developed (or even regressed!), you could compose an effective Reflective Introduction that clearly and powerfully explains that performance and the reasons behind it.

The quality of the Reflective Introduction depends on how well you demonstrate an understanding of rhetoric and your own writing processes and how well you marshal evidence—from class discussions, from readings, *and* from your own texts—to support your thesis. This text stands as a natural capstone to the course, not only because it explains your performance and

the quality of your final project, but because it requires the rhetorical techniques that you have honed in your portfolio's composition: You will have to narrate (as you did in Unit 1); you will have to analyze and evaluate (as you did in Unit 2 and Unit 3), and you will have to synthesize texts (as you did in Unit 4).

### **Reflective Introduction Guidelines**

**A.** The completed Reflective Introduction should be submitted with the course portfolio as an overview of the collection of essays and your development this semester. Additionally, the Reflective Introduction—and the other Unit Assignments in the portfolio—must be submitted in digitized format (RTF or PDF). See the portfolio guidelines for further explanation of the portfolio's composition.

**B.** The Reflective Introduction should provide evidence of your acquisition of “content knowledge” during the semester. It should demonstrate your understanding of rhetorical theory and the paradigmatic composing process.

**C.** The Reflective Introduction should provide evidence of your acquisition of “metacognitive knowledge” during the semester. It should demonstrate your critical engagement with your own writing process and your appreciation of how rhetorical theory applies to your own writing.

**D.** The Reflective Introduction should provide evidence of your facility with the level of written communication expected of college students. It should demonstrate your ability to make wise choices about how to frame your work for the intended audience. The Reflective Introduction should: 1. have a title and introduction that foster the reader's interest; 2. present a clear thesis that in some sense conveys an evaluation of your work and development; 3. develop your thesis through logical organization and connect its various subpoints with effective transitions; 4. provide sufficient evidence from a variety of sources (assigned readings, drafts, finished essays, peer and instructor commentary, postwrites) in support of claims; 5. appropriately attribute and cite sources; 6. be free of grammatical, mechanical, and usage errors.

**APPENDIX B**  
**PERMISSION SLIP COVER SHEET AND FULL COPY OF THE STUDENT**  
**PERCEPTIONS QUESTIONNAIRE, BY STEPHEN ERIC JOHNSON**

Dear Southern Illinois University Carbondale English 101 Student,  
My name is Stephen Eric Johnson, and I am a graduate student seeking my Master's degree in the Department of English at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale. The purpose of this project is to gather information about student perceptions of the effectiveness of the portfolio system in SIUC's English 101 classes. No minors will be involved in this study; you must be at least 18 years old to participate. This questionnaire should take about 20 minutes of your time to complete.

If you choose to take part in this study, the demographic data and questionnaire attached to this cover permission slip will be collected by your instructor as you complete them and passed along to me. If, in addition, you choose to take part in a follow-up interview to elaborate on your survey responses, please fill out your contact information on the second page and you will be contacted as soon as possible so that we establish a suitable meeting time and place.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and students can choose to withdraw their participation at any time with no negative consequences. All information gathered will be kept strictly confidential, and only the director of my study, Dr. Dively, and I will have access to the information provided in the study during its course.

Any questions about this study should be directed to me or to my supervising professor:

Dr. Ronda L. Dively  
Department of English, SIUC  
Carbondale, IL 62901  
Phone: 681-453-6811  
E-Mail: rdively@siu.edu

Thank you for your time and interest in assisting me with this research.

Stephen Eric Johnson  
Department of English  
Southern Illinois University  
Carbondale, IL 62901  
gidkath@siu.edu

PLEASE REMOVE AND RETAIN THIS LETTER FOR YOUR RECORDS

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Southern Illinois University-Carbondale Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research can be addressed to the Committee Chairperson; Office of Research Development and Administration, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, IL 62901. Phone (618) 453-4533. E-mail: siuhsc@siu.edu.

Please read and respond to the following:

I understand that completion and return of this form and the questionnaire indicates voluntary consent to participate in this study, allowing reference to my statements on the questionnaire, and statements in any interviews. I also that I may withdraw at any time with no negative repercussions.

No minors will be involved in this study; you must be at least 18 years old to participate.

