

12-1-2014

# "I Don't Want to Hurt Anyone's Feelings": Using Race as a Writing Prompt in First Year Writing

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“I DON’T WANT TO HURT ANYONE’S FEELINGS”: THE USE OF RACE PROMPTS  
IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITON

by

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B.A., Saint Martin’s College, 1991  
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A Dissertation  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English  
in the Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
December 2014

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**DISSERTATION APPROVAL**

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the field of English

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## **AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF**

DIANNA ROCKWELL SHANK, for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in ENGLISH,  
presented on SEPTEMBER 26, 2014, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: "I DON'T WANT TO HURT ANYONE'S FEELINGS": THE USE OF RACE  
PROMPTS IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITON

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Lisa J. McClure

First Year Composition (FYC) is one of the most important courses for any incoming college student. This course (often designated as English 101) provides students the rhetorical tools to fully engage in critical thinking and writing on the college level. One of the most common methods of organizing FYC is to use a topic as the center of all the reading and writing prompts. The use of outside subject matter to teach FYC is a common practice that is rarely interrogated for its effectiveness. However, the Hairston debate in the early 1990s opened up a public discussion of how FYC should be taught. I am arguing that this debate was never fully resolved. Instead of using this historical moment in our field to discuss how topics impact FYC instruction, the use of topics has continued to be normalized during the last twenty years with little attention given to interrogating what actually happens in a FYC course that focuses on a topic. This dissertation study examines the result of using a controversial theme like race as the primary organizing principle of both a day and night FYC course in a metro-St Louis

area community college. Using discourse analysis, I analyze student writing to determine how the students' writing is impacted by the subject matter of the course.

## **DEDICATION**

There are three people in this world who have everything to do with me being able to complete this dissertation. First, my husband, James W. Shank, has been there from the start, encouraging me even when he has no idea what I am talking about in terms of composition theory. Second, my first academic mentor, Dr. Leslie G. Bailey, treated me like I was his daughter when I was an undergraduate at Saint Martin's College; without his enthusiasm for rhetoric and language, I don't think I would have become a teacher. And last, but not even close to being least, my graduate mentor here at SIUC, Dr. Lisa J. McClure, has taught me how to be an academic and a teacher, as well as reminding me that every now and then I might have something clever to say. Without her guidance, this dissertation would have never happened.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Besides Dr. Lisa J. McClure, I must also acknowledge Dr. Charles Bazerman, Dr. Christiane Donahue, and the entire group of participants at the 2012 Dartmouth Summer Seminar for Composition Research. Each of these folks helped me “birth” the coding categories for analyzing the sentences my students wrote while we worked at the beautiful campus of Dartmouth College during a very hot July and August. I also acknowledge the willingness of my committee members, Dr. Ronda L. Dively, Dr. Gerald Nelms, Dr. Robert E. Fox, and Dr. Judith Ann Green, for agreeing to serve on this committee and helping me to shape this research into something useful.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Introduction:

“Many young people come to university able to summarize the events in a news story or write a personal response to a play ... But they have considerable trouble with what has come to be called critical literacy: framing an argument or taking someone else’s argument apart [and] synthesizing a different point of view.” — Mike Rose (*Lives on the Boundary* 188)

A few years ago, I was leading a class discussion in one of my ENG 101 sections, a course I have been teaching for approximately 15 years. The students had read an essay by Tom Perrotta from *GQ* magazine titled, “The Cosmic Significance of Britney Spears.” In his essay, Perrotta asks a question about Spears’s significance in our society: “Do we need to think about Britney? ... Does the fact that she’s currently one of the biggest pop stars in the universe ... make her by definition a figure of sociological influence?” (236-7). I thought the discussion was going well — students were responding to Perrotta’s question — some negatively, others sheepishly admitting that they liked Spears — but more importantly, it appeared that this reading was helping the class to formulate ideas for an essay I had already assigned, asking students to deconstruct the term “icon” in terms of race, class, and/or gender. Spears was especially interesting in terms of how she is sexualized in a specific class category (i.e. “White trash”). In addition, I thought using an essay on a pop star who students were familiar with would make the discussion (and, hopefully, the resulting writing) more

relevant.

However, about half-way through the class, one of the students became frustrated by the discussion. Melissa turned her attention to me and asked why I had assigned such a “horrible essay.” When I started to respond by linking the reading with the essay assignment, Melissa became even more frustrated and unleashed her anger directly at me. Standing up and heading for the door, she yelled that I was a “Britney-hater” and that she had signed up for a writing class, not a sociology class. Melissa’s unexpected words made me feel both sad and bewildered. Before I had a chance to talk with her, Melissa dropped the class; however, the memory of her departure from that course remains with me. In my quest to help Melissa refine her “cultural literacy” skills (as defined above by Mike Rose), was I forcing my own political views on the class? Was I implying that Britney Spears was worthless and, thus, indirectly invalidating the lives of her fans? Was it possible that I had walked across some sort of line in my class objectives? Should I have led the students in a discussion on comma splices instead of Britney Spears? Was Melissa right in her accusation that I was not teaching the English skills that she had signed up for?

In part, this dissertation is a response to the above scenario. As composition instructors teaching one of the few classes that most students seeking a college degree must take, we must seriously consider not only how we organize the course but also how we can ensure that the course is both useful and relevant to our students. As compositionist Irene Lietz laments in her recent dissertation, “It is a pain deep in our hearts — and the pit of our stomachs — that many students ‘do’ writing to meet a requirement, failing to ever discover the power of writing as thinking and

communication” (2). Essentially, we want our students to become less reluctant in learning how to grasp an idea and wrestle with it. Indeed, too few of our students embrace the relevancy of writing instruction in the first place:

A key observation among teachers of critical thinking is that students, when given a critical thinking problem, tend to reach closure too quickly. They do not suspend judgment, question assumptions, imagine alternative answers, play with the data, enter into the spirit of opposing views, and just plain linger over questions. As a result, they often write truncated and underdeveloped papers. To deepen students’ thinking, teachers need to build into their courses time, space, tools, and motivation for exploratory thinking. (Bean 7)

Often “exploratory thinking” inevitably leads to forays into exploratory writing. In her study of using race-themed FYC courses, Lietz mentions “The Neglected ‘R,’” a study commissioned by the National Commission on Writing For America’s Families, Schools, and Colleges which argues that “analyzing and synthesizing information are ... beyond the scope of most first year students” (14). Without a doubt, our FYC students need to recognize the complexity of thinking and writing: “Without the ability to use writing to deeply examine complexities, students are consigned to the level of public discourse governed by Fox News and radio shock-jocks. This is costly to individuals and education, as well to society as whole because democracy relies on vigorous, public discussion and well-considered critique to function well” (Lietz 2).

FYC instructors must be aware of the great responsibility we possess in organizing our pedagogical instruction. In *The Vocation of a Teacher*, Wayne Booth

argues that “The most valuable political act any teacher can perform is not to impose particular political views but to teach students to see the words that society tries to inject into them unseen” (154). Thus, a composition course has the potential to be a powerful force in the lives of first year college students. Many of them come to college with only the skills to summarize, not — as Rose argues — the ability to “fram[e] an argument” and “synthesiz[e] different points of view” (188). By offering a diversity of readings and perspectives, I hope that students will start to grapple with critical literacy in both their thinking and writing. If they learn these skills in FYC, then they are better able to proceed to other (upper division) classes with a hearty dose of intellectual curiosity. But I also understand — as Booth asserts — that I must be careful about indoctrinating students with only one view; honestly, I welcome the moments when I am challenged by students to rethink my own perspectives. But should first year writing be so controversial anyway? What should I be “doing” when I teach?

The infamous war of words in 1992 between two huge names in the field of first-year composition, James Berlin and Maxine Hairston, brought a previously private discussion (the decisions instructors/ departments make when organizing writing courses) into a more public arena. While Berlin basically argued that any writing course (no matter the focus) is going to be inherently ideological, Hairston fervently believed that teachers must omit their personal politics (and interests) from aggressively entering the writing classroom. She had faith that students could discover for themselves not only what the “important” and “relevant” issues were to them, but that these same students could complicate their chosen writing subjects enough to bring diversity into the center of the writing classroom. If anything, Hairston didn’t want students to be

powerless to resist being dominated by an instructor's ideology (even if this ideology was an intended result of classroom interactions).

I see my job as one in which I help my students realize the power of cultural literacy so that they can better manipulate the writing and communication texts they will need to produce in their "real" lives. If the objectives of ENG 101 include an awareness of purpose and audience — as well as the development of strategies for analysis, synthesis, organization, and precise language — then using artifacts from our social and political world (e.g., an article about Britney Spears) could provide an effective means of examining a type of literacy that seems imperceptible to so many students. Further, as English instructors Theodore F. Fabiano and F. Scott Goodson have argued, "As teachers of language, we have an important opportunity and an obligation to help students learn to interpret persuasive discourse" (50). But how to aid students in learning this type of discourse is debatable. Writing in 1945, teacher Charlotte E. Crawford lamented that ENG 101 "has now become *the problem child of the department*, the course that no one quite knows how to handle but about which everyone is concerned" (70, emphasis added). Crawford's comment was as true in 1945 as it is true today.

Too often we teach our students to avoid questions and "messiness" and promote attention simply to form (e.g., the five paragraph essay). Sometimes I wonder if we "seem afraid to let them loose with ideas" (George 7). Thus, I try hard to encourage students to find their authentic voices in their writing. I would argue that when students are forced to conform their writing to a specific and "artificial" style (e.g., writing assignments that students do not connect to), the resulting writing can best be

characterized as phony and depersonalized; the student is not authentically invested in either the discussion or the actual words. Too many composition students are asked to write “What I Did on My Summer Vacation” essays which require very little thinking (or knowledge making). Students end up seeing the course as simply a prerequisite, as something they must “do” in order to fulfill a degree requirement. I would argue, however, that essay assignments that focus on race, class, and gender (including “The Cosmic Significance of Britney Spears”) offer relevance and interest — or, at least, as much connection to the world of undergraduates as possible. Further, such discussions and texts, focused on how knowledge is created by a particular community, can introduce students to the discourses of various groups, including an examination of the “discourse of the university” (George 1).

In this introduction, I first discuss the general dilemma of organizing a college writing course. Next, I will explain how using a subject matter when teaching FYC fits into the rhetoric and composition discipline as a whole and what kinds of pedagogies have preceded and paved the way for it (e.g., ENG 101 courses organized around a touchy topic or theme). Later in this chapter, I will explain my particular discourse analysis project and the basic research questions that guide it.

### Organizing First Year Composition (FYC):

So how do we get there? How do we create a first year composition course that offers students the best means of interrogating both their critical thinking and writing skills? I started teaching first-year composition (FYC) in the same way many people come into the field – as a graduate teaching assistant. Since that very first semester, I

have continually questioned the methods I use to encourage – and motivate – students to grasp the fundamentals of effective essay writing. We know that the teaching of college-level writing is not an exact science – many viable options exist as to how an instructor can approach the organization of this course. I know that I want students to genuinely understand how important effective communication will be for their academic, professional, and personal lives. Instead of prescribing forms and modes for students to follow (again, assigning “What I Did on My Summer Vacation” essays), I want to give students experience making the difficult rhetorical choices writers always have to make: How can I best arrange these ideas to facilitate my readers’ understanding? What style would be most effective for this writing situation? How much detail might my audience want? What kind of evidence should I introduce, and why? Should I include stories, anecdotes, or hard empirical research?

The challenge for FYC instructors, then, is how to best organize such a course. Even the question of whether or not to use reading material in a writing classroom – and what type of reading material – remains an explosive topic. The use of literature in FYC is but one controversial debate associated with the decisions related to arranging a FYC course. The practice of using literary works normally manifests itself by way of the numerous anthologies used in composition courses which are made up of essays, short stories, plays, or even poetry. This practice of using literature in FYC has its roots in New Criticism and its focus on close textual readings (and product over process): “James Berlin observes that New Criticism’s assumption that there is a correct way to present and read a text has passed over into the writing classroom to create current-traditional rhetoric” (Kennedy 205). Proponents of using literature claim that this

encourages students to not only read, but to think more critically. Since critical thinking is necessary in the writing of expository essays, the practice is, by definition, useful. However, opponents claim its application in the composition course requires too much focus on reading and too little on actual writing.

Thus, the very history of FYC has directly determined the variety of approaches and methods available in the teaching of college level writing. Controversies and hot topics arise – as seen in the question of using literature in FYC. Debates over readings are part of the larger debate concerning the “true” purpose of the course. How should FYC be organized? What, if any, reading materials belong in a composition course? What is the actual subject matter of FYC? What subject matters are even appropriate?

These questions lead to the research I will outline in this dissertation. What effect does it have on student writing when a FYC course is organized with a specific focus on the sensitive topic of race? Is the writing produced more “effective”? Certainly, there are risks in deliberately using race as a writing prompt. Compositionist Mona Scheuermann claims in her essay “Freshman Writing and Ideological Texts” that too often teaching freshman composition can degenerate into “a very sloppy introduction to political science, sociology, psychology, and environmental science” (n.p.). I believe that focusing a FYC course on the potentially volatile subject of race works and can accomplish the objectives of English 101. Using cultural issues and politics can be a great way to get students to write (and talk) about “real” issues. Why have them write about topics that have no relevance to them (and these are usually the topics that are most often included in a reader for any class)? Instead, they should be able to respond to the issues that we haven’t really figured out as a nation -- we have an

African American President, for example, but we still have an issue with race in this country. By encouraging students to think about these difficult, tough topics, we can more easily get them connected to their world around them (perhaps proving to them that they can make a difference in this world).

### Understanding Our Past:

Harvard University first initiated FYC in 1874 after discovering that many of the students entering the university system were exhibiting weak writing skills. According to the *Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Writing*, this new entrance requirement emphasized correctness and a focus on literary studies:

Each candidate will be required to write a short English composition, correct in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and expression, the subject to be taken from such works of standard authors as shall be announced from time to time. The subject for 1874 will be taken from one of the following works: Shakespeare's *Tempest*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Merchant of Venice*; Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*; Scott's *Ivanhoe* and *Lay of the Last Minstrel*. (Reynolds et al. 14)

Thus, what happened in those early classrooms – and arguably even up to the 1950s – is often loosely described as Current-Traditional Rhetoric, an approach to teaching FYC that focuses on textbook instruction, an emphasize on correctness, and an insistence on the modes of discourse (though debatable, this approach might be observed in the infamous textbooks of the time by Alexander Bain, Hugh Blair, A.S. Hill and Barrett Wendall). In his history of the discipline, Robert J. Connors argues that these textbooks

were so popular that they “introduced pedagogies and rhetorical ideas that still have currency in the teaching of writing a century later” (12). A typical class at this time probably included a general weekly topic being assigned with students handing in the completed assignment with little response from the teacher or among their class colleagues. The goal of such a course was the production of a “perfect” academic essay.

But gradually this objective was questioned. Recognizing the need for serious reconsideration of FYC, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) mandated the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in 1949. Not too long after, the journal *College Composition and Communication* appeared in 1950. Throughout the 1950s, then, the CCCC did much to lay the foundations for the modern discipline of composition studies. Teachers and researchers started to realize that there was a large gap between the traditional way of teaching a course and how students actually worked as writers. For instance, these early researchers discovered that students might need longer than a week to develop their ideas. Once those writers wrote a draft, they needed feedback to better their writing in terms of thinking and editing. Further, students might write best when they felt connected to the relevancy of the writing prompt. Eventually these observations resulted in a process approach to writing, best illustrated by the work of Janet Emig and Sondra Perl.

Seeing writing as a process also involved the goal of helping students find a “natural” voice, often through the use of personal narratives (a type of writing that would never be generated via Current Traditional Rhetoric assignments). So starting in the 1960s, an extensive amount of research in the field of composition was conducted on

how people write and how writing should be taught. For example, the Dartmouth Conference in 1966 was attended by both American and British educators who came together and argued that writing instruction should emphasize self-expressive uses of language instead of simply emphasizing correctness and form: “Unlike the Harvard-model course, which imposed standards on passive students, the new Dartmouth-model writing course encouraged more interaction among teachers and students, more dramatic and collaborative activities” (Reynolds 8). This emphasis on authentic voice (and more active students) became an important component in the research of Peter Elbow, leading many writing instructors to embrace invention, style, and voice as objectives of FYC.

However, as composition began to grow as a field of research throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, a multitude of other theories began to emerge in an attempt to grasp how students write and what we should emphasize in our course objectives. Cognitive theorists such as Linda Flower and John Hayes believed that understanding the cognitive relationship between the way we think and the way we shape language might help unlock the potential writer in every student. Such a theory focused on a “scientific rhetoric of the composing process” so that the mind is studied as a “set of structures that performs in a rational manner” (Berlin, “Rhetoric” 685). In fact, Janet Emig’s work (*The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* in 1971) eventually led to a difference in thinking about the process of “writing” in favor of thinking about the process of “composing.” Mina Shaughnessy’s important work *Errors and Expectations* (1977) encouraged FYC instructors to re-think the way they approached “errors” and the correction of grammatical issues, especially in terms of

underprepared FYC students. Shaughnessy believed it wasn't that these students didn't understand communication, but they simply had not been taught or even misunderstood the rules of written formal English that are generally accepted. Her work prompted the discipline to reevaluate whether or not grammatical concerns were even one of the goals of FYC.

Theorist James Kinneavy claimed that different types of discourse have different aims and conventions. His early work on the modes of discourse led to his classification of rhetorical situations according to their emphasis on the writer (expressive), audience (persuasive), subject matter (referential), or verbal medium (aesthetic). *A Theory of Discourse*, published in 1971, provided a unifying framework for understanding many kinds of writing and reestablished important connections between writing instruction and classical rhetoric. Indeed, Kinneavy was instrumental in articulating how contexts shape purposes, including reintroducing the concept of "kairos" to contemporary rhetorical theory. He demonstrated how the triangle, the "interrelationships of expressor, receptor, and language signs referring to reality" (18), pervades Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and how this triangle should be used as a foundation for FYC.

As the field of composition and rhetoric continued to develop in the 1980s and 1990s, a new theorists encouraged alternative ways of thinking through the goals of FYC. Those instructors in the trenches of composition classrooms realized that student writing could improve if students encountered writing assignments in classes outside of FYC. James Britton coined the phrase "writing across the curriculum," leading to writing programs that encourage written communication no matter the course. In addition,

giving students opportunities to work collaboratively on academic projects can help prepare them for the advantages and pitfalls of collaborative work in the “real” world. Christopher Thaiss in *The Harcourt Brace Guide to Writing Across the Curriculum* argued that the increasing compartmentalization of writing instruction (typically designated to one or two semesters of FYC) could not possibly provide students with sufficient writing skills to perform successfully in advanced courses across, especially, other disciplines.

The late 1980s also saw a rise in awareness of the degree to which race and social class affect the situation of student writers as evidenced by Mike Rose, Linda Brodkey, and Ira Shor. Social epistemic rhetoric sees knowledge as “not simply a static entity available for retrieval.” Instead, truth must be “interpreted – structured and organized – in order to have meaning” (Berlin “Contemporary” 242). The social epistemic approach sees everything as a possible text, questioning hierarchies such as patriarchal or sexist literature, texts biased toward higher socio-economic classes, or texts that reinforce dominant ways of thinking. The objective of designing a FYC course around social epistemic theory is that students learn to critically deconstruct texts and to notice the inconsistencies that may be unfair to groups outside the controlling paradigm. Such an approach to FYC encourages students to think in what Mary Louise Pratt termed “the contact zone,” a phrase used to describe “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (33). Students – and FYC instructors – must resolve their own unique backgrounds, especially their language practices, with classrooms that demand standard academic English and don’t encourage the complex interplay that more closely

resembles the “real world.” The goal in FYC, then, becomes one in which students are encouraged to acknowledge the interplay of power in how they create – and use – language. In other words, in order to teach students how to effectively write academic discourse, we need to understand their “histories”; it would not be fair (or effective) to simply teach students from diverse backgrounds how to write in the language of power while ignoring their culture and the fact that there actually is a language of power.

In “Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century,” Richard Fulkerson attempted to make sense of the variety of approaches in composition by trying to decide, based on scholarly publications and textbooks, what actually occurred in classrooms. Essentially, he offered a comprehensive overview of some major pedagogical theories and approaches in contemporary composition studies. Fulkerson argued that “composition studies has become a less unified and more contentious discipline early in the twenty-first century than it had appeared to be around 1990” (654). There is no doubt the field of composition has become more complex. Fulkerson argued that the late 1980s saw a shift from a genre based study to a focus on feminist, cultural, and postmodern studies in the teaching of FYC. Within the field of composition, we sometimes argue what is more effective for FYC students – a cultural studies, reading-response based program or a more widely centered rhetoric of genres and discourse forms? Fulkerson warned us that some degree of commonality must occur in writing classes because the university sees these courses as a larger part of the general education plan. Ultimately, his concern about the disunity in the field encouraged him to think that some agreement about what constitutes “good” writing would make FYC stronger.

An attempt at consensus in terms of the purpose of FYC happened in 1999 when the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) published a statement outlining the common knowledge, skills, and attitudes sought by FYC programs in American postsecondary education (see Appendix E). Divided into separate sections, this statement outlines four major FYC objectives: Rhetorical knowledge; Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing; Processes; and Conventions (“WPA Outcomes”). This document was a result of a concerted effort to regularize (to some extent) what happens in the composition classroom, an effort that is complicated by the fact that FYC is perhaps the one class that almost every college student must take, no matter the size or type of institution. We know that learning to write is a complicated task that is individual for every person. As Doug Hesse has noted, “learning to write is not like learning the dates of World War II” (41). Effective writing occurs from “messy” experiences in which drafting, discussion, and feedback all play important roles. However, this way of thinking about writing (as suggested by the WPA objectives) only evolved as the developing discipline of composition and rhetoric wrestled with defining the very goals of FYC.

Obviously, current composition theory is a vast and complicated “beast.” However, the 1991 statement by the WPA clearly indicates that rhetorical knowledge and critical thinking provide the foundation for what we should be doing in the classroom. Hesse argues that “in general, writing is a process of constructing a text to achieve a desired effect within a specific group of readers” (41). There is no doubt that this activity can be pursued in a myriad of different ways. All four objectives outlined in the WPA statement – Rhetorical Knowledge; Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing;

Processes; and Conventions – argue that the objectives of FYC are to “focus on a purpose” and consider the rhetorical situation of the written communication in terms of audience, organization, support, and clarity. These outcomes are not meant to be standards, but simply a way of regularizing FYC courses by identifying FYC objectives (and outcomes) that we can all agree upon. The WPA expects writing instructors to take this outcome statement and adapt it to suit particular institutions and contexts.

And this is where the controversy continues. Cultural critical approaches to teaching FYC, such as pedagogies forwarded by John Trimbur, Linda Bordsky, and James Berlin, have come under strong criticism for supposedly attempting to indoctrinate students into their instructor’s political beliefs. However, these approaches to composition aim to enable students to critique ideologies implicit in cultural practices so that students will be able to resist and possibly change unjust social, political, and economic conditions. But for every cultural critic, there is always another FYC expert who fervently believes that any political topic has no place in a writing classroom.

### The Context and Organization of This Study:

The goal for this dissertation is to discover what happens in a composition classroom organized around the subject matter of race. Given the history of FYC that I just briefly outlined, how does organizing a writing class around a sensitive topic like race work out in a practical way? Does a sensitive topic like race, class, or gender simply add complications that get in the way of meeting the basic objectives of FYC? This study is not meant to be compared to how others approach and organize FYC, but rather this study is meant to be a specific attempt to more fully understand the practical

applications of what happens (or doesn't happen) in a FYC course with race and diversity at its core in one specific community college setting.

The site for this research is a two year college (Sam Wolf Granite City Campus of Southwestern Illinois College) located near East St Louis, a Midwestern city known for its historical and volatile race relations. Even today, the communities around East St Louis – St Louis, Granite City, Madison, Collinsville, Venice – are like pieces of a chess board, some predominately white while the neighboring community predominately black. At the time this research data was being collected (Spring Semester 2010), Barack Obama had recently been elected president (in 2008) and I often heard students say in the classroom, "We are all equal now," simply because we had elected a black president. "Teaching students about racism in society not only helps racial minority students feel seen and respected for their experiences, but also helps white students become more cognizant of the facts and causes of racial inequalities" (Perry 228).

Given the before mentioned history of FYC, I believe that race is still most often appropriated as a racial category rather than as a valid factor in better understanding the composing process of our students. In fact, in his recent dissertation *Whiteness, White Privilege, and Three First-Year Composition Guides to Writing*, Nicholas Neiman Behm argues that even the selection of a textbook in a FYC classroom can reinforce white privilege by valorizing (and supporting) colorblindness and ignoring how the complicated social construct of race impacts how and what students write. Thus, my research seeks to join Behm and others who are actively addressing this gap in our current FYC scholarship and national discussions.

In addition, community colleges are often not the site of academic research.

However, the composition sequence at SWIC doesn't differ from most of the colleges and universities around us in the Midwest. In fact, most FYC programs consist of either one course or two courses that require an entire academic year to complete, unless students test out of one or more courses during placement examinations. At SWIC, students take a COMPASS test and this placement score determines if a student needs developmental work or immediate placement into either ENG 101 or ENG 102. The first writing course, English 101, typically verifies that by the end of the semester, students recognize and can produce persuasive essays that have both a focus and specific development/ support. The second course, English 102, aims to help students develop research essays that incorporate the voices of sources as well as the voice of the student. Those of us who teach in the English department recognize that students will be taking courses throughout their college careers that will ask them to communicate their written ideas on paper; thus, most of us view ENG 101 and ENG 102 as crucial courses in the foundation of a solid college career.

The research for this dissertation attempts to address the gap in scholarship in terms of interrogating the often "normalized" practice of using an immersed subject matter in FYC courses by describing what specifically happens when race-themed writing assignments are used in FYC. The discussion about "themed" FYC courses is a complicated one; indeed, the WPA listserv regularly discusses (and debates) the myriad meanings of this term and how difficult it is to pin down one definition or approach – where do we mark the dividing line between appropriate course content and inappropriate course content? Who decides on "appropriateness" anyway?

A recent posting on the WPA listserv by Elizabeth Wardle highlights the

frustration resulting from debates about “themed” FYC: “What I hope for is the day when we stop thinking that teaching the content of our discipline is a ‘theme.’ Would any other discipline ever degrade what they know in this way? ‘Welcome, students, to Biology 101, where the theme is ... biology!’” One of the responses to Wardle’s comment came from another composition scholar who argues that one way to interpret a theme is to evoke the term “immersion” – “immersion in the ongoing ‘conversation’ that the writer seeks to respond to, immersion in the discourse community whose audience the writer is addressing” (Nelms). For this study, I will be using the term “topic” to represent a FYC course in which the students are “immersed” in reading and writing assignments that focus on race. Again, I realize the conversation about themes in FYC is a complicated one but this dissertation is more interested in the overt use of a subject matter traditionally considered “outside” the realm of writing instruction.

After this introduction, Chapter 2 – a literature review – describes what has been analyzed and researched already in terms of using social justice themes in FYC and, more specifically, using race in ENG 101 courses. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of this study, including a detailed description of the data collection, coding, and analysis. While Chapter 4 outlines the results of the raw data from the study itself (both the essays generated by the students and responses to three class surveys), chapter 5 provides an analytical discussion of the findings. Chapter 6, the conclusion, ends with a summary of this entire project, as well as specific advice on organizing and teaching a FYC course with race as the subject matter. The appendices at the end of the dissertation include the syllabus that was used in both classes as well as each of the five writing assignments that the students were asked to respond to (though this

study focuses only on two of these assignments). I also include 56 data tables that represent the data coding of two introductory paragraphs from each of the 28 students in the study (14 students in each course).

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction:

As mentioned in the introduction, this dissertation reports on and analyzes the results of using a specific subject matter to organize two sections of ENG 101 at an urban community college. This chapter, the literature review, will describe the long standing “debate” over course topics that started with disagreement over the organization of FYC at the University of Texas Austin in 1990. The scholarly discussion surrounding this controversy, however, left a gap in terms of the practicality of using a topic as an organizing principle in FYC. In other words, we did not use this opportunity to openly scrutinize whether a topic of any type was the most effective means of structuring a FYC course in the first place. As the following discussion will highlight, composition studies missed the perfect opportunity to carefully discuss the proliferation of using sensitive subject matter and immersing FYC students in a particular topic. Instead, we simply slid into the “easier” debate of the usefulness of cultural studies on FYC curriculum decisions. One of the many texts written by Hairston, “The Reasons Why Not,” alludes to “the other side” (12) in her account of the disagreement and an accompanying image published with the article shows two groups of academics at each end of a rope, pulling as hard as possible. This resulting dichotomy did little to further our knowledge of topics as the center of FYC courses.

Undeniably, composition studies sorely needs descriptions – and analyses – of what happens to student writing when instructors employ a single topic as the organizing principle of a FYC course. As this chapter will outline, we have many voices of writing professionals “debating” over the use of topics in FYC coursework but few

pedagogically focused studies that actually highlight the voices of the students themselves.

I believe that this gap in the scholarship represents a research area where the use of “touchy topics” like race, class, or gender still need to be investigated. With more focus on the voices of the students and carefully examining the precise pedagogical decisions of the instructor, the field could more deeply examine the effects of themed writing courses on the actual writing as well as how this pedagogical approach impacts the teaching of rhetoric. Even with controversial themes like race and class, the focus of the classroom can remain – and should remain – on writing. This chapter will outline the scholarship that has arisen around the question of using specific topics in the writing classroom.

#### The Hairston Debate: “A Spirited Discussion”:

In 1992, Maxine Hairston wrote “Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing,” an article that would initiate much debate in terms of answering the question, “What should be the subject matter of FYC?” This important article was a response to the major media hype surrounding the controversy of a proposal at the University of Texas at Austin to restructure its FYC courses with a required text that highlighted racism and sexism. At the time of the controversy, Hairston had published several textbooks and chaired the 1985 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). Obviously, Hairston was no newbie to the field of Composition Studies. In fact, in 1985 Hairston, perhaps unintentionally, paved the way for ushering in the very question of incorporating politicized texts (with a specific focus/ theme) in FYC by arguing for a

psychological “break” from literary critics in her essay, “Breaking Our Bonds and Reaffirming Our Connections.” This essay was based on her 1985 Chair’s Address at CCCC and was a direct challenge to the literary theorists who had long influenced much of the FYC curriculum up until that point. The subject matter of a writing course, according to Hairston, should be writing itself. If anything, Hairston was certainly interested in helping to publically consider the most effective methods of organizing and implementing FYC on both a local and national level.

According to an article Hairston wrote as a result of the heated controversy over “Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing,” the trouble at the University of Texas began when the English Department became divided after a proposal to make ENG 306, the first year writing course required by all first year students, into a course centered around the topic of difference: “The reading text chosen for the course was a social studies text titled *Racism and Sexism*: students would read and write about essays from that book, and all sections of the course that were taught by graduate students – more than 90 percent of the total – would follow a single syllabus” (Hairston, “The Reasons” 12). Like initiatives at many institutions, Hairston and her colleagues at the University of Texas were attempting to bring some level of consistency to the FYC program, especially given the fact that such a large percentage of FYC courses were taught by (often) inexperienced graduate students. In terms of the original discussion of these course changes, Hairston does mention that two of the six committee members disagreed with the text and organization of the course, believing that the readings were not diverse and balanced, resulting in a one-sided presentation of the ideas. However, the proposal passed since four committee members were in favor of the proposed changes.

It didn't take long, though, for a seemingly "private" department discussion to evolve into a more public dialogue. And it is perhaps the way that this historical discussion was handled that has determined the way that discussions on course organization and pedagogy are often polarized today. Hairston notes that not too long after the original department decision, the debate moved out of the English Department and into the larger community at the University of Texas: "56 faculty from a cross-section of University departments published an open letter in *The Daily Texan* asking the English department to reconsider its action" ("The Reasons" 12). After the Dean of Liberal Arts postponed the decision because of the growing debate, the English department eventually approved the required course (with the addition of supplemental readings to appease the faculty members who felt the original readings were too one-sided). Hairston comments that the "observers outside the University began to voice objections to what they saw as the highly political content of the course, suggesting that the attempts to implement it at Texas were part of the liberal left's much politicized attempts to impose a 'politically correct' orthodoxy at colleges all over the country" ("The Reasons" 12).

The very fact that this English department dispute bubbled over into a larger community discussion illustrates that as one of the first public discussions in which our field (and even those outside it) debated what "exactly" should happen in a FYC class, emotion was in no short supply. Note that Hairston described the course as including "highly political content" simply because the proposed FYC re-organization would focus on rhetorical strategies associated with a theme of difference. However, any politically themed overtones can focus on rhetorical issues.

I would argue that the one missing discussion point during the University of Texas situation was a more focused and productive dialogue of exactly *how* a FYC course focused on a subject matter (political or otherwise) might work (or not work). There is no overt conversation about how one's teaching philosophy might affect the choices in how one organizes a class. Certainly, the pedagogical decisions that a writing instructor makes are highly influenced by how that individual teacher views knowledge-making and learning. The discussions instigated by Hairston and her detractors, however, seemed to imply that there could be a static approach to teaching FYC – give every instructor the same book and syllabus and a certain outcome is virtually guaranteed. A more productive discussion might have called into question that varying ways that individual instructors might use specific topics as an organization tool (no matter if that topic has strong political associations or not).

Hairston – perhaps rightly to some degree – vehemently disagreed with the idea that a writing classroom needed to have a “theme” or “subject.” However, her comments in any of her articles during and after the situation in Texas show no indication that Hairston saw the traditional classroom as a site of power, privilege, or even hierarchy. By commenting that the “Left” seeks to take over the way that FYC is organized and even thought about in imposing a “politically correct orthodoxy,” she suggests that teaching can be apolitical and completely disconnected to the larger world. Her take on a topic for the class indicates that the course is likely to become a political or perhaps even philosophical discussion, not a writing course that might be attempting to get at the rhetoric inherent in these fuzzy concepts.

Much of what Hairston argues in “The Reasons Why Not” (written after the

trouble at the University of Texas) was a repeat of what she argued in “Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing” publication in *College Composition and Communication*, but in this later article she does more succinctly describe what she thinks a writing course should have as its objective: “Well taught, a freshman writing course becomes an introduction into the essence of a university education: learning to think critically and articulate ideas clearly and logically” (“The Reasons” 13). Any writing course with politically charged topics as the central organizing feature of the curriculum (e.g. a theme) does not, according to Hairston, achieve this goal. She clearly argues here that a writing course with *any* theme that she would label “politically charged” does not encourage students to “think critically and articulate ideas clearly and logically.” However, Hairston is unclear about *what* topics might be considered “politically charged” but certainly – going back to the situation at the University of Texas – Hairston would pronounce a writing course themed around difference (e.g. race, class, and gender) as too polarizing of a subject for students to adequately tackle in FYC.

Prior to “Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing,” Hairston published an earlier editorial on this issue in the widely read *Chronicle of Higher Education* in January 1991, “Required Courses Should Not Focus on Charged Issues”; in this text Hairston specifically outlines her opposition to the move in the English department at the University of Texas, arguing that “the proposed course is pedagogically unsound” (n.p.). Stating that “being passionate about the issues doesn’t confer the expertise to deal with them in the classroom,” Hairston contends that politically charged issues are likely to impede instructors and students from attacking the one goal of FYC: “learning how to use language to express ideas effectively” (n.p.). Here, Hairston uses the term “issues”

in place of “subject matter” and negatively labels such a course as “pedagogically unsound” simply because the course “appears to be” about a non-writing subject.

Hairston summarizes several problems in this early *Chronicle* article behind her personal opposition to the redesigned course and in determining that such a course is “pedagogically unsound.” English instructors (especially adjunct and teaching assistants) do not have the expertise to teach sociological subject matter that takes valuable time away from learning how to effectively communicate on paper. In terms of the topic matter itself, Hairston argues that students who are forced to write about subjects that do not interest them will be unable to write essays that they care about. Further, because students are so focused on grades, they will likely not take the risks that would be required to authentically engage with such complex topics as racism and sexism. The largest ethical problem, Hairston argues, is that “mandating political content for a course that students must pass in order to graduate severely limits their freedom of expression” (n.p.). She ends her discussion with “We’re not missionaries; we’re educators” (n.p.).

Essentially, Hairston warned against the move in composition studies to create FYC courses that relied on politically charged topics and writing assignments. Of course, Hairston’s words through this very public discussion prompted an outpouring of responses from writing instructors across the country. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* published a selection of these responses a month later. Three of the four published responses disagreed with Hairston’s position. Louise Z. Smith argued that any topic has political connotations – “every issue, even every topic, is charged somehow for someone” (Letter n.p.). Smith’s progressive take on pedagogy

encourages her to view the classroom as a political space no matter the writing topic used by the instructor. In addition, Smith advocates that students should, in fact, feel uncomfortable with topics so that those students can genuinely engage with ideas that differ from their own. Indeed, arguing that “expertise does not confer neutrality,” Smith uses the example of a likely essay found in a general FYC reader – an essay about a spotted owl – and points out that “nobody says, ‘Hey, wait a minute! Since when are you a biologist?’” (Letter n.p.). This point by Smith clearly indicates that rhetoric can be found all around us, not just in the mythical “neutral” classroom that focuses on supposedly “neutral” writing.

Two other responders – Seth Mendelowitz and Carl Mills – also offered negative criticism much like Smith. Mendelowitz points out that English teachers do not “teach in a cultural vacuum” and that students can offer insightful written critiques of the world around them. Mills supports this position, arguing that “good writing is situated, contextualized” (n.p.). The lone published supporter of Hairston’s argument, Ann Shillinglaw, argues that “a course focusing on racism and sexism should be taught in the sociology and anthropology department, not under the English rubric” (n.p.). Shillinglaw advocates that a semester of writing should focus on rhetorical concerns like audience, tone, and voice, not class material that is not overtly connected to written communication. I am not sure how this “conversation” could have been more effectively structured by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* but these responses to Hairston resulted in further alienation of the apparent two “sides” of this issue – Hairston’s vehement feeling that writing courses should be only about writing and her opponents who felt that “everything is political” and writing with some sort of context could be

beneficial. We see no genuine attempt to critically engage with the questions (e.g. How does a focus on particular subjects affect FYC writers anyway?) between these two polarizing ends.

By the time Hairston compiled her reasons together in the seminal “Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing” in 1992, she fervently argues that FYC should not include a political platform of any kind. Although she personally supports many of the political aims (including eradicating racial and gender inequalities) of her colleagues (e.g. compositionist Linda Brodkey) who worked to institute the writing class focused on racism and sexism, Hairston believes that politics (of any kind) should be kept out of the writing classroom. She fears the results of this present trend in FYC: “It’s a model that puts dogma before diversity, politics before craft, ideology before critical thinking, and the social goals of the teacher before the educational needs of the student” (698). A course organized around a “touchy” subject matter, from her perspective, simply legitimizes the use of valuable classroom time to supposedly non-writing topics.

Arguing that “I fear that we are in real danger of being co-opted by the radical left,” Hairston believes more radical teachers (those who value the subject matter itself over rhetorical concerns) might infiltrate college writing classes. Hairston insists that teachers should use their power and authority not to influence the politics of young and relatively unsophisticated students, but to teach them literacy and writing skills while respecting their unique sociopolitical backgrounds. She argues that “the students bring their own truths” (711) into the writing classroom and we can best honor those “truths” by offering a politically neutral classroom. What do a teacher’s political opinions have to do with thesis statements and essay structure anyway?

Hairston's comments here suggest that she believes in the possibility that the writing teacher can inhabit a completely neutral subject position. Again, a too easy opposition is established – good teachers are neutral (no matter the topic) and bad teachers are political. Hairston contends that teachers who support bringing politics into the writing classroom are not only doing a disservice but are even shortchanging their students' educational opportunities; in fact, she argues that “often those who advocate such courses show open contempt for their students' values, preferences, or interests” (700). Hairston believes that because FYC lives in the English Department – home of deconstruction, Marxism, and post-structuralism — this course in particular finds itself under fire from theorists who question conventional writing instruction (a.k.a. Current Traditional Rhetoric):

An instructor who wants to teach students to write clearly becomes part of a capitalistic plot to control the workforce. What nonsense! It seems to me that one could argue with more force that the instructor who fails to help students master the standard dialect conspires against the working class. (703)

Instead of submitting to the “whim” of using sociological topics in the writing classroom, Hairston proposes that (1) the center of a FYC course must be the writing of the students themselves and (2) we writing teachers “should stay within our area of professional expertise” (705). If we follow both of these guidelines, according to Hairston, then we can better prepare our students for the academic challenges of higher education. For Hairston, using an immersed subject matter in organizing the FYC classroom comes with the likelihood of the topic itself overwhelming actual writing

instruction. She does not see a strong likelihood that a course topic (even a political one) could cultivate learning.

Going even further by calling political topics in the FYC classroom a “threat,” Hairston outlines three main reasons as to why such an approach will ultimately not be successful. First, she notes the often cited comment that students write best when they are writing about subjects that they feel personally connected to, not topics that they are forced to write about. Second, students will create “fake discourse” (708) when they write what they *think* the teacher wants them to say. Her third objection to incorporating political topics into the writing classroom is that “such action severely limits freedom of expression for both students and instructors” (709). In other words, she believes that the students in the class – as well as the teachers themselves – would have no say-so in a prescribed curriculum that appears to be seeking conformity (i.e. a leftist perspective).

In terms of the debate at the University of Texas, Hairston argues that students already bring differences into the classroom; there is no reason that we need to overtly use gender, race, and class as an artificial means of introducing difference as a topic in FYC. In fact, she believes that letting students write about their own differences leads to writing instruction that she calls “organic” (711) – “it allows students to make choices, then discover more about others and themselves through those choices” (711). In such a teaching scenario, the instructor becomes a “mid-wife, an agent for change rather than a transmitter of fixed knowledge” (711). For Hairston, “political zealots” (712) have taken over FYC and she feels it is “time to speak up, time to reclaim freshman composition from those who want to politicize it” (712).

It is important to look carefully at the six responses to Hairston's article (including her own reply to these responses) published in a subsequent issue of *College Composition and Communication*. All six vigorous negative responses criticize Hairston's words and take her to task on her viewpoints of students, writing instructors, and FYC classrooms. In varying degrees, all six of these responses differ with Hairston on whether or not a political topic can be used in organizing a successful FYC course.

John Trimbur, one of the "radical" compositionists Hairston mentions in her original essay, supports the proposed course at the University of Texas, noting that "the course is resolutely rhetorical in design" (248) and highlights the construction of argument, a worthy objective for FYC. In addition, Trimbur accuses Hairston of selling short the intellectual capabilities of first year students: Hairston offers "a serious underestimation of the social and intellectual resources students bring with them into the freshman course and a refusal to ask students to mobilize these resources in order to find out how and why they differ with their peers" (249). Similarly, William Thelin "reject[s] this portrayal outright as it demonstrates little respect for novice writers and ... it reduces them all to a stereotype that simply does not match my experience with students" (252).

The responses to Hairston's article were just not focused on the supposed limited capabilities of the students in a themed FYC course. Writing instructors, too, are underestimated by Hairston. William J. Rouster argues that he is, indeed, trained to bring cultural artifacts (i.e. race, class, and gender) into the classroom: "I have been trained how to use theory to examine texts, including culture as a text" (254). But using cultural criticism does not necessarily equal indoctrinating students with a particular

viewpoint: “We should not attempt to force our ideologies on our students, but, instead, we attempt to create a kind of cultural awareness in students that they may not have had before entering our classrooms” (Rouster 253). If anything, we need to encourage our students to recognize the complexity in every single topic that appears to offer the general public an easy solution or resolution. In fact, using topics associated with cultural criticism (like race and class) in FYC can be about writing and can encourage students to carefully analyze rhetorical strategies.

Hairston herself, in responding to the various criticisms of her article, acknowledges that “even though I knew my speaking out would stir up controversy ... I had no idea how much!” (“Reply” 255). Calling “Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing” her “last major professional article” (255), Hairston believes that this publication instigated a much needed discussion as FYC continues to develop as a serious academic discipline: “It strikes me as a healthy sign for our profession to be having such a spirited discussion about what and how we should teach in writing courses, particularly in required first year English courses” (255). Indeed, I would argue that even today -- over twenty years later – the question of “how” FYC is organized is an imperative task that our field must continue to investigate. But we must earnestly work at creating a discussion and not a polarizing debate. Indeed, Hairston’s only regret was that “some good professional friendships have dissolved in the heat of the argument” (255), proving that a debate on pedagogy can be an emotional one.

One of Hairston’s colleagues at the University of Texas, Linda Brodsky, was the primary compositionist behind the infamous English 306 course that started the entire discussion. Eventually, the controversy resulted in an emotional split between two

camps in the English Department – those supporting Hairston and those supporting Brodsky (again, leading to a senseless dichotomy between two positions). In her personal response to the debate, “Writing about Difference: The Syllabus for English 306,” Brodsky maintains that the rethinking of the course was an effort to make FYC more effective: “My request that all graduate-student instructors teach English 306 from a common syllabus for at least one year was an attempt to teach the teachers how to teach writing while teaching writing to the students enrolled in their classes” (211). Any use of a course theme (in this case, readings that focused on difference) was designed to encourage students to think critically about rhetorical concerns, a key objective in FYC.

Brodsky defends her position by noting that a committee was behind the restructuring of the course, a group of individuals who included both faculty members and graduate students (12 people total). The group worked for months during the early part of 1990, a collaborative experience that Brodsky describes as “so positive that I would no longer even consider designing a course for others to teach without benefit of such counsel” (212). In addition, the committee devised a course syllabus and schedule that would result in even more student writing than the original course: student works-in-progress and revisions (for six full-length essays), four peer critiques, and a final cumulative project. None of the readings about the controversy note the specific writing assignments and Brodsky herself laments that “it was a rare journalist who even asked about, much less requested a copy of, the writing assignments or the writing and reading schedule” (215). In other words, the hoopla over the course focused more on the subject matter of the proposed course, not the actual rhetorical

and writing exercises themselves. A discussion about the actual assignments could have led to a more productive conversation about the usefulness of using topics to organize FYC in the first place.

In a 1996 essay co-written with Richard Penticoff (one of the graduate students who was on the original committee), Linda Brodsky more fully explains the model of a FYC course that she believes is more effective – the idea of writing as inquiry. In fact, she believes that creating uncomfortable moments in the writing classroom is a positive move: “It is at least arguable that intellectual discomfort gives a point to writing in a way that intellectual comfort cannot” (236). In other words, if students are not confronted with texts that make them struggle with their own belief systems, then their writing will not rise above mediocre or average. Professing the importance of “putting student and professional texts in conversation and contention with each other” (235), Brodsky and the committee worked hard at creating a FYC course that would, in fact, encourage “intellectual interactions” (234). The scholarly activities of analyzing, researching, and synthesizing were foremost in the minds of the committee.

A closer look at the proposed course from 1990 reflects the thought and collaboration that went into carefully constructing a course around a specific topic and determining possible outcomes produced as a result of that subject matter. Penticoff and Brodsky use Stephen Toulmin’s language of argumentation to describe how the course was developed. His model of a persuasive argument includes such categories as claim, grounds, and warrant. FYC students might come into a first semester college writing course understanding a thesis statement, Brodsky argues that “Toulmin’s notion of warranting leads most of them into uncharted, but crucial, intellectual territory” (233).

In other words, a warrant — with its link to ethos, pathos, and logos – requires more thought than a simple “this is my opinion” and does not necessarily bridge the claim and the data/ evidence.

The primary consideration in the redesigned English 306 course was to better first-year students’ use of writing and argument:

We tried to be responsible foremost to [first-year students and graduate-student instructors] in meeting the already stated curricular goals with a common syllabus that supports teaching writing. Our initial goal was to engage students and instructors in intellectual inquiry. (234)

In addition, the committee felt that focusing a FYC required course on the theme of difference would be a “positive way for students and teachers to contribute to civic life” (234). Students would be in the position to have a “conversation” with texts and to go beyond just taking one side of any issue. Using Toulmin’s definition of a claim (a statement being argued), students would be encouraged “to examine the positions we take as claims” (236) and not be satisfied with that initial position: “Claims make it easier to treat positions as partial and provisional statements about the world, rather than as unarguable and immutable truths with which readers either agree or disagree” (236). So, in other words, Brodsky’s pedagogical intent of writing as a form of inquiry would hopefully inspire FYC students to more fully embrace the art of arguing (and ideally have the tools to move beyond the class theme once the course had been completed).

Penticoff and Brodsky view this topic-based writing course as an opportunity for students to “invent” a discipline. Arguing that “inquiry invents disciplines” (243), Penticoff and Brodsky profess that the course was essentially not about either rhetoric

or law (since most of the readings on racism and sexism centered on court cases). Instead, “when students explore in writing an indeterminate situation like difference, they transform seemingly determinate disciplines like law and composition into new, yet-to-be-determined disciplines” (243). This themed FYC course, then, would provide the perfect opportunity for students to practice intellectualism in their quest, borrowing from David Bartholomae, to “invent the university” and their own sense of language.

Penticoff and Brodsky end their discussion by affirming the importance of using topics in FYC: “We can think of no more important dimensions of culture to study than laws prohibiting discrimination and the strategies of argumentation employed in suits brought before the courts” (245). Hairston disagrees with this use of FYC, suggesting that a topic-based class such as the one proposed at the University of Texas would do more harm than good. Hairston identifies the theme as the Albatross in the development of the course. Politicizing the teaching of writing was not, according to Hairston, a fruitful direction for composition studies.

Inciting controversy throughout the discipline of rhetoric and composition in the early 1990s, Hairston’s influential article “Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing” has sometimes been considered conservative during an era in which social-epistemic pedagogies (and themed based FYC courses) gained popularity. In addition to the FYC controversy at the University of Texas, many theorists also see Hairston’s essay as a response to Berlin’s 1988 “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class.” In this important work, Berlin argues that “a rhetoric can never be innocent, can never be a disinterested arbiter of the ideological claims of others because it is always already serving certain ideological claims” (679-80). While Hairston suggests the possibility of a

pedagogical approach which can be (and should be) neutral, Berlin believes that any pedagogical approach is infused with an ideological perspective. Thus, if a writing instructor decided to use any subject for organizing a FYC course, that topic – no matter how controversial or non-controversial – will have some amount of ideology attached to it from the outset.

Berlin expresses two main ideas in his article: First, he wants to convince his readers that there is no such thing as an innocent (non-ideological) rhetoric. The only way to get at what's going on with different rhetorics is to look at them through the lens of ideology, and more specifically through the lens of how each rhetoric can be co-opted by a dominant ideology or political power structure. Secondly, he argues in favor of the social-epistemic rhetoric as compared to the other two types of rhetoric he examines -- cognitive rhetoric and expressionistic rhetoric. Berlin believes social-epistemic rhetoric best arms students to resist and even to fight domination from political power structures. Focusing on the "dialectical interaction of the observer, the discourse community (social group) ... and the material conditions of existence" (692), a social-epistemic approach in the FYC classroom offers the best opportunity at interrogating the construction of knowledge since "in studying rhetoric – the ways discourse is generated – we are studying the ways in which knowledge comes into existence" (693).

Finally, Berlin likes the social epistemic rhetoric best because it can resist political pressures. While cognitivists naively ignore questions of ideology and expressionists put too much faith in the individual to change the world, social epistemic rhetoricians focus on critiquing whatever paradigm happens to be dominant (making this a flexible approach). They do this by formulating a rhetoric which is based on the

instability of meaning and interpretation and thus remaining always fully aware of how changeable all ideology, all knowledge is. For them, knowledge is always changing because it is generated by the interaction of writer, community, and context. And if knowledge is always changing, it's obvious that cultural, political, economic paradigms are also changeable. Since "reality" is constructed, that it is not something transcendent or knowable other than through the intersection of the "observer," the "social group," and the "material conditions." Thus, according to Berlin, this three-way interaction will continually serve to question current knowledge paradigms or "realities." Berlin's comments here support why so many writing instructors might be drawn to developing FYC courses around a specific topic, especially ones that have a social justice focus. A course focused on race or class, for example, might work best at helping students to make these connections on their own.

Ultimately, Berlin and Hairston disagree on one major point: the presence of ideology within the practice of teaching. Berlin ends his article by arguing that "every pedagogy is imbricated in ideology, in a set of tacit assumptions about what is real, what is good, what is possible, and how much power ought to be distributed" (697). Hairston believes that "writing courses, especially required freshman courses, should not be *for* anything or *about* anything other than writing itself, and how one uses it to learn and think and communicate" ("Diversity" 697). In other words, Hairston envisions a writing classroom that is ideology-free but Berlin argues that any classroom is always already imbued with various ideologies. This flurry of responses to the Hairston and Berlin debate has been repeated at numerous conferences, colleges, universities, and hallways. Richard Gebhardt, editor of CCC at the time of Hairston's "Diversity,

Ideology, and Teaching Writing,” noted that the article “provoked more Counterstatement submissions than any other CCC article since the start of 1987” (295). Even now, some twenty years later, some compositionists still view Hairston as a controversial right wing conservative (as compared to Berlin). An increasingly common criticism of English departments is that we are all left wing liberals who indoctrinate students to “our” way of thinking, the very fear that Hairston outlines in her articles. A FYC course, then, that focuses on a “hot topic” like race or gender can encourage some people to believe that we are teaching politics instead of writing instruction. These critics fail to recognize, however, that a subject matter (no matter the political associations) in a FYC class can help students better recognize rhetorical issues like establishing a purpose and supporting that purpose while drawing attention to additional concerns like audience, tone, and organization.

#### The Hairston Debate, Take Two:

Using topics (of any kind) as the organizing principle in FYC continues to be normal pedagogical practice. However, a topic with more blatant political associations can still cause debate and public discussion (often by people outside of FYC). Writing instructors who use such subject matter find that they must defend their pedagogy. In “Teaching the Political Conflicts: A Rhetorical Schema,” experienced writing instructor Donald Lazere notes that the continued attention of the national press on what exactly happens in a FYC classroom, initially started by the controversy at the University of Texas, highlights the need to consider the theoretical assumptions associated with a typical FYC course. He believes that the FYC community has neglected dialogue about

“the more advanced levels of writing that involve critical thinking in evaluating others’ ideas” (194) because of overwhelming attention to basic writing concerns. Lazere calls this inattention a “failure” (195) and he “share[s] the concern of critics that such courses can all too easily be turned into an indoctrination to the instructor’s particular ideology or, at best, into classes in political science” (195).

Evoking the memory of the opposition against Hairston, Lazere argues that even though he directly uses politics in FYC, he is vehemently opposed to any instructors who impose “socialist (or feminist, or Third-World, or gay) ideology on students as the one true faith” (195). In other words, there is a least effective way of applying such a topic and there is a more effective way. However, he does believe that students should be exposed to socialist viewpoints – and varied responses to such a viewpoint – “because those views are virtually excluded from all other realms of the American cognitive, rhetorical, semantic, and literary universe of discourse” (195). FYC, a course almost every college student has to take, offers the chance to introduce students to become better critics of their own society. Lazere, rightly, sees the objective of FYC as an opportunity “to broaden the ideological scope of students’ critical thinking, reading, and writing capacities so as to empower them to make their own autonomous judgments on opposing ideological positions in general and on specific issues” (195). He uses the bulk of his essay to describe how he has organized a FYC course around the topic of politics in a way that is productive in encouraging students to improve their writing skills. Closely examining Lazere’s course design may help us in better understanding exactly “how” a potentially volatile subject matter might be effectively used in teaching the art of writing and rhetoric in FYC.

In his essay, Lazere explains how an instructor can directly introduce partisan political positions into the curriculum without intentionally validating one particular ideological position: “I believe the left agenda of prompting students to question the subjectivity underlying socially constructed modes of thinking can be reconciled with the conservative agenda of objectivity and nonpartisanship” (195-6). Lazere believes his approach has the added benefit of encouraging instructors to also consider their own (often unintentional) biases. Essentially, Lazere suggests four sequenced writing assignments for a second semester FYC research-based course: (1) “Political Semantics” (197), (2) “Psychological Blocks to Perceiving Bias” (199), (3) “Modes of Biased and Deceptive Rhetoric” (200), and (4) “Locating and Evaluating Partisan Sources” (202). In addition, a hefty portion of Lazere’s article is devoted to an extensive number of appendices which outline specific pedagogical activities that link to each of his four main writing assignments.

For his first unit, “Political Semantics,” Lazere suggests that students be asked to define terms like “conservative” and “liberal.” He believes that “defining political terms, including the way partisan biases color our perception of these terms’ meanings” (197) is an important initial task in order for students to more accurately use these terms in their own writing. Students must have a clear idea of specific terms and ideologies before they jump into more complicated discussions. The second appendix offers a political spectrum of concepts like “left wing” and “right wing” and asks students to consider how other definitions might be linked to such broad categorizations. In this first unit, he is already asking students to carefully consider the definitions of terms that they think that they already know.

The second unit, “Psychological Blocks to Perceiving Bias,” asks students to become more aware of the varied psychological obstacles that often inhibit more effective critical thinking:

Students need to become aware that what they or their sources of information assume to be self-evident truths are often – though not always – only the opinion or interpretation of the truth that is held by their particular social class, political ideology, religion, racial or ethnic group, gender, nationality and geographical location, historical period, occupation, age group, etc. (200)

Lazere is asking students to interrogate the rhetorical context of supposed “pure” objectivity. One of the appendices at the end of the article asks students to consider how different newspapers, for example, might fit into the categories of “left” and “right.” So instead of students thinking that a newspaper only offers objective “truth,” students are asked to consider the subjectivity of both the authors and the corporations behind the publishers.

Lazere’s third unit, “Modes of Biased and Deceptive Rhetoric,” has the objective of encouraging students to be “aware that authorities are not immune from numerous causes of subjective bias” (201). In order to be more critical writers – and thinkers – students need to understand that every ideological viewpoint, no matter the origin, has “its own distinct pattern of rhetoric” (201). Appendices five, six, and seven correlate to this skill, encouraging students to apply a semantic calculator, for example, to any type of text. Can FYC students figure out the assumptions behind the author’s words/ statements?

The culminating unit, “Locating and Evaluating Partisan Sources,” introduces the preliminary stages of a research essay. The first appendix outlines this comprehensive writing project for a common FYC second-semester assignment, an annotated bibliography. Essentially, each of the previous three units works together to help students in compiling viewpoints on any topic of their choosing. Students have to analyze the rhetorical and ideological context of each of their sources and consider the language and persuasive tactics used in each argument: “In this way they can get beyond the parochial mentality of those who read and listen only to sources that confirm their preconceptions while deluding themselves that these sources impartially present a full range of information” (202). Using the subject matter of “everything is political,” Lazere’s course encourages the students to understand rhetoric and the strategies that can be used to interrogate texts of all kinds.

As these four units show, a FYC course can effectively lead students to embrace important rhetorical strategies. In addition, Lazere contends that directly using political language, concepts, or even topics in FYC proves that the subject of rhetoric and writing can “be” the subject of a FYC course: “Composition can and should be a service course in the sense of fostering modes of critical thinking that are a prerequisite to studies in other disciplines ... and to students’ lifelong roles as citizens” (203). An important aspect of Lazere’s pedagogical approach included developing FYC students who are “responsible global citizens” and writing classes that value “critical civic literacy” (194). In other words, then, using political concepts to organize FYC can result in critical thinking – and writing – for students who will hopefully continue on to higher level courses with more rhetorical awareness. However, such a “touchy topic” must be

carefully considered and planned– as Lazere argues – but the resulting course can, indeed, be overtly focused on rhetoric.

Like Lazere, Dan Frazier in “Writing about War: Assigning and Assessing a Moving Topic” explains his own use of political writing assignments related to Iraq and Afghanistan wars/ occupations from 2003-2006. He begins his discussion by alluding to the fear that many writing teachers have in teaching political topics:

My effort here is to first describe how past arguments in composition studies over assigning politicized topics in the classroom and critical pedagogy in general ensured that relatively few teachers would invite their students to write on topics related to these politicized wars/ occupations.

(n.p.)

Though topics are often used when creating a FYC course, few writing instructors are brave enough to choose a “touchy topic” as the organizing principle. However, Fraizer argues that teachers can aim for “a more collaborative truth-seeking atmosphere” (n.p.) by using a timely current topic that is both relevant and complex with no easy solutions: “Student-centered approaches seem especially appropriate when instructors engage students in thinking and writing about a topic *as it is happening*, a characteristic that sets the wars/ occupations apart from more historically far-reaching and politicized subject areas related to race, class, and gender” (n.p.).

Fraizer proposes that “blundering,” when both students and teachers struggle to respond to difficult conflicts, is a desired positive outcome of using politicized writing topics. Noting that writing professionals on the WPA listserv had recently pointed out the danger of students mimicking the viewpoint of the instructor, Fraizer makes a valid

comment about the oversimplification suggested by critics:

But these objections oversimplified how war-related topics were assigned and assessed. For example, to assume that writing about the war is a matter of either arguing for or against it, and hence would lead to an intimidating classroom atmosphere, implies that it is impossible to narrow and frame assignments in ways that lead to a greater range of multiple and focused war-related topics and ask broader, more difficult “why” questions ... writing about these wars is not a single for/ against topic, but a series of complex and related topics ... (n.p)

Indeed, it is this very complexity that works toward the purpose of most FYC courses. Like Lazere, Fraizer believes that “narrow[ing] and fram[ing] assignments in ways that lead to a greater range” is actually more effective at teaching students to consider the full rhetorical situation. This type of critical thinking – and writing – will help students tackle the more complicated writing assignments that they will encounter after FYC.

After explaining the reading and writing assignments of his course on the Iraq and Afghanistan war occupations, Fraizer makes it clear that most of the resulting essays are “not simply pro- or anti-war in their focus” (n.p). He uses several examples of students using a working thesis statement to wade through the complex rhetoric of war and assess the process of their own critical thinking and writing. Even though, during the three semesters he used the topic, students might express “battle fatigue” (i.e. weary of the class theme), on a whole Frazier thought “students used writing to learn from their own experiences, from the world around them, and from each other, and I learned a way to teach writing to young people for a new world of reasons” (n.p).

However, a topic for FYC does not have to be overtly political in order to have the same results as Lazere's and Fraizer's courses. In 1980, as just one example, high school teacher Jim Detherage contemplated the use of "running" as a subject in his required writing course for high school seniors. Calling the class, "Reading, Riting, and Running" (38), Detherage hoped to capitalize on the popularity of jogging and running in the early 1980s. Detherage makes it clear that this writing course would still be a writing course: "The course capitalizes unabashedly on the popularity of running (or, more popularly, jogging) to motivate students to read and write better. Our regular class activities encompass all the 'basics' of traditional English class" (38). Students were required to run fifteen miles per week outside of the class which asked students to "analyze the varied effects of running on their lifestyles" (38). Some of the running involved the class as a whole, including Detherage, with the actual English class being held after the class would run together: "The immediacy of the experience proves paramount to effective writing" (39). Detherage began the project by asking himself if this proposed course would "fit together in a way justifiable for English instruction" (40). He discovered by the end of this course, however, that "Students who have an added interest in the subject matter are more willing to attempt an assignment they feel they know something about or can relate to" (40). In addition, students "are at ease discussing their feelings and findings with the class" (40). Though this article is over thirty years old, the chief result that Detherage highlights – authentic engagement with the course material – is exactly the end result that writing teachers hope to create in current FYC courses that are organized around a topic.

Because the use of topics in FYC is so widespread, especially since Detherage's

1980 article, most current discussions of organizing FYC assume (without specifically examining the writing produced by the students) that a thematic approach is acceptable and appropriate. Indeed, in “Critical Thinking and the Thematic Writing Course,” Stephen Wilhoit argues that a FYC course with a topic offers “a model of how topic knowledge, analytical reasoning skills, and a questioning attitude are all involved in critical, reflective thought” (127). He notes that most composition textbooks are set up to have themed chapters — such as gender issues or the legalization of drugs — but these chapters do not work together to offer students the tools of critical thinking. Instead, “we would be able to teach critical thinking more effectively if we asked students to explore only one theme or issue over a much longer period of time” (128). Wilhoit argues that a themed organizational center offers the students the opportunity to engage in both declarative and procedural knowledge. While many FYC courses might offer some amount of declarative knowledge — knowledge about a particular subject — we often fall short in terms of exposing students to analyze how this information can be evaluated: “Moving our students beyond novice-level understanding of topics in their composition classes would force them to exercise their critical thinking skills on a growing body of knowledge so that they may form clear, rational judgments” (128). In addition, Wilhoit believes that selecting a subject matter for students to follow for the semester serves as a model for how upper-division coursework will work: “Focusing an introductory composition course around a central theme can allow us to model more clearly how the students will likely develop and employ critical thinking skills later in their academic careers, when they begin to specialize in one area of study” (132). In other words, the deliberate use of a topic in FYC can provide a foundation for the more

advanced course work that students will encounter post-FYC (where they may become immersed in a particular discipline).

Many of the students who enroll in FYC are not aware of the intricacies behind language use. Karen Peterson Welch, in “Social Issues in First-Year College Writing,” notes that “we see many first-year students who are unaware of the complexities of the social and political issues that affect their lives.” As Welch argues, many FYC instructors see the first semester writing course as an ideal opportunity to introduce students to these issues while providing writing instruction:

As teachers of college writing, we are in an ideal place to help students recognize their own questions, explore their own biases, expose themselves to varied and multiple perspectives, and shape their own conclusions. I contend, however, that to do this, we first need to become aware of our own biases and limitations and to acknowledge the influence of our backgrounds and experiences — not only to our ideologies, but on those of our students as well.

Thus, if a course topic is selected, it is important that the writing instructor be completely conscious of his/ her specific pedagogical choices. But as we saw with both Lazere and Fraiser and their detailed explanations of setting up a topic focused writing course, subject matter for the course, even one with overt political overtones, can positively encourage first-year students to better grasp effective writing skills.

#### Reasoning Behind a Topic Approach:

Though topics are used fairly routinely in FYC, we continue to miss opportunities to more closely examine the writing produced in such courses because (especially if the

topic is “touchy”) there is much public debate about the organization of the course as a whole. In a 2009 article published by the University of Denver Writing Program, Rebekah Shultz Colby describes a recent talk on her campus by noted rhetoric and composition scholar Patricia Bizzell. Bizzell’s discussion was entitled, “How Composition Saved the World,” a direct response to Stanely Fish’s 2008 controversial book, *Save the World on Your Own Time*, in which “Fish has argued that the business of academia is solely teaching the content of the disciplines without ... teaching being influenced by personal ideological beliefs or efforts to achieve social justice” (n.p.). Bizzell notes that Fish’s critique of composition is nothing new – in fact, this is the very action undertaken by Hairston almost two decades ago. In addition, Bizzell firmly believes that “this concern for social justice ... drove writing instruction to become what it is today” (Colby n.p.).

As Bizzell points out, however, Fish’s more recent *Save the World on Your Own Time*, contradicts this earlier perspective. Arguing that knowledge is objective (and, thus, unchanging), Fish argues that “our job as teachers should be to simply and unproblematically transmit this transparent and objective disciplinary truth to our students who are waiting like acultural vessels to be filled up” (n.p.). However, Bizzell believes that interrogating difference is a good thing (e.g. “Where would our understanding of African American rhetorics be without the hotly contested Civil Rights Movement?”). Bizzell argues that Fish is not embracing the truth that “politics shape knowledge construction” (n.p.). Simply by teaching any sense of “knowledge,” difference will arise and this struggle ultimately highlights political difference(s).

Another valid point that Bizzell raises in her discussion is that when we teach, we

teach as a “whole person,” not someone who can ignore (or turn off) a “part” of oneself. According to Colby, Bizzell aptly argues that “the act of teaching is coming in full contact with a room full of students who also cannot help but fully communicate who they are as individuals” (n.p.). The communication we practice in the classroom alludes to not just our verbal communication but also our tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language.

Perhaps most importantly, Bizzell notes a major ethical problem with Fish’s argument. Not only does she think that it is our social duty as higher education professionals to empower students to change their lives (including having a better grasp on their political leanings), but she “encourages teachers to expose students to a myriad of conflicting political beliefs that may conflict with each other in uncomfortable ways” (n.p.). Bizzell herself notes that she includes readings from a range of perspectives, including ideologies that are not always compatible with her own. A well-developed FYC course (no matter the topic) will include multiple perspectives (even dissonance) to aid in reflecting the complexity of most real-world issues.

The discussion on FYC course topics instigated by Hairston continues to linger in the background. In 2002, a collection of Hairston’s most influential articles, along with personal recollections of her as a scholar, instructor, and colleague, was published in the anthology, *Against the Grain: A Volume in Honor of Maxine Hairston* (edited by David Jolliffe, Michael Keene, Mary Trachsel, and Ralph Voss). At the beginning of this collection, the editors argue that “As Hairston’s career prospered and she earned the highest status in the community of writing teachers, one also sees her growing concern for the profession itself – where it had been, where it was, and where it should (or

should not) be going” (xi). The collection includes her last academic piece – the 1993 address to the Conference on College Composition and Communication – as well as her early 1976 essay, “Carl Rogers’ Alternative to Traditional Rhetoric” and her famous 1982 treatise, “The Winds of Change: Thomas Kuhn and the Revolution in the Teaching of Writing.”

One of the included essays, “Second Thoughts on ‘Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing,” was written by a former graduate student and colleague of Hairston – Kristine Hansen – who urges the composition community to re-examine Hairston’s urgent criticisms of writing courses organized with a social or political theme. Hansen admits that “even though I will quibble with some of her 1992 statements and attempt to interpret the motivation for them, my own professional judgment eight years later is that on most counts, she was right” (228). It is possible that a zealous (even well meaning) writing instructor might focus so much on a beloved theme that rhetorical concerns become secondary to the theme itself.

In “Seeking Common Ground: Guiding Assumptions for Writing Courses,” Denise David, Barbara Gordon, and Rita Pollard insist that the response to Maxine Hairston’s article, “Diversity, Ideology and Teaching Writing,” marks a critical debate about the purpose of the writing course. They claim the debate needs well-defined assumptions to demarcate what specifically constitutes a writing course. These authors fear FYC is in danger without these clear assumptions:

The first year writing course has become the site at which the field’s disunity is apparent, but the lack of common assumptions fundamentally underlies all writing courses. While the divergence of views and the lively

debates may be one indication of the discipline's maturity and vibrancy, unless conversations are better grounded and grow from common assumptions, the field runs the risk of fragmentation and dissolution. (524)

The Hairston debate is but one example of discordant voices in terms of FYC conversations (another example would be the possible abolishing of FYC as a required course). David et al. maintain that there should be three assumptions: 1) "the development of writing ability and metacognitive awareness [as] the primary objective of the writing course," 2) "student's writing [as] the privileged text in a writing course," and 3) "the subject of a writing course [as] writing" (525).

In terms of the third assumption, the authors argue that class time must be devoted to considering issues related to writing such as determining a subject/ focus, framing that focus in terms of evidence, and choosing a writing voice. In other words, the subject of a writing class is, indeed, writing: "Crowding the curriculum with subjects other than writing limits the amount of time students and teachers can devote to writing, which is, after all, the focus of a writing course" (526). In addition, students should be encouraged to "reflect upon the writing decisions and choices embodied in their texts" (526).

Perhaps one of the most important objectives in a writing course is a skill beyond learning to write and manipulating rhetoric: "At the heart of teaching a writing course is not the transmission of content but the process of intervening in students' efforts to produce meaning" (528). Each of us who teaches writing knows that this is not a skill that is easily taught – or even effectively taught in just one specific way. And this is perhaps what makes the organizing and teaching of FYC more "artistic" then, let's say,

a chemistry course or a psychology seminar. Individual instructors have discovered multiple, varied approaches to encouraging students to make their own textual meanings via specific rhetorical strategies. Indeed, helping students to make meaning requires adequate preparation and considerate immersion. Ultimately, there simply is no one “answer” to best practices.

However, FYC courses with overt topics – especially race, class, and gender – continue to be debated even today in terms of their usefulness as a FYC organizing principle. In fact, in "Second Thoughts on 'Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing,'" Hansen urges the composition community to re-examine Hairston's criticism of writing courses organized around social justice themes. Taking all of Hairston's professional work as a whole, Hansen outlines six key beliefs that Hairston promoted throughout the whole of her work:

- \* "The composition classroom should be student-centered ..."
- \* "The content of the writing course should be language ..."
- \* "... students need to be personally invested in their topics ..."
- \* "Students need to be taught a broad range of types of discourse ..."
- \* "Teachers need to care about and teach the craft of writing ..."
- \* "Writing teachers need to be writers themselves ..." (229)

I believe every single one of the composition scholars who disagreed with Hairston twenty years ago would agree that these six core principles are what each and every conscientious writing teacher aims to deliver in terms of teaching FYC. However, because Hairston comes across as "indignant" (229) in "Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing," Hansen believes that this tone inhibited her colleagues from

recognizing that her controversial essay incorporated all six of the above beliefs. In many ways, Hairston's overall message in this controversial essay is no different from, for example, her 1985 Chair's Address at the 4C's Conference: "By not breaking our bonds, as Hairston urged in 1985, compositionists became vulnerable to the influence of critical theory, which like literature before it, threatened to take over the first year composition course" (230). As an important step in "breaking our bonds," Hairston argues that we must meticulously consider every pedagogical practice that we make and study if that decision advances the field of composition studies. In terms of FYC organized around topics, Hairston was simply reminding us to attend to what makes the field of composition "composition."