**Year in school:** Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Graduate

(circle one)

**Gender:** Female Male

(circle one)

**Date of birth:** \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_

(Day/Month/Year)

Please return this form and the questionnaire to your English 101 instructor, who will pass it along to the following individual:

Stephen Eric Johnson

Department of English

Southern Illinois University

Carbondale, IL 62901

gidkath@siu.edu

If you wish to take part in a follow-up interview, to better state your perceptions and opinions, please include contact information so that you can be reached. This is not required, but will aid this study greatly. If you do not wish to be contacted, then please leave this section blank.

**Contact Information** (e-mail or phone): \_\_\_\_\_

Your information shared here and on the questionnaire will be kept strictly confidential.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Southern Illinois University Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research can be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Research Development and Administration, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. E-mail:

[siuhsc@siu.edu](mailto:siuhsc@siu.edu)

## **Questionnaire**

If you require more space to answer questions please use the backside of this questionnaire, or attach additional sheets of paper with your answers, as preferred.

### **Prior Portfolio Experiences**

4. Have you had any prior experiences with portfolios (Work/School/Etcetera)? Yes/No
5. What were those experiences, and what was their purpose?

6. Were your prior experiences generally positive or negative? Please explain.

### **Reactions to SIUC's Portfolio System**

9. Which of your papers in English 101 did you select for inclusion in your final portfolio and why?

10. When and how often did you revise your papers, and what sort of revisions did you do?

11. What work did you do with your peers and/or instructor when revising your papers?

12. What advantages do you see in using a portfolio system?

13. Did you take full advantage of these advantages? Why or why not?

14. What disadvantages or problems did you see or experience in using the portfolio system?

15. How effective do you feel that the portfolio system is? Why do you feel this way?

16. What alternatives to the portfolio system in English 101 do you think would work more effectively?

**APPENDIX C**  
**COMMON SYLLABUS FOR SIUC'S ENGLISH 101 COURSE, FALL 2009**

**English 101: Composition 1**  
**Course Objectives, Requirements, and Policies**

**DESCRIPTIVE OVERVIEW**

English 101 provides students with the rhetorical foundations that prepare them for the demands of academic and professional writing. In this course, students will learn and practice the strategies and processes that successful writers employ as they work to accomplish specific purposes. In college, these purposes include comprehension, instruction, entertainment, persuasion, investigation, problem-resolution, evaluation, explanation, and refutation. In addition to preparing students for academic communication, this core-curriculum course prepares students to use writing to realize professional and personal goals. Accordingly, class discussion and readings will address the function of rhetoric and of composing processes in a variety of contexts, with attention to various audiences. Throughout the course, while engaged in a diversity of composing endeavors, students will learn to respond constructively to their peers' texts and to use peer responses (along with extensive instructor feedback) to improve the quality of their own work.

**PLACEMENT IN ENGLISH 101**

To qualify for placement in English 101, students must have completed English 100 with a C or better or have elected to enroll in the course. Students should review a description of English 100 and the 100/101 Stretch Program. This information will help students identify the introductory composition course that corresponds to their interest in, their training in, and/or their facility with critical reading and writing. This information is available from the Writing Studies office (Faner Hall 2390).

**COURSE GOALS**

After taking English 101, students should be able to:

- generate effective compositions using various methods for critical thought, for the development of ideas, for the arrangement of those ideas to achieve a specific rhetorical goal, for the application of an appropriate style, and for revision and editing;
- demonstrate understanding of the ways that language and communication shape experience, construct meaning, and foster community;
- analyze and describe rhetorical contexts and use such descriptions to increase the efficacy of communicative acts;

- analyze and use the forms and conventions of academic writing, particularly the forms and conventions of argumentative and analytical writing;
- produce texts that demonstrate an understanding of how purpose, process, subject matter, form, style, tone, and diction are shaped by particular audiences and by specific communicative constraints and opportunities;
- understand the importance of research to writing, explain the kind of research required by different kinds of writing, and compose effective texts by judiciously using field research, library resources, and sources retrieved from electronic media;
- employ critical reading and listening as forms of invention;
- efficiently compose reading and lecture notes that are concise and clear;
- synthesize different and divergent information, using the integration of information from multiple sources to engage in critical discourse;
- use Edited American English appropriately.

## ***COURSE MATERIALS***

### **Required Materials**

Maimon, Peritz and Yancey. *A Writer's Resource*. 3rd ed. McGraw-Hill, 2009.

Douglass. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Dover Thrift ed.