Alluding to the paradigm shift Hairston describes in her earlier 1982 article, "The Winds of Change: Thomas Kuhn and the Revolution in the Teaching of Writing," Hansen comments on the Current Traditional Rhetoric method of teaching writing that Hairston describes as dwindling in power. Hansen notes that Hairston believes that "the students now coming to college are not likely to be served well by writing teachers trained in literature, who have no opportunities or inclination to learn about composition research, and who cling to pedagogical methods they learned in graduate school but never bother to question" (231). As writing teachers take graduate courses taught by composition /rhetoric specialists, Hansen reminds us that Hairston predicts "that change will have a profound effect on secondary school teaching" ("Winds" 87). By the time these students begin college, they will be well versed in undertaking a FYC course in which the students own writing is the primary reading/ text in the course.

Few direct discussions about the ideology of using a topic exist in composition

studies but in his book *Thinking Through Theory: Vygotskian Perspectives on the Teaching of Writing*, James Thomas Zebroski begins his discussion on the impact of theory on his teaching life by evoking the importance of establishing specific subject matter in FYC: “If we believe that essays benefit from having a thesis statement or a theme, then the composition course ought to also have such a theme, open-ended enough to involve the students and their worlds, but also somehow coming back at the end to the reality that this is a course on writing” (10-11). Zebroski does warn his readers that extremes in terms of choosing a topic should be avoided: “Using a theme to pattern a course and suggest new activities should not make the course any less a composition course” (18). Students in FYC should not think that they are taking a sociology or history class. In fact, according to Zebroski, “writing courses *do* have content and form unique to composition” (19). He often uses the topic of work since “students generally come to class with some work experience and they often see their reason for being at college to be primarily to get a good job” (22). This topic works to support “students to think about the writer’s work” (23). According to Zebroski, earlier composition theorists like William Coles and Paulo Friere, “show[ed] us the value of creating a theme that ties the course together and of selecting activities to reflect the various facets of that course” (18).

Interrogating the validity of using topics in FYC continues to this day. Recently, Sucheta Kanjilal, Karla Maddox, and Meghan O’Neill, three graduate students at the University of South Florida, shared their observations of creating a course around a particular topic and described this attempt as providing “additional scaffolding for our students,” a description that I agree aptly describes our goal in helping first year

students transition to college-level writing. FYC students are new to the university setting and, for the most part, new to adulthood:

Deciding on a topic for a project is a difficult decision for a person who has little, or perhaps an underdeveloped, understanding of herself as an agent in society, let alone in the university. And the decision about a topic is no small matter, as we expect our students to continue in some fashion with that topic for the whole semester... It is worthwhile to additionally scaffold students' critical thinking by at least orienting the class around a common theme... The themes are broad enough to allow for a variety of individual approaches, yet specific enough to orient the classroom into its own community, with the common goals of writing and thinking rhetorically.

(n.p)

Though our field still has much to discuss in “how” we can best organize FYC courses, this dissertation is an attempt to more fully explore the question of what happens when using topics when organizing FYC, particularly courses that directly center on topics related to social justice.

### Conclusion:

As mentioned earlier, although Hairston notes in a response to the debate that “it strikes me as a healthy sign for our profession to be having such a spirited discussion about what and how we should teach in writing courses” (“Reply” 255), I think that we did not use this opportunity to go even further with this discussion. Instead of looking more closely at the work that students produce with a course topic, the dialogue, unfortunately, took a less useful turn towards debating the more theoretical question of

the placement of cultural studies in writing instruction. The resulting interchange led to no clear answers and perhaps unintentionally assigned compositionists into certain “camps” – those who use topics in general, those who do not use topics, those who use politically charged topics, etc. Indeed, Hairston even admits that “some good professional friendships have dissolved in the heat of the argument” (“Rely” 255).

This literature review indicates that our field has experienced a long discourse about “how” a FYC course should be structured. Using a specific topic (political or not political) to organize a FYC course can encourage student writers to connect their thinking and writing to a larger frame of reference. However, because the explicit use of subject matter has been a “given” for so long – even after the discussion originated by Maxine Hairston -- we have yet to directly interrogate and carefully examine what might happen in a course that is overtly using a topic. This study, teacher research of a race-themed FYC course in a community college, is an attempt to more clearly learn what happens to student writing when a topic like race is used as the sole writing focus. But first, before proceeding into this study, it is important to fully describe the methods employed in this study so that the reader may be assured of their soundness and for the respect of the student voices themselves.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction of Research Question:

The previous chapter, a literature review of “how” course topics have been talked about in FYC (as well as politically charged issues like race), clearly indicates that the field of composition studies includes unresolved discussions as to exactly “how” a writing class should be best organized. As noted, Maxine Hairston was troubled by the shift – or “political turn” (Pittman 31) – that she noticed in FYC discussions by the early 1980s. She worried that thematic sections of FYC could lead to substantial inattention to writing course objectives. If composition scholars were supposed to be teaching writing in their writing classes, why were they becoming more concerned with issues of social justice like race, class, and gender? Why not teach the act of writing instead of spending valuable class time with a topic of the instructor’s choosing (often a subject of interest to that particular teacher)? In particular, Hairston was concerned that the students would experience political indoctrination (intentional or not) from their writing instructors; writing teachers are trained in the teaching of writing, not sociology or political science. Hairston, however, failed to use this disagreement as an opportunity to openly discuss the rhetorical inherent in any writing topic or assignment. As mentioned in the literature review, she openly confronted and admonished James Berlin – and those like him – to teach writing without all the (unnecessary) cultural critique.

The disagreement highlighted during the Hairston-Berlin discussion in 1989 continues to “haunt” discussions centered on how or what FYC should be taught. As Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz recently noted in an article focused on race and writing, “prior to

1989, and until the present day, compositionists cannot seem to agree on just how critical the discourse in FYC really is” (388).

Instead of perceiving the debate originated by Hairston and her colleagues (both at the University of Texas at Austin and within the discipline in general) in a negative, derisive light, I would argue that this discussion prompts a more positive message that we who teach FYC need to consider this historical discussion as an opportunity to openly examine the varied organizing principles (which are often “normalized” and not interrogated) used to teach FYC. If we accept the premise that teaching writing is inherently political, then the issues raised by Hairston over twenty years ago need to be answered and investigated. We continue to get mired in the hotly debated theoretical considerations that the Hairston conversation instigated instead of focusing on the more practical concerns that every FYC instructor must contemplate. Indeed, we need to consider that we haven’t even responded to the central issue that Hairston raised for the rhetoric and composition community: Does a course topic have any impact on the writing that students produce in the course? This is a harder question to tackle. I would argue that it might be “easier” to discuss the more overt political issues related to a possible course theme instead of slowing down and fully examining the core issue. This dissertation study is an attempt to do just that by seeing how organizing FYC by a topic “works.” I am deliberately using a subject like race that is a more deeply political issue as opposed to less political FYC topics. My research question, in short, is what effect does it have on student writing when a FYC course is organized with a specific focus on the sensitive topic of race? Is the writing produced more “effective”?

Since many commentators examining the use of politics or topics in the writing classroom (including Berlin, Hairston, Lazere, Peterson Welch, and Marshall) have failed to pay close attention to the actual writing produced by students in such a course, my chosen methodological approach is discourse analysis. Compositionist Richard M. Coe describes this approach as one that “analyzes passages by looking at the logical/semantic relationships, including patterns of modification, among coordinate, subordinate, and superordinate sentences” (134). Instead of focusing on the instructor or the entire discipline’s theoretical approaches, I wanted my study to focus on the words of the students as much as possible. I wanted to closely examine their language and interrogate how the students’ language was being shaped by and impacted by the course theme.

Instead of vast generalizations on the impact of political topics in a writing classroom, I want to explore what happens, as specifically as possible, to two writing classrooms at the Sam Wolf Granite City Campus of Southwestern Illinois College (SWIC) in Granite City, Illinois. Roberta Ann Binkley, in her description of discourse analysis as a form of teacher research, argues that this approach can help us better question the language of our students: “Our words and the written discourses of our students are often pregnant with unconscious meaning” (252). Would students write what they *really* felt when taking on such a touchy topic like race? My goal was to answer this question while carefully investigating the writing produced by the students enrolled in two FYC classrooms in an urban community college during the 2010 Spring Semester. This study is not meant to be compared to how others approach and organize FYC, but rather this study is meant to be a specific attempt to

more fully understand the practical applications of what happens (or doesn't happen) in a FYC course at an urban community college with race and diversity at its core.

Research Setting : Community:

This study must begin with describing the institutional context at Southwestern Illinois College (SWIC) as well as the surrounding communities from which the students reside. The campus where I teach, the Sam Wolf Granite City Campus (SWGCC) of SWIC, is but a short fifteen minute drive from downtown St Louis (and approximately 30 miles north of the larger Belleville Campus) in Illinois's Madison County. There are at least 15 small communities in the Granite City College District and our student population at the SWGCC represents all of these communities (including towns from both Madison and St. Clair counties). Even though the students who attend the SWGCC include dozens of nearby small towns in both counties, there are 9 main communities represented in the most current enrollment information available (Fall 2012):

Table 1

Community Enrollment

Belleville	150 (6.34%)
Collinsville	243 (10.27%)
East St Louis	47 (1.99%)
Granite City	935 (39.5%)
Madison	83 (3.51%)
Maryville	64 (2.70%)
O'Fallon	56 (2.37%)
Troy	96 (4.06%)
Venice	18 (0.76%)

Obviously the largest percentage of students – almost 40% -- are residents of Granite City, home of the Sam Wolf Granite City Campus. However, it is significant to note most of these communities are perceived by the general public along racial lines. East St Louis and Venice, for example, are predominantly black communities while Troy, O’Fallon, and Maryville are predominately white communities. Thus, the one common characteristic of these towns is the fact that most of these population centers are predominantly either black or white. According to city-data.com (“Collinsville, Illinois”) for example, the population of Collinsville is 82.9% white and 9.9% black (with a growing Hispanic population of 4.3%). Nearby Venice, Illinois, reflects almost the opposite racial numbers with 93.5% black and 3.2% white (“Venice”).

While several nearby counties are represented in our student population, the bulk of the students come from Madison County (1701) and St Clair County (519), representing 94% of the SWGCC students. Further, like any community college in the nation, our students come to SWIC for a variety of reasons and objectives:

Table 2

Reasons for Enrollment

Intent Status	Number of Students
Prepare for transfer to a 4 year school	797 (37.99%)
Improve skills for current job	244 (6.98%)
Prepare for future job after SWIC	827 (38.16%)
Prepare for GED/ Basic Skills	96 (2.68%)
Personal Interest (not seeking a degree)	144 (3.81%)
Other	259 (10.38%)
Total	2367

Many of the students who finish their two-year degrees at SWIC will enroll at nearby

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, a mere 5 miles from our campus.

In order to better understand the racial perspectives of the SWGCC students, I will briefly focus on two communities as examples of the general racial consciousness of our student population: Granite City and East St Louis. Since Granite City is predominately white, I have chosen another small community – East St Louis – which represents an almost entirely African American community. As noted in the chart above, these two communities represent two of the most common towns that are the most likely to include students who enroll at the SWGCC. According to “Madison County QuickFacts,” the county is predominantly white (89% of a reported population of 268,459). Granite City itself is even whiter at 95%. What is interesting, though, is the presence of East St Louis only 11 miles to the south.

Like Granite City, East St Louis was created in the nineteenth century to house the many workers involved in both the burgeoning railroad and manufacturing industries (in fact, I have overheard several people describe the Metro East as “industrial suburbs”). According to the recently published *East St Louis, Made in the USA: The Rise and Fall of an Industrial Town*, this city “began experiencing social and political crises by 1920, and by 1955 started a long, slow descent into desperation and abandonment” (Theising 11). Students have often related stories to me about the problems plaguing East St Louis: as far back as the Race Riots in 1917 to more current discussions of how the construction of the highway system entering St Louis via eminent domain has decimated the community. Theising argues in the first chapter of his book on East St Louis that “the city is plagued with financial problems, educational problems, structural problems, governance problems, and environmental problems”

(13). In fact, I have heard many people use East St Louis as an example of a community that is considered dangerous (especially at night) and not a civic area thought of in positive terms.

Even though East St Louis is located in St. Clair County, many students from that city seeking a higher education attend classes at the Sam Wolf Granite City Campus (the small SWIC site in East St Louis offers only limited course selections). According to the 2010 U.S. Census, East St Louis has a total population of 27,006, less than one-third of its peak of 82,366 in 1950. Like many larger industrial cities, East St Louis has been severely affected by loss of jobs in the restructuring of the railroad industry and de-industrialization of the so-called “Rust Belt” in the second half of the 20th century (which accounts for the numerous “problems” that Theising described in the previous paragraph). For current residents of the area, it is hard to believe that in 1950 East St. Louis was the 4th largest city in Illinois. A short drive through the city center confirms business abandonment and severe civic neglect.

However, East St Louis is not alone in the way in which the community was created – and eventually left on its own. Incorporated in 1896 (Engelke 10), Granite City prospered for many years as a company town with much of the population employed by Granite City Steel (started by the Niedringhaus brothers in the late nineteenth century). Interestingly, race was legislated from the beginning of the town’s development; as local laws were established by companies owned by the Niedringhaus family, “[e]mployees were required to live in the city, and blacks could not remain in the residential section of town past sunset” (Theising 108). In other words, company employees were forced to rent and own from the Neidringhaus real estate office and the

racial makeup of the community was designed by these same town leaders. As mentioned by historian Andrew J. Theising, both of these communities – Granite City and East St Louis – were “not founded on the social contract” (197). Like many towns developed by industrial interests, money became the most important aspect of community building.

By the mid 1990’s, the relationship of the steel mill and Granite City was described in the following way: “Today, the American Steel Plant in Granite City is the nation’s largest producer of cast steel railroad freight side frames and bolsters” (Engelke 48). However, the downward spiral in the economy since the start of the twenty-first century has tested the city’s ability to stay financially afloat. Starting in 2008, US Steel had to temporarily close. Though it reopened less than a year later, unemployment in Granite City is currently “nine-and-a-half percent, quite a bit higher than the larger St. Louis region. And the backbone of Granite City’s economy [remains] steel” (Schaper). As Theising mentioned in his comments on these “industrial suburbs,” both Granite City and East St Louis were the result of “a profit strategy and when that strategy came to its conclusion, industry was able to escape the responsibility for the problems it had created” (198). In both Granite City and East St Louis – two communities that started as company towns – “the government was not founded on the social contract. It was designed to facilitate profitability and meet private ends. It had little or no capacity to deal with social problems” (Theising 197). So when social problems inevitably arise – often out of unemployment and financial concerns – these big companies simply relocate and leave the community to fend for itself. This dire economic situation is exactly what both Granite City and East St Louis share – though Granite City has

managed to financially prosper on some level as compared to East St Louis.

Research Setting: Institution:

Perhaps one reason that Granite City has been able to stay more fiscally afloat as compared to East St Louis has been the presence of SWIC within the community since 1983 (the East St Louis Campus has a more recent presence and has not yet played a significant role in the development of the community). Like many two-year colleges, Southwestern Illinois College (SWIC) grew out of a need to provide higher education classroom space for “the large numbers of returning [WWII] veterans registering in colleges and universities across the country” (Lanter 1). Established in 1946 (as “Belleville Junior College”), SWIC provided an academic space for returning soldiers to use the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act (the G.I. Bill) benefits signed into law in 1944 (Lanter 1).

In the decades following its founding, SWIC has continued to grow and, in fact, changed its name to Southwestern Illinois College from Belleville Area College in 2000 in order to more accurately describe the growth of the institution. SWIC is currently comprised of three distinct campuses located in southern Illinois directly across from the St Louis region. The current Belleville Campus (often referred to as “the main campus”) was built in 1971 (in St Claire County) while the Sam Wolf Granite City Campus (in Madison County) opened in 1983 and the Red Bud Campus (in Randolph County) opened in 1985. In addition to these three campus locations, SWIC also has more than 20 off-campus sites located in area high schools, Scott Air Force Base, and the East St Louis Community College Center (which it shares with Southern Illinois University

Edwardsville). SWIC offers more than 150 university transfer degrees and certificate programs and was recently named one of the best in our nation in terms of a two-year college that awards degrees. As reported recently in our local newspaper, “Southwestern Illinois College is one of the most prolific higher education institutions in the nation at awarding associate’s degrees and certificates, according to *Community College Week* magazine” (Wuerz n.p.). According to the SWIC home page (swic.edu), nearly 25,000 students attend the three branch campuses and 20 off-campus sites.

Each of the three campus locations has a unique personality. The Belleville Campus generally has a younger population as the two high schools in Belleville, Illinois, filter many graduating seniors to SWIC. The Belleville Campus is currently experiencing even more growth as a new Liberal Arts Building was completed and opened in August 2013. The Art department has been recently remodeled and both music technology and film making courses are now taught at this campus. The William and Florence Schmidt Art Center is located on the east side of the campus and has been home to several successful art exhibits for the community. In addition, the light train system in the area – the Metrolink, which connects the Metro East with St Louis – makes a stop at the Belleville Campus, connecting this part of our college with the greater St Louis community.

The “youngest” and smallest campus is Red Bud, located south of the Belleville Campus in rural Randolph County. This campus offers unique scheduling that is not available at the other two campuses. Most of the students at the Red Bud Campus attend courses on a two-day block schedule (Monday and Wednesday or Tuesday and Thursday) and there is also the option of Friday-only classes. This campus also has a

Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) Service Center as many of the students interested in transferring to a four-year school end up enrolling at nearby SIUC.

Research Setting: Campus:

As already noted, my field work was carried out at the Sam Wolf Granite City Campus of Southwestern Illinois College, approximately fifteen minutes from downtown Saint Louis. Our campus is comprised of mostly a low-income and working class population. The majority of my students live within ten miles of the campus and many use the Madison County Transit bus system to commute to our college campus. Though my students represent numerous ethnic groups and age categories, most of them have one trait in common: a desire to change their socio-economic status and a lack of economic resources.

Besides the continuing dire economical situation in the community itself, another “negative” associated with the Sam Wolf Granite City Campus of SWIC is related to our very building. When the local high school in Granite City became too small to address the demands of its once booming population in the 1960s, a second high school – North Granite High School – opened in 1971 at the intersection of Maryville Road and Illinois Route 203. Open for just over ten years, this high school closed in 1983 and was immediately purchased by Belleville Area College (later, of course, to be renamed SWIC), opening in 1983 as the Sam Wolf Granite City Campus. Even though our building has undergone numerous remodels since that time, many local students still associate our location with a high school.

Not only are local community members asked to revise their way of looking at our building on Maryville Road, but they are also continually being prodded to reconsider

the ways that Granite City is seen as viable community. At the same time that SWIC was establishing a campus in Granite City, the economy made some significant changes to the city and its residents:

The high school was not all that closed down in 1983. In the first quarter of the year, American Steel foundries called it quits after being in operation in Granite City for nearly 90 years. Unfortunately, the recession in the U.S. at this time hit the steel industry and other heavy manufacturing industries extremely hard, making Granite City one of the hardest hit communities in the country. The hard-hit steel industry in Granite City saw the loss of a few thousand jobs during this time.

(“History of Granite City”)

I would argue that the losses suffered as a result of the closing of American Steel (and then reopening on a limited scale) were perhaps lessened to a degree by the presence of an institution of higher education now available in the local community. Even though the economy of the city is still closely associated the steel industry (and its continual fluctuation up and down in terms of job opportunities), at almost thirty years old, the SWGCC continues to have a strong presence in the Granite City area.

#### Research Setting: The English Department:

Even though the economic factors surrounding our campus may provide moments of instability, the English Department at SWIC has worked hard to provide a program that is grounded and stable. At the SWGCC, we teach composition exactly in the same manner as those who teach at the other campuses of our institution. At SWIC, the first semester of FYC – English 101 – is devised to introduce students to the

expectations of college-level writing (students are placed in the course via a placement test). Our course catalog describes English 101 in the following way:

English 101 is designed to help students write papers for a variety of general and specific audiences. Students will learn to recognize features that make writing effective, and learn different strategies writers use while pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing. Students will learn to read their own work more critically and to constructively criticize the work of others. The course also provides a brief introduction to the writing of source-supported papers and methods of documenting sources.

Typically, instructors at SWIC use a reader as well as a separate handbook (our department has used the *St Martin's Handbook* for the last several years as the “official” handbook of the English department). Full-time instructors are free to design English 101 in any way they would like, as long as the goals outlined in the course description are evident (acknowledging audience, seeing writing as a process, engaging in critical thinking and writing). Our department does not officially sanction using literature in FYC but writing instructors, in fact, use varied approaches in organizing their sections of English 101. For example, a colleague at the Belleville Campus recently organized an ENG 101 course in the virtual world of *World of Warcraft*. It is important to note that we see our writing program as a program in rhetoric, not just composition. We believe our writing courses should focus on more than “basic skills.” For this reason, we do not adopt textbooks with a building-block approach to writing (such as sentences to paragraphs to essays). This is not to say that skills like paragraphing are not important, but just that they should be deferential to a larger goal: writing effectively for an

audience. We believe that this kind of rhetorical awareness should be at the center of effective writing. Thus, there is a lot of variety in terms of “how” the course is organized and managed.

Because my English 101 sections usually meet in a computer-assisted classroom (CAI), each writing course (ENG 95, ENG 96, ENG 101, or ENG 102) can only enroll 20 students. In ENG 101, I generally divide the sixteen weeks of the semester into five essays, which all include extensive revision work. Although it is difficult to generalize what typically happens in the course, most of our class time is devoted to generating writing related to the essay prompts and making decisions about the rhetorical “moves” necessary for an effective piece of writing. I view English 101 as an opportunity to teach rhetoric, which implies teaching sophisticated cognitive “skills” like analyzing a writing situation, exploring one’s own beliefs about a topic, and anticipating the needs and responses of an audience. As a whole, our department rejects current-traditional rhetoric because we believe it emphasizes form over purpose and product over process. Thus, much of my class time is devoted to small and large group discussion, in-class writing, group analysis of student generated writing, and editing workshops.

All five of my essay prompts typically ask students to analyze a specific writing “moment.” As an example of a writing prompt I have assigned in a typical ENG 101 section, I have asked students to write a “letter” to a SWIC administrator, outlining a problem or issue associated with our particular campus (students at the Sam Wolf Granite City Campus often feel disconnected from the services available on the larger Belleville Campus). Students had to consider audience, organization, and wording as

they worked through this “rhetorical move.” As a class, we then invited the “audience” of the letters – administration on our campus – to a town-hall style class meeting.

Nearly everyone was excited about attending and, most importantly, students were able to present their “texts” in a real-life situation in which they had a better grasp of how their writing was valid and “alive.”

#### Research Setting: Race-Themed Course:

For this dissertation study, I chose two ENG 101 courses to closely examine in terms of how students responded to specific writing prompts. These two sections asked students to do what I might generally ask of students in any ENG 101 course: read texts, watch videos, participate in discussions, generate writing individually and in groups, share their thoughts and drafts, learn effective editing strategies, and produce writing that centered on an argument. In other words, I taught these two courses exactly as I teach any FYC course – the only difference was that the class discussions, readings, and writing prompts were focused on the topic of race. This section of the methodology chapter more specifically describes the classroom setting of these two courses.

I selected two sections of English 101 at the SWGCC during the Spring semester 2010. In choosing two different sections, I hoped to include as large a variety of students as possible. I decided to examine both a day and a night course because these particular time slots at SWIC are often comprised of differing groups of students – day classes usually consist of mostly traditionally aged students (under the age of 25) and night classes usually consist of non-traditionally aged students (over the age of 25).

Thus, each section met at a different day and time slot, which I had hoped would result in student enrollments that represented varied backgrounds. By my union contract, neither course can have an enrollment over 20 students. The first course, English 101 (section 061) met on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 10:00-10:50 AM (throughout this dissertation, this class will be referred to as the Day Class). Our day students obviously vary in age, but a large percentage of these students are generally younger, many recently graduated from local high schools. The second section, ENG 101 (section 067) met on late Monday afternoons from 4:00-6:50 PM (throughout this dissertation, this class will be referred to as the Night Class). As already mentioned, late afternoon and evening classes usually are filled with older students who have work and family obligations during the day. In my experience, it is not uncommon to encounter students who enroll in evening courses who have never attended a day class (thus, resulting in two different SWIC population groups). Again, by choosing to study two different sections, I hoped to include as many different student voices as possible in determining how using race affected their writing.

The syllabus for the course (used in both sections) – as well as all five writing assignments – are included in Appendix A of this study. Since both courses would be meeting in a Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) classroom, I decided not to ask students to purchase a handbook for the course (i.e. *The St Martin's Guide to Writing*). In terms of rhetorical and sentence-level issues, I decided that this information was readily available on the internet for free (e.g. The Purdue Online Writing Lab). In addition, I used a wikispace to create a class web site:

<http://eng101spring2009.pbworks.com/w/page/17548616/FrontPage>. I chose this



November and December 1959 – with his skin artificially darkened by medication. In that time he traveled through Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia, finding out first-hand what it was like to be treated as a second-class citizen – or, as he says, as a tenth-class citizen. The articles he wrote on his journey were collected into this thin volume of observations.

By using *Black Like Me* as the central text for the first few weeks of the semester, I had hoped to center our class discussions about race on a “famous” conversation, perhaps thinking that this might take some of the emotion out of such a topic. After we interrogated this first text, we then moved on to other stories and events reported in the news, particularly ones in which race played a pivotal role. As can be noted in Appendix A, these writing assignments included creating a racial autobiography, analyzing an advertisement or media image of their choosing (including an option to respond to the Chris Rock documentary *Good Hair*), examining the racial (and other) conflicts in the Academy Award winning film *Crash*, writing a “letter” to a member in the other section reacting to written comments that person made in response to readings, and creating a multi-media essay/ text responding to the class as a whole. Each of these five essay assignments piggyback one another, progressively prompting students to widen their rhetorical abilities as they worked from essay one through essay five.

The first essay, a racial autobiography, was designed to introduce students to the theme of the course, inviting them to start considering the importance of establishing a focus when they write; in addition, students were asked to think carefully about their experiences with noticing race in an effort to provide supporting evidence for their thoughts. Essay assignments two and three were intentionally designed to help the

students better grasp the idea of selecting a topic and developing an argument by analyzing. Because our class watched the documentary by Chris Rock, *Good Hair* (2009), most students chose for essay two to analyze the idea of hair as a political marker. Essay three focused on the film *Crash* (2005) and students were given a variety of possible essay responses that would encourage them to think deeply about the many ideas about race, class, gender, privilege raised in the film.

Once students were comfortable with the idea of stating an argument and then supporting that claim, I designed essay four with the purpose of helping students to build off those initial skills by better understanding (and applying) the rhetorical concept of audience. After asking students to openly post their comments about Jane Elliott's Blue-Eye/ Brown-Eye experiment on the class web site, I then asked the students to choose one person's comments and to reply directly to that person in a professional letter (again, making it clear that students needed a focus and support for that focus just as they would in an academic essay). To bridge the two different course sections, I asked students in the Day Class to respond to the Night Class (and vice versa). The comments from each of the sections were easily accessible on the class web page. Figure 2 shows an image from one of these discussions.

Fig. 2

## Essay 4 Discussion Example

Comments (13) [Delete all comments](#)

 **██████████ said**  
at 10:40 am on Apr 19, 2010  
[Reply](#) [Delete](#)

i think it was a good thing to get people talking about the article because its very important to our society. many people experience race in different ways than other people.

---

 **██████████ said**  
at 10:43 am on Apr 19, 2010  
[Reply](#) [Delete](#)

I totally understand where john is coming from. To tell you the truth, I have NO IDEA if my family had slaves, I have no idea where my family came from, I have one grandparent, and I've never really asked where we were from. Generations of my family come from Madison, IL, and I have no idea if my family had slaves. I don't know what to say. Do I say sorry? If I do, it would not be a very sincere apology. Am I not supposed to say anything? And by doing that, would I be considered a racist? I am just not sure how to go about bridging the gap that is there. Does anybody feel me on this?!?!

---

 **██████████ said**  
at 10:44 am on Apr 19, 2010  
[Reply](#) [Delete](#)

I think the achievement gap issue was very true. I have seen it since i was in middle school. The majority of the class is white. And i do not think that i have ever had a black teacher. In my classes there may have been maybe a handful of blacks and they seem to miss the most class. But the fact that they are less prepared to attend college is not all the schools fault that they attend. If you do not attend school almost everyday your gonna miss out on a lot of information that you talk about and its up to them to do the homework and study for test the teachers can not make them do anything.

---

 **██████████ said**  
at 10:44 am on Apr 19, 2010  
[Reply](#) [Delete](#)

I think that the male African-American achievement gap issue does have a lot to do with the parents of these boys. If they are taught that they have to do what they are supposed to as younger children they would care more about their school work and do the homework like they are supposed to and make the grade and learn something while doing it. I was always told I couldnt go outside or do anything fun untill all my homework was done and checked over by mom or dad. I know that some kids dont have that same privelege. But now that I am older I still make sure homework is done first, almost like it is a routine. A child or teenager would much rather be having fun rather than sitting in the house working on homework. I do strongly believe that the parents of these children are to blame in most cases!

For this fourth writing assignment, students had to read through the comments and choose one to respond to. I hoped by doing this that not only would students grasp the concept of how audience might determine language choices, but I also wanted the students to be comfortable with differences of opinion.

For the final writing assignment, students did not have to write “a traditional essay” but were welcome to use any multi-media way in presenting an argument/ purpose. As the assignment outlines, students were welcome to create any sort of “text” that would comment or address on “anything” learned in the course. Students were even welcome to work together in pairs; I hoped that such an assignment might result in cooperative efforts between students in recognizing key rhetorical strategies

and how these strategies could work in any sort of “text.” However, only one pair of students took me up on the offer of creating a text that was not a traditional essay – these two women designed and wrote a comic strip, outlining some of the key terms they learned in the course (both racial terms – like “privilege” – and rhetorical terms – like “audience” and “argument”). All five essay assignments (as well as the syllabus) are included in Appendix A.

### Participants:

My students (all names are pseudonyms) for this study were a group of twenty-eight students (fourteen in each class) who all registered for ENG 101 because they were in degrees and programs that required this important writing course. Any students interested in enrolling in either of the two sections knew ahead of time that these sections were not “typical.” At SWIC, students are asked to meet with an academic counselor before they are allowed to officially register for courses on our campus. When registration started for the Spring 2010 semester during the Fall of 2009, I wrote a letter directed at our counseling office to notify academic counselors that students enrolling in either of these two sections of ENG 101 would need to understand that the course was organized around the topic of race. Included in Appendix D is the letter that I personally gave to each of the SWGCC academic counselors so they could more effectively advise students about not only the course topic but that I would also be conducting research throughout the semester. In this way, the class topic would not come as a surprise to any of the students enrolling in the course since I had no contact with any of the students enrolled in either of the courses before the first day of the semester. In addition, it is not uncommon for students in our institution to “try on” a

class during the first week of the semester and enroll in a different course if the original section is not comfortable to the student.

Before the semester started, all twenty class slots were filled. Before the semester started, this project was also given Human Subjects Approval by both SIUC and SWIC. Because I secured funding through a Title III grant, I was able to provide each student with a complimentary text for the course (*Black Like Me*) and a 2 MB flash drive. On the first day of the class, students were given an Informed Consent Form, outlining the basics of this study and the student's willingness to participate (see Appendix D). A department representative (our faculty secretary on the SWGCC) collected the consent forms from the students. She locked this information in the English department until the end of the semester. I did not know until final grades were submitted which students had consented to the study (I eventually discovered that all students in both sections of the course had agreed to allowing me to use their work in this dissertation). By the end of the semester, fourteen students in each class completed the course and received a final grade. Six students in each of the courses dropped within the first few weeks, an action not uncommon in first year courses.

I worked with the students for sixteen weeks. The ethnographic research extended for the entire Spring 2010 semester, from January 18, 2010, to May 14, 2010. As previously noted, the day section met three times a week while the night section met once a week. During the semester, I evaluated and graded the students' essays as I regularly assess the essays of any work I receive in any FYC course. I commented on both rhetorical and sentence-level issues in an attempt to guide students to better focus on purpose and support. Before handing the essays back to the students, I made

copies of the essays and placed the copies in a file I made for each student in the course. After the Spring 2010 courses concluded, I changed the identities of the 28 students who had completed the entire course, giving each person a pseudonym. If a student indicated that he/she did not want to participate in the study, my plan was to shred the entire student file.

#### Data Collection:

The research approach used in this study is discourse analysis, attention to the linguistic details in words, sentences, and paragraphs. My aim was to carefully analyze some of the language written by the students participating in this study. A recent article in *College Composition and Communication* by Thomas Huckin, Jennifer Andrus, and Jennifer Clary-Lemon argues that discourse analysis represents “a powerful new methodology for rhetoric and composition, leading to unusually rich and versatile research” (110). Later in their study, these three researchers note that the value of this approach is helping researchers “find patterns that create, circulate, reinforce, and reflect societal norms and ideology” (119). In this study, I focused solely on the writing produced in each of the courses, thus following the progression of the students’ written work as they worked through a series of five essays.

I used discourse analysis because I wanted the research to focus on the students and their words. Even though there are numerous studies that look at how FYC courses might work in terms of using sensitive course topics (Welch or Wilhot, for example), few of these studies focus on the words of the students themselves. Instead, many of these studies focus on the instructors and analyze their thoughts on providing a pedagogical framework for this discussion. For this study, however, I was particularly

interested in understanding how, over the relatively short time of sixteen weeks, the student engaged with the topic of race via their actual words.

In terms of data collection, by the end of the semester, I had collected three major forms of data: (1) five essays, (2) a class blog (predominantly comprised of class announcements and uploaded assignments and other class handouts), and (3) responses to three surveys – one at the beginning of the semester (mid-January), one at mid-term (mid-March), and one at the end of the semester (mid-May).

I did not closely analyze the student essays in terms of specific rhetorical movements of “race talk” until after the completion of the semester (and after I had submitted the students’ final grades). I did, of course, grade the essays (as I do in any class) in terms of the course objectives (primarily purpose and support). So I could study the student essays later, I made copies of all five writing assignments from each student before returning the work to the student, and – because I encourage students to revise their work if they wanted a “higher grade” – I also copied any revision work the student elected to do as well. As I previously mentioned, each student had a designated file that included all submitted essays (along with any revisions) as well as responses to the three surveys.

The major components of the survey findings, as well as the discussion of the student essays, are included in the next section of this dissertation (Chapter Four: Results). In sum, the procedures associated with my data collection can be found in the following table:

Table 3

## Data Collection

Method	Purpose	Procedures for Data Collection	Data Content
Essays	Determine efficacy of using race/ diversity writing prompts	Systematic coding of student essays in terms of FYC goals after the course was completed	Qualitative changes throughout the course in terms of writing and thinking abilities
Three surveys (beginning, middle, and end of the semester)	Determine variations in attitude, knowledge, perceptions, demographic information	Self-administered in questionnaires in class (I left the room)	Quantifiable answers to both close-ended and open-ended questions
Class Blog	Determine (directly) efficacy of using race/ diversity writing prompts	Students responded to in-class writing assignments (including several out-of-class assignments)	Qualitative (public) changes throughout the course in terms of writing and thinking abilities

No matter the writing assignment, students were asked to develop a clear and focused argument, use relevant and reliable sources in support of an argument, and develop a clear sense of the rhetorical choices available for varied audiences and purposes, including voice, tone, diction, structure, and format. The only significant difference in the way I created writing assignments for this course was that the writing prompts primarily focused on the ideas generated from the reading of Griffin's *Black Like Me* (and other race related topics/ discussions). When I read the book before the

start of the class, I saw many contemporary connections between Griffin's comments about the racial situation in the late 1950's and the racial conflicts of present-day Granite City, Illinois (and the surrounding communities). For example, early in the semester students discussed their thoughts on a local African American man who was appalled when he picked up his pizza order at Pizza Hut after waiting for the order to be made, and he discovered that his receipt did not note his name (the usual protocol when waiting for a pizza) but the words "Big Black Man." At the time this event occurred, we had been reading the first sections of *Black Like Me* and students connected the history of Griffin's account with contemporary examples of when one's skin color "means" something. After the first couple of weeks of the course, it was not uncommon for the first couple of minutes before class – and once class had started – to be taken up with students bringing these news stories into the classroom (and often being debated by the students themselves).

I started the course with *Black Like Me* and then moved on to more complicated readings. With these other readings, students were exposed to several other readings through which I tried to make them aware of a variety of opinions and viewpoints in terms of the complicated subject of race. For example, once students were more comfortable talking about race after completing *Black Like Me*, we read Peggy McIntosh's famous essay on white privilege, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" (1990) and then followed this up by viewing sections of the Frontline show *A Class Divided*, which focused on educator Jane Elliot and her famous Blue-Eyed/Brown-Eyed experiment in 1968 with children (and a later experiment with adults). Other readings in the course included Yasmine Bahrani's "Why Does My Race Matter?"

(1998), Stanley Fish's "Boutique Multiculturalism" (1997), and Laila Al-Marayati and Semeen Issa "An Identity Reduced to a Burka" (2002). We also looked at several published speeches by the then recently elected American president Barack Obama.

In terms of how we used class time, we looked at the readings by analyzing how the text was written and organized (models of "good" or "bad" writing) and we examined the readings with a goal of generating possible topics for essay writing. Some classes, then, were directed at responding to texts and discussing them while other days were spent in peer workshops (helping each other with writing tasks), mini-lectures in terms of style issues (e.g. audience concerns or building more effective introductions) and sentence-level concerns (e.g. comma splices or transitional wording). If I knew we were going to be talking about a particularly heated topic (e.g. white privilege), I tried to help students create definitions for these terms before we tackled them within the context of the reading. It is impossible to specifically describe what happened in each class meeting, but the activities mentioned above exemplifies how our class sessions were generally organized and conducted.

Class time was also used for responding to brief surveys so that students could directly respond to the class theme. For this study, I had the students complete three surveys: On the first day of the semester, at approximately mid-term (mid-March), and at the end of the semester (mid-May). All three of these surveys can be found in Appendix D. The first survey was simple – I just wanted to collect basic demographic information. Besides their name, phone number, and email address, I also asked the students to complete three additional questions:

- How old are you?

- How do you racially identify yourself?
- Where were you primarily raised (location)?

I didn't offer the students any explanations even though I knew that the second question might be difficult. I thought it was important to think about how the students in the two courses might "see" themselves racially without any interference from me. I didn't want to influence how they responded to this question. The other two surveys (later in the semester) offered more difficult questions. Both the mid-term and the final survey asked students to answer questions connected to the class theme itself – Was the chosen topic distracting? Has one's approach to the concept of race altered in any way? The responses to all three of these surveys will be discussed in the next chapter (Chapter 4: Results).

#### Data Analysis:

After the completion of the semester and submitting final grades, the faculty secretary at SWIC gave me the envelopes containing the release forms that the students had signed at the beginning of the semester. Since every student agreed to let me use their work, I then was faced with an enormous amount of data which included copies of all essays written by each student (including multiple versions of an essay if the student had elected to revise). According to Peter Smagorinsky, "The researcher's task is to take this amorphous mass of data and reduce it to something comprehensible and useful" (397). Though the surveys I conducted indicated some interesting information in terms of "how" the students wrestled with race (to be discussed in the next chapter), it was the actual student essays, of course, that promised the most

interesting data. Smagorinsky further states that the method a researcher takes in terms of coding highlights “the manifestation of theory” (399). As an advocate of social epistemic theory, I am interested in the social dimensions of knowledge production. Ideology is the central core of my approach to composition pedagogy -- language constructs meaning (versus the idea that language as a simple means of recording thoughts and ideas). Since I view writing as a social act, students in my class participate in social interactions as they develop their texts (this includes sharing their drafts and ideas in class with each other and with me): “As researchers, we must be perpetually aware that we are constructing a reality as we articulate our understanding of [contexts], as well as select and apply methods, analyze data, and represent results” (Rickly 385). I am aware, of course, that I must be conscious of “how” I am interpreting the words and ideas of these student writers.

Thus, in order to more accurately capture the action of what the students were doing with their writing based on race writing prompts, I used a coding system that rested on the act of “verbing.” Calvin and Hobbes once discussed “verbing” in Bill Watterson’s classic comic strip. When Calvin mentions that he “like[s] to verb words,” he argues that he enjoys to “take nouns and adjectives and use them as verbs.” As he and Hobbes walk further down the street, Calvin concludes with the following comment: “Verbing weirds language.” This is exactly what I wanted to do with the way I categorized the rhetorical “movements” that students were making in their writing. How were they wrestling with race as a concept? How connected was this thinking to bettering their critical thinking and writing skills? If I broke down some of the data into sentence level segments, would I be able to see their written ideas differently as

opposed to “judging” the essay as a whole? Were the students “weirding” language in any particular way?

Because of the huge amount of student data (e.g. five essays from each of the 28 students in the study), I decided to use the first paragraph of the first and fourth essays that students wrote in the five essay assignment sequence. Using language from the first essay might capture how the students grappled with race at the onset of the course; using language from the fourth essay might show how students were grappling with some of these same ideas as the students were nearing completion of the course. I decided to use the first paragraphs because I encourage students in FYC to use their first paragraphs to provide a catchy hint to their essay’s overall theme as well as establishing their overall purpose/ focus for the entire paper. In some cases when I was coding data, however, I used the final paragraph of the paper when the introductory paragraph did not, in fact, capture the paper’s overall focus.

There is a further argument for focusing on the first paragraph of each essay. As a class, we spend a great amount of time talking about the rhetorical context of introductory words and sentences. Indeed, when we are working on revising our essays before a final due date, we often spend additional time re-thinking the introduction, making sure that this important paragraph effectively sets up the ensuing discussion.

This study, then, focuses on two paragraphs from each student – one from their first essay and one from their fourth essay. Of course, no one paragraph is exactly the same length, but most paragraphs were between five to eight sentences long. For each student paragraph, I separated all of the sentences. Appendix C includes two tables

for each of the students (a table for Essay One and a table for Essay Four). The left side of the table shows each sentence from the students' paragraphs while the right side shows how a coding category (mentioned earlier) was applied to each sentence.

Eventually, each sentence was labeled with one of the categories noted in the following chart. This table outlines the eight categories that I developed to describe the rhetorical movement via language that a student made in terms of grappling with race as a concept or idea. These eight coding categories ended up including several components: a "verbing" category name, a definition with its abbreviation used in the actual coding, and examples of what sentences in this category might look like. While the full category definitions can be found in Appendix B, Table 6 identifies the eight categories and their general definitions.

Table 4

Coding Categories

Acknowledging Writing (AW)	Any sentence with a reference to recognizing the complexities inherent in the concept of race. This type of writing reflects varying levels of critical thinking in terms of race as a topic.
Being Writing (BW)	Any sentence with an explicit reference to racial group membership (as a member or an outsider). A sentence may indicate a common shared experience with another individual, group, or other relationship. Additionally, this type of sentence might desire some type of harmony with an individual or group.
Defending Writing (DW)	Any sentence with anger or frustration directed toward the discussion of race as a topic. Such a sentence might show anger toward the instructor, another individual, or a text.

Table 4 (Continued)

Fixing Writing (FW)	Any sentence with a desire or an attempt to fix or change thinking and/ or comments perceived to be racist. The writer might likely embrace an activist perspective.
Observing Writing (OW)	Any sentence with a reference to the term “race” as a concept with <u>no</u> emotional entanglements. Such a sentence will indicate a level of separation or detachment from racial phenomenon, identity, prejudice, or bias.
Perceiving Writing (PW)	Any sentence with a reference to struggling with the concept of race via the metaphor of “sight” or the metaphor of “learning.” Such writing often highlights a new understanding of some kind.
Realizing Writing (RW)	Any sentence with a reference to the understanding that race is a valid topic of study that can offer alternative identity knowledge. The writing may show a specific connection to a text encountered in the writing classroom.
Treading Writing (TW)	Any sentence with a reference to an easy or simple explanation for the resolution of difficult racial issues, feelings, or problems. This type of writing often indicates an unwillingness to recognize the complexities associated with a topic like race.

After assigning each sentence one of the categories listed in the table above, I then reviewed those designations at least three times over a five week period (in order to insure that I was indeed coding the sentences consistently). I then constructed the tables for each student’s two paragraphs. I tabulated the results manually (with the use of a calculator) in order to ascertain how often a certain category was used. Counting through these sentences an additional three times (as well as enlisting the help of a colleague to count on her own), I counted the categories by hand, noting the frequency of each category. I made sure that with each count that I always came up with the same results. I then proceeded to add all of the sums together as a whole and these numbers represent the totals mentioned throughout this study.

One final remark on my coding activities: I made three additional decisions related to how I counted up the totals. First, if a student revised an essay, I decided to use the more recent version of the essay instead of the original essay. The revision might have given the student an opportunity to rethink a phrase or idea and I thought it was important to use the version that best captured how the student actually thought. Second, whenever the student writer alluded to a class reading (in terms of summarizing that reading) or simply quoted what someone had said, I blocked out those comments completely since I was more interested in discovering “how” the students talked about race or other complicated concepts (this explains the “gray blocks” in the table results). Thirdly, If there were two different categories possible in terms of coding a sentence, I designated the category which seemed the most dominant in the particular situation.

### Conclusion:

This study uses discourse analysis to better understand what happens to student writing in a FYC course that focuses on the touchy topic of race. There are few studies available in which the voices of the students are the focus of the discussion (as opposed to the writing instructor’s subjectivity or the theoretical reasoning behind using the topic as an organizing principle). Indeed, using a topic has become such a common practice in organizing FYC that we don’t even consider that there might be problems in using a topic to pull the class together. At the 2014 Conference on College Composition and Communication, chair Howard Tinberg argues that those of us who teach FYC need to keep our focus on the way we shape student learning: “... the impetus of our scholarship is toward the breaking of new sub-fields, new areas for

research. Rather than continuing to return to and reflect on familiar scholarship, we are led to move on and cite new work, new authors. Our attention has spread far and wide rather than deepened.”

In my view, the teaching of FYC is more an art (with “blurry” lines) than a more scientific linear route that must be rigidly followed in order to produce a college writing course that meets FYC objectives. We do, of course, have specific learning outcomes (as illustrated in the WPA FYC Objectives position statement found in Appendix E) but as a discipline we have no set standards on exactly “how” a FYC should be organized to achieve these outcomes.

Because we have no unanimously agreed upon standard for organizing an effective writing course, we are fortunate to teach in an academic discipline that embraces a wide variety of approaches. But we must not be blinded by these methodologies and, instead, we must continue to interrogate what constitutes the best practices in the field (or even what we might mean by asserting something is the “best” or the “most effective”). Though this specific research project cannot be universalized to apply to what could happen in every FYC classroom, this contextualized project relates what happens in one version of ENG 101 in one urban community college; my hope is that this study might help to revitalize the many unanswered questions as we continue to deliberate over the issues raised in the Hairston-Berlin discussion almost more than twenty years ago.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction:

This chapter will outline the raw data collected in the two FYC courses (a Day Class and a Night Class) using race as course topic during the Spring 2010 semester at the Sam Wolf Granite City Campus of Southwestern Illinois College (SWIC). Each course had 14 students who maintained enrollment throughout the semester with each student writing a total of five essays. With the students' permission, I made copies of each of the essays as the students worked on their writing assignments one-by-one throughout the sixteen week semester. Because of the huge amount of data collected by the end of the semester, I decided to focus my study on the first and the fourth essays, in particular the opening paragraph of each assignment (the decision to analyze the opening paragraphs was fully discussed in Chapter 3).

These first paragraphs were coded by the categories described in the previous chapter pertaining to methodology. Each of these eight categories designates a specific rhetorical level of thinking that was captured by the words and language that the students used when writing about the complex topic of race. For each student (14 in each class for a total of 28 students), I developed a data table outlining the results of the categorizing for Essay One and a data table outlining the results of the categorizing for Essay Four (thus, a total of 56 tables representing the 28 students in this study). Each table includes both the sentence and the coded category. A complete listing of all of these tables can be found under Appendix C. This particular chapter, however, will highlight the basic results of the data categorizing along with basic demographic

information about the students involved in the study. In addition, I asked the students to complete three surveys during the semester: during the first week of class, approximately mid-term, and on the final day of the course. This chapter also highlights data collected from all three of these surveys.

### Survey One and Survey Three -- Demographic Questions:

Two of the three surveys that I asked the students to complete asked for basic demographic information. The first survey, at the beginning of the semester, asked students to provide hometown, age, sex, and self-identified race (see appendix D for a copy of the survey). Both ENG 101 classes started with an initial enrollment of 20 students in each class. By the end of the semester, there were fourteen students still enrolled in each of the two ENG 101 sections (14 in the Day Class and 14 in the Night Class). The following two tables indicate basic demographic information about each of these 28 participants, including name (the pseudonym I created for the student), role in the class, self-identified “race,” hometown, age, and sex (I did not include demographic information for any of the students who dropped the class).

Table 5

#### Research Participants in the Day Class

<b>Name</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Self-Identified “Race”</b>	<b>Hometown (City or State)</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>
Dianna	Teacher	White	Washington State	42	F
Andy	Student	White	Granite City, IL	18	M
Ashley	Student	White	Independence, MO	24	F

Table 5 (Continued)

Brenda	Student	White	Granite City, IL	19	F
Dave	Student	White	Denver, CO	32	M
Erika	Student	White	Granite City, IL	19	F
Esther	Student	Black	Venice, IL	19	F
John	Student	White	Kansas City, MO	30	M
Kate	Student	White (Irish and Mexican)	Granite City, IL	19	F
Kathy	Student	White	Granite City, IL	19	F
Lesley	Student	White	Collinsville, IL	19	F
Lisa	Student	Mixed	Granite City, IL	19	F
Mike	Student	White	Granite City, IL	19	M
Roberta	Student	White	Granite City, IL	18	F
Saul	Student	White	Tennessee	23	M

Table 6

## Research Participants in the Night Class

<b>Name</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Self-Identified "Race"</b>	<b>Hometown (City or State)</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Dianna	Teacher	White	Washington State	42	F
Amy	Student	White	Granite City, IL	22	F
Bee	Student	White	Troy, IL	19	F
Beth	Student	White	Granite City, IL	22	F
Carley	Student	White	Granite City, IL	18	F
Genny	Student	White	Granite City, IL	20	F
Haley	Student	White	Granite City, IL	22	F

Table 6 (Continued)

Jesse	Student	White	Granite City, IL	19	M
Jill	Student	White	Granite City, IL	45	F
Joe	Student	White	Granite City, IL	22	M
James	Student	White	Collinsville, IL	19	M
Kerri	Student	White	Collinsville, IL	19	F
May	Student	White	Granite City, IL	52	F
Sherice	Student	African American	East St Louis, Illinois	21	F
Terry	Student	White	Madison, IL	62	F

My goal in selecting two sections that met at different times of the day was an attempt to include as much diversity as possible. I was hoping to capture the type of diversity that I often see in sections of ENG 101 particularly in terms of race and age. However, as these two tables indicate, both sections were predominantly white and young. In the Day Class, 12 students were under the age of 25 (the typical cut-off age for “traditionally aged” college students) while two others were over 25. Twelve of these students identified themselves as “white” (though one student amended this information to include “Irish and Mexican”). Two students used non-white designators – “black” and “mixed.” The demographics in the Night Class were similar – 11 students were under the age of 25 while 3 students were over 25 (including two students, however, who were several decades older than most of the other students). In the Night Class, only one student out of fourteen did not identify as white.

My hopes for a diverse student population may not have been founded in reality, however. As an institution, the Sam Wolf Granite City Campus is firmly white.

According to Fall 2012 statistics, 1,750 students who enrolled at our campus (74.67% of the total student population) checked “white” in the enrollment forms while the other roughly 25% represented the categories “African American,” “Hispanic,” and “Not Specified.” However, it is interesting to note that Sherice indicated her race as “African American” while Esther indicated she was “Black.” I am aware that this use of language is a complex one and would be interesting to pursue in future research. The use of different terminology to identify oneself racially is just one of the many complex issues connected to this project that is in need of further research.

Not surprisingly, most of these students represented individuals who had grown up in Granite City and the surrounding community: 17 students were raised in Granite City, 3 in Collinsville, Illinois, and 1 each in Troy, Illinois; Madison, Illinois; East St Louis, Illinois; and Venice, Illinois. These last four communities are within twenty miles of our campus. Four students were from outside the local area (Two of these four students were from out-of-state – Colorado and Tennessee).

Both classes were predominantly female and young. In the Day Class, there were 9 female students and 5 male students for a total of 14 students. Of these 14 students, 12 of them were under the age of 25, marking them as “traditionally aged college students.” The two who were not traditionally aged were approximately a decade older, 30 and 32 years old respectively.

The Night Class was also primarily composed of females -- 11 women and 3 men (again, for a total of 14 students). The traditionally aged students outweighed the non-traditional students (11 compared to 3). However, one difference is the non-traditionally aged students in the night class represented ages that were far older than the non-

traditional students in the day class. These three female students were 45, 52, and 62.

These two classes represent the typical enrollment status that I have often encountered in both day and night classes on our campus. Usually, day classes include more full-time students while the night classes enroll more part-time students. The survey conducted at the end of the semester asked students their enrollment status in terms of being part-time or full-time. The Day Class indicated that 11 students were full-time while 3 students were part-time (typical for a day class). The Night Class indicated that 7 students were full-time while 6 students were part-time (again, a characteristic statistic for students who attend classes in the late afternoon or evening).

The survey at the end of the semester (see Appendix D) asked students to identify their intended degree or profession. The following table indicates either the discipline or the actual type of employment that each student indicated as a goal for attending SWIC:

Table 7

Intended Degree/ Profession

Degree/ Profession	Day	Night
Accounting	0	2
Culinary Arts	1	1
Education	2	3
Film	1	0
Industrial Electrician	1	0
Law Enforcement	0	1

Table 7 (Continued)

Network Design/ Administration	1	0
Non-Degree Seeking	0	1
Nursing/ Health	5	3
Probation Officer	1	0
Undecided	1	2
Veterinary Science	1	0
Web Design	0	1

As the table above specifies, the students enrolled in the two courses represent a variety of professional aspirations – at least 8 of the students specified that they were pursuing degree programs related to health (a popular major on our campus). Other common degree paths reflect technology careers (Network Design and Web Design) and occupational certificates (Culinary Arts and Industrial Electrician). Three students out of the 28 were still undecided in terms of a major, not necessarily an uncommon situation for many first-year students. One student out of the 28 specified that she was pursuing the class for her own personal pleasure, not for a college degree.

#### Description of Essay One:

For the first assignment of the semester, I asked students to write a racial autobiography (see Appendix A). Students were told that they didn't need to answer

every question I had included on the assignment sheet, but they needed to focus on several of the prompts (e.g., What is the racial makeup of the neighborhood you grew up in? Have you ever felt or been stigmatized because of your race, gender, or ethnic group membership?) As with any writing assignment, I ask students to have both (1) a purpose or focus for their discussion and (2) evidence to back up that purpose or focus.

Since this was the first assignment for this race-focused FYC class, I wanted the writing prompt to introduce not only the topic of the course but also the idea that our class would be grappling with a difficult subject that didn't necessarily result in "the answer." By assigning a racial autobiography, I thought this assignment would provide an "easier" transition into some of the more difficult readings and discussions that I knew would come later in the semester. In order to better understand the concept of race, it is crucial to explore how it is that we have come to see the world the way that we do. Without lifting up our beliefs for examination, we are prone to making uncritical assumptions about others, or taking for granted the way we have been told things are. This assignment provides the opportunity to look at life experiences, so that we may start examining our beliefs in order to consciously hold on to some, while deciding to let go of others.

As with any ENG 101 essay, I ask the students to establish a purpose for their discussion (this could be but is not limited to a thesis statement). The students also need to make sure to include any needed support to make their established focus make sense for their readers. Though grammatical and sentence-level issues are important for a smooth read, I do not suggest that these issues are more important than rhetorical concerns. I ask students to consider the more minor issues during the proofreading and

editing stage of their writing.

### Data Categorizing of Essay One:

Using the coding categories outlined in chapter three (Methodology), I coded every sentence in the introductory paragraph of the first essay (the two classes produced a combined total of 183 sentences). For Essay One in the Day Class, there were 85 sentences in the introductory paragraphs, not including sentences that were blocked off and not coded because the writer was either quoting another person/ source or making a comment not closely affiliated with race. For Essay One in the Night Class, there were 98 such sentences. The following table illustrates how the sentences taken from Essay One were coded for students in both the Day Class and the Night Class:

Table 8

### Essay One Coding

Coding Category	Day	Night	Total
Acknowledging Writing	28	30	58
Being Writing	14	7	21
Defending Writing	1	5	6
Fixing Writing	1	0	1
Observing Writing	30	24	54
Perceiving Writing	0	2	2
Realizing Writing	3	3	6
Treading Writing	8	27	35

In both classes, the most common categories used with essay one were Acknowledging Writing and Observing Writing. However, the Night Class had more Treading Water sentences (27) as opposed to the Day Class (8).

I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter but two categories were used the most in Essay One: Acknowledging Writing and Observing Writing. Between the two classes, Acknowledging Writing was coded 58 times. As noted in the category definition for Acknowledging Writing, sentences were coded using this definition if the sentences included instances in which the writer expressed any recognition of the complexity inherent in race as a concept. Examples might include "My assumption was racism would disperse after the end of slavery" or "When discussing the subject of race, I think it's important to choose our verbiage carefully." Students using Acknowledging Writing might even just be asking a question, hinting at the complexity of a concept with no easy response or answers: "What exactly do white people get discriminated for?" This category also included any attempts at connecting with (and trying to understand) someone else's way of thinking about this difficult topic, e.g. "I understand your frustrations about race."

The second most common coding classification for Essay One was Observing Writing. Between the two classes, Observing Writing was coded 54 times. Sentences that were coded using this category included sentences that made a reference to the concept of race without indicating any emotional connections or entanglements. A sentence coded as Observing Writing most often indicated some level of separation between the writer and any racial phenomenon. Examples included sentences like "I used to hear the word on television but I never thought about it" or "I have always

looked at race as not a serious concern." A writer using a sentence like this might also recognize the possibility of a racial entanglement but a refusal to connect on this level such as "I don't want to hurt anyone's feelings." Another example might be a sentence that uses a passive verb construction: "America seems to have a race problem." A sentence would also be coded as Observing Writing if there was a reference to overhearing strong racial language but the writer expressed little emotion, e.g. "I heard my grandmother say that I liked dating Niggers."

The Night Class used 27 instances of Treading Writing out of 98 possible sentences (27.5%) as opposed to 8 instances of Treading Writing in the 85 sentences written in the Day Class (9.4%). Treading Writing refers to any sentence that alludes to an easy or simple explanation for the resolution of difficult racial issues, feelings, or problems. Examples of Treading Writing might include "Since we have a black president, race is no longer an issue" or "I am color blind." These types of sentences might also include an allusion to a relationship as evidence that the writer is not racist such as "I have friends who are white, black, Mexican, and Asian." If a sentence pointed out that racial issues are inevitable and will always be a characteristic of our society (such as "We will always have race problems in America"), these sentences were also included in Treading Writing. In addition, if a sentence referred to a simple agreement with no explanation as to why that position was significant, the sentence was also coded as Treading Writing (e.g. "I agree with you" or "I agree with that idea").

#### Description of Essay Four:

For Essay Four, I wanted the students to practice their sense of voice and

audience, two important characteristics of an effective college-level essay. First, I asked students to respond to a comment that had been previously written by one of their colleagues in class (see appendix A for the full assignment). Figure 3 shows one of the comments that I posted on the class web site, as well as several of the student responses. I posted the question, “So what did you think about the experiment that Jane Elliott does with professionals?” As the figure shows, some students responded generally with comments like “I thought it was very interesting to see how she handled the blue eyed people.” Other students made more emotional connections: “This clip really hit me hard. I truley [sic] never realized that we can put someone through such a terrible thing like that...” Eventually, the students were asked to respond to three different prompts, each posted after an assigned reading.

Fig. 3

### Screen Shot of Essay Four Assignment

☆ **MWF: The Complete Blue Eyed**

last edited by  Dianna Shank 4 years, 6 months ago  Page history

So what did you think about the experiment that Jane Elliott does with professionals? (she used to do this exercise with only students, but now she does it with both colleges and professional organizations that invite her to speak to folks above diversity).

**Click "Add a Comment" below to leave your thoughts for others to read!**

---

 Comments (14) [Delete all comments](#)

 **██████████ said**  
at 10:42 am on Apr 12, 2010  
[Reply](#) [Delete](#)

i thought it was very interesting to see how she handled the blue eyed people.

 **██████████ said**  
at 10:44 am on Apr 12, 2010  
[Reply](#) [Delete](#)

I think it is a great experiment, everyone should know what other races go through and what we put others through. She made the experiment great because she has went through it before and you can tell she is a very strong women and she is very right about the things that she says to all of her participants.

These three short writing prompts centered around two of the class readings – the famous documentary *A Class Divided* and a controversial editorial that opened up a national conversation on race identity. The first text, *A Class Divided*, focuses on Jane Elliott's Blue-Eyed Experiment. Elliott famously divided her elementary school class in 1963 by eye color — blue eyes and brown eyes. On day one of the lesson, she told the blue-eyed children they were smarter, nicer, neater and better than those with brown eyes. All day that first day, Elliott praised the blue-eyed children and gave them extra privileges. On day two of the lesson, the roles were changed. On the second day, the brown-eyed children were made to feel superior and the blue-eyed children were criticized and ridiculed. Elliott wanted to show the students how racism is created (and then taken apart). As Figure 1 reflects, I asked students to think about Elliott's experiment as a whole. The students posted their comments beneath the posting with my writing prompt.

The second text used for this assignment was an ABC News report, *A Conversation on Race: Black, White, or Other?*, in which Lonnae O'Neal Parker, a reporter for the *Washington Times*, lamented that her biracial cousin had checked the box for "white" instead of the box for "black" or "other." Parker's article provoked many heated letters to the editor from the news reading public when the story was picked up by other national papers. The ABC News report included many of these responses with the authors of the letters reading their words out loud to the camera and to Parker herself. In essence, Parker instigated a genuine dialog between herself and readers on both coasts. It was this rhetorical situation that inspired the design for the fourth essay

assignment. I wanted the students to read each other's comments and get engaged in a "real" conversation, one perhaps with no easy answers. Indeed, Parker raised the question in her editorial of how we see ourselves "marked" racially. Parker even argued that most Americans are "scared to talk honestly about race ... They're afraid of the implications, afraid of the ramifications, afraid they'll be branded a racist. They just seem to close down a lot because they think it's all stuff they've heard before."

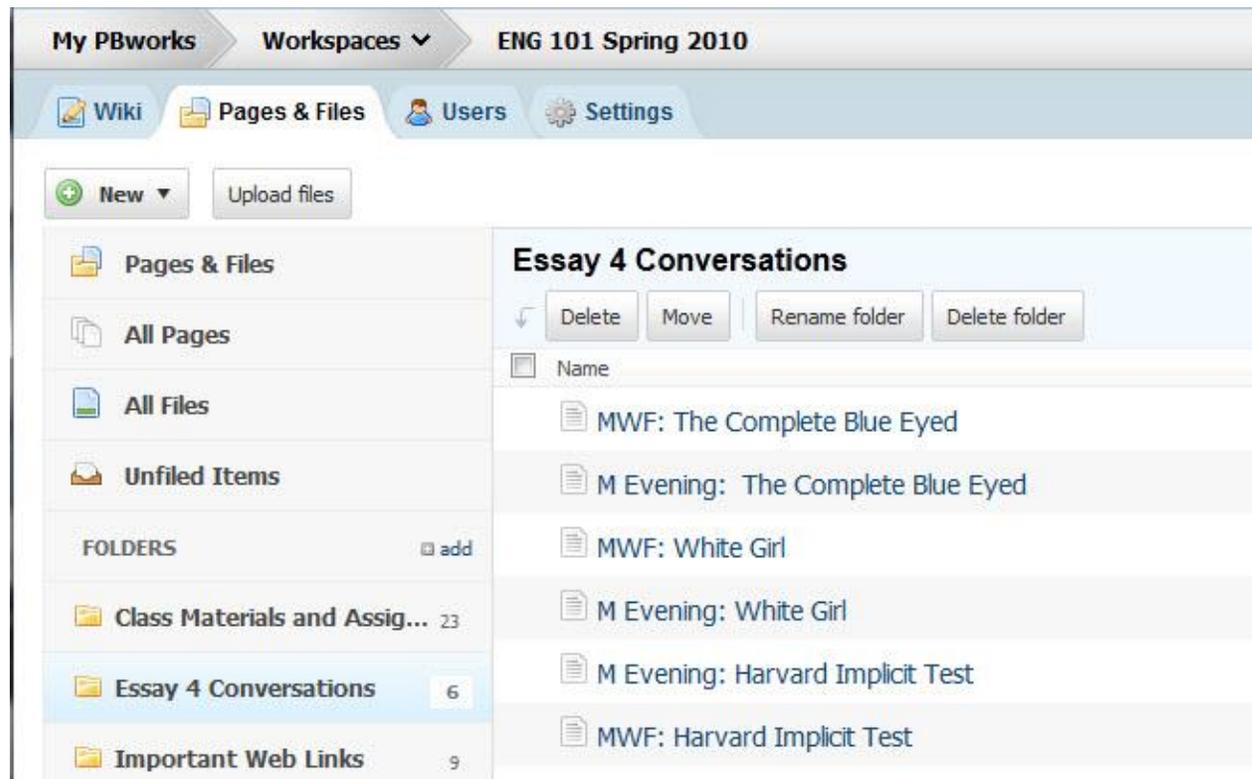
By the time of the fourth essay assignment, about 3/4 of the way through the semester, I felt the students in these two ENG 101 classes were ready not only to take on Parker's words but to genuinely engage in a difficult discussion on race. Nearing the end of week twelve, we had completed our reading of *Black Like Me* and had watched, analyzed, and discussed the film *Crash*, as well as many short and controversial discussions and readings focusing on race (For more details, see the course syllabus in Appendix A). Students were also more at ease with the people in the class and almost everyone was familiar with everyone's names.

After several days of responding to the three general questions related to Parker and Elliott that I posted on the class web site over the course of a week, the students were asked to carefully read the comments written by the members in the other class section. As Figure 2 illustrates, I grouped these written conversations under one file ("Essay 4 Conversations") on the class web site. One intent of this assignment was for the students to connect – through words – with the students in the other section (I did not require that the student directly respond to the chosen comment on the blog itself but the students were welcome to respond if they felt comfortable doing so; only one student pursued this option). The students did not have to disagree with the original

post; they simply had to be able to respond to something that the person had written.

Fig. 4

#### Essay Four Conversations



After reading all the comments from the other section, students then picked one of these comments and responded back to that student (in the form of a letter essay). The specific assignment can be found in Appendix A. Again, students didn't have to necessarily disagree or agree with the other person, but they did need to have a specific reason in choosing that particular comment.

### Data Categorizing of Essay Four:

Using the data categories outlined in the Methodology chapter, I coded every sentence in the introductory paragraph of Essay Four for each student in both classes. In the Day Class, the students produced 72 sentences. In the Night Class, the students wrote a total of 92 sentences. The following table outlines how those sentences were coded:

Table 9

#### Essay Four Coding

Coding Category	Day	Night	Total
Acknowledging Writing	31	44	75
Being Writing	11	2	13
Defending Writing	0	10	10
Fixing Writing	18	13	31
Observing Writing	3	2	5
Perceiving Writing	1	1	2
Realizing Writing	0	9	9
Treading Writing	8	11	19

After Acknowledging Writing, the second most common coding category was Fixing Writing. Fixing Writing refers to any sentence that exhibits a desire or an attempt to fix or change thinking or comments perceived to be racist. Such sentences might include "Your comment demands action" or "Race is not vital in your life but it is in

others." In fact, the writer might even take on an activist perspective in relation to another student's comment, such as "I strongly disagree with you because ..."

For the Night Class – much like the Day Class -- the most common coding category -- with nearly half the total sentences at 44 occurrences out of 92 sentences total -- was Acknowledging Writing. Overall, for this fourth writing assignment, the coding category of Acknowledging Writing occurred the most frequently -- 43% for the day class and 48% for the night class. Also similar to the day class, the night class produced sentences coded as Fixing Writing 13 times. Ultimately, the coding category of Fixing Writing was used 25% by the Day Class (18 out of 72) and 14% (13 out of 92) by the Night Class.

One difference in coding between these two classes in terms of Essay Four was in the use of the Defending Writing category. The Day Class had no instances of this type of sentence in the introductory paragraphs of essay four but the Night Class had 10 instances (out of 92). According to the coding definition for Defending Writing, this type of writing can be characterized as a sentence that expresses anger or frustration toward the discussion of race as a writing topic. An example might be "In this class, I get the impression that it's only the white people who are racist and that is not true." Such a sentence might show anger toward the instructor, a text, or another student's words (e.g. "I hate it when the book is supposed to make me feel guilty as a white person").

### Survey Two:

Approximately half way through the semester (in mid-March), I asked students to respond to an anonymous mid-semester survey. I wanted to gauge how the students were coping with the theme of race as the focus of their writing class. In this section, I

will provide the responses to two questions from that survey: “How is the class going for you?” and “Has the class discussion ‘done anything’ for you at all?” The following table presents the responses to the first question from the Day Class:

Table 10

## Survey 2 Question 1 Results (Day Class)

<b>Student Name</b>	<b>Positive Language</b>	<b>Negative Language</b>	<b>Neutral Language</b>
Andy		“I’m having a hard time being motivated to wright about race differences. It doesn’t really effect me personally because I’m white.” [sic]	
Ashley	“I like the fact that we are doing race because it really is something that effects us all.” [sic]		
Brenda	“I think the class is going great and personally I like the way your teaching. Your not one of those teachers that makes me fall asleep.” [sic]		
Dave	“So far, so good. I like reviewing other writing. It helps me with my own.”		
Erika	“I love this class!”		
Esther	“I love this class. It’s my favorite class.”		

Table 10 (Continued)

John	"This is my favorite subject now, due to our subject matter ... this class has inspired me to move into writing with my career."		
Kate	"I think class is going better than I thought."		
Kathy	"I like the class. It's fun and upbeat."		
Lisa			"The class is going well. I can't say I've learned much considering I already know and understand the information thrown at me."
Lesley	"I really enjoy the class, it's definitely not boring."		
Mike			"It's going alright. I do have some problems with the essays because it has to do with race and have not had to deal with a lot of these problems."
Roberta		"I just kind of wish we had more topics to choose from."	
Saul		"I would have like to have seen, toward the beginning of the semester, a workshop about ways to help you say what you want to say."	

In terms of the Day Class, most of the fourteen students responded generally positively to the question, "How is the class going for you?" Specifically, nine students

answered with positive language, three answered using negative language, and two students used neutral language. Students who responded positively made comments like “I think the class is going great ... your [sic] not one of those teachers that [sic] makes me fall asleep,” “I like this class – it’s fun and upbeat,” “I love this class. It’s my favorite class,” and “This is my favorite subject now due to our subject matter.”

Students who responded negatively wrote comments like “I just kind of wish we had more topics to choose from,” “I would like to have seen, toward the beginning of the semester, a workshop about ways to help you say what you want to say,” and “I’m having a hard time being motivated to wright [sic] about race differences.” Students who answered in neutral terms said comments like “It’s going alright” and “The class is going well [but] I can’t say I’ve learned much considering I already know and understand the information thrown at me.”

The next table indicates the responses that students in the Night Class noted for the first question of the survey:

Table 11

Survey 2 Question 1 Results (Night Class)

<b>Student Name</b>	<b>Positive Language</b>	<b>Negative Language</b>	<b>Neutral Language</b>
Amy			“This may just be me but the whole comma splice and apostrophes I just do not understand.”
Bee	“I like the class and the topic of race.”		
Beth	“I’m loving it.”		