Ramage, Bean and Johnson. *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing, Brief Edition, MLA Update Edition (5<sup>th</sup>)*. Pearson/ Longman, 2009.

Reynolds and Rice. *Portfolio Keeping: A Guide for Students*. 2nd ed. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006.

*The Mercury Reader* (custom), Southern Illinois University-Carbondale: Spring 2010 Version

Access to a computer that is connected to the Internet

### **Recommended Materials**

A portable or desktop file case or an accordion folder

A portable USB storage device

A college-level dictionary

## ***COURSE WORK***

During the semester, your instructor will require you to write frequently—for a variety of purposes, for a variety of audiences, and in a variety of forms. Most of this work will provide direct or indirect contributions to the culminating project of English 101, the course portfolio (explained below). The portfolio will contain revised versions of your major assignments and an analysis of your writing and your communicative development during the semester.

### **Unit Projects**

English 101 is divided into five units. By the end of each unit, you will produce a significant “formal” composition that is the equivalent of three to six double-spaced pages. For each unit, your instructor will distribute detailed assignment guidelines for the major composition associated with it.

Unit One—Literacy Narrative: For an audience of your 101 class, you will narrate and address the significance of an experience in which you learned the literate practices of a given field or community and, as a result, gained access to that field or community.

Unit Two—Advertisement Analysis: For a business audience, you will compose a report that evaluates the effectiveness of a given advertisement in the context of the magazine in which it appears.

Unit Three—Summary/Rhetorical Analysis: For an academic audience, you will summarize an article to be assigned by your instructor, as well as critique the rhetorical strategies employed by that article’s author.

Unit Four—Literature Review: For an academic audience, you will synthesize information from various sources about a controversial or debatable issue as designated by your instructor.

Unit Five—Reflective Introduction: With attention to course readings and activities, as well as to the contents of your portfolio, you will compose an essay, targeted for readers in English 101, that discusses your development as a writer during English 101.

Each of these texts will emerge from a process approach to writing, in which you engage in invention activities, planning activities, drafting activities, and revision/editing activities (including peer review). The formal composition for each unit and the materials used to write the composition will be submitted in a “working folder,” which is a folder that documents your work during a particular unit.

Format of Unit Assignments: All drafts of major essays for the course must be computer generated and submitted as both a hardcopy and an electronic copy as directed by your instructor. The first page should be labeled with your name, the course and section number, the date, and

the unit number; subsequent pages should be numbered and labeled with your last name. The pages should have one-inch margins. The text should appear in 12-point Times New Roman font. Multiple pages should be connected with a staple or a paper clip.

Submission of Working Folders: During each of the five units listed above, your instructor, on pre-determined due dates, will collect preliminary informal exercises (idea sheets, plans, drafts, peer comments) for purposes of providing you with some feedback, and he or she will keep track of your timely and engaged attention to these exercises in his or her grade book. At the end of the unit, your instructor will collect some or all of this material again as part of a “working folder,” or a record of your effort and development during the unit; thus, it will be imperative that you retain all informal exercises produced in the context of the unit. Failure to submit your responses to such assignments in timely and thorough fashion relevant to their original due dates will result in a deduction from the unit grade.

The working folder for each unit will also contain a draft of the major assignment or essay associated with that unit. The entire working folder contents for a given unit, then, will be assigned a grade that ultimately will account for 10% of your course grade. In addition, your essay will be assigned an “advisory grade,” or an indication of its quality at the time you submitted it. The advisory grades will not contribute to your final grade for the course since you will be able to revise most essays until the end of the term, but the unit drafts will be an integral part of the holistic working folder grade. Indeed, it will be impossible for you to receive higher than fifty percent of the points available for the working folder grade without having submitted a *substantial* draft of the unit essay in addition to the informal assignments required by your instructor. (Important note: Because you will need to consult the working folder contents for all units at the end of the semester as you are assembling your portfolio and composing your reflective introduction, you will need to keep all the working folder contents from previous units in a safe, readily accessible place as you embark on each subsequent unit.)

If you know you will not be able to attend class on the day a working folder is due, make arrangements in advance with your instructor for a revised deadline and receive written approval of this deadline (which you must include in the folder). If your need to miss class is sudden, make sure that, at least, you have e-mailed your major essay assignment to the instructor in the specified format before the assignment is due. Never submit an assignment by leaving it on your instructor’s desk, giving it to your instructor’s officemate, or slipping it under your instructor’s door. Your instructor will not be responsible for receiving such submissions.