Table 11 (Continued)

Carley	"I enjoy this class."		
Genny	"The class is going well. Your a great teacher. I have learn many things from the class dealing with essay writting." [sic]		
Haley			"It's alright. Would like to write about something different."
James			"So far the class is going okay."
Jesse	"Class is going fairly well. I'm content with my writing style."		
Jill			"Coming along fine."
Joe	"I like love the class." [sic]		
Kerri	"This class is going great. I'm learning alot of new stuff." [sic]		
May	"I enjoy the class and I feel I have been given all the tools I need to succeed in this class."		
Sherice			"I have no objections to this class."
Terry	"The class is great. I'm really enjoying it more than I anticipated."		
Dale (Student who later dropped)	"This class makes students think as well as have a grasp of who they are socially and mentally."		

The responses in the Night Class included no negative language when responding to this question. At mid-term this class had fifteen students (one student later dropped out). As the table above indicates, ten students used positive language in responding to the question, “How is the class going for you?” There were no overtly negative responses but there were five neutral responses that used neutral language. Students who responded positively made comments like “I like the class and the topic of race,” “This class is great. I’m really enjoy[ing] it much more than I anticipated,” “[The class theme] was an ingenious way of going about the class,” and “The class is going well.” Neutral statements included “It’s alright,” “I have no objections to this class,” and “So far class is going okay.”

The second important question from the mid-semester survey was “Has the class discussion ‘done anything’ for you at all?” For both sections, the responses to this question fell into three separate categories: race as a topic/ theme, rhetorical concerns, or a simple yes/ no with no further explanation (or no response at all).

Table 12

## Survey 2 Question 2 Results (Day Class)

<b>Student Name</b>	<b>Race as a theme/topic</b>	<b>Rhetorical Concerns</b>	<b>Yes/ No</b>
Andy	“It has made me happy with who I am in that I’m not narrow minded on the subjects.”		
Ashley			“Yes.”
Brenda			[No response]
Dave			[No response]

Table 12 (Continued)

Erika	"It's really broadened my thinking. I've never really sat down and thought about race because I'm white, and I haven't had many experiences with racism."		
Esther	"Some, I wish there were some more verbal African Americans in class."		
John		"Yes! They have made me push harder in my writing."	
Kate			[No response]
Kathy		"It gives me ideas on how to write my essay."	
Lisa			"Not really"
Lesley	"Yep, it makes me view things differently than I have before."		
Mike	"It has helped me realize that there are many problems with race still."		
Roberta			"Yes"
Saul		"I believe it has I just need more practice at this stuff." [sic]	

As Table 17 indicates, eleven students out of fourteen in the Day Class answered this question with some sort of an answer; three students, however, did not answer this particular question in the survey. Of the eleven students who did answer the question, five made comments pertaining to race as a topic, three made comments about rhetorical concerns, and three offered a simple yes/no with no further explanation.

The survey results in the Night Class show similar responses to this question.

Table 18 outlines those responses.

Table 13

## Survey 2 Question 2 Results (Night Class)

<b>Student Name</b>	<b>Race as a theme/topic</b>	<b>Rhetorical Concerns</b>	<b>Yes/ No</b>
Amy			"Maybe a little."
Bee			[No response]
Beth			[No response]
Carley	"I think it has made me more aware but I seem to be afraid to open my mouth and talk when we are on touchy subjects as race." [sic]		
Genny			"Yes"
Haley			[No response]
James			[No response]
Jesse			[No response]
Jill			"Definitely Yes"
Joe			[No response]
Kerri		"It help me to figure out what I would write about on my essays."	
May			[No response]
Sherice	"It enlightens me more and makes me more comfortable with my background and the things I know and have seen."		
Terry			"Yes."

Table 13 (Continued)

Dale (Student who later dropped)	“Builds heritage of yourself and others.”		
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Of the fifteen students taking the survey (again, one student – Dale – later dropped the course), eight students answered this second question in survey two while seven students did not answer the question. Out of the eight students who did respond, three made comments about race as a topic, one made comments related to rhetorical concerns, and four offered a simple yes/ no without any further explanation.

### Survey Three:

The final survey from the students in the two courses asked multiple questions, including (as previously mentioned in Chapter 3) what professions or academic goals the students were planning on pursuing. Since the students were nearing the end of the course by the time I asked them to complete this final survey, I also included two questions related to the idea of using race as a theme in FYC. The first question was an attempt to discover if using a sensitive theme like race for all the reading and writing prompts impeded their ability to work on their writing skills: “Was the theme of this course distracting or not? Explain your answer.” The following table outlines the responses from the Day Class:

Table 14

## Survey 3 Question 1 Results (Day Class)

Student Name	Yes	No
Andy	"Yes because let's face it we couldn't wright [sic] anything <u>real</u> . That's just not how it works so instead we wrote a handful of papers about blah blah blah ..."	
Ashley		"I really liked hearing other peoples' opinions in the topic of race."
Brenda		"Race is something we need to talk about. It was a touchy subject but it opened my eyes."
Dave		"No, I thought the theme kept things focused."
Erika		"I actually found out a little about myself."
Esther		"I feel it made the course a little more interesting than an average English class."
John		"I loved our topic. I found it very challenging and engaging. I really enjoyed our discussions in class. I was surprised at how honest I was with my ideas of racism. I felt the other, younger students, didn't have a strong grasp on it yet due to their worldly inexperience."
Kate	"A little just for the fact that it's (race) hardly discussed outside of class."	
Kathy		"It's a major issue today and we should know about it."

Table 14 (Continued)

Lisa		"No, but it did become boring and played out after a month."
Lesley		"I enjoyed talking about race and hearing what everyone had to say."
Mike	"Yes because I haven't had any personal experience with racial issues."	
Roberta		"I wasn't too keen on race when I started so it was boring. But the course <u>has</u> changed my views."
Saul		"No."

As the table above indicates, three students in the Day Class responded that the theme was distracting while the other eleven students in the class replied that the theme had not been distracting.

The students in the Night Class had similar responses. The next table indicates how the students in the Night Class responded to the same question:

Table 15

## Survey 3 Question 1 Results (Night Class)

Student Name	Yes	No
Amy		[No response to the survey]

Table 15 (Continued)

Bee		“No, definitely not. This is a topic that I happen to have much to talk about. And I feel like no one talks about race anymore because it’s such a touchy topic. It’s almost been thrown into the same category as politics and religion nowadays and I think people need to talk about race more.”
Beth		“No. I think it actually gave us a broader horizon or things to talk about.”
Carley		“No [but] it was a bit uncomfortable at times. But it was also intense. I felt bad for Sherice because in the end she was the only black student. I bet she felt singled out.”
Genny		“I thought it was different to have a class based on race. It was nice to focus on one issue instead of tons.”
Haley		“No, it was interesting in ways. Opened my eyes a little more on racism.”
James	“Yes, a little. It was good but being white I feel a little weird defending myself.”	
Jesse		“No.”
Jill		“Not at all – in fact, I felt it helped my writing. Changing topics makes it difficult to focus on writing skills ... but since I kind of understood where we were going, I could focus on writing skills.”

Table 15 (Continued)

Joe		"No."
Kerri		"No, I think it gave everyone something to write about. It's an easy opinion to talk about."
May		"No, I enjoyed hearing how other people think. I will look at band-aids differently from now on."
Sherice		"The theme was ok. If you change it, be careful what you change it, too."
Terry		"No."

As the table above clearly illustrates, only one student in the class felt like the race theme had been a distracting element in the class; the other thirteen students responded that the class topic had not been distracting.

The second question on the survey at the end of the semester was, "Do you think your approach to the concept of 'race' has changed/ been modified in any way as a result of your experience in this class?" The following tables indicated the responses from the Day Class. If the student made any additional comment beyond a "yes" or "no" response, I also included the full comment that was indicated on the survey:

Table 16

## Survey 3 Question 2 Results (Day Class)

Student Name	No	Yes
Andy	"Nope, just realized the more you think about the idea of 'race' it becomes more stupid and how talking about it is a waste of time because nothing is solved let alone being done about it."	
Ashley	"No but it has opened my eyes to how others feel about it. I learned some new things also that I didn't know before."	
Brenda	"It has helped me realize what other people think, however, my opinion has not changed."	
Dave		"I realize that I should be aware that sometimes I take my 'whiteness' for granted. I will be more aware of how I treat people of a different race."
Erika		"Yes, I need to not be afraid to look outside the box, and it makes me want to actually study different races and ethnicities, so I have a better understanding of them because I think racism comes from being uneducated."

Table 16 (Continued)

Esther	"My concept on race is still the same although I now know how some whites feel about some of the race issues."	
John		"I think it has forced me to open up a bit with the topic as well as become more emboldened with my opinions."
Kate		[No response to the survey]
Kathy		"A little bit."
Lesley		"Yes, I was never racist to begin with, but after this class I'm a lot more open minded about the subject."
Lisa	"No."	
Mike	"I don't look at people as a concept of race. People are people to me and that won't change."	
Roberta		"Yes."
Saul	"No but I feel a little more open-minded about things now."	

In sum, seven students indicated that their perceptions on race had not changed by the end of the semester, six students indicated that they had been impacted by the topic of the class, and one student chose not to respond to the question at all.

The table below indicates how each of the students in the Night Class responded to the same question. If the student indicated additional information in answering this “yes/no” question, I also included those words under the appropriate category.

Table 17

## Survey 3 Question 2 Results (Night Class)

<b>Student Name</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>
Amy		[No response to the survey]
Bee	No	
Beth		“Somewhat yes. I had thought before this class of the possibility I was racist but now I know that I am not. I feel like my eyes are opened to things that I did not think about before.”
Carley		“Well, I think so. I’ve never considered myself a race. It’s like ... I’m white and in the background. It opened my eyes that race is an issue that a lot of people face who aren’t white that I never knew existed.”
Genny		“I now have a better understanding of race. Also I understand that blacks have more issues with their hair.”
Haley	No	
James		Yes
Jesse	Nope	
Jill		“I needed to be reminded of the decades of scars that will take several more decades to heal. I need to continue to be sensitive to the issue.”

Table 17 (Continued)

Joe		“Yes, because I know in depth different people’s views.”
Kerri		Yes
May		“It made me more aware of the other side, even though I haven’t changed the way I treat people.”
Sherice	No	
Terry		Yes

As the chart for the Night Class shows, four students asserted that the class topic had not altered their thinking about race in any way (however, one student refused to respond to the survey at all). The other nine students did note that the course readings and writing assignments has altered their thinking about the topic of race.

Conclusion:

As this chapter outlines, the data for this study using a discourse analysis approach is primarily composed of two paragraphs from the students’ written work (one paragraph taken from essay one and one paragraph from essay four) and three surveys that the students completed in class (at the beginning of the semester, at mid-term, and at the completion of the course). The surveys were designed to gather demographic information and to determine the effectiveness of using race as a topic for a FYC course. The coding categories were designed to gauge any rhetorical movement (via language and ideas) that the students made as they wrote about the complex subject of race throughout the sixteen weeks of the semester.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ANALYSIS

#### Introduction:

This study was developed in order to consider the implications associated with one possible strategy of organizing and teaching an ENG 101 course. As Chapter 2 (The Literature Review) shows, the model of FYC courses with topics (especially subject matter associated with social justice or popular culture) has been used for decades, sometimes leading to public debates about how and why this important foundational course should be taught and organized. The Literature Review further shows that the inclusion of reading in a writing course (whether that reading is used as writing prompts or as models of “good writing”) has also been an idea that has sometimes been hotly debated. There can be little doubt that aspects of popular culture entertainment like television, film, music, and computers have impacted and influenced how our students think (and write) about the world (indeed, many FYC textbooks include popular culture selections). It is appealing for many of us who teach FYC, then, to use these topics as ways of appealing to our student enrollments and “enticing” students to buy into the objectives of the course.

Essentially, ENG 101 and ENG 102 remain courses that our students are often “forced” to take in order to complete their college requirements; as a result, many of these students enter FYC with little enthusiasm or motivation (other than simply passing). Like many writing instructors, this dilemma leaves me with at least one difficult question: How can an instructor grab students’ attention from the very beginning of a course and encourage them to at least start to recognize how powerful a role critical writing and thinking could play in their lives?

Thus, this local study of two FYC courses at the SWGCC of Southwestern Illinois College, an urban community college in the Metro St Louis area, was developed to interrogate what happens to the student writing in a FYC course focused on race as the primary organizing feature of the course (as well as answer the preceding questions). Both a day class and a late afternoon class (referred to in this study as a “Night Class”) were used to determine if there were any significant differences in the responses between the two groups of students. Would the generally more non-traditional students in the Night Class grapple with the race concept any differently than the Day Class? Would students in both classes be able to recognize – and effectively use – the skills listed in the course objectives? Was the class topic distracting? Were students able to critically think and write? Does this method of organizing and teaching FYC “work”?

I used both direct writing (surveys) and indirect writing (essays) to analyze how students were grappling with race in terms of critical thinking and writing. As I read the students’ writing after the semester had ended, I coded their sentences using the data categories that were explained in the Methodology chapter (Chapter Three). I developed these categories by testing each sentence to understand at what level the students engaged with the subject of race. If one of the goals of FYC is to encourage students to flex their critical thinking and writing muscles, I wanted to determine how aware the students were about racial consciousness. In their article, “White Racial Consciousness in One Midwestern City: The Case of Cincinnati, Ohio,” Cathy McDaniels-Wilson, Judson L. Jeffries, and James N. Upton define racial consciousness as “the ability to be cognizant of the myriad ways that race/racism manifests itself in various facets of American society, both historically and currently” (24). So how do I

explore the idea of whether or not using race as a FYC topic is a viable option?

Many commentators examining the use of politics in the classroom have failed to pay close attention to the everyday experience of what happens in the FYC classroom, particularly the actual words of the students themselves. Possibly one way of answering this question is to closely examine the essays produced by students in such a class. By coding the sentences to test for the level of racial consciousness, perhaps we can determine if the subject of race as a topic for a writing course resulted in any amount of critical thinking and writing. By using discourse analysis, I attempted to identify and quantify particular instances of differing treatments of race in the introductory paragraphs of students' written work. Ultimately, does a writing course with race as a topic meet the goals of FYC as outlined by the WPA and SWIC?

This chapter is an attempt to answer the above question. In general, I did not detect any enormous coding differences between the Day Class and the Night Class in terms of the types of sentences that students produced. Because I expected a more non-traditional student population in the night class, I assumed before the study that I might see more variety and perhaps even more "maturity" in their approach of this difficult and touchy topic. Students attending late afternoon and evening classes often work during the day, which might lead those students to possibly having had more experiences working with people different from themselves as compared to their younger, more traditionally aged counterparts. As I mentioned in the Results Chapter, both classes had 14 students each and of these 14 students a large percentage were students under 25 years of age – 12 in the Day Class and 11 in the Night Class. Thus, two students in the Day Class were non-traditional and three students in the Night Class

were non-traditional. The only remarkable difference in ages was the fact that the Night Class students who were non-traditional (aged 45, 52, and 62) were significantly older than the non-traditional students in the Day Class (aged 30 and 32).

The bulk of this chapter discusses the study's findings in terms of both the essays the students wrote and the surveys that the students completed in class (each type of writing might capture different perspectives). I decided to arrange the discussion of this chapter by using the coding categories that were designed for this study. These eight categories were developed to highlight the language that was used by the students to talk about race. Analyzing the words in each sentence, I determined the cognitive level by assigning one of the categories to each sentence. Using the coding categories, I have ordered the following sections of this analysis chapter from the lowest cognitive level – Treading Water – to the highest cognitive level – Acknowledging Writer. After discussing the coding categories, I then focus attention on two of the questions from the last survey that the students completed. This survey asked students to directly consider what they thought of using race as the subject matter for a FYC writing course.

### Treading Writing:

Table 18

#### Occurrence of Treading Writing

	Day Class	Night Class	Total
Essay One	8	27	35
Essay Four	8	11	19
Total Sentences	16	38	54

I gave the designation “Treading Writing” (TW) to any sentence in which a student writer offered an easy or simple explanation for the resolution of racial issues, problems, or feelings. In such cases, a student might write “This one comment solves racism” or “Since we now have a black president, race is no longer an issue.” I used the term “treading” with this category on purpose. I wanted to use a verb that highlighted the action of staying on top of the surface of a complicated issue – like someone “treading” water while swimming. The sentences that I assigned as belonging to this category did not recognize the complexity of race as an issue. This type of writing symbolizes the simplest level of cognitive activity. For my coding category, this level represents an inability to recognize a complicated issue or to think for oneself instead of simply digesting the thoughts of others.

For Essay One, there were 35 instances of TW out of 183 total sentences (19% of the total written). The Day Class wrote 8 of these sentences with the remaining 27 coming from the Night Class. I had assumed since there might be more non-traditional students in the Night Class (student older than 25), students who might have had more interactions with people of different backgrounds (and, thus, encouraging them to see the complexities of this issue), that the Day Class would have more instances of treading writing but this was not the case. As mentioned previously, the high number of traditionally aged students in the Night Class might account for this unanticipated higher number.

It is also possible that many of the students in the Night Class had not, in fact, interacted with a variety of people as I had assumed: “Students who have grown up in more racially and culturally diverse areas -- typically suburbs -- often have little

experience thinking critically about race and their own racial identities, in part because their home and school lives have been marked by residential and social segregation" (Winans "Local Pedagogies" 253). In the Methodology Chapter, I outlined the racial history of the communities around the Sam Wolf Granite City Campus of Southwestern Illinois College – many of these communities remain racially divided and people stay within the parameters of their community (e.g. whites stay in Granite City and blacks stay in East St Louis). A college campus is often the first time that many of these students will find themselves interacting with people who look different from the people they live with.

By the fourth writing assignment, there were 164 total sentences written and I categorized 19 of those sentences as TW (11% of the total). The Day Class produced 8 of these sentences and the Night Class produced 11 of these sentences. Because students had been exposed to readings and discussions associated with race, it is possible that this exposure affected the number of sentences that I categorized as TW. By the time the students encountered Essay Four, they had been reading and analyzing the concept of race for the previous three writing assignments.

I noticed an interesting pattern in terms of TW sentences. It can be easy to dismiss a student's writing as simply one-dimensional. We might read a sentence like "Racism is dead in America because we now have a black president" and immediately feel the urge to "write off" this writer's ability to critically think and write about this complex topic. However, I discovered that "Treading Writing" (TW) and "Acknowledging Writing" (AW) can work together in a paragraph to create a piece of writing that might be more complicated than we first might notice (AW sentences

represent the highest level of cognition/ racial awareness). Several times, I discovered an interesting phenomenon with my data coding -- students who expressed rhetorical "linguistic moves" that I would consider "lower level" (TW) also sometimes expressed rhetorical "linguistic moves" that were higher-level (AW).

For example, Andy in the Day Class wrote a statement that I categorized as TW. In one sentence of a paragraph he submitted, he wrote "No single person holds any more God given value than another." As I previously mentioned, this sort of sentence refers to an easy or simple explanation for the resolution of difficult racial issues. In other words, Andy is expressing the idea that "God" is the "one" solution to racial difficulties and if we all just got on board with this kind of thinking then racial issues would simply dissolve and not be a societal concern anymore. However, the sentence Andy wrote just before the sentence I just mentioned is more complicated: "I recognize that there is undoubtedly a problem with racism in the U.S." Andy's use of the word "undoubtedly" is interesting -- he recognizes on some level that unquestionably the idea of race is something that is still wrestled with and unresolved in our country. Thus, I categorized his "undoubtedly" sentence as Acknowledging Writing (AW), a sentence that reflects the knowledge that complexities are inherent in a concept like "race" -- indeed, I argue that there is a step towards a higher level of critical thinking in terms of what Andy was trying to write. What is so interesting, of course, is that Andy starts to wrestle with the critical idea of this touchy topic -- race -- and then immediately backs down a sentence later by claiming that a belief in God (or any other spiritual entity) would solve this "problem" and lead to a better society. Andy moved quickly between AW and TW.

Kathy in the Day Class wrote sentences that were similar to the pattern that I just described with Andy but the order of her sentences was reversed – she started with AW and then moved to TW. In Essay One, Kathy wrote several sentences that hint at the complexity of race such as “Race is more than just a color” and “It’s your ethnic group.” In both of these instances she is trying to reach beyond race as a stable concept – for example, linking “race” with “ethnicity” is complicated and multidimensional. However, her next sentence reflects a retreat: “The truth is, we are all the same inside we all have cells, blood, muscles, they are pretty much the same.” The sentence boundary mistakes that she makes – a run on and comma splice – might suggest that Kathy is speeding through her discussion, uncomfortable with a topic that she feels little authority about. She quickly retreats to simpler, less complicated TW sentences.

Mary in the Night Class also wrote paragraphs that were a combination of AW and TW. In her first essay, she had TW sentences like “The most important thing is to treat each other with kindness and respect” and “Children learn what they live, and we should teach our children tolerance and indifference from day one” [sic]. Though both of these statements are, of course, wonderful in their sentiment of kindness and respect, you could also argue that neither statement goes much below the surface, instead resting with glib sentiment. However, mingled with these instances of TW were more thoughtful “deeper” comments. For example, Mary wrote, “We should be proud of where we come from; race should only be important to each individual because it is a part of who we are.” Here, Mary acknowledges that race is but one aspect of being human -- she notes that there are other aspects of our individuality beyond race. In other words, Mary appears to understand that race is a complicated concept with no

easy answers. In a paragraph like Mary's with a mix of AW and TW sentences, I see a student writer who is making "some" rhetorical moves as she tries to better understand this complicated concept.

Mary's fourth essay reflected this same type of back and forth movement between AW and TW. In responding to a fellow classmate, Mary writes several sentences that were coded as AW: "I agree with you that we should know the history of slavery. We should also know the history of the United States. Slavery was just one of her many injustices." Here Mary is acknowledging the idea that our history may be more complicated than most people realize; in other words, the history we read might be shaped to create a certain version of "the" story. Just as Mary is making these critical writing moves, however, she follows up with a sentence labeled as TW: "I'm sure my father's generation had prejudices against the Japanese but I don't."

I coded sentences written by Brenda in the Day Class and noticed the same pattern of AW and TW witnessed in Mary's sentences. In her first essay, Brenda wrote four sentences that I coded as TW except for one sentence. An example of her TW writing was a glib statement like "Everyone is different, you have to except not everyone is just like you, look on the inside because deep down that's the part that counts." But she also had a more thoughtful comment that exhibited a deeper exercise in critical thinking and writing: "Race doesn't just mean color; you can be racist against someone for whom they love, their religion, gender, or even where they come from." Though Brenda's sentence structure is a little confusing here, I do like that she is trying to wrap her head around race by expanding her definition of the word to include other considerations like religion and gender.

In her fourth essay, Brenda again makes the type of move reflected in Mary's language – both of these students wrote sentences that I coded as AW followed with writing coded as TW. Two of Brenda's AW sentences in Essay Four are as follows: "When someone says they aren't racist, I don't believe them, everyone is to an extent. I personally try to see both sides, I try not to judge, but I'm just as guilty as the next person when it comes to judging someone." By the time she wrote this fourth essay, it is interesting that Brenda has taken -- in some ways -- a more sophisticated approach to race -- as a white woman, she is acknowledging her limited perspective on race. However, Brenda ends this conversation with a sentence I coded as TW: "Two of my best friends are black, and one is a lesbian, they are two of the most caring people I know." I recognize that Brenda making this connection is simply her way of expressing the diversity she recognizes in her circle of friends, but ending her discussion with this type of sentiment also suggests that her connections with both a black friend and a lesbian friend "outs" her in some way as someone who is not mired in racial problems.

Saul in the Day Class also exhibited this type of writing, going back and forth between AW and TW sentences. I coded one sentence as clearly TW: "Then again racism is always going to be a part of any culture." In other words, Saul believes that there is no use in thinking and writing about this subject since racism will always be a feature of our society. However, he then follows up this TW sentence with a more thoughtful sentence that I coded as AW: "Racism is imbedded so deeply into ones mind that no one even recognizes it" [sic]. Again, here is a student who is "treading" on the surface of race but – at least for the moment – doesn't embrace the concept of race too deeply.

### Observing Writing

Table 19

#### Occurrence of Observing Writing

	Day Class	Night Class	Total
Essay One	30	24	54
Essay Four	3	2	5
Total Sentences	33	26	59

After TW sentences, the next cognitive level I developed was “Observing Writing” (OW). Like TW sentences, I found other sentences that I thought also did not reflect an ability to delve deeply into race as a complicated topic. However, OW sentences have an additional quality. Most of them directly acknowledge no emotional entanglements with race. Such a sentence indicates a level of separation or detachment from racial phenomenon, identity, prejudice, or bias. This denial seems to be an important trait in a person grappling with race, especially if this person has had little need to consciously think about this topic.

For Essay One, there were 54 instances of OW (30 in the Day Class and 24 in the Night Class). This number accounts for 29.5% of the total sentences that I categorized. At the beginning of the course, I expected that this category would include a high number of sentences since most students had probably little experience in directly reading, talking, and writing about race.

For Essay Four, I noticed fewer OW sentences. Out of 164 sentences that I categorized, only five sentences (3 in the Day Class and 2 in the Night Class) were labelled as OW (.03% of the total). By the time that students were writing Essay Four,

they had been exposed to not only multiple readings about race, but they had interacted with classmates in both of the courses. Roughly thirteen weeks into the semester, they were not thinking about race in the same way that they had with the first writing assignment.

As Shelly Tochluck argues in her book, *Witnessing Whiteness: The Need to Talk about Race and How to Do It*, most white people are “less in touch with how race affects us” (xvii) so it is no surprise that the most common category I observed in the student writing was “Observing Writing” (OW) in terms of Essay One. Ashley in the day class is a perfect example of this type of thinking. In her first essay she wrote several sentences which indicated she felt no connection to the concept of race because of her privileged position of whiteness. For example, “I used to hear [the “N” word] on television quite a bit when I was younger, and people would just throw the word around like it wasn’t a big deal, but I never really thought anything of it.” However, after several OW sentences, Ashley shares that her aunt once called the African American boy Ashley was dating a “Nigger.” She ends her introduction with a “Realizing Writing” (RW) sentence: “So I had realized that that was a bad term to call an African American, and when I told him what she had said he was upset and irritated at the fact that she couldn’t accept her niece dating someone of African American race.” Ashley was starting to move from a simpler detached observation to a more complicated connection with the concept of race.

Interestingly, another pattern I saw unfold with students who originally had many OW sentences in their first essay was a movement by the fourth essay to write sentences that I coded as Treading Writing (almost signifying a step back in their

thinking). Lesley in the Day Class, for example, wrote 11 sentences in the introduction of her first essay which were coded in the following way: 10 instances of Observing Writing and 1 instance of Being Writing. As the sentences indicate, Lesley was primarily creating some distance between herself and how she saw or viewed race. For example, a sentence coded as OW included, "I have never experienced any conflict with another race, but in my high school there was always a conflict." There is perhaps a hint at an emotional entanglement that she does not wish to connect with herself. She then goes on to relate hearing the derogatory term "Nigger" from family members but she states that "I never paid attention or knew what it meant." This last sentence suggests a refusal to embrace the emotional baggage that comes with this derisive term.

In her fourth essay of the semester, however, Lesley writes three complex sentences which make up her introduction. She responds to Amy and includes both a "Fixing Writing" (FW) and a TW in her response. She tells Amy that "I would have to agree that you can do anything you want in life; however, I would disagree that the black race can't be successful." Now faced with the perhaps onerous job of defining what she meant, Lesley ends by offering a simple explanation: "Anyone can go as far as they want if you set your mind to it."

I believe that Lesley's initial comment that she disagrees that an entire racial group should not be stereotyped as being inherently unsuccessful indicates that she is thinking outside her own skin, perhaps considering race in a more complicated manner. However, she quickly backed off once she was pushed to support her earlier remark. An instance of TW, especially near the end of the semester, may not break the

boundaries of intensive critical thinking, but it does represent a small move by Lesley to be more interactive with how race is talked about (instead of just ignoring conversations centering on “Nigger” as she did when she was younger).

### Being Writing

Table 20

#### Occurrence of Being Writing

	Day Class	Night Class	Total
Essay One	14	7	21
Essay Four	11	2	13
Total Sentences	25	9	34

The next level of hierarchy I developed to gauge student thinking about race was Being Writing (BW). When students identified themselves as belonging to a racial group (as either a member or a nonmember), I saw this as at least a small move towards a fuller understanding of race. A sentence was categorized as BW when the writer indicated a common shared experience with another individual, group, or other relationship. Examples of such sentences might include “Racist individuals are everywhere” or “Just think how it feels to be black.” This coding category represents the first significant movement to engaging with a racial consciousness in writing.

In her 1990 groundbreaking article, “Black and White Racial Identity: Theory, Research, and Practice,” Janet Helms develops six stages in an individual’s development of a racial identity. Her second stage, “Disintegration,” is important in terms of my development of BW as a category. In this stage, Helms argues that people can become conflicted when they recognize that what they knew doesn’t jive with new

knowledge or understanding of race; in other words, a person might be experiencing a genuine racial moral dilemma. This stage can be uncomfortable for students as they come to understand that their perceptions of themselves as being completely “free” from racial prejudice might not be accurate. In an attempt to capture students making this huge cognitive leap, I designed BW as a way to show how students are beginning to recognize race as a category (as a transitional stage between the higher and lower ends of critical thinking about race). The two categories cognitively lower than BW – Treading Writing (TW) and Observing Writing (OW) – do not make this type of intellectual move in perception. However, the coding categories that follow BW – Defending Writing (DW), Fixing Writing (FW), Perceiving Writing (PW), Realizing Writing (RW), and Acknowledging Writing (AW) – all illustrate some movement to help explain the complicated transformation of improved critical thinking.

The coding of Essay One resulted in a total of 21 sentences categorized as BW (11.4% of the total sentences that were coded for the first essay). The Day Class included 14 of those sentences with the remaining 7 in the Night Class. Fewer of these sentences occurred with Essay Four. In the Day Class, there were 11 sentences coded as BW and only 2 sentences in the Night Class were coded as BW. These 13 sentences representing the BW category accounted for 7.9% of the total coded sentences.

I firmly believe that students who wrote these sentences were taking a crucial step in better understanding the way(s) that they might think about race. For example, when Andy started his fourth essay, he begins provokingly with the following BW statement: “As a white person I feel like maybe I am missing something.” Perhaps Andy

is beginning to critically examine the idea that his own skin color might be prohibiting him from seeing other perspectives in terms of a huge concept like race. Even when Ashley makes her own BW sentence, “Growing up as a Caucasian girl, I was surrounded by people of many other different races and ethnic groups,” she is recognizing, like Andy, that her white membership might be offering her a different picture of the world than other races or groups of people. Again, this is an important step in critically thinking and writing about race.

### Defending Writing:

Table 21

#### Occurrence of Defending Writing

	Day Class	Night Class	Total
Essay One	1	5	6
Essay Four	0	10	10
Total Sentences	1	15	16

The classification I developed that refers to an emotional reaction – again, an often needed step in embracing critical thinking and writing about race – describes the coding category of Defending Writing (DW). As the Results Chapter notes, there were 6 instances of DW with Essay One (1 in the Day Class and 5 in the Night Class). For Essay One the DW category was comprised of 3.2% of the total categorized sentences. The number of DW for Essay Four was similar. There were 10 instances of DW sentences, all occurring in the Night Class for a total of 6% of the categorized sentences. Generally speaking, then, the DW category was not a common category for the writing the students submitted. However, this is an important category to discuss.

In her recent article, "Cultivating Critical Emotional Literacy: Cognitive and Contemplative Approaches to Engaging Difference," compositionist Amy E. Winans makes a valid point when she indicates that asking students -- via writing or reading prompts -- to consider thinking "outside the box" might involve more emotional labor than we might think:

Critical engagement with difference in the classroom means asking students to interrogate something that is so fundamental to their belief structures and lived experience, something so deeply personal, that it is often experienced as being beyond questioning. As a result, students often struggle with significant emotional discomfort as they move from mindlessness regarding difference to greater mindfulness, as familiar assumptions, beliefs, habits, and even understandings of identity are disrupted. (151)

This "move from mindlessness regarding difference to greater mindfulness" is often the primary objective behind a themed FYC course, especially if that theme alludes to any form of social justice. The whole idea behind critical thinking and writing is to unmoor students from their current way of thinking and to help them take a wider scope and eventually re-place their thinking (even if they find that their original thinking was, in fact, their version of "truth"). However, we writing teachers may not be prepared for the emotional "baggage" that students might experience as they "move" through this type of thinking and writing. We might be asking students to grapple with "great ideas" that our culture hasn't even begun to answer or feel comfortable with. Thus, it makes a lot of sense that our students might feel uncomfortable with any emotion that "bubbles up" in

the process of thinking through these "touchy topics."

I found it interesting that the writing from the students did not generally include the often uncomfortable emotional outbursts that I would sometimes witness in class during discussions about the texts that we read. But the few instances of DW came from those students who did, indeed, feel comfortable expressing their defensive perspectives. In each of the two classes, there was at least one student who reacted personally to almost every reading and writing prompt. When I coded these students' writing, I coded many of their sentences as DW. In the Night Class, Amy (who indicated that she had dropped out of high school several years earlier and had completed a GED) struggled in just writing coherent sentences during the entire semester. A white single mother working hard to juggle a job, a child, and her education, she often reacted negatively to the class discussions and writing prompts, insisting that in her experience, African Americans were given more advantages and public assistance. In her fourth essay, Amy wrote two sentences that included frustration and anger: "Slavery is something of the past and yet we still have to keep talking about it" and "In this class I get the impression that it's only the whites that are racist and I know for a fact it [is] not just white people." Each time I tried to get Amy to focus on her argument and supply evidence, I think she thought that I was trying to encourage her to think about race in a way that she thought I wanted her to see it. I could feel her frustration about the course material in almost all of our later encounters in class. If I criticized her writing, she perceived this as my criticizing her thoughts about race.

Genny in the Night Class also reflected a lot of DW, especially evident in her fourth essay. Of the ten sentences in her introduction, I coded 8 of them as DW. As a

young white woman growing up poor in Granite City, Genny – like Amy – felt that the African Americans in her community were given more economic advantages than the (white) people in her circle of family and friends. Responding to a classmate’s comment about contemporary African Americans blaming whites for slavery, Genny connects this type of thinking with the frustration she encounters on our campus when African American students converge in hallways and – according to Genny – block her ability to move freely through the hall:

I believe that there are still people who have bad behavior to whites due to the past. I have seen the issue myself. When walking down the halls of SWIC, there are blacks who block the hallway while talking. I have asked before for those students to move but they still give me a “dirty” look and continue to stand in their place. Now this may not be a crime, but it sure does [offend] me. When does the [attitude] stop? Where does racism take effect?

In each of these sentences, Genny is exhibiting anger and frustration at feeling uncomfortable walking through a group of African American students. In what she perceives as a “dirty look,” Genny sees racism directed at white students like herself.

Most of the sentences that I categorized as DW were written after our class had read Peggy McIntosh’s infamous essay on white privilege, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.” In this essay, McIntosh catalogs the daily advantages that someone with white skin might experience as compared to someone with darker skin. McIntosh is attempting to illustrate the idea that when people do not have access to certain “privileges” that it is too easy to blame the individual as opposed to blaming the

system. Though this article was published in 1990, more than twenty years ago, I would say that it was this particular reading that prompted the most discussion from the students throughout the entire semester.

Haley in the Night Class is an example of a student who wrote sentences that I categorized as DW. After Haley read McIntosh's article, she alluded to this text in her fourth essay: "I believe that race is old news and also that the U.S. has become an opportunity for many non U.S. citizens. But our citizens are still stuck on believing that they have a cultural disadvantage." Haley thinks race is not an issue, and so if someone non-white can't find a job, then she believes this person will use race as proof of "cultural disadvantage." I suspect as a young 22 year old white female who has always lived in Granite City, Haley might simply be regurgitating what she has heard those around her say. I value the fact that Haley read McIntosh's text carefully and seems to understand the term "cultural disadvantage," but her automatic defensiveness might limit her ability to fully grasp the concept of race.

This defensiveness to race as a term that matters in our society is also apparent in other student writing. For example, Kerri in the Night Class wrote sentences that I coded as DW after reading McIntosh's essay: "I do think that racism is mostly blamed on White people." Like Haley, Kerri responds sensitively, wanting to point out to her readers that racism can happen to young white women like herself. While her comments can certainly be true, this type of defensive posturing limits the writer from recognizing how complicated race actually is.

Instead of remaining silent, these students were brave enough to respond to the essay assignment as honestly as they could. I was delighted that students like Haley

and Kerri were at least willing – and felt comfortable enough – to convey their distress in written form. I recognize that spiritual growth in viewing a large concept word like “race” is not an automatic, easy process to consider. Indeed, McIntosh’s comments about white privilege cannot be an easy concept to grasp for young students like Haley and Kerri who are just embarking on their collegiate careers. As Helen Fox argues in her own ethnographic study of students struggling with race, “it takes a certain amount of courage and generosity of spirit to question one’s world view” (89). The very defensive posture that Amy, Genny, and Haley are taking is at least a step in showing that they are a part of the discussion.

#### Fixing Writing:

Table 22

#### Occurrence of Fixing Writing

	Day Class	Night Class	Total
Essay One	1	0	1
Essay Four	18	13	31
Total Sentences	19	13	32

I developed Fixing Writing (FW) as a coding category to represent any sentence that indicates a desire or an attempt to fix or change any thinking or comments perceived as being racist. The writer may be conscious of his or her language (i.e. a student who sees himself or herself as an activist) but the writer may also not be fully conscious that he or she is advocating a different way of thinking. Like the previous coding category, Defending Writing, Fixing Writing is also a positive sign of a movement toward more sophisticated thinking and writing. For Essay One, there was only one

instance of a sentence being coded as FW (a student in the Day Class). Out of 183 total sentences, this results in .54% of sentences being coded as FW. The number for the fourth essay was much higher. Out of a possible 164 sentences, 31 were coded as FW (18 in the Day Class and 13 in the Night Class). This accounts for 18.9% of the total sentences coded.

It is probably no surprise that there were more occurrences of FW in the fourth essays as compared to the first essays. By this point, we had spent roughly 12 weeks reading, discussing, and writing about race. Of course, it is possible that the fourth essays included more occurrences of FW because of the very nature of the assignment – students were asked to respond to one comment made on our class web site by another member of the class. Asking students to respond to someone might have encouraged them to select a comment that was different from their own way of thinking so that they would have “something” to write about in their essay, often resorting to writing that might be coded as FW.

In the Night Class, Carley wrote five sentences in her introduction, all five of which I coded as FW:

The comment that Mike made, “Just because someone is a different color, doesn’t mean that they are different,” makes me ask one question: then is it okay to treat someone differently if they’re overweight, underweight, have a mental disability, or because of their religion? With that being said, I would have to say no, it’s not okay. Treating someone differently because they don’t look like you or act like you isn’t okay. Making fun of someone or excluding them from parties, or play groups, or from your

lunch table because they're not like you isn't right. Doing things like that can damage someone on the inside.

Each of these five statements is an attempt by Carley to connect with Mike. She reads his words and takes him to task on the way he worded his response; in other words, Carley reads his comments on race but then asks "is it okay to treat someone differently" for any other reason? She finds ambiguity in Mike's comments and immediately calls to his attention how awful it might be to be excluded. Indeed, Carley tries to "fix" his vagueness by pointing how this type of thinking "can damage someone on the inside." Further, she recognizes that Mike is her audience – an important rhetorical objective – and she genuinely wants him to understand and connect with her perspective.

As I previously mentioned, I would argue that the reason for a great number of FW sentences occurring in Essay Four went beyond just the way that the assignment was set up. By this point in the semester, students were also more comfortable talking about race and sharing their opinions with other people. Sherice in the Night Class, for example, ended her conversation with Lisa by writing three strong FW sentences: "I strongly disagree with you. It's not a vital issue in your life but it is for others. Blue eyed people experience racism only a few times in life and brown eyed people experience it for the rest of their lives." Sherice assumed that Lisa was white because of Lisa's comment, "I don't see racism as being as relevant or as large scale of an issue" (Sherice chose a comment from Lisa, a stranger to her, who was in the Day Class). Lisa, in fact, identifies herself as mixed race. But it is interesting that Sherice has taken on the task to "fix" the thinking that she sees as holding back someone. If anything,

Sherice is using rhetoric in a sophisticated manner – not only is she aware of a specific audience (Lisa) but there is no doubt here that she has something genuine to say.

Terry in the Night Class also used two strong FW statements in the introduction to her fourth essay: "... it is sometimes necessary to go one step further in order to get our audience[']s attention. [Elliott's] intense abruptness was necessary only because she had to make an impression upon the Blue Eyed group, one they'll never forget." I once encountered Terry, an older student in the class, fervently explaining Elliott's experiment to a group of her friends (who were not in my course) in the school cafeteria; I noticed that the students seemed genuinely interested in her passion about the experiment.

It is possible that the need to "fix" someone's thinking comes from some amount of guilt. Helms argues that "shame seems to occur for some Whites, whose identity is based on a core belief that they do not partake of White racism or privilege, when they are revealed publicly to have benefited from White privilege" (48). Many of the students who I mentioned above who engaged in FW sentences (with the exception of Sherice and Lisa) identified themselves as white and appeared to come to a new understanding of race via our class discussions and writing assignments. Perhaps their attempts at "fixing" their classmates represented genuine efforts at better understanding any feelings of guilt as these students recognize the power that white skin has even in our modern day culture.

## Perceiving Writing

Table 23

### Occurrence of Perceiving Writing

	Day Class	Night Class	Total
Essay One	0	2	2
Essay Four	1	1	2
Total Sentences	1	3	4

I developed Perceiving Writing (PW) as a coding category to describe any sentence that a student wrote that includes a reference to struggling with the concept of race via the metaphor of “sight” or the metaphor of “learning.” A sentence that was coded this way might include some version of the word “see” like the following: “That text has been a critical eye opener for me.” A sentence coded as PW might also include a version of the word related such as “think” or “learn”: “I learned from my brother’s mistakes.” For both classes, the occurrence of any sentences categorized as PW was miniscule. For Essay One, there were no instances in the Day Class and only two in the Night Class. For Essay Four, there was one sentence coded as PW in each class. For both classes, then, PW occurred less than 1% in the coding schemata. Instead of making PW as a separate coding category, I might have attached these types of sentences to the Acknowledging Writing (AW) category since there is a minor attempt at noticing race as a complicated concept.

Even though there were not many sentences coded as PW, I thought it was still important to separate these types of sentences from the rest of the categories. As students struggle with better understanding racial consciousness, the idea of “perceiving” or “learning” seems an important step. For example, when writing Essay

Four, Esther decided to respond to Alicia. She started her essay by writing, “your comment caught my eye.” This proclamation might be viewed as something more than a simple clichéd comment; it is possible that this statement is her attempt at describing her personal reaction to one of the responses that her fellow students had written. She is trying to grasp each of their comments (and, thus, thinking) and truly understand where each is coming from. We know that advertisers are often working hard to create advertisements that “catch our eyes” and pique our interest (amid the plethora of advertisements that we see on a daily basis). The fact that Esther used “caught my attention” highlights her own attempt at marking “race” as “something” to be discussed and talked about. She might not be sure exactly how to see the comment in question but she recognizes on some level that the comment needs to be responded to. The comment made her pause and it is this pause which is interesting – and might lead Esther to further exploration on her own.

### Realizing Writing

Table 24

#### Occurrence of Realizing Writing

	Day Class	Night Class	Total
Essay One	3	3	6
Essay Four	0	9	9
Total Sentences	3	12	15

Realizing Writing (RW) was a second coding category that did not include a large number of coded sentences but is still important to examine nonetheless (however, this category might also be absorbed by Acknowledging Writing as I argued could be the

case with Perceiving Writing). A sentence was coded as RW if that sentence made a reference to the understanding that race is a valid topic of study that can offer alternative identity knowledge. There were a variety of ways in which this could be articulated including reference to connections with any of the readings from the course or even the direct acknowledgement that race can be an identity marker. For Essay One, there were 6 instances of RW (3 in the Day Class and 3 in the Night Class). Since there were a total of 183 sentences written for essay one, then 3.27% of the sentences were RW. For Essay Four, the number was similar. A total of 9 sentences (all in the night class) meant that with 164 sentences, RW accounted for 5.48% of the total categorized sentences.

An example of a student using RW is Beth in the Night Class. In her fourth essay, she relates the usefulness of Jane Elliott's experiment with eye colors and asserts "Jane Elliott's experiment should be implemented in our school system curriculum nationwide, with the focus being on middle school and high school age students." Beth is not only taking in what Elliott was doing with her experiment (encouraging people to recognize white privilege) but she is suggesting "how" that experiment should be implemented by targeting a specific age group (middle school and high school). In terms of the same text, Bee, also in the Night Class, described Elliott's experiment as "the most fascinating and moving display of selflessness that I've seen in a long time." For both of these students, a text served as the impetus for better clarifying their own ideas about race and race consciousness.

Acknowledging Writing:

Table 25

## Occurrence of Acknowledging Writing

	Day Class	Night Class	Total
Essay One	28	30	58
Essay Four	31	44	75
Total Sentences	59	74	133

In order for me to label a sentence as AW, the student's language had to have a reference to recognizing the complexities inherent in the concept of race. This type of writing reflects varying levels of critical thinking and writing, though AW sentences reflected higher levels of cognitive abilities than the previous coding categories. For the Essay One, there were 58 sentences marked as AW (28 for the Day Class and 30 for the Night Class). This represented 31.7% of the total sentences. The number was slightly higher when the students tackled Essay Four. Out of 164 sentences, 75 were categorized as AW, 45.7% of the total sentences (31 in the Day Class and 44 in the Night Class). Before the study, I expected that there would be fewer students who had been exposed to direct conversations on the touchy topics of race relations in this country. However, these results tell me that in both courses, there were students who came into the class (no matter the section) already thinking about the complexities inherent in a difficult term like "race."

Obviously, students do not come to us as empty vessels. Not all students entered the course with an unawareness of race relations in this country. John in the Day Class wrote a first essay that used a more sophisticated technique when responding to the presence of race in his male, white life. Previously working at a night

club, John recounted the story of a co-worker who had passed away. The sentences leading up to his comment on race were blocked off by me because not one of them directly commented on the concept of race. Instead, he was recounting the phone call he received about his co-worker's death and how his other colleagues responded to the man's death after John had arrived at the scene. After calling the owner of the club, John described this man's response: "Can't we find another nigger to do his job?" In the next three sentences, John uses language to build up to his reaction: "Al was fifty years old, a respected family man, career minded, and had a joy for everything he did. He also happened to be black. This was my first time seeing real and true racism." John's last sentence was categorized as AW.

Because of John's life experiences -- perhaps especially since he managed a bar in Washington D.C. and encountered all kinds of people -- he entered the class with an understanding of diversity that was unlike his younger classmates. In his fourth essay, John even expressed concern about the use of language in terms of how race is constructed and perceived. In response to another student -- Genny, a young African American female -- John wrote several sentences that were both BW and AW: "I enjoyed reading your thoughts and I understand your frustrations. I agree with what you are saying, Genny. However, when discussing the subject of race, as well as racism, I think it's important to choose our verbiage carefully." John shows that he understands that a complex subject like race can be constructed and thought through via language and words. Again, John's older age and life experiences might have caused him to be a little more open-minded in terms of this touchy topic.

Roberta in the Day Class recounted her first experience with race in Essay One,

the racial autobiography. She started by writing several sentences which were coded as Being Writing (BW); again, these type of sentences made an explicit reference to racial group membership (as either a member or an outsider to another group). Her BW sentences included, "I can't remember having any African-American classmates while in elementary school, and there weren't any dark-skinned people on my neighborhood block. I grew up in a low income, entirely Caucasian community in the west portion of Granite City." After writing these BW sentences, Roberta goes on to recount the first time that she met someone who was not white, her brother's therapist (Brinda). After noting that she was "drawn to her kind, sympathetic nature," Roberta then follows up this description with several AW sentences: "I didn't realize she was 'black.' She was just another person to me. I was later exposed to racial differences via the media, though this exposure did not change my feelings toward Brinda. Instead, it showed me how Brinda and other African-Americans were being treated differently than Caucasian people." Roberta recognizes that whatever (negative) media images that she was being asked to digest as a consumer did not coincide with her personal experience with someone who was of a different race. However, as many race theorists have pointed out (e.g., Tatum) the idea of "colorblindness" negates the cultural values and life experiences of people of color. Even if an individual white person – like Roberta – can ignore a person's skin color, the society we live in does not.

Dave, a student who had moved back to the Granite City area to live with his father after spending his twenties living with his mother and step-father in Denver, Colorado, also came into the class with an awareness of race as a complicated topic. In his fourth essay, Dave responded passionately to Amy's perceptions of white and

blacks being treated fairly. Amy had posted the following comment on our class blog: "... I never see a black person being [dealt] wrong but I see it with white people all the time." Dave wrote back to Amy with using several AW sentences, along with a slight sense of sarcasm:

As ridiculous as it sounds, I have heard many people say that they do not see minorities being treated unfairly. Instead, they proclaim that the majority group which just so happens to be white is the helpless victims who are treated unjustly by whom they seem to never name. When I hear this, I know that the person who makes such a statement is probably ignorant of what minorities have to deal with everyday. I would love to hear of the horrible experiences that these poor white folks have to endure.

One aspect of Dave's writing that I find interesting here is that there is no doubt that he is passionate about what he is saying. In addition, he is the only student in my study who used sarcasm in making his point. Of course, this remark from Dave might have been intended to belittle Amy's generalized comment about white/ black relations.

Jill, one of the non-traditional students in the Night Class, responded to Ashley who had written comments on the class blog about her own biracial son. As a mother herself (including an adult disabled daughter who Jill provided full-time care for), Jill responded by evoking her own motherhood and noting that race issues were not something she was concerned with in raising her own children: "I never once had to think about which ethnic group would accept [them]." Jill then follows with specific advice to Ashley, writing several AW sentences: "Society will see your son as African

American even though he is biracial. As such, you should raise your son to be prepared to live his life as an African American. You not only have the role but the obligation of a parent to prepare your child for the world they must live in." Jill not only connects with Ashley as a mother, but she makes a mature comment to Ashley that is genuine and sincere.

A younger student than the others mentioned previously, Lisa, also approached the topic of the class in a more sophisticated way (like John). Lisa was a young mixed race female who had spent her entire life in the Granite City area. When she describes Granite City to her audience, she writes, "As the stories go, Granite City had a 'No Negroes after sun down' policy extending up until the late 1960s. Even after that law had been abolished, it wasn't until a year before I was born, 1989, that African Americans were allowed in the downtown portion of town, West Granite, at all. But, even so, signs of hate and death threats still littered the streets and telephone poles, keeping all those with dark skin towards the outskirts of the neighborhood. This is the town I was born and raised in." Like John, Lisa has an excellent grasp of language and uses a description of her hometown to set the scene before delivering her whammy of "this is the town I was born and raised in."

Towards the end of the semester, in her fourth essay, Lisa expressed disillusionment in the comments that had been made in the class during the semester. When asked to respond to "something" that one of her classmates had posted on our class web site, Lisa discovered that she could not identify even one comment that would move her to respond back to the author: "Personally, I would say if I wanted something that incredibly fake with a slight hint of lovey-dovey, idealistic nonsense, I would simply

watch re-runs of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. But I wanted something more from these comments. I wanted real, honest feelings about how, as an individual in today's society, [race] really made them feel." Lisa is obviously frustrated by what she sees as a lack of thinking in her colleagues (at least from her perspective); I would argue that Lisa's final comment is a perfect example of a student genuinely engaging with the complications of race but not understanding that other students are in different places with their own thinking.

I developed these eight coding categories to more fully investigate the sentences written by the students in both sections of the course. I wanted to look beyond what the sentences were literally articulating and discover for myself what the sentences might have been saying about *how* these students grappled with the topic of race as a theme in FYC. Thus, the previous sections of this chapter represent my attempts at analyzing the students' language. However, in addition to the essays, I also asked the students to directly answer survey questions which asked them to respond to questions that I posed to them about using race as a theme in the course. Because these questions were asked more directly, it is possible that the survey responses might offer a different perspective than what we can actually see in the essay writing. The students might have been more honest in their responses to the questions of the surveys since the surveys were collected by the department secretary (who the students gave their surveys to) and they knew that I did not have access to these surveys until the end of the semester after final grades were posted. Certainly, triangulating the survey responses to the essay writing might make for a future study in which we can try to determine if students write essays that capture the way that they *really* think (via a

survey). However, in terms of this particular dissertation study, the following sections of this chapter outline the direct responses from the three surveys.

#### Survey Question One:

At the end of the semester, students completed a survey asking them to voice their opinions on two important questions pertaining to the use of race as an organizing device in FYC. With the exception of Amy in the Night Class, all of the students (27 total) completed the survey and responded to the two questions. In the previous chapter, I specifically noted how the students in the two sections answered these questions. In general, both classes indicated that the focus on race was not distracting in terms of meeting the objectives of FYC.

The first question focusing on class organization was as follows: “Was the theme of this course distracting or not? Explain your answer.” As the Results Chapter outlined, both the Day Class and the Night Class reflected a similar statistic. Three out of fourteen students in the Day Class answered in the affirmative (21.4%). For the Night Class, one student answered the question positively (7%), not including the absence of one survey, a student who did not attend the class session in which the survey was dispersed.

It was truly frustrating for me that by the end of the semester, a student like Mike (in the Day Class) could complete the entire course and end by asserting that using race as a theme in his FYC course was distracting because “I haven’t had any personal experience with racial issues.” I can understand Mike saying this at the beginning of the semester, but I hoped after fifteen weeks and five writing assignments that Mike might have a more “sophisticated” perspective on race. Helen Fox mentions this same

frustration in her book, *When Race Breaks Out: Conversations About Race and Racism in College Classrooms*, in terms of actively incorporating race into the college classroom and discovering that some students are not interested in rhetorically wrestling with race: “When I began to address issues of race and racism more deliberately in my classroom, I found myself getting more and more frustrated with privileged white students who were unaware of their own prejudices and stereotypes” (81). Either Mike was truly not affected by the course theme – or he wasn’t admitting to it. Certainly, as writing instructors, if we use a sensitive topic like race, then we need to be aware that some students might be reluctant to consider any new perspectives or ideas that ask them to think outside their comfort zones.

Two other students in the Day Class – friends Lisa and Andy – also expressed concern about using race as topic in their FYC experience. Even though Lisa initially said that the theme wasn’t overtly distracting, she did qualify her response by adding “but it did become boring and played out after a month.” Her friend in class, Andy, also expressed dissatisfaction of the course subject matter: “Yes [the theme was a distraction] because let’s face it we couldn’t write anything real. That’s just not how it works so instead we wrote a handful of papers about blah blah blah ...” It is interesting that Andy was so emphatic with his response that he underlined the word “real.” It does hurt, of course, to read that Andy thought that the writing prompts I had worked so hard to develop did not, in his opinion, result in “anything real” but in “blah blah blah.” Andy’s survey comment expressed an attitude that is poignant – at first, I thought that as a young white male, he sees nothing “real” in discussions of race or privilege. However, I

now wonder if this particular topic – race – was too real for him in terms of being able to comfortably discuss and write about this subject.

Most of the other students in the Day Class simply indicated that the course topic was not distracting. John, however, expressed an opinion that represented the opposite of Andy's comment. John stated,

I loved our topic. I found it very challenging and engaging. I really enjoyed our discussions in class. I was surprised at how honest I was with my ideas of racism. I felt the other, younger students, didn't have a strong grasp on it yet due to their worldly inexperience.

Perhaps because of his age (30 years old) and because of his varied experience bartending in both Washington D.C. and Kansas City, John felt more comfortable expressing his opinions on race (both orally and written) and discovered a sense of "honest[y]" when trying to connect with the other students in the class.

Of the thirteen students in the Night Class who completed the survey, only one – James – directly stated that he thought the theme was distracting. His response was slightly different than Mike, Lisa, and Andy in the Day Class; in fact, I thought it was interesting that James evoked a sense of his whiteness: "[The theme] was good but being white I feel a little weird defending myself." James' comment was hard for me to read since I had worked so hard at making sure that students understood that whiteness was about acknowledgment, not about feeling guilty because of having white skin.

Sherice in the Night Class expressed a level of discomfort about the race theme although she answered the question in the positive. However, she attached a caution to

her “approval”: “The theme was ok. If you change it, be careful what you change it, too” [sic]. On at least two occasions during the semester she shared with me that she felt like everyone in the class was staring at her because she was the only African American in class. Carley, a young woman who became a friend to Sherice as they sat next to each other for the entire semester, actually specifically mentioned Sherice in her own response to this survey question: “No [but] it was a bit uncomfortable at times. But it was also intense. I felt bad for Sherice because in the end she was the only black student. I bet she felt singled out.”

There were several other interesting responses to this question in the Night Class. At least two of the Night Class students mentioned an issue that did not come up in the responses from the Day Class – the idea that a theme might help them maintain a focus for their writing. Jill answered “Not at all” when responding to this question, adding, “in fact, I felt it helped my writing. Changing topics makes it difficult to focus on writing skills ... but since I kind of understood where we were going, I could focus on writing skills.” Genny echoed something similar: “I thought it was different to have a class based on race. It was nice to focus on one issue instead of tons.” Certainly, using one specific topic to organize FYC might offer this one important advantage – students have the opportunity to see the topic “play out” in the course of a rhetorical discussion and discover multiple methods of examining the issue. Zebroski notes that a course topic can serve as a “kind of *refrain* that can help the class to *broaden* its activities, to extend its inquiry” (18). Emphasizing the term “broaden” here, Zebroski clearly shows that using subject matter can help students “master” a topic and then be in a better position to question and “attack” that topic rhetorically.

In terms of the first question from the survey, there was an additional comment from the Night Class that I found fascinating. May remembered a picture that I had briefly shown the students during the first week of class to make them think about how race has been naturalized in our country. This was an image of a “flesh-colored” Band-Aid in a popular FYC reader, Donald McQuade and Christine McQuade’s *Seeing and Writing* (the first edition of the book). The introductory art to the “Constructing Race” chapter in this textbook is a seemingly simply photograph of a close-up of a Band-Aid attached to “brown skin.” It takes the viewer a moment to realize that the tan color of the Band-Aid is meant to blend into the skin. It just so happens that this skin isn’t tan. When responding to my inquiry as to whether the theme of the course was distracting, May evoked this early text from the class in her survey response: “No [the theme was not distracting]. I enjoyed hearing how other people think. I will look at Band-aids differently from now on.” Her colleague Bee even suggested that race is a theme that needs more attention: “... I think people need to talk about race more.” Clearly, it is important to remember that we don’t always know which texts our students will encounter that might get the critical thinking and writing wheels in their heads turning.

#### Survey Question Two:

The second question I asked students was as follows: “Do you think your approach to the concept of ‘race’ has changed/ been modified in any way as a result of your experience in this class?” The specific responses to this question can be found in Chapter 4. Unlike the first question about the course topic in which there were only a small number of students who indicated that the course theme was a distraction, this question resulted in almost a split 50/50 result among the Day Class students. As I

mentioned in the Results Chapter, seven students replied that their conception of race had not changed by the end of the semester while six noted specific ways in which their thinking had indeed changed (one student decided not to respond to this particular question).

Esther, one of only two non-white students in the class, said that her thoughts about race had not changed as a result of her work in the class but she now “[knew] how some whites feel about some of the race issues.” It is interesting that she did not consider her qualification in answering the question as a “yes” in learning something about race. Was it because her comment was about whiteness? Did she see not see this component as part of the national discussion on race?

Not surprisingly, given his previous response to the class as being a place where his writing became “blah, blah, blah,” Andy’s response was the most emotional. His comment includes anger and resentment, perhaps directed at me in particular for making him think and write about race for the previous fifteen weeks. In responding negatively in terms of this second question, Andy commented, “Nope, just realized the more you think about the idea of ‘race’ it becomes more stupid and how talking about it is a waste of time because nothing is solved let alone being done about it.” I don’t think that Andy is the only one who feels this way – on a daily basis I have seen people express the same frustration when race is talked about in connection with national issues. It’s unfortunate that Andy came to the determination that the conversation in our class was “a waste of time.” His comment suggests that if we use such a touchy topic in organizing a FYC class, then we must figure out ways to minimize the uncomfortable feeling that students might experience (though there is no possible way to negate this

necessary feeling completely). Other students might have been feeling the same way Andy did but instead of responding with an attitude, they may have simply written comments like Lesley did, “I was never racist to begin with ...,” suggesting that the course theme was not relevant in any way, shape, or form.

In the Night Class, four students out of the thirteen who completed the survey indicated that their conceptual framework of race had not been altered (in some way) as a result of the class topic. These four students – Bee, Haley, Jesse, and Sherice – offered no further commentary other than simply indicating “no.” I am not sure why the students in the Day Class had more comments when answering the survey; unfortunately, it may be because I distributed the survey at the end of the class (which was the end of a long day for many of these students who came to SWIC after working all day) it is possible that they just simply didn’t have the energy to add any additional words or thoughts. The results might have been different if I had given out the survey during the first few minutes of the class.

One of the more interesting comments from the Night Class came from Carley who expressed the following thoughts when indicating that the class had, indeed, changed the way that she approached the concept of race:

Well, I think so. I’ve never considered myself a race. It’s like ... I’m white and in the background. [The class] opened my eyes that race is an issue that a lot of people face who aren’t white that I never knew existed.

As I mentioned earlier, Carley struck up a friendship with Sherice, the one non-white student in the class, and she mentioned when I encountered her several weeks after the completion of our course that Sherice was the first “black friend” that she had ever had.

Growing up in the predominately white community of Granite City had not given her many opportunities to meet people who didn't look like her.

Some of the other students in the Night Class expressed appreciation for increased awareness about race. May argued, "[The race theme] made me more aware of the other side" and Beth offered a similar sentiment, "I feel like my eyes are opened to things that I did not think about before." Jill commented, "I need to continue to be sensitive to the issue." In discussing racial awareness in her own racial autobiography, Frances E. Kendall mentions a friend, Barbara, who once told her something that has stuck with her: "Barbara said something I have never forgotten. She said that once we began to notice racism we could never not see it again; we had bought a one-way ticket. That certainly seemed to be my reality" (13). I wonder if this is now the reality for students like May, Beth, and Jill.

### Conclusion:

By coding the introductory paragraphs of two essays the ENG 101 students wrote in the two race-themed courses, several generalizations can be made about this specific group of students. The concept of "whiteness" is just as difficult a term as "race." We should not assume that our students are familiar with analyzing either of these terms (or any other complicated socially constructed terminology). We also should not assume that any non-white students in the class would welcome race discussions or writing prompts. In general, I didn't expect the emotional response that race brought into our discussions and writing assignments. Critical Race theorists Joe L. Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg, in fact, offer a caution to scholars who want to see

whiteness as an “easy term” which needs no further investigation or interrogation after a quick introduction: “[W]hiteness scholarship to this point has sometimes failed to recognize that its greatest problem is the lapse into essentialism” (182). Thus, simply exposing my students to Peggy McIntosh's landmark essay on whiteness (“White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”) is not enough in terms of thinking that an essay like this could possibly cover every aspect of whiteness as an academic field of study. All of us in the classroom, including myself, have not experienced whiteness the same way. Other factors like gender and class may change the perception of how whiteness is experienced, as well as regional differences and personal family background. As compositionists Ian Marshall and Wendy Ryden assert “[a]ll students need to be enabled with a critical rhetoric of whiteness, but it is not a one-size-fits-all proposition” (249).

## CHAPTER SIX

## CONCLUSION

Introduction:

This dissertation evolved from the one question I have relentlessly contemplated in my ongoing mission to make FYC as relevant and important as I can to the students I find sitting in my classroom semester after semester. P.L. Thomas evokes this provocative question at the beginning of his essay, “The Struggle Itself: Teaching Writing As We Know We Should,” published a decade ago in the *English Journal*. In his introduction, he asks his readers, “What must we do as English teachers to improve our quest for fostering vivid, dynamic, original, and thoughtful writers?” (39). My response to this question is to research ways that I can place the actual act of composing in the center of the classroom, where students struggle – and, hopefully, succeed – to gain control of written language. Ultimately, the study at the center of this dissertation affirms that the use of a topic as an organizing principle in FYC, particularly a controversial topic with no easy answers, *can* be successful at promoting the objectives of FYC.

Certainly, the use of a specific theme in FYC is a widespread, generally acceptable, and popular method to organize college-level writing classrooms. Reading any of the journals available to those of us who teach FYC — *College English*, *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, *Pedagogy* to name just a few — or even attending NCTE conferences or subscribing to the WPA list-serv, it is not difficult to find some version of popular cultural and social justice-centered courses in FYC being talked about as a “given,” as an accepted organizational method for teaching FYC. Further,

one of the most discussed topics the last decade is the suggestion that FYC is generally void of any “real” content and is simply a writing skills course. This perspective views writing as a non-discipline and sees the essays produced by students as separate from any clear course content (i.e. whereas the writing produced in a “content” course like history or sociology cannot be separated from the course content). Indeed, Doug Downs and Elizabeth Wardle identify this dilemma in the teaching of writing in their online article “Re-Imagining the Nature of FYC: Trends in Writing-about-Writing Pedagogies”:

This separation of content knowledge from writing instruction forces the composition teacher to instead value writing process (for example, number of drafts), adherence to specified forms, grammatical correctness, specified style, or ability to persuade a general audience. While all of these are important aspects of writing, they represent an incomplete set of concerns for a teacher to value. Rhetoric understood more fully as a unification of content, arrangement, style, and delivery appropriate to various audiences and discourse communities appears to be unattainable in a composition class where any content and form are allowable but the teacher’s expertise regarding all the possible content and forms is realistically limited. (Downs and Wardle 8)

In other words, using a controversial topic *can* work effectively in organizing and teaching FYC. Indeed, I firmly believe that when a FYC course genuinely embraces rhetoric, both content and form merge together to help the student writer fully understand and use both critical thinking and writing skills. A carefully chosen course

topic offers the perfect opportunity to do just that.

Like most FYC instructors, my aim is to provide students with opportunities to think through and produce purposeful writing. This is not to say, of course, that FYC as a discipline does not have “purpose” on its own. In fact, in Judith A. Scheffler’s “Composition with Content: An Interdisciplinary Approach,” she incorrectly assumes that FYC is “subject-less” without some type of themed content. Though I agree with her that topics in FYC could lead to “purposeful writing” (51), we need to be careful in making assumptions that there is no content in FYC itself: “Combining freshman remedial and regular composition with an interdisciplinary studies program thus has the prominent advantage of providing subject matter for essays” (55). I believe that a “subject matter” in essay writing can be found in the very act of writing itself (rhetoric) but I agree with the spirit of Scheffler’s assertion here in that an “outside topic” (in this case, “interdisciplinary studies”) could offer one way of providing students a “subject” for their writing. As the Literature Review of this dissertation clearly outlines, there is no shortage of theme-based FYC courses in our national discussions.

In short, this study was designed to investigate what would happen in a FYC course organized around the subject matter of race in one specific community college (The Sam Wolf Granite City Campus of Southwestern Illinois College) during one specific period of time (Spring 2010). After the course ended and I started to look closely at the student writing, I then developed coding categories to determine as closely as possible “how” the students in the two different FYC sections were writing about race. I don’t pretend to think that any of the conclusions here would fit perfectly in any other class in any other college or university. Indeed, the personalities of all

involved – the instructor and the 28 students in this particular study – had a great deal of influence on these final results.

As Chapter 5 (Analysis) indicates, using this version of critical pedagogy requires an instructor to be conscious about the terms used in the readings and assignments – e.g. whiteness – and to be prepared for the emotional responses (and the resistance) that might occur from this type of discussion. Though it may be difficult to make firm generalizations based on one experience, this study does, in fact, provide an opportunity to make one small step in furthering research on “how” race (or any other topic) might be directly talked and written about in FYC. If we writing instructors decide to use a topic like this to organize a FYC course, we must consider what works – and doesn’t work – instead of relying solely on our intuition. This conclusion will outline both the possible positive and negative consequences of intentionally using a topic like race in FYC, as well as specific advice and a call for further research.

### Course Logistics:

As a whole, this study indicates several key points to consider in terms of the logistics related to using race as a topic for a FYC course. When planning such a course, an instructor must be careful about navigating the waters of a themed FYC course from day one. In other words, we must be consciously aware of what we are asking of our students in each writing prompt: “Through carefully constructed essay assignments, journal projects, and class discussions, we can encourage students to summarize, analyze, and critique arguments (informal logic), foreground the reasoning which led them to their current position or allows them to maintain it (metacognition),

and continually reappraise that position and redefine the points of contention (problem finding)” (Wilhoit 129). Before the course commences, in other words, the instructor must have already thought out the reasoning for particular assignments and readings – even more so than in a typical FYC that uses a typical reader. If we want to offer our students multiple viewpoints, then we need to be aware that we are offering just that.

A careful consideration of the course topic will help as we handle the complicated matters of rhetoric, ideology, and politics. Of course, our students do not need to embrace a certain ideology or political beliefs in order to have an engaged debate. Rather, students should have to interpret opposing (even multiple) positions and think through them reasonably and ethically, ultimately gaining some subtle understandings of the way language helps to shape the subject matter in question. In other words, a topic for FYC that purposely uses rhetoric as the center of the course must carefully deliberate how that topic might be impacted by rhetorical concepts and concerns.

In terms of choosing a topic, another point to consider is the relevancy of the topic itself, especially among our student population: “What if the student who is placed in a course is not interested in the chosen theme?” (Wilhoit 131). Just because an instructor is inherently invested in a particular topic does not mean that this same enthusiasm will carry over to the general student population. In fact, an effective subject matter might be one in which multiple layers exist and students can “enter” the discussion from various angles. Thus, great care must be taken in selecting a topic that might serve as an impetus in encouraging students to connect with rhetoric, not a possible obstacle. As much as I personally thought that the concept of race was a

thought-provoking one, for example, I need to be aware that this will not be the perspective of all the students who enroll in the course.

Another important concern for a race-themed FYC is the consideration of a text/reader (to initiate discussion or writing). The textbook I decided to use for the course in this study was a reprint of John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me*, a journalistic book first published in 1960. The book recorded the events of Griffin pretending to be a black man over the course of several weeks in 1959. He starts this "diary" by asking the following questions: "If a white man became a Negro in the Deep South, what adjustments would he have to make? What is it like to experience discrimination based on skin color, something over which one has no control?" (1). Using medication that darkened his skin to deep brown (and using sun lamps), the white Griffin traveled throughout Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia, experiencing life as a black man would -- a radical transformation that may have ended violently for Griffin. Eventually, his travel documentary became the book *Black Like Me* (the book was developed into a film in 1964 starring James Whitmore).

When considering a possible "reader" for the race-themed FYC course, I immediately thought about *Black Like Me* since I had recently read that the book was "turning" 50 years old. Even though I had read the book in college years ago, I wondered how many of my students had ever read Griffin's experiment. Indeed, with a black man -- Barack Obama -- as president of the United States, how were Griffin's observations the same -- or different -- fifty years later? How would my students respond to the idea of race as a "costume" that could be taken on -- or off? No white man could, Griffin reasoned, truly understand what it was like to be black because black

people would never tell the truth to outsiders. "The only way I could see to bridge the gap between us was to become a Negro," Griffin writes. "I decided I would do this" (1).

But it was Griffin's preface that most convinced me that this book could be something stimulating in terms of encouraging the students to see beyond the black versus white dialectic: "The Negro. The South. These are details. The real story is the universal story – one of men who destroy the souls of other men. It is the story of the persecuted, the defrauded, the feared and detested." I thought the book would lay the groundwork -- from a rhetorical perspective -- of how race has shaped the relationships, culture, and language of the world that our current students exist in. Then, perhaps the students would recognize the power of language and rhetoric and ... perhaps leave the class with a fresh eye toward interrogating language they would encounter as they proceeded with their academic careers.

In my research writing course (ENG 102), I have had great experiences with students when using Barbara Ehrenreich's controversial ethnography *Nickel and Dimed*, so I thought that *Black Like Me* would produce the same type of conversations and debates. I had hoped that *Black Like Me* would provide a variety of writing prompts as well as establishing the foundation of our racial talks and discussions. However, if I were to use race as theme for FYC course again, I would not use this text. In the end, it was difficult to get the younger students interested in a text that was fifty years old. Our initial first chapters went smoothly and I thought that I had made the "right" choice in deciding to use Griffin's *Black Like Me* as the base reading for this writing course. However, as might be expected, the reading came across to students as outdated and not relevant to the world around them. I had not realized that to some students,

including my African American students, Griffin's words came across as patronizing, offensive and even a little comical. Even though I was hoping that there was enough in this "older" text to set up the discussion of race relations and perhaps introduce the concept of "white privilege," I had more luck using current films like *Good Hair* and *Crash*.