Late submissions of working folders without prior approval will be accepted, but submissions under these circumstances will result in a deduction to the unit grade. Any submission after the deadline on the same day will receive a five-percent deduction of possible points to be earned. Submissions on the next day (which starts at midnight) will receive another five-percent deduction. For each day that the assignment is submitted after the second day, the assignment will receive a five-percent deduction.

### **Informal Exercises**

In some sense, each unit project will serve as a model for the portfolio that you will submit near

the end of the semester. The working folder for each unit will be a collection of your work during that unit (the major unit assignment and smaller daily assignments). Each working folder that you compile should provide evidence of your growth as a writer during a specific unit (much as the course portfolio will provide evidence of your growth as a writer during the semester). During each unit, you will engage in work that will assist in preparing the text that you will submit for review at the end of the unit. Often, these small assignments will constitute stages in your own writing process for a particular major essay, but they might include other documents such as a peer review of a classmate's work or a detailed summary of a reading. In determining the grades for working folders at the end of each unit, the instructor will "weight" exercises in accordance with their length and complexity. Though this course does not have a specific class participation grade, the informal exercises will indicate your level of effort and engagement.

In the case of unexcused absences, late informal exercises will not be accepted for any reason, and you will not be allowed to submit alternative assignments for missed work of this nature. If you know you will not be attending class on the day an informal assignment is due, you should e-mail it to your instructor before the start of class (but such posts do not excuse you from any work completed during the class period). For excused absences of any nature, you will be expected to provide documentation if you want your instructor to allow you to make up an informal assignment. For planned excused absences, you must make arrangements with your instructor for doing the work before the established deadline or for a later deadline. (You must receive written approval for any extensions of deadlines.) For unplanned excused absences, you will need to provide after-the-fact, official documentation of the reason for your absence before you will be allowed to make up the work that you missed.

Unless you are given other guidelines by your instructor, the informal exercises should be neatly written (on lined loose-leaf paper in blue or black ink) or computer generated. The first page of the assignment should be labeled with your name, the course and section number, the date, the unit number, and a brief assignment title (such as "Peer Review," "Idea Sheet," or "Page 10 Questions"). Work that is not labeled appropriately will be returned without a grade. Multiple pages should be connected with a staple or a paper clip.

### **Portfolio**

This course has been designed to increase your ability to communicate, particularly in writing, by encouraging you to develop and then exercise a rhetorical sensitivity by which you identify the constraints and opportunities of any communicative challenge and respond appropriately. To improve this ability (which you already possess), this course is structured around a portfolio system, in which a large portion of your grade (fifty percent) is based on texts that you will be able to revise for much of the semester, drawing upon the rhetorical sensitivity that you develop, your instructor's comments, your peers' comments, and other resources that you might employ (for instance, the Writing Center). Near the end of the semester, you will submit your portfolio by gathering essays that you have completed during the semester and polished to "presentation quality" text. You will present this work to your instructor (in a two-pocket folder) as evidence of your ability to write and as evidence of your learning during the course of the semester. This collection of finished essays will be graded on the quality of the writing, not on effort. (Effort will be rewarded in the context of the working folder.)

Your instructor will judge the portfolio by engaging the collection of texts largely as an experienced reader (rather than as an educator). As he or she will have made regular comments

on your writing (if you submit your rough drafts and visit him or her during the semester to discuss revision), your instructor will read your portfolio attentively but no longer with the kind of attention that supports formative commentary. Your instructor will read these texts against a rubric, based on the course guidelines, to see if your work is rhetorically effective and indicates that you have achieved the communicative goals set by the English 101 objectives. In the process of preparing your portfolio for presentation to your instructor, you will be asked to compose a Reflective Introduction (Unit 5 essay) that comments on your development as a writer as evidenced by the other formal essays that you've decided to submit.

## **Exam**

In this class, you will be required to take a final exam during the officially scheduled exam period. The exam will ask you to generate an essay (employing strategies explicitly addressed in the context of English 101) on a subject matter to be announced near the end of the semester.