A race focused FYC course must reflect a careful consideration of how the reading assignments intersect with the writing assignments. However, I have discovered that we need more research in discovering the best methods of creating assignments in a themed course that effectively engages with the rhetorical objectives of FYC. In my own research, I found few voices offering specific and practical pedagogical advice. However, there are a few scholars in race studies who are, indeed, proposing useful classroom methods that might work well in a FYC course. For example, in her essay, "Creating Safe Spaces in Predominantly White Classrooms," Pamela Perry mentions a class activity that might work well in a FYC that has a focus which is on a touchy topic like race:

To start, the teacher or class chooses a controversial topic that will excite a wide range of opinions. Each student writes a statement on a piece of paper that expresses his or her knowledge or thoughts about the topic. Students can choose to write their name(s) on the paper or not. When each person finishes writing his or her statement, he or she looks up to meet someone else's eyes, and the two swap papers. The students now respond to the statement on the paper they just received, and when they are done, they look up to meet someone else's eyes and swap again.

After five or six swaps, the teacher can stop the activity and read some of the written conversations to the class. This exercise enables all students, including those who are shy or fearful of speaking up in class, the opportunity to express their views and engage in a conversation in a way that feels nonthreatening. (228)

I tried to do something like this with essay assignment four, but Perry's take on getting students to "talk" (via writing) in class might be more successful. Instead of just taking on one voice (like my assignment requires), Perry's assignment idea would expose the students in the classroom to a variety of ideas.

#### Advantages of Using Race as a Topic:

This study indicates at least three specific advantages of using race as an organizing principle in FYC. These advantages are the following: (1) familiarity with college level terms and discussion, (2) critical thinking skills, and (3) increased cooperation. All three of these skills represent abilities that we hope to foster in any of the students that we find in a FYC classroom. Though not the only way of incorporating these skills into FYC, a carefully considered FYC course topic of any type can certainly introduce objectives like the three mentioned above and help first year students adjust to the rigors of college thinking and learning.

A FYC course focused on race can help students learn the language of the academic world. For example, students might consider the differences between the terms "ethnicity" and "race." Incoming college students are asked to increase their vocabulary and critically examine the new vocabulary of college thinking and writing. Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz describe this shift that all incoming FYC students must

make -- becoming what they term "novice writers" -- which represents a crucial step in becoming effective college-level writers. Sommers and Saltz emphasize that becoming a novice writer is a crucial re-seeing of one's self; students who "cling to their old habits and formulas and who resent the uncertainty of being a novice have a more difficult time adjusting to the demands of college writing" (134). As Sommers and Saltz observe, the psychological phenomenon of displacement encountered by freshmen during the transition to college life can be traumatic and unsettling. This change in setting is far from seamless, and first-year students often find themselves located in an emotional space that is no longer truly connected to their pre-college lives but is not entirely separate either. So too with academic venues: the norms and rhythms of high school are done away with, and the absence of that familiarity can be awkward. It is natural, then, that a massive sense of validation comes with the first fruits of a student's academic labor; the authors of this study observed that they were "unprepared for the pride of accomplishment that many freshmen experience, the joy of holding in their hands the physical representation of their thinking, the evidence that they have learned something in-depth" (134).

For my community college students, so many of them are scared by the very idea that they are now sitting in a college classroom, especially if they struggled in high school or came from a family with little support in terms of valuing a college education. A FYC course developed around one topic might help incoming students slowly become mini-experts on this topic, allowing these "young" writers to grow in a short amount of time. Thus, the idea of familiarity in pursuing a course topic could help negate some of the negative energy that students might have when embarking in this first-semester

course of writing. A course topic might even encourage trust and openness among the students (and even the instructor). On several different occasions during my study, I noticed that the students in both sections appeared to be “comfortable” with each other, perhaps more so than in a typical class. In fact, one or two students would regularly bring in local news stories in which race seemed to play a role. For example, John brought to our attention the local story about a worker at a pizza restaurant in St Louis using the description “big black guy” instead of the customer’s phone number. For at least fifteen minutes, his class debated the intent of this description and I ended up adding this debate to their options for essay two. Rarely in other ENG 101 courses have I had students bring in local news stories related to class conversation; in addition, it’s not always common for the students in the class to actually express interest in discussing a “rhetorical situation” without me prodding them to begin.

Along with gaining more familiarity with a particular topic, students might also be better able to work on critical thinking (and writing) skills in a FYC course with a topic: “Students can appreciate the existence and impact of such defining assumptions and criteria only by reading widely in a subject, and analyzing and comparing material drawn from many different disciplines” (Wilhoit 128). Again, more time spent on a particular topic might help students “see” this subject from several different perspectives, thus allowing the students to truly grasp the complexity of complicated issues like race, class, and gender. In addition, a specific topic might offer more opportunities to practice differing levels of critical thinking: “Allow [students] to define for themselves that they will investigate and to give them the opportunity to discuss their ideas with others” (Wilhoit 130). Because courses with a specific topic provide a deeper and wider context for a

subject, they help students achieve greater complexity and nuance in their papers (and a “sexy” topic might also make a FYC student more excited about taking on this type of writing class).

As seen in the surveys given to the two sections of the course, the majority of the students answered in the negative when asked if the topic of race had been distracting in their quest to better their writing skills. Ashley in the day class, for example, noted that “I really enjoyed hearing other peoples’ opinions.” Many of the students in her section echoed the same sentiment: Brenda noted that race was “something we need to talk about” and John mentioned that the topic was “challenging and engaging.” Erika further argued that the topic has encouraged her to “[find] out a little about myself.” All of these responses reflect differing positions in critically examining race, an important component that Wilhoit suggested above in designing a FYC themed course.

A FYC course with a topic might also allow for more types of group work: “A thematic writing course allows for extremely productive types of group work, collaborative writing, and class discussion” (Wilhoit 129). Because the students are working on the same general topic, they might be able to offer more suggestions to their colleagues in class. A regular feature in my writing classes are for students to contribute to peer writing workshops where the students bring their drafts to class in order to get feedback from their colleagues in order to develop these works-in-progress into more effective essays. For example, when working on essay four, I noticed that the students were more interactive in sharing their reactions to the comments from the opposite section. I realize that the assignment itself might have encouraged this development by my assignment “forcing” the students to interact with other students’

comments but the camaraderie that developed from this experience appeared to bring the classes together (for example, those enrolled in the Day Class felt like a united front when mentioning the comments that were written in the Night Class). Working together for shared goals will be an important trait for most future employment situations. I used to teach in Tokyo and the Japanese actually have a word for an academic effort made individually and cooperatively – *satori*. Basically *satori* means a sudden flash of understanding that is a result of a long, intensive effort, often made by talking and working with others. Certainly, any constructive peer relationship (including those forged in topic-driven FYC courses) can aid in helping students to develop the cooperative skills that will help them be successful.

#### Advice in Using Race as a Topic:

Not only did this study help me think through the advantages of organizing FYC around the topic of race, but I also end this study with a better understanding of concepts to consider when developing such a course. In general, I can identify at least three ideas that an instructor might want to consider when organizing a FYC course with a touchy topic like race: (1) Being careful not to force a particular ideology on the students, (2) Making it clear to students how assignments will be assessed, and (3) Understanding that emotional outbursts in reaction to the topic will happen and might, in fact, even be necessary.

The most important piece of advice I can offer in this conclusion is that we must be careful that we don't want to "force" our ideas on the students -- for example, they might just mimic what we say in order to get a good grade on a paper and not actually

practice critical thinking and writing. I know that the motivation that is behind this whole project is that I earnestly believe that connecting with your writing skills is such a great way of embracing education and knowledge-making. I don't think too many people get into the teaching profession without this desire to want to motivate students. But with this enthusiasm, we do need to be careful that any course theme does not take over and become the content.

In Chapter 5, I mentioned my personal disappointment when I read a comment at the end of the semester from Mike who was enrolled in the Day Class. When asked if the course theme was distracting, Mike responded that it was, indeed, distracting because “I haven’t had any personal experience with racial issues.” Mike’s response reminds me of an important lesson. My job as his FYC writing instructor was to encourage Mike and his class colleagues to wrestle with rhetorical concerns, not force my opinions down their throats. Even though I think that Mike has everything to gain by considering racial ramifications in our culture – and his position in our culture as a young white male – ultimately I am more concerned with his ability to express himself through language (as he does in his response). Indeed, it is this fear of radical teachers in higher education “indoctrinating” their students to hold a certain political viewpoint that ruffles the feathers of vocal commenters like Conservative pundit David Horowitz. If we indoctrinate in any way, then it should be to indoctrinate students with the ability to reason and to think for themselves.

Mike’s survey response that I just noted above also reminds me that we instructors need to be extra vigilant in the assessment of responses and essays that reflect thoughts or ideas that may not mesh with our personal opinions. By using

example essays in class that represented a wide range of opinions on race, I had hoped that the students would know that I would not grade them “badly” simply because I disagreed on a personal level. When using a controversial topic like race, we teachers must be hyper vigilant and conscious of “how” we are grading papers so that students don’t assume that there is a “right” answer that we are looking from them (and that the “right” answer” is closely aligned to our own individual opinions on the topic). Though a rubric for writing assessment is important in every class, I would argue that a rubric in a course with a controversial theme is even more crucial; students need to understand that our evaluative comments are connected to rhetorical concerns, not our own personal biases (my rubric can be found in the syllabus that I gave on the first day of this class; this syllabus is located in Appendix A).

One of the most important realizations I had with this study was the presence of emotion. As Helen Fox notes, "It is only natural that strong emotions will surface" (51) when forcing race (or, indeed, any controversial issue) in the center of a discussion or writing prompt; however, we must be prepared for the potential of these emotional responses. We must also show our students that these types of conversations are centered on rhetoric and they can be analyzed and interrogated. As I noted before, the emotional response of the students in my study was not something that I consciously considered before I began my project. Looking back, however, I am shocked that I didn't consider that the students would be asked to wrangle with some pretty big issues and any emotional responses could become front and center in the coursework.

Here is but one example: While watching the film version of *Crash*, there is a scene where Sandra Bullock's character, Jean Cabot, falls down a flight of stairs and breaks her leg. While this scene was playing in the darkened classroom, Andy and Lisa (who sat next to each other) began giggling and laughing. Right away, I noticed that the students around them expressed horrified expressions and I quickly walked across the room and asked them to keep the noise down. Both Andy and Lisa continued to quietly chuckle throughout the rest of the film. I do not know why these two students were laughing -- it may have had nothing to do with the film itself -- but the other students in the classroom noticed and appeared to be angry at these two students for laughing at the point in the film in which they did. I, too, became angry because they were laughing during a serious part of the film. However, I chose not to ask either Andy or Lisa about their emotional response, partly because these were two of the students who had given me the most trouble in terms of hostility and apathy. I may have missed a great opportunity to encourage the class to openly discuss (either by talking or writing) their reactions to this relatively minor disturbance.

The idea of analyzing emotional response in rhetoric and composition is a fertile area of current research. For example, Donna Strickland and Ilene Crawford (in their essay "Error and Racialized Performances of Emotion in the Teaching of Writing") argue that we writing teachers who utilize the concept of whiteness as a reading or writing prompt in a race-themed FYC classroom must make visible "the role emotions play in the construction of white subjectivity" (69). How can I create a classroom space in which emotions are openly discussed and utilized for rhetorical purposes? How do I ensure that any emotional outbursts are directed at the objectives of FYC and do not

veer off in the direction of a "feel good" support group or -- the opposite -- an uncomfortable space of angry and violent words? Julie Lindquist describes "students' emotional labor in scenes of literacy learning" (189). We need to work on finding ways to "educate the emotions," borrowing a phrase from compositionist Marlie Banning. Banning writes, in her conclusion of the essay "The Politics of Resentment," that understanding the "emotional force and coherence of a structure of feeling that underpins a cultural politic such as resentment ... is a key element in educating the emotions" (94).

An emotional response is often seen as negative but Frances Kendall, in her brave treatise on how race frames experiences and relationships in *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race*, argues that themes that might seem volatile and emotional are needed – and necessary – in higher education settings:

There is a great fear on the part of faculty, whether in community college classrooms or law schools, that a conversation will get out of hand and the professor will lose control. Most of us who went to school to learn how to be professors weren't taught to teach students, we were taught to teach subject matter, so many of us don't have the skills to handle conflict. One of your possible responses is, "We can't talk about these topics, they're too sensitive. I don't know what to do." (135)

Kendall then offers several strategies to help any instructor (teaching any discipline) to purposely – and productively – bring race into the classroom setting. First, she suggests that we ask students to focus on active listening and not make assumptions

about what we think people might say. She also argues that we must be clear about the motivation of the discussion. For example, is the motivation of a particular discussion to learn and to share? Or is it simply to vent and express frustration? Another key component of a genuine dialog is to make sure that each speaker's sense of privilege is openly discussed, being okay with being uncomfortable, and being "honest about what you don't know" (131).

Certainly, there is still much research that needs to be done in terms of purposely encouraging students to investigate -- and write about -- topics like race that might openly invite emotions into the writing classroom. Even though I was comfortable using race as the organizing principle of the FYC courses I used in this study, this is not a theme that will work for everyone; it is imperative that the writing instructor be comfortable with the topic used in the organization of the course. In fact, Sally Chandler, a compositionist at Kean University in Union, New Jersey, argues that her continuing research (in which she considers the intersections between both psychology and composition research) suggests that "writing assignments that press young adults toward critical thinking and identity shifts can evoke stressful emotions that, in turn, evoke discursive patterns inappropriate for the demands of critical, analytic writing" (54). Thus, if we ask students to consider complex identity markers (e.g. race, class, and gender) that are wrapped up in emotional "baggage," we need to expect that emotional outbursts and disruptions are natural and may, in fact, happen. In fact, Chandler further notes that insisting that students tackle these difficult emotional topics may lead to weak writing: "... anxiety surrounding the writing process might lead to the cliches, generalizations, and pat conclusions so typical of beginning writers" (54).

I would argue that a FYC course with emotion may help make the writing assignments more interesting and relevant to the student. In the end, Chandler discovered that an emotional connection might help the student better analyze a difficult, emotional topic. "Overall, writing which allowed participants to experience the most benefit had a narrative structure that moved from an emotional to a more reasoned stance, came to closure, and allowed the author to gain increased distance from upsetting events" (61). She further connects a hard issue like race with a traumatic experience: "Since the 1980s, researchers in psychology have documented how writing narratives about traumatic experiences has resulted in positive health effects" (60). If we want our FYC students to truly engage with the complexities of critical thinking and writing, perhaps offering the opportunity for "trauma" to enter the FYC classroom is a good thing. "The research emphasizes that to relieve stress effectively, communication is needed to explore the emotions that produced the upsetting feelings before moving toward a more distanced, rational perspective" (61-62).

Chandler's suggestion at the end of her study exactly matches my own thoughts in terms of why we composition instructors should actively seek discomfort and tough writing and discussions in the FYC space: "... we need more work to characterize affective contexts for teaching and composing and the associated patterns for writing and learning" (67). If anything, our job as composition instructors is to offer opportunities for our students to initiate an engagement with language and to begin the process of critical thinking and writing.

### Conclusion and Recommendation for Future Study:

I hope that my study serves as a reminder that we writing teachers must carefully consider the implications of using a controversial topic like race as the primary organizing tool of FYC. Even though using social justice and popular cultural topics are a normal practice in our field, there are, in fact, few voices actively engaged with the questioning of this method of organizing sections of FYC. However much our discipline debates the tools or methods we use to teach FYC -- “Composition Studies has a long and embattled history” after all (Downs and Wardle, “Re-Imagining the Nature of FYC”) – we need to continue to rethink and retool the way we organize FYC coursework. Using a topic is not only popular and timely, but it has become normalized and something that many composition teachers “do” with little thought.

I am convinced that a FYC course that focuses on the sensitive issue of race can be a productive way of teaching FYC; I can't, however, claim that the writing was improved or “better” than in a section that did not use this topic. Indeed, this would be an area in which more research could be helpful. The coding categories I developed and applied to the students' writing helps me better understand the nuances of their thinking as they grappled with language and rhetoric. Their voices should be at the center of any discussion about improving student writing.

Ultimately, this study has proven to me that more research is needed in terms of considering the relationship between thinking and writing. My coding of the students' sentences represented one concrete step in trying to better understand how their “thinking” about race resulted in thoughts and language. Again, in this study I was limited to analyzing just two paragraphs; further research should take on the entire

essay that a student writes, perhaps using my coding categories as a starting point.

If anything, we writing instructors must continue to engage in much-needed classroom research that highlights the voices of the student writers. In the essay “Composing Composition Courses,” noted compositionist and scholar Louise Z. Smith admits that “one of the chief pleasures of our profession must be composing harmonious courses. We lovingly choose our themes” (460). Indeed, any English department in any college or university is made up of diverse talented and committed individuals who organize their FYC courses in any number of different ways, perhaps allowing our discipline a delightful pedagogical freedom that might not be available in a more structured course. As previously noted, this specific ethnographic study was an attempt to discover what happens when a social justice theme – like race – plays the center role in the organization of a FYC course. Was my attempt – to borrow Smith’s term “lovingly” – a successful enterprise for the students enrolled in the course?

If success can be measured by the following comment from writing teacher Stephen Wilhoit -- “Critical thinkers must be willing to analyze and evaluate opinions and assertions, their own included” (129) – then I do believe the FYC course described in this study was successful. I know that I am constantly fighting against the following description of stereotyped college writing assignments: “Students too often are pressured to use composition as a mechanical fill-in-the-blank formula for conveying information” (Gebhardt and Smith). Instead, I want students to be “active interpreters of their own experience” (Trimbur 127). In order to facilitate such writing, I must “allow for friction, edginess, dissention, and discomfort” (Landsman 148) in the ENG 101 classroom if I genuinely want students to actively interrogate language and subjectivity.

I believe that the possible friction that may develop helps students better acknowledge that there exist no “easy” solutions to large concept ideas like race.

However, no matter how a FYC course is organized, the definition of how we approach the term "rhetoric" is best expressed by Jennifer Seibel Trainor, a compositionist who has done much in terms of ethnographic research and student language. Trainor believes that "those of us working on the currently separate but highly overlapping areas of whiteness, political rhetoric, critical pedagogy and resistance, and emotion, have got hold of separate strands of the same knot" (654). It is acknowledging these strands that will move the field of FYC in a new -- and refreshing direction: "To grapple fully with the knot itself returns us to rhetoric, where identity, emotions, schooling, and politics coalesce and persuade" (654).

Further, I enthusiastically agree with Amy Winans who argues that "exploring race helps students learn to think and write critically" ("Local Pedagogies" 254). Indeed, examining race as a "hidden" identity marker may provide the perfect opportunity for students to wrestle with the whole idea of interrogating language and stripping away its assumptions and connotations. Winans continues, "Making diversity central to my teaching helps students realize that all ideas and writing emerge from a specific subject position, a position or point of view shaped and reshaped by one's lived experiences of race, class, sexual orientation, gender, religion, region, and ability. Any stance or position that might appear neutral or objective, or simply to constitute 'common sense,' is in fact one whose power and positionality have been naturalized" (254). If anything, the students in the two FYC sections I studied for this dissertation were encouraged to re-think the idea that a “neutral or objective” position exists and each of them

represented differing points on the scale of critical thinking. A complicated topic like race offers many rhetorical levels that help students be more self-reflective as writers.

But given the difficulty in using race as a topic in FYC, I agree with Shelly Tochluk in her assertion in the introduction to her book *Witnessing Whiteness: The Need to Talk About Race and How to Do It*. She asserts, “After much consideration, I now stand convinced that the future of our country depends on white people being able to turn within, into the depths of our being, focus on our whiteness for a time, and perceive its effects on our deepest psyche and our collaborative relationships. We must face our deepest shadow, our country’s historical legacy of white supremacy. While uncomfortable to admit, its memory lies within us, embedded” (xvi). Using race as the focus of a class is not always viewed as an acceptable way of practicing critical thinking and writing; in fact, recently a teacher at a Seattle high school was “involuntarily transferred” from his school after one student complained about the “atmosphere” in a “popular Citizenship and Social Justice course” (Connelly). It is not easy to tackle such an emotionally and politicized topic whether in high school or college. However, if our FYC students can tackle such a difficult topic, then they will be able to interrogate so many other aspects of our culture that remains embedded and hidden.

The FYC classroom is the ideal space to explore the rhetorical connections of how we talk about a difficult and deeply entrenched subject like race. Of course, we must be hyper sensitive to how we open up opportunities of pulling off the layers. The primary problem with the Hairston debate was that we compositionists missed the perfect opportunity to interrogate how we use subject matter of all kinds in FYC (particularly, though, in terms of social justice issues) and how a topic might impact the

way we teach FYC. While some of the best minds in our field discussed how and why a FYC course should be organized, we should have taken the opportunity to investigate the work that students produce in a FYC course with a sensitive topics like race and then used that discussion to more fully flesh out the objectives and goals that we desire in our writing courses.

The Hairston debate should have gone beyond being a simple argument about whether a writing course should focus on a subject (outside of rhetoric). We know, of course, the materials we use in FYC and even in what order they are presented can impact a student's ability to recognize the multiple rhetorical layers of any topic. Race should not be seen, for example, as merely a means of oppression:

Teaching about racism should not be only a litany of the ways people of color have been victimized by oppression. It must also include examples of the resistance of people of color to victimization. Just as white students are not eager to see themselves as oppressors, students of color do not want to be characterized as victims. (Tatum 474)

Instead, we want our students to be aware of multiple layers that race evokes. Again, a FYC topic related to social justice – like race – might help our students better understand the rhetoric they encounter in all aspects of their lives, both academic and personal.

My coding categories may not capture all the small linguistic moves that students made as they thought and wrote their essays. However, this project taught me that it is difficult to make a blanket statement about the quality of critical thinking in a student's written response because -- if you looked closely enough -- you could see something

interesting that was being accomplished in the "small moves" that a student was making. In Chapter 5, I mentioned a pattern in which a student would write several sentences that I coded as Treading Writing (TW) – the lowest cognitive level I developed – but that same student might follow up the TW sentences and write an Acknowledging Writing (AW) sentence before retreating back to TW. The lesson here, of course, is that as teachers we need to look carefully at each of the sentences that students produce when tackling a complicated topic like race. Even if we notice writing that appears to represent the bottom tier of critical writing and thinking, this doesn't mean that the student isn't engaging – on some level – with the complicated topic at hand. It would be too easy to write off any of the students with instances of TW writing; instead, we need to develop further research to continue to identify the little movements that the students are making in their quest to wrap their heads around a difficult and complex topic.

Using a controversial topic in FYC is not the only way to successfully structure and teach this important foundational course to first year college students, but it does offer a multitude of possibilities and we are just beginning to research the dynamics of such courses more deeply. I would encourage the field of rhetoric and composition to continue to investigate the specific impact a topic might have on the rhetorical knowledge and decisions of a first year writing student. We shouldn't continue to advocate the use of these courses unless we are more certain of their intentional – and unintentional – aims. This study provides a few answers as to how a topic might work; if anything, we need to stop making assumptions about the positive outcomes of using a topic in FYC and continue to interrogate this normalized and often unquestioned

practice.

In spite of the difficulties in asserting any definitive answers to the idea of using a potentially sensitive theme like race as the organizing principal in a FYC course, I know that this experience has helped me define exactly what it is that I am trying to do as a composition teacher. I also recognize that I am obviously invested in the implementation and success of FYC's position in an undergraduate education, but I can still think of no other course which is more important in providing students the rhetorical tools to fully engage in critical thinking, often the one intellectual activity touted as the hallmark of a college education. Thus, one of the most important discussions we can have in the field of rhetoric and composition is the question of "how" we will organize a writing class in the current climate of economic crises and calls for further assessment and accountability in higher education; it's imperative that the faculty engaged in FYC continue to take the initiative of describing, critiquing, debating, and investigating the most effective methods of organizing a college-level writing course. If we can't convince most of our students to consider the power of language, then we are only contributing to a world in which words blindly shape the way(s) that people think about the ideas and other people.

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## APPENDICES



a prospective employer: you will encounter all of these and more over the course of your academic career (whether it be two-year or four-year).

The main purpose of English 101 is to introduce you to the conventions of academic writing and critical thinking. And while academic writing means different things to different people, there are some common elements. We write to communicate to others – whether they are colleagues, professionals in their fields, or friends. We write to convince others that our position has validity. We write to discover new things about our world as well as ourselves. For that matter, the process of writing is epistemological – a *way of coming to know*. Writing can become a medium for self-reflection, self-expression, and communication, a means of coming to know for both the writer and reader.

Learning to write requires writing. Writing is a craft, and as a craft, writing can be learned and refined. As we delve into this semester, I hope you will discover also that writing, reading, and learning are intricately intermeshed. Writing is based on experience-experience with a text or personal experience-and that reading is a means to broadening experiences, especially when actively engaged by reading dialectically (as opposed to polemically). Much of the readings, lectures, and discussions may challenge more commonly accepted assumptions and beliefs. You will be required to critically rethink and reevaluate popular concepts and ideas (this may also challenge your own ideas so please try to keep open perspective). One of the main goals for this class will be to try to understand how language informs and shapes our culture and society as well as our everyday lives and practices.

Special Note: Notice the “word cloud” on page one? You have signed up for a section of ENG 101 which will focus on the theme of race and ethnicity throughout the semester. Race is a topic that is ever present in our culture, yet rarely analyzed or discussed. This will be an unusual and, hopefully, interesting course.

I would also like you to know that I will be conducting research for my dissertation throughout this semester; this is why you will notice that the last page of this syllabus is an informed consent form that you must fill out at the end of the first day of class. We will talk more about this later in the class. BUT – Be absolutely aware that this course will still have the central components of any ENG 101 course. As with any course – everyone should come to class prepared to discuss the appropriate readings (whether a professional text or a student text).

### **Description**

According to the SWIC catalog: “English 101 is designed to help students write papers for a variety of general and specific audiences. Students will learn to recognize features that make writing effective, and learn different strategies writers use while prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. Students will learn to read their own work more critically and to constructively criticize the work of others. The course also provides a brief introduction to the writing of source-supported papers and methods of documenting sources.”

I would like to add that, in addition to the learning how to use writing as a cognitive tool as outlined above, we will also work to understand how language = power.

### **Requirements:**

This course will have several kinds of writing assignments; in order to pass this class, you must complete all the assignments outlined below:

Four essays (and revision): You will do a great deal of reading and writing in this course. The reading assignments – in most cases – will be related to a particular writing assignment. Some of your writing will be in the form of revision (reworking, or “re-seeing,” previously written material). Ultimately, you will write four finished papers, approximately 800 - 1000 words each (typed and double-spaced, of course; this is usually in the ballpark of 3-4 pages), most of which are the result of substantial revision.

- (1) A Racial Autobiography: Our first assignment will be a personal reflection on how race impacts individual lives. I hope you see this writing task as a tool for developing and deepening a personal understanding of and insights around race.
- (2) Media Analysis: The media permeates and saturates virtually every aspect of our lives, but we seldom analyze it beyond our initial response to the product being peddled. However, in order to be effective consumers, that is exactly what we must do! We must turn on our brains and analyze what the images and products we are buying say about us -- both as individuals and as a society. For this assignment you must analyze a piece of media, which essentially means you must take that image, advertisement, or movie and break it into its components and examine those components carefully.
- (3) Historical Image Analysis: You will select an *iconic* (meaning important or enduring) *photograph* (not a painting, video, or other media) related to the discussion of race in this country, describe it to the readers and analyze how that photograph defines “race” or presents a particular view of a particular historical moment.
- (4) Class-to-Class Dialogue: Because I will be conducting two ENG 101 sections with the same theme, you will compose a letter/ essay to someone in the other class section. These essays will be created out of writing prompts that will pass between the two classes via our class blogs (see below!).

Student Blog (throughout the semester) – What is a blog? Most people define a **blog as a type of website that is usually arranged in chronological order from the most recent “post” (or entry) at the top of the main page to the older entries towards the bottom. It’s sort of like an online diary/ journal. For this class, your blog** (using Blogspot) will be an opportunity for you to “journal” about your ideas in an online

forum. Other students in the class (including the instructor) will “drop in” on your thoughts and offer feedback and conversation. You will get credit for posting and commenting.

Our class blog (we will all be attached to this blog at some point) has the following web address: <http://eng101spring2010.wordpress.com/>

One multimedia “essay” (end of the semester): Our last assignment does not have to be a “formal essay.” By learning how to engage a variety of technologies in order to tell a cohesive story, you can still engage in the learning outcomes of the formal essay but doing so with new technologies, technologies that I would argue many students need to learn in order to become successful in the 21st century job market. You may, for example, produce a short video (using a Flip Video) reflecting some part of the story of “race” in this country/ some aspect of what you have critically analyzed this semester. There are endless possibilities for this assignment! You will present your multimedia “essay” at the end of the semester (this assignment will serve as our final for the course).

Other Assignments: We will share our writing quite a lot in this class so you will be required to sometimes bring hard copies of what you have so far (in terms of a draft).

**Late Papers and assignments:** The pace of this course is fast. To keep up, you must turn all papers and assignments on the date they are listed on the syllabus. Papers are due the minute class begins, no exceptions.



### **Class Materials:**

Guess what?! You will pay nothing for the materials you need in this course! We will be reading a classic non-fiction book, *Black Like Me*, written by John Howard Griffin. (A general summary of the text can be found here:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_Like\\_Me](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Like_Me)). I will provide each of you with your own copy of this book that you can write it and keep for yourself. I will also be providing you with a Memorex 2GB portable flash drive that is also yours to keep at the end of the semester. I expect you to use this flash drive to save all of your work in this course.

Some of our texts in this class will also include films like *Crash* and the documentary *The N Word* as well as articles that we will download from the internet.

### **Class Policies:**

Class attendance is required. Absences will detract from your grade. According to the SWIC Catalog, “If you are absent more times during the semester than the number of times the class meets per week, you may be dropped from the course at the discretion of the instructor” (page 24). Tardiness also disrupts class proceedings. Two instances of lateness count as one unexcused absence. So -- be on time! **IMPORTANT:** It is your responsibility to let me know after class if you walked in late. This is so important! So don't forget if you happen to walk in late!

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course. Cite any information using MLA guidelines (for example, if at some time you wish to use a quotation from an essay that we read). Plagiarized work will result in a failing grade for the class. For those seeking online help, the following web pages have some great MLA information:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/> (Online Writing Lab at Purdue)

[http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/p04\\_c08\\_o.html](http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/p04_c08_o.html) (Author of a great textbook)

OK, a few things to help me **not** get annoyed!

- Never, ever ask me “Did I miss something important?” when you miss a class. Of course you did! You also don't need to give me long, involved “excuses.” What you missed is more important than why you missed.
- Give me at least a week to grade your papers. Asking me the next day if I have graded your paper will cause unneeded stress on your teacher. Seriously. I know you want your essay back ASAP.
- Please don't continue Facebooking or emailing once class has started. I promise – we will have breaks when you can do this!

- I will not withdraw students after mid-term. If you fail to show up – or do not turn in all 5 of the essays – you will receive an “F.”
- Turn off your cell phones in class. If a phone goes off in class, I may ask you to withdraw from the class. No joke.
- Attending class on Day 2 indicates your willingness to abide by the policies and assignments outlined in this syllabus. You can’t argue with me later about the assignments. End of story.

### **The Americans with Disabilities Act**

Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the Special Services Center at campus extension 5368 (Belleville Campus) or campus extension 6652 (Granite City Campus) as soon as possible to ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

### **Safe Zone Program**

I am a member of the Safe Zone Program: Allies for Gender and Sexual Diversity. This means that I promise to provide confidential support for members of the college community who are gay, lesbian, transgender, intersex, or cross-dressing. I am available to listen if you wish to talk or to refer you to appropriate resources in the community.

### **Writing = Money???**

Since last year, English Department here at the SWGCC has offered a scholarship opportunity for any student completing (or enrolled) in ENG 101 or ENG 102. All you have to do is submit an essay that you wrote in one of these classes and you could win one \$500 award! Pretty cool, eh? All you need is a 3.0 GPA and be either a part-time or full-time student here on our campus (only our campus!). You must apply at the following web site: <https://estormcontent.swic.edu/foundation/scholarships/> (or contact the Southwestern Illinois College Foundation via the SWIC web page!).



## Class Behavior

I know this course is going to be different than perhaps any (writing) class you have ever had before. Certainly, any discussion about such a touchy topic like race suggests the possibility of dissention and hard feelings. However, we live largely **segregated** lives. We rarely understand the **differences** between us. And we think in ways that keep the legacies of distrust **alive**. This has not **changed** with the election of Barack Obama.

So, to help us better structure this class, I will be using the text *Courageous Conversations about Race* by Glenn E. Singleton and Curtis Linton. In this book, the authors suggest that we must concur with four agreements when focusing on such a controversial writing topic. We must all agree to (1) stay engaged, (2) speak our own truth, (3) experience discomfort, and (4) expect and accept non-closure. Many of you will be going into fields and professions in which race may play a factor in how people perceive and respond to you. Do we talk and listen honestly about race? Certainly, our world is becoming more globalized and this is a discussion that can help engage us as active Americans. Each of you will have something important to bring to the table.

Educator Margaret Wheatley has asked, “What would it feel like to be listening to each other ... about what disturbs and troubles us, about what gives us hope, about our yearnings, our fears, our prayers, and our children?” To gain full access to her question – *what would it feel like?* – we need to venture into a difficult conversation, one that can clearly make everyone downright uncomfortable. Often, I have found that the very best writing is personal. I realize that this is uncomfortable for some people, but it is also rewarding when you get thoughtful and constructive feedback. It is never appropriate to make fun of others’ writing or ideas, but honestly and respectfully challenging ideas helps writers clarify and further explain their ideas and arguments. As we get to know each other, I hope that you will be comfortable both sharing your work and responding to the writing of peers. This class requires a high level of cooperation and thoughtfulness as you work together to become better writers.

Obviously, this class won’t work well without universal respect (even if you disagree with someone!). Good listening skills and good classroom behavior are required. I truly believe that the ideas we talk about as we discuss race and other diversity concerns

can have a profound influence on the way **you** critically think – and write – about the world. Thus, you are expected to actively and productively participate in class discussions and activities.

**Important Web Sites that we will Examine in this class:**

“Talk about Race? Relax, It’s OK” (From *The New York Times*, January 14, 2009)

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/15/fashion/15race.html>

“Why I Talk About Race” by Mary Mitchell (Blog posting from 2006)

[http://blogs.suntimes.com/mitchell/2006/07/why\\_i\\_talk\\_about\\_race\\_1.html](http://blogs.suntimes.com/mitchell/2006/07/why_i_talk_about_race_1.html)

PBS web site for a documentary called *Race: The Power of Illusion*

[http://www.pbs.org/race/001\\_WhatIsRace/001\\_00-home.htm](http://www.pbs.org/race/001_WhatIsRace/001_00-home.htm)

“Understanding RACE” (A Project of the American Anthropological Association)

<http://www.understandingrace.org/lived/index.html>

“Is Race Real?” (a conversation for those of you interested in science and biology!)

<http://raceandgenomics.ssrc.org/>

ENG 101 (Spring 2010)  
 Essay Assignment #1; Racial Autobiography  
 Writing Workshop: Wednesday, February 10  
Due: Friday, February 12

First, do the following: Try to answer one or two (or more) of these prompts! Don't worry about grammar – just write!

1. Family:

Are your parents the same race? Same ethnic group? Are your brothers and sisters? What about your extended family -- uncles, aunts, etc.?

Where did your parents grow up? What exposure did they have to racial groups other than their own? (Have you ever talked with them about this?)

What ideas did they grow up with, regarding race relations? (Again, do you know? Have you ever talked with them about this? Why or why not?)

Do you think of yourself as white? (If you're not white, do you think of yourself as black, or Asian-American, etc.?) Or just as "human"? Do you think of yourself as a member of an ethnic group? What is its importance to you?

2. Neighborhood:

What is the racial makeup of the neighborhood you grew up in?

What was your first awareness of race? -- that there are different "races" and that you are one?

What was your first encounter with another race? Describe the situation.

Do you remember ever hearing the word "nigger"?

What messages do you recall getting from your parents about race? From others when you were little?

3. Elementary and Middle School:

What was the racial makeup of your elementary school? Teachers?

Think about the curriculum: what black Americans did you hear about? How did you celebrate Martin Luther King Day?

Cultural influences: TV, advertising, novels, music, movies, etc. What color God was presented to you? angels? Santa Claus? the tooth fairy! dolls?

What was the racial makeup of organizations you were in? Girl Scouts, soccer team, church, etc.?

#### 4. High School and community:

What was the racial makeup of your high school? Of its teachers?

Was there interracial dating? Any racial slurs? Any conflict with members of another race?

Have you ever felt or been stigmatized because of your race, gender, or ethnic group membership? Because of your sexual orientation? social class?

What else was important about your high-school years — maybe something that didn't happen in high school but during that time?

What is the racial makeup of your home town? of your metropolitan area? What of your experiences there, in summer camp, summer jobs, etc.?

#### 5. Present and Future:

What is the racial makeup of this institution? of your circle(s) of friends here? Does it meet your needs?

Realistically, think about where you envision living as you start a family. What is its racial makeup? social class makeup? What occupation do you foresee, 10 years hence? What is its racial makeup? social class makeup?

#### 6. General:

What's the most important image, encounter, whatever, you've had regarding race? Have you felt threatened? In the minority? Have you felt privileged?

What do you want to tell us that we didn't ask about? About handicap, sexual orientation, social class, whatever?

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OK – so how do we get to an essay from here? As we have talked about in class, a solid college essay will have both a thesis (main point, argument, claim, whatever you want to call it) and supporting evidence (in other words, back up your assertions).

Your assignment is to write a racial autobiography, a personal reflection on how race impacts your individual life. The questions above should help you figure out how consciously aware you are of race. How might any of these events or conversations

related to race and/ or racism have impacted your current perspectives and/ or experiences? You need to pick one angle for this essay (if you answer all the questions above, you should have a ton of different directions that you could go in!). If you are struggling with this assignment, come and see me as soon as possible – I might be able to help!

So here is the assignment in a nutshell ..... Write an essay (ballpark 3 pages) in which you select one issue/ concept/ conversation about race in terms of how race has impacted your life.

Ground Rules:

- Using the “I” is fine since you are talking about yourself;
- Your aim is for approximately 3 pages;
- Make sure your final essay is double-spaced, Times New Roman font (size 12);
- If you decide to use a specific quotation (i.e. something from Black Like Me that you want to bring in), make sure you use quotation marks and make it clear where the quotation comes from
- Make sure you proofread and edit your final version of your essay.

ENG 101 (Spring 2010)

Essay #2

Due for both classes: Friday, March 12

(Folks in the Monday afternoon class will need to email me the paper as a Microsoft Word attachment by noon on Friday).



OK, this paper is going to be a media analysis: The media permeates and saturates virtually every aspect of our lives, but we seldom analyze it beyond our initial response to the “product” being peddled. However, in order to be effective consumers, that is exactly what we must do! We must turn on our brains and analyze what the images and products we are “buying” say about us -- both as individuals and as a society. For this assignment you must analyze a piece of media, which essentially means you must take that image, advertisement, or movie and break it into its components and examine those components carefully. I would love it if you focused your discussion on race (and you might be able to use quotations from Black Like Me in your written discussion) but you don’t have to if you wish to talk about something else like class or gender, for example.

So here are your choices ....

Prompt #1:

Analyze stereotypes (or lack thereof) in either a movie or a video game of your

choosing. I recommend choosing a movie/game you can sit through a couple of times. Things you should consider when looking at the construction of stereotypes might include cinematography, dialogue, lighting, music, story, genre, and audience expectations. Then try to draw some conclusions about the audience of this particular movie/game. Are they reinforcing these ideas by paying for a ticket/ buying the game? How culpable is the audience in what is displayed on the screen? Although in a movie, the movie itself is the product, be aware of any product placement or instances where they are trying to get the audience to buy or buy into a certain thing.

Note: Do not spend more than one paragraph summarizing the movie/game. Although it may help to choose a critically acclaimed movie/game or one that has won an award of some nature, you do not need to. If you do choose a movie/game with serious or extensive reviews, do not simply recycle what the critics say!



### Prompt #2:

Print ads make a complex argument in a very limited space – even if they are on huge billboards. Analyze a print advertisement of your choosing (you may want to pick one that you feel strongly about). Look both at the appeals and the visuals presented in the ad that assist with these appeals. How are these appeals conveyed? How do they affect the audience? Who is that audience? What does that say about the audience that looks supports or responds to these ads? You may want to start by describing the advertisement; if so, keep it brief. The real description should be sprinkled throughout the various paragraphs that are analyzing different aspects of the advertisement. Berger's "Checklist for Analyzing Print Advertisements" (attached to this assignment)

might help here. Consider things such as: who is in the ad (is it anyone famous?), color, space, mood, design, product being sold, models used (race, gender, class of those models), use of text, and where the ad is found. Also, try to boil down the advertisement's argument to its most extreme message.

Note: You will not be turning in a copy of the advertisement with your paper so your paper needs to be sure that it is descriptive enough so that your audience can "see" the advertisement.

Prompt #3:

We are going to watch the recent documentary by Chris Rock, *Good Hair* (2009). The film has reviewers who love it – and hate it! So write an essay where you talk about your personal response or take on this film. What do you think about the film says about the political history of hair? In your analysis, make sure that you use cultural artifacts (i.e. advertisements, film or television scenes, etc) and even your own personal experience to help make your point.

Appendix for all three writing prompts:

What does it mean to look at Gender/Racial/ Class Stereotypes? For gender, show how the characters or models are either typically feminine or masculine or how they do not fit the normal categorization of gender, as well as the implications of this gender "norm." If looking at race, are they stereotyped? Are the models/characters simply tokens intended to appeal to a great audience? Are the models even that ethnically diverse or are they extreme representations of their race? Do they act naturally or do they seem false? If the main character is a certain race, how are other races situated around him/her? When looking at class, see if the main "character" is part of a certain class. How can you tell? How are other classes represented? Are they stereotyped, offensive, over the top, or more moderate? Does that help indicate who this product is being marketed to? When you check, see if the models/characters are sexualized, objectified, stereotyped, or realistic. Look at their physical characteristics, emotional behavior, actions, clothing, and word choice. These are important focal points for this assignment. Virtually all of these ideas can also then be applied to the audience.

ENG 101 (Spring 2010)

Essay #3 Assignment

MWF Class: Due on Friday, April 9

Mon Eve Class: Due on Monday, April 12

“Crashing” Into Racial/ Ethnic Baggage

The film we will be watching in class – *Crash* – won three Academy Awards in 2005 – the Best Editing, the Best Screenplay-Original and Best Picture. The film is about racial and social tensions in Los Angeles. A self-described "passion piece" for the director, Paul Haggis, *Crash* was inspired by a real life incident in which his Porsche was carjacked outside a video store on Wilshire Boulevard in 1991.

The film offers up some hard to answer questions: What assumptions does one carry about different cultures? What implications do assumptions have on one’s ability to effectively communicate cross-and inter-culturally? How about the ability to develop relationships across the color line? What does diversity mean anyway?

So on to your assignment. In fact, you have two options for essay #3. The only “rule” is that you must include *Crash* in your discussion in some way, shape, or form. You must also, of course, have a specific thesis/ focus and you must support that argument. And that’s it as far as rules go!

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Option #1: Answer one of the following questions:

- What does this film say about “whiteness”? (we will be looking at a reading soon!)
- How were stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination depicted in the film?
- Discuss the complexity of the one or more of the characters in terms of how he/she/they either embodied or dissolved a stereotype.
- Discuss some examples of differences within cultures and similarities across cultures.
- What was the most interesting aspect of the movie from your perspective? How does this aspect highlight what we have been talking about in terms of race all semester?
- Think about the title of this movie. What does it exactly mean? Could the title say anything about our little world here in the metro St Louis area?
- You could work with the composition of the film itself. Pay attention to the beginning and the end of the movie. They are similar: a ring road and circulation – maybe suggesting that our life is a never ending circle?

- This film was made, of course, many years after John Howard Griffin wrote *Black Like Me*. Do you see any connections between the film and the book?

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Option Two: Choose a scene from the film that fits under one of the following “social constructs” (i.e. categories we humans have made) and critically discuss how it “works” and might connect back to “real” life as you know it:

Race – Consider the experienced police officer (Matt Dillon) insisting on flashing his lights after being informed that the license plate does not match the reported stolen vehicle belonging to the district attorney (Brandon Frazer), and proceeding to pull over a couple, and the subsequent harassment upon taking note of their race.

Class – Consider Anthony’s (Ludacris) reaction in his attempt to steal a luxury vehicle from Cameron Thayer (Terrence Howard) and coming to realize the driver was not the White person he assumed to be cruising in the Lincoln Navigator.

Power and Privilege – Consider the rookie officer’s (Ryan Phillippe) attempt to file a complaint and go on record about his partner’s behavior and what was discussed in the conversation between him and the Lieutenant (Keith David).

Gender – Consider the verbal treatment imposed on the young Persian doctor (Bahar Soomekh) by the gun store owner (Jack McGee) following her inquiry about bullet options.

Culture – Consider the gun store owner’s sarcastic assumption (even if jokingly) of the Persian store owner (Sahun Toub) as an Arab planning a Jihad, referring to him as Osama, and suggesting that he plans to engage in acts of terrorism.

Identity – Consider the verbal dispute between the film producer (Terrence Howard) and his wife (Thandie Newton) as they question each others’ identity and level of Blackness.

Write *clearly* and *concisely*. Do not BS, wander, or free-associate. In short, cut to the chase: everything you write should be essential for making your point – if it isn’t, don’t include it. Use examples (whenever possible, try to think of your own).

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In your discussion, you will want to use the names of the characters as you work on being specific. So, for your information, here is a list of the cast:

<u>Actor’s Name</u>	<u>Character’s Name</u>
Sandra Bullock	Jean Cabot

Don Cheadle	Det. Graham Waters
Tony Danza	Fred
Keith David	Lt. Dixon
Loretta Devine	Shaniqua Johnson
Matt Dillon	Officer John Ryan
Jennifer Esposito	Ria
William Fichtner	Flanagan
Brendan Fraser	Rick Cabot
Nona M. Gaye	Karen
Terrence Howard	Cameron Thayer
Daniel Dae Kim	Park
Chris "Ludacris" Bridges	Anthony
Jack McGee	Gun Store Owner
Thandie Newton	Christine Thayer
Greg Kinnear	Choi
Michael Pena	Daniel
Ryan Phillippe	Officer Tom Hansen
Alexis Rhee	Kim Lee
Ashlyn Sanchez	Lara
Bahar Soomekh	Dorri
Larenz Tate	Peter Waters
Beverly Todd	Graham's mother
Shaun Toub	Farhad

ENG 101 (Spring 2010)  
 Essay Assignment #4

Due: Friday, May 7



Since her original blue-eye/ brown-eye experiment in 1968, many people have engaged in discussions with Jane Elliott. Some have hated her approach; others have commented that she genuinely discusses racial difficulties. As a class, I suspect that even each of us has a different response to her work. *Genuine dialogs on an issue represent not only a necessary step to intellectual growth, but such dialogs also lead to a better understanding of the issue itself.*

So what does this have to do with our new essay assignment?!

Your assignment is a dialog. I want you to respond to someone's comment from the three writing prompts that we will have on April 12 (Monday), April 19 (Monday), and April 21 (Wednesday). The "someone" you respond to must be in the opposite class (so a MWF student will respond to a student in the Monday evening class; a Monday evening student will respond to a MWF student). You can find the comments from each class posted in our class wiki/web site (<http://eng101spring2009.pbworks.com/>). Under the "Pages and Files" tab, click on the "Essay 4 Conversations" folder. For each of the three texts that we examine on the three days mentioned above, there will be a separate folder for the MWF class and the Monday evening class.

So -- talk to that person. Explain -- through examples and observations -- why you feel the way you do. To make your point clear, you could use examples from television shows and films (including anything we have used this semester), you could relate a personal experience, you could use specifics from any of the readings we have used this semester (Black Like Me or "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" for example), or you could use anything else to support your argument. Of course, the goal here is to state a focus and then support that idea, but be sure to keep an open mind and be aware of your audience (in other words, be respectful!). As usual, you are shooting for approximately 3 pages, typed, double-spaced.

Some Notes:

- Assume that all of the comments from people raise interesting, insightful points;
- I would like you to respond to just one comment, but if several could be merged into one, specific response, then this is OK, too;
- You could disagree, agree, or state some position in the middle;
- Don't assume your audience is familiar with any of your examples (so explain fully!);
- Proofread, proofread, proofread!

ENG 101 (Spring 2010)

“Essay” #5

Due: MWF Class – May 19 at 11:30 AM in our classroom (time of our final)

Monday Evening Class – May 17 at 4 PM in our classroom (time of our final)

[You will give a *short* oral presentation of your “essay”; be open to questions from others]

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In place of a traditional final, we will write or create one last assignment in which you must respond to one of the following prompts/ questions:

- Given your experience in this class, should ENG 101 continue to be a required course for students seeking an academic degree?
- What specific advice would you give to students beginning this writing course next semester? How do you succeed? Fail?
- Has your approach to the concept of “race” been altered or modified in any way during the past sixteen weeks? If so, in what way(s) specifically?
- Create a 5 minute visual definition essay centered upon the phrase, “the truth of race in America.”

In a nutshell, I would like to see signs of intelligent life. You know that an argument and support for that argument are the two most important characteristics of any writing assignment. These traits are equally important if you decide to create a visual argument (instead of a written essay). So ... that is what I am primarily looking for here with this last assignment (and, of course, you should proofread and edit anything you create!).

You can write a more traditional essay (like our previous four assignments) or you can try something more multi-media (i.e. PowerPoint, a video, music, Flickr, Twitter, etc). You could even blend several genres together.

I am open to a text co-written by a small group.

Big tip for those going the multi-media route: Try your presentation on a computer or DVD or CD player (whichever you plan to use for final presentation) on campus before the day you are to present it to the class. Check with me ahead of time about the method of presentation you want to use, so that I can have all the equipment you need in the class during the final exam period. Make sure that your presentation is saved in more than one way and place.

## APPENDIX B

### DATA CATEGORIES

#### **Acknowledging Writing:**

Definition: Code as “Acknowledging Writing” (AW) any sentence with a reference to recognizing the complexities inherent in the concept of race. This type of writing reflects varying levels of critical thinking in terms of race as a topic.

“Acknowledging Writing” may include instances where the speaker ...

- refers to a connection made between one’s past experiences or knowledge with race, e.g. “I started to pay attention to factors race plays in my home” or “My assumption was racism would disperse after the end of slavery.”
- refers to questioning dominant ideologies, e.g. “What exactly do white people get discriminated for?”
- refers to an acknowledge that language is powerful, e.g. “When discussing the subject of race, I think it’s important to choose our verbiage carefully.”
- refers to an attempt to connect race to one’s current thinking an any topic, e.g. “Perhaps they formed this white power gang because they were lacking closeness elsewhere.”
- refers to an attempt to connect to someone else’s way of thinking about race, e.g. “I understand your frustrations about race.”

#### **Being Writing:**

Definition: Code as “Being Writing” (BW) any sentence with an explicit reference to racial group membership (as a member or an outsider). A sentence may indicate a common shared experience with another individual, group, or other relationship. Additionally, this type of sentence might desire some type of harmony with an individual or group.

“Being Writing” may include instances where the speaker ...

- refers to the existence of large group membership, e.g. “Blacks, Asians, and Mexicans are discriminated against daily” or “Racist individuals are everywhere.”
- refers to suggestions of group empathy, e.g. “Just think how it feels to be black.”
- refers to the idea that an outside group has no possibility of understanding an inside group, e.g. “The blue-eyed people are finally feeling the torture of a brown eyed person.”

- refers to overt agreement (harmony) with another individual or group, e.g. “I agree with what you are saying.”

### **Defending Writing:**

Definition: Code as “Defending Writing” (DW) any sentence with anger or frustration directed toward the discussion of race as a topic. Such a sentence might show anger toward the instructor, another individual, or a text.

“Defending Writing” may include instances where the speaker ...

- refers to anger directed at the class topic, e.g. “In this class, I get the impression that it’s only the white people who are racist and that is not true.”
- refers to anger directed at the instructor or a text, e.g. “I hate it when the book is supposed to make me feel guilty as a white person.”

### **Fixing Writing:**

Definition: Code as “Fixing Writing” (FW) any sentence with a desire or an attempt to fix or change thinking and/ or comments perceived to be racist. The writer might likely embrace an activist perspective.

“Fixing Writing” may include instances where the speaker ...

- refers to some version of the word “action,” e.g. “Your comment demands action.”
- refers to encouraging alternative viewpoints, e.g. “Race is not vital in your life but it is in others.”
- refers to a strong difference of opinion, “I strongly disagree with you.”

### **Observing Writing:**

Definition: Code as “Observing Writing” (OW) any sentence with a reference to the term “race” as a concept with no emotional entanglements. Such a sentence will indicate a level of separation or detachment from racial phenomenon, identity, prejudice, or bias.

“Observing Writing” may include instances where the speaker ...

- refers to witnessing race without any personal involvement, e.g. “I used to hear the word on television but I never thought about it” or “I have always looked at race as not a serious concern.”
- refers to other people having emotional difficulties with race, e.g. “Growing up, I figured out that people in my family had a problem with race.”

- refers to strong racial language with no emotion, e.g. “I heard my grandmother say that I liked dating Niggers.”
- refers to the verb “heard” as opposed to a more active stance, e.g. “I can remember the first time I heard the N word.”
- refers to comments that recognize the (possible) emotion associated with race but refuse to make the connection, e.g. “I don’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings.”
- refers to the passive “seems to,” e.g. “America seems to have a race problem.”

### **Perceiving Writing:**

Definition: Code as “Perceiving Writing” (PW) any sentence with a reference to struggling with the concept of race via the metaphor of “sight” or the metaphor of “learning.” Such writing often highlights a new understanding of some kind.

“Perceiving Writing” may include instances where the speaker ...

- refers to some version of the word “see,” e.g. “The text has been a critical eye opener for me,” “This was my first time seeing race,” or “That comment caught my eye.”
- refers to some version of the words “I think,” e.g. “I thought you might be naïve in your response to race.”
- refers to the direct act of learning, e.g. “I learned from my brother’s mistakes.”

### **Realizing Writing:**

Definition: Code as “Realizing Writing” (RW) any sentence with a reference to the understanding that race is a valid topic of study that can offer alternative identity knowledge. The writing may show a specific connection to a text encountered in the writing classroom.

“Realizing Writing” may include instances where the speaker ...

- refers to pleasure in reading/ watching a class text, e.g. “I enjoyed watching *The Complete Blue Eyed* experiment.”
- refers to race as a new identity marker, e.g. “Before taking this class, I never associated race with my life”
- refers to the recognition that race is an identity marker, e.g. “Race has impacted my life.”
- refers to other individuals as being exposed to race as a new (or continuing) identity marker, e.g. “The participants in Jane Elliot’s experiment have had their outlook on racism forever changed.”
- refers to the possibility of increased awareness, e.g. “Jane Elliot may lead us to a new understanding of race.”

## Treading Writing:

Definition: Code as “Treading Writing” (TW) any sentence with a reference to an easy or simple explanation for the resolution of difficult racial issues, feelings, or problems. This type of writing often indicates an unwillingness to recognize the complexities associated with a topic like race.

“Treading Writing” may include instances where the speaker ...

- refers to one action to solve a complicated problem, e.g. “This one comment solves racism.”
- refers to race as a dead issue, e.g. “Since we have a black president, race is no longer an issue.”
- refers to friendships or other relationships as proof that one is not racist, e.g. “I have friends who are white, black, Mexican, and Asian.”
- refers to a lack of recognizing racial divisions, e.g. “I don’t see race,” “I am color blind,” or “All people are humans.”
- refers to a complete separation from one’s racial identity as a means of solving racial problems, e.g. “Race has never been an issue with me.”
- refers to race problems as an inevitable fact, e.g. “We will always have race problems” or “That’s just the way things are.”
- refers to a simple agreement with another position without explanation, e.g. “I agree with you” or “I agree with that idea.”

**APPENDIX C**  
**DATA TABLES**

Day Class Data Tables:

Aaron: Essay 1

<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Category</b>
There are a great number of topics/ ideas that cause groups of people to dislike or even hate other groups of people.	<b>OW</b>
One of the leading issues is one's skin color.	<b>OW</b>
At times it can affect social standing with another person while being the only factor that is ever even considered.	<b>OW</b>
I recognize that there is undoubtedly a problem with racism in the U.S.	<b>AW</b>
However, I refuse to be a part of that problem.	<b>FW</b>
No single person holds any more God given value than another.	<b>TW</b>

## Aaron: Essay 4

Sentence	Category
Dear Sherry, I have a few questions for you.	
As a white person I feel like maybe I am missing something.	<b>BW</b>
Perhaps I am incapable of understanding what you meant when you stated "That's why black people can endure many hardships in our lives. I mean we went through slavery and are still here" as your comment on <i>The Blue Eyed Experiment</i> .	<b>FW</b>
I don't understand what you meant.	<b>FW</b>
Why does slavery keep getting brought up as an issue that divides whites and blacks today?	<b>AW</b>

## Ashley: Essay 1

Sentence	Category
Race has impacted my life in a big way.	AW
Growing up as a Caucasian girl, I was surrounded by people of many other different races and ethnic groups.	BW
My neighborhood, my school, family members and people all around me were all from different races.	BW
I can remember the very first time I ever heard the "N" word.	OW
I used to hear it on television quite a bit when I was younger, and people would just throw the word around like it wasn't a big deal, but I never really thought anything of it.	OW
Then as I got older I would hear kids say it at school just playing around with one another, but the actual very first time I heard the word and could understand what it meant was maybe when I was about 13.	OW
I was dating an African American boy and I was living with my Aunt at the time, so I brought him over to the house to meet her, then a few days later I heard her saying to someone that I liked dating "Niggers."	OW
So I had realized that that was a bad term to call an African American, and when I told him what she had said he was upset and irritated at the fact that she couldn't accept her niece dating someone of African American race.	RW

## Ashley: Essay 4

Sentence	Category
Dear Alicia, I have chosen to analyze the comment you made towards the <i>Complete Blue eyed</i> experiment.	
You made a statement that I found was completely wrong and appalling.	<b>FW</b>
Your exact words were, "Like I've said from the beginning, I never ever, ever see a black person being dealt wrong, but I see it with white people all the time. I believe that there is still racism out there but I think that white people are more the ones getting treated badly."	
Personally, I feel that you need to open your eyes to the world around you.	<b>FW</b>
It is ridiculous that you think that white people are more the ones getting treated badly!	<b>FW</b>
It is true that white people are also discriminated towards, but come on, do you really not see how other races are still being treated unfairly in 2010?	<b>FW</b>
Blacks, Mexicans, Middle Eastern's, Asians, and every other race is discriminated towards daily.	<b>BW</b>
What exactly do white people get discriminated for?	<b>AW</b>
Not much at all because whites have most of the privileges!	<b>AW</b>

## Brenda: Essay 1

Sentence	Category
The saying "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" isn't true.	
Sometimes the hurtful words that your peers say to you can hurt more than getting a punch in the stomach.	
Race has been a problem for as far back as I know of, and to this day it hasn't gotten much better.	<b>TW</b>
Race doesn't just mean color; you can be racist against someone for whom they love, their religion, gender, or even where they come from.	<b>AW</b>
When you see someone don't be so quick to judge, you never know who that person could be, or what they have gone through.	<b>TW</b>
Everyone is different, you have to except not everyone is just like you, look on the inside because deep down that's the part that counts.	<b>TW</b>

Note: I used her last paragraph for coding (first had no connection to race)

## Brenda: Essay 4

Sentence	Category
<p>Dear Jon, in your comment about the White Girl article you said, "so I haven't read the whole article yet but so far it seems that Lonnae is mad at Kim for not owning up to her blackness. Kim doesn't understand much about racism because they never talked about it in her home. Race is a major issue to Lonnae. She thinks about the future of the blacks and doesn't see one. It bothers me that people can be some hateful towards each other. We are really not that different."</p>	
<p>I agree with your statement.</p>	<p><b>BW</b></p>
<p>We are not different, so why do people make such a big deal about skin color, we are all people, we all have the same feelings, we all go to school, and we all have jobs.</p>	<p><b>TW</b></p>
<p>I don't blame Lonnae for being mad at Kim for not owning up to her "blackness," if everyone who is of mixed race only says they are white, then the black community is losing people that could be important to them, and that could make a difference.</p>	<p><b>AW</b></p>
<p>Someone of the mixed race gets to see the world in both views, white and black.</p>	<p><b>BW</b></p>
<p>This isn't fair to someone who only gets to see the world from one side.</p>	<p><b>AW</b></p>
<p>When someone says they aren't racist, I don't believe them, everyone is to an extent.</p>	<p><b>AW</b></p>
<p>I personally, try to see both sides, I try not to judge, but I'm just as guilty as the next person when it comes to judging someone.</p>	<p><b>AW</b></p>

<p>Two of my best friends are black, and one is a lesbian, they are two of the most caring people I know.</p>	<p><b>TW</b></p>
<p>Sometimes I have to deal with people saying rude remarks or the glances because I choose to hang out with them, but to me it's worth it because I have found great friends.</p>	<p><b>TW</b></p>

## Dave: Essay 1

Sentence	Category
Looking back, I feel that I was blessed to have had the opportunities to know so many different kinds of people.	<b>AW</b>
I laugh at the fools who generalize a race by the actions of a few.	<b>AW</b>
It is mind boggling to see how passionately hateful racist are.	<b>AW</b>
I feel sorry for them because I know they are hurting themselves along with others because of an idea.	<b>AW</b>
Times are changing, as the population grows and people mix.	<b>OW</b>
Currently there are things that are more acceptable today than when I was a kid 20 years ago.	<b>OW</b>
There are more bi-racial relationships, racially-diverse TV shows and what do you know, a black president.	<b>AW</b>

Note: I used his last paragraph since the first one did not mention or focus on race.

## Dave: Essay 4

Sentence	Category
Alicia, When you stated in your comment, "like I said from the beginning I never see a black person being delt wrong but I see it with white people all the time."	
I tried too Imagined a world where the majority ethnicity is the victim of inequality.	<b>AW</b>
As ridiculous, as it sounds, I have heard many people say that they do not see minorities being treated unfairly.	<b>AW</b>
Instead, they proclaim that the majority group which just so happens to be white is the helpless victims who are treated unjustly by whom they seem to never name.	<b>AW</b>
When I hear this, I know that the person who makes such a statement is probably ignorant of what minorities have to deal with everyday.	<b>AW</b>
I would love to hear of the horrific experiences that these poor white folks have to endure.	<b>AW</b>

## Erika: Essay 1

Sentence	Category
Young people are like sponges.	
They soak up everything they see and hear.	
Wrong or right, it doesn't matter.	
Children don't know the difference.	
So when these children's parents express their feelings about important subjects such as race and racism, the children begin to share the same feelings.	<b>AW</b>
These children then start on their own journey discovering the world, spreading the tainted values their parents taught them to their children, and the racism circle never ends.	<b>AW</b>

## Erika: Essay 4

Sentence	Category
<p>I fully understand what Joan Niepart was talking about when she said, "I still struggle with fear when I'm in an environment in which there are more African Americans than European Americans. I think it stems from being raised in a home in which it was beat into our heads – not to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. The wrong place was Madison or Venice – due to black violence towards the white man. These conversations with my parents have never left me. It's unfortunate. I wish I could change this way of thinking. Fear is a terrible emotion."</p>	
<p>That is what I have been trying to say this whole semester.</p>	<b>FW</b>
<p>I'm glad to see that someone else feels the same way as I do.</p>	<b>BW</b>

## Esther: Essay 1

<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Category</b>
Before I began taking this course, I never associated race with being a direct issue in my everyday life.	<b>OW</b>
I've always looked at it as something that's not a serious concern and usually a matter that my family, friends, and other close to me have joked about.	<b>OW</b>
Since I've received to write this racial autobiography, I've began to observe more closely the ones close to me.	<b>RW</b>
I started to pay attention to factors race play in my home life due to my parents experience growing up.	<b>RW</b>

## Esther: Essay 4

Sentence	Category
Dear Alicia, While going through the Monday evening classes' comments on the article "White Girl" your comment caught my eye.	<b>PW</b>
You decided to respond to the statics that Dianna gave us about the rate of black males not finishing high school or going to college: "I think it's crazy that black guys don't stay in school or go to college, I mean if a white guy can do it then certainly a black guy can."	
This particular part of your statement I felt was just ludicrous.	<b>FW</b>
It's not so much what you said that bothered me, but the context that you say it in.	<b>FW</b>
When I first read it I thought that you might be naïve or even a little racist honestly.	<b>FW</b>
Then I took several looks at this statement trying to see how you could come to such a conclusion and that maybe you were just trying to justify and say if one can do it than certainly so can the other.	<b>FW</b>
I sincerely hope that's your intention with it.	<b>FW</b>

## John: Essay 1

Sentence	Category
I was awakened one afternoon by a call informing me that a very close friend and coworker had just suffered a heart attack at the club I managed.	
By the time I arrived, he was already pronounced dead.	
The air had been sucked from the planet, leaving me unable to breath.	
People were crying and screaming all around me, but all I heard was a deafening silence.	
Minutes felt like hours as I stood over his body trying to make sense of what had happened, what needed to happen.	
I called the owner of the club to inform him of the tragedy, asking him if closing for the night would be the respectful thing to do.	
His response: "Can't we find another nigger to do his job?"	<b>OW</b>
Al was fifty years old, a respected family man, career minded, and had a joy for everything he did.	
He also happened to be black.	<b>OW</b>
This was my first time seeing real and true racism.	<b>AW</b>

## John: Essay 4

Sentence	Category
Dear Geneva, I am writing you this letter in response to your comments on <u>The Complete Blue Eyed</u> .	
My name is Jon Rice and I am in the Monday, Wednesday, Friday English 101 class.	
I enjoyed reading your thoughts and I understand your frustrations.	<b>BW</b>
I agree with what you are saying, Geneva.	<b>BW</b>
However, when discussing the subject of race, as well as racism, I think it's important to choose our verbiage carefully.	<b>AW</b>
You said, "I hate when people black and white walk around while their underpants hang out. That is disturbing to me."	
You used the word "hate," which translates to a feeling of dislike so strong that it demands action.	
A very powerful word indeed.	
I hope I am correct in assuming you do not plan on taking action against a person with a belt deficiency.	
I too feel strongly about this fashion faux pa.	
Looking at someone's boxers is the last thing I want to look at, especially in the summertime when it's hot outside.	

## Kate: Essay 1

Sentence	Category
How do we define our race today in this integrated country, the United States of America?	AW
It may be difficult for some people to define what ethnicity they are, but it is simple to find out where their family originates from.	AW
It is safe to say that everyone's family came from somewhere other than the United States at some point in history.	AW
Today nearly everyone in this country was new here through the eyes of their ancestors.	AW
Thus, it is unfortunate when we still judge other people by the color of their skin because we do we really know who we are related to?	AW
Someone in our family might not have been married to the same race, grown up in favorable areas of the country, or even grown up with the same ideas involving race relations.	AW
Our family's past is what we live and grow from in the present.	
It is just not human to judge those of other races especially when you could be related to them.	AW
Family is where the heart is; we wouldn't judge the ones we love, would we?	

## Kate: Essay 4

Sentence	Category
Who is black and who is white?	<b>BW</b>
By definition, white means you are a Caucasian or Non-Hispanic person with ancestors from areas of Europe, North Africa, or even the Middle East and black means a Black or Non-Hispanic person with origins in any of the black cultural groups of Africa.	<b>BW</b>
What happens when a person has one white parent and one black parent like Kim McClaren in the essay "White Girl"?	<b>AW</b>
She had to decide what race to mark on an application and ended up shocking some of her family.	<b>OW</b>
She chose the white box and Holly from the Monday evening stated, "I think it's wrong for Kim to lie, and check the white box. I do think they should have a biracial box, but she should be proud of where she comes from ..."	
Holly could not be more out of touch with reality in the world today.	<b>FW</b>
Kim had every right to choose what race she felt most comfortable calling herself especially in this multifaceted country.	<b>AW</b>
Yes, she is biracial, but some people like Kim want to know what race dominates them more and Kim obviously thought her duty in life was to live as a white woman.	<b>AW</b>
People have the right to choose their racial identity because they did not ask to have mixed backgrounds when they were born and no law prohibits them from that freedom of choice.	<b>AW</b>

## Kathy: Essay 1

<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Category</b>
When someone asks you, "Do you think of yourself as white, black, Asian, or any kind of race?" you will automatically say the color or race that you are.	<b>BW</b>
The thing is that's not what you are.	<b>AW</b>
Race is more than just a color.	<b>AW</b>
It's your ethnic group.	<b>AW</b>
Once that person asks you what your race is, some people will stop and think about the question before they give an answer.	<b>AW</b>
The truth is, we are all the same inside we all have cells, blood and muscles, they are pretty much the same.	<b>TW</b>

## Kathy: Essay 4

<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Category</b>
What would be the one reason why people don't get along with other people?	<b>AW</b>
Let me tell you why; because of our race!	<b>AW</b>
From day to day people are judged due to their color.	<b>BW</b>
No matter if you're black, white, mixed, or even if there was someone who was purple, the people of that race would get judged.	<b>TW</b>

## Lisa: Essay 1

Sentence	Category
Granite City, Illinois, is a small town still facing the horrors of segregation and racism from times past.	<b>OW</b>
As the stories go, Granite City had a “No Negroes after sun down” policy extending up until the late 1960s.	<b>OW</b>
Even after that law had been abolished, it wasn’t until a year before I was born, 1989, that African Americans were allowed in the downtown portion of town, West Granite, at all.	<b>OW</b>
But, even so, signs full of hate and death threats still littered the streets and telephone poles, keeping all those with dark skin towards the outskirts of the neighborhood.	<b>OW</b>
This is the town I was born and raised in.	<b>AW</b>

## Lisa: Essay 4

<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Category</b>
Personally, I would say if I wanted something that incredibly fake with a slight hint of lovey-dovey, idealistic nonsense, I would simply watch re-runs of The Oprah Winfrey Show.	<b>AW</b>
But I wanted something more from these comments.	<b>AW</b>
I wanted real, honest feelings about how, as an individual in today's society, this [race] really made them feel.	<b>AW</b>

## Lesley: Essay 1

Sentence	Category
I have never experienced any conflict with another race, but in my high school there was always a conflict.	OW
In my hometown of Collinsville, Illinois, I heard the word "Nigger" a lot from my dad's side of the family.	OW
I never paid attention or knew what it meant.	OW
My mom never said the word.	OW
She was not racist.	OW
I was born and raised in Collinsville, Illinois.	
There was a mixture of race since I could remember.	OW
I was always taught that white people belong with white people and black people belong with black people.	BW
The reason for that was because of what the society would think.	OW
The black people at my high school would always want to be "in-charge", or more dominant.	OW
They would make fun of the white people.	OW
When the white people would not let that happen, then they would get defensive.	OW

## Lesley: Essay 4

Sentence	Category
Dear Alicia, While reading your comment to the newspaper, "White Girl," you stated; "I think it's crazy that black guys don't stay in school or go to college, if a white guy can do it certainly a black guy could. I don't personally see anything that's holding anyone back from doing whatever they want in life."	
I would have to agree that you can do anything you want in life; however, I disagree that the black race can't be successful.	<b>FW</b>
Anyone can go as far in life as they want if you set your mind to it.	<b>TW</b>

## Mike: Essay 1

Sentence	Category
It should not matter what your race is, but unfortunately in some circumstances it does.	<b>AW</b>
In the United States there are many different types of families; some of mixed races and some of the same race, you may come across different types of families in your neighborhood, and you will also come into contact with different race at school.	<b>BW</b>
I live on the 2800 block of Willow Avenue, also known as the Glenview Subdivision in Granite City, IL.	
My parents have lived here for almost thirty-three years, even though both of my parents are Caucasian, and our subdivision is primarily of white, we also have a few different races living in our neighborhood.	<b>BW</b>
In our neighborhood we have a Mexican family as well as an African American male living with a Caucasian male.	<b>BW</b>
My neighborhood, however, has always been primarily white.	<b>BW</b>
My dad grew up in the same neighborhood we live in now, and he says it has always been that way.	<b>OW</b>

## Mike: Essay 4

Sentence	Category
Dear Sherry, I disagree with what you said: "I think it could happen if the whites keep degrading black people. It's really said [sad] when you think [it]. This [is] supposed to be the country of the free. It doesn't feel free to me."	<b>FW</b>
This was the part of your comment that got my attention.	<b>FW</b>
The fact that you accuse only whites of degrading blacks is false.	<b>FW</b>
Although whites are not completely innocent, they are not the only ones guilty of this action that so greatly affects our society today.	<b>AW</b>
Degrading in general happens to all races.	<b>AW</b>
For example, blacks degrade whites by saying that just because white's ancestors may have had slaves, they are bad peoples because of the fact.	<b>AW</b>

## Roberta: Essay 1

Sentence	Category
Granite City is my birthplace and current home.	
Its population was generally made up of Caucasian