## **Percentages**

Unit 1 working folder (including draft of Literacy Narrative)	10
Unit 2 working folder (including draft of Advertisement Analysis)	10
Unit 3 working folder (including draft of Summary/Response)	10
Unit 4 working folder (including draft of Literature Review)	10
Unit 5 portfolio (including Reflective Introduction)	50
Final Exam (in-class essay—form and subject matter TBA)	10

## ***COURSE POLICIES***

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is the intentional use of another author's material and/or words in your own text without acknowledging that author's contribution. In the academic environment, plagiarism is a serious ethical violation that carries serious consequences. Please read the sections on plagiarism in the *Allyn and Bacon Guide* and in *A Writer's Resource*.

In addition to the standards regarding plagiarism addressed in those two books, your instructor will hold you to some other standards.

- First, as you are responsible for learning how to write effectively at the college level, *unintentional* use of another author's material will still constitute plagiarism. You are responsible for understanding the standards that will be taught

in this class and abiding by them. If you are in doubt about a potential plagiarism problem, ask your instructor about the material before the assignment is due.

- Second, make no mistake about the fact that presenting even “unpublished” material

written by someone else (e.g., a paper written by a friend for English 101 or another course) as if it were your own work is an act of plagiarism.

- Third, the use of texts in this class that you have written in the past or are writing during this semester for another course (the idea being to expand or rework them for submission in English 101) must receive written approval from your instructor. You should submit a copy of the text (or the assignment) to the instructor when you request the permission. In the case of an assignment that is being composed in another class during this semester, your instructor will request permission from the other instructor.

Ostensible violations of the plagiarism standards will be referred to the Director of Writing Studies. She will select an appropriate response in consultation with the instructor of record. Substantiated accusations of plagiarism could result in either a failing grade on the assignment, a failing grade for the class, or a referral to the Chair of the English Department or Dean of the College of Liberal Arts for possibly more severe disciplinary action. In addition, such cases will also be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs, where the information will be placed on file for reference relevant to any future violations of the Student Conduct Code.

Please also note that assisting others in the act of plagiarizing by providing them with your own work to turn in as their own—and/or submitting your work to on-line data bases from which students can purchase papers to turn in as their own—could be interpreted as an act of academic dishonesty and may be subject to disciplinary action under the Student Conduct Code.

### **Course Attendance Policy**

Excessive unexcused absences will prevent students from passing this course. Students who miss more than a total of three weeks of class (9 class periods of a MWF schedule; 6 class periods for a T/TR schedule) as a result of **unexcused** absences will be assigned an “F” for the course. While one day over three weeks (consecutive or not) of unexcused absences will result in **automatic failure** of the course, the negative effect of total unexcused absences under the three-week mark inevitably will be substantial in that

- no in-class work can be made up without providing official documentation of the reason for the absence (unexcused absences will result in a “zero” for work completed during the missed class period);
- work that comes in after the due date as a result of an unexcused absence will receive a deduction in accordance with the late work policy outlined in the English 101 course description;
- lack of participation in classroom activities will negatively impact one’s level of preparedness for succeeding on the unit assignments and, ultimately, the portfolio.

Students who miss over three weeks of class as a result of **excused** absences (e.g., those resulting from extended illness) must obtain official documentation (e.g., a letter from a medical doctor) that establishes 1) the cause of the excessive absences **and** 2) the necessity for having to miss so many class periods. In the interest of organizing and expediting the documentation process, students who are absent for an extended period of time as a result of illness or other personal crises should seek the assistance of SIUC’s Transitional Services Office (453-7041).

Please note that early departures for holidays will **not** count as excused absences. Excused absences for weddings, funerals, court dates and other such obviously compelling matters must

be approved as such ahead of time by your instructor, and procedures for making up missed work must be formally arranged with the instructor. All absences that you wish to be designated as “excused” as a result of illness or an emergency must be officially documented. This documentation must be provided to the instructor no later than two weeks after the absence in order for the absence to be marked as “excused.” Therefore, if you are not feeling well enough to come to class and wish the absence to be excused, you will need to provide evidence of a visit with a health care professional.

### **Tardiness**

Unless excused by the instructor, an instance of tardiness or an early departure from class exceeding ten minutes will count as an unexcused absence. Unless approved by the instructor in the case of valid excuses, students will not be allowed to complete in-class assignments missed partially or in full as a result of being tardy or departing early from class. Chronic tardiness may be regarded as disruptive behavior (see below).

### **Policy Regarding Cell Phone Use**

The increased prevalence of cell phone use in our society has necessitated articulation of a policy for using phones responsibly in classroom settings. Any student who brings a cell phone--or other mobile communication device--to class is responsible for turning it off *before the beginning of the official start time*. If you are in the midst of some family crisis that requires you to keep your cell phone turned on, you must keep the ringer set to “manner mode” and must alert your instructor before class about the situation. Doing so will minimize potential disruption as you prepare the instructor up front that you might need to take a call. If you need to take an emergency call, quietly leave the classroom and find a place where your conversation will not disturb others. Lack of compliance with this policy will be regarded as disruptive behavior, and violators will be subject to the consequences for disruptive behavior outlined in the following section.

### **Disruptive Behavior Policy**

Behavior that disrupts the educational environment in English 101 and that, therefore, interferes with others’ learning opportunities will not be tolerated. Disruptive behavior in the context of the English 101 classroom includes (but may not be limited to)

- disrespectful treatment of your instructor or peers
- patterns of tardiness
- violations of the policy for responsible cell phone use

A student determined by his or her instructor to be “disruptive” will be referred—along with a report describing the offending behavior—to the Director of Writing Studies or her Administrative Assistant. A student in this situation will not be allowed to return to class until the offending behavior has been specifically identified and the consequences of repeating the behavior clarified in the context of a meeting between the student, the Director of Writing Studies, and, in certain cases, the instructor reporting the behavior. Following this meeting, repeated acts of disruptive behavior as identified by the instructor will result in referral to the Chair of the English Department, the Director of Student Judicial Affairs and/or the Dean of the

College of Liberal Arts. Consequences could include suspension or expulsion from the course.

### **Incompletes**

An “Incomplete” is a special end-of-course designation granted only to those students who have regularly attended class and who are in good standing relevant to course work completed but who, for catastrophic, officially documented reasons outside their control, are unable to finish a large portion of the required course work. “Incompletes” will be granted by the instructor of record in consultation with the Director of Writing Studies, and subsequent completion of the course will be governed by a contract signed by the instructor and student to be approved by the Director of Writing Studies.

### **Emergency Procedures**

SIUC is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for study and work. Because some health and safety circumstances are beyond our control, we ask that you become familiar with the SIUC Emergency Response Plan and Building Emergency Response Team (BERT) program. Emergency response information is available on posters in every building on campus and in the Emergency Response Guideline pamphlet. It is also available on BERT’s website at [www.bert.siu.edu](http://www.bert.siu.edu) and on the Department of Safety’s website [www.dps.siu.edu](http://www.dps.siu.edu).

Instructors will provide guidance and direction to students in the classroom in the event of an emergency affecting your location. It is important that you follow these instructions and stay with your instructor during an evacuation or sheltering emergency. The Building Emergency Response Team will provide assistance to your instructor in evacuating the building or sheltering within the facility.

### **Disability Support**

Students who require accommodations for physical or learning disabilities should contact the Disability Support Services office (453-5738). The Disability Support Services office will provide Accommodations Agreements that students with differing needs may submit to their instructors.

### **Proficiency Examination**

In accordance with the University’s policy toward “academically talented students,” the Writing Studies Program in the Department of English offers proficiency credit for English 101. The Writing Studies Program offers this credit to students who pass a nine-hour examination (spread across three testing periods), during which they must write in a variety of forms and thereby indicate that they have developed proficiency in the areas of written communication addressed in English 101, such as narration, self-reflection, analysis, and rhetorical criticism. To be eligible for this test, a student can never have enrolled in English 101 and received a grade (including a W, a PR, and an INC). Students interested in more details about proficiency examinations should consult the Undergraduate Catalog.

Students interested in taking the English 101 test must sit for three three-hour components. The three components will be administered on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday during the first week of classes for the fall and spring semesters. For students who miss one of the first three sessions, a fourth, make-up session will be offered on the Saturday morning following the first week of classes. Students must arrive one half-hour before an examination period begins and

may not enter the examination room after the exam start time. To the exam, students should bring two blue or black ink pens and their SIU student identification. Students are allowed to use a grammar handbook and a dictionary that meet the approval of the exam proctor. (Recommended texts are *A Writer's Resource* and *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*.) Specific dates, times, and locations for proficiency exams are available from the Writing Studies Secretary (453-6811).

VITA

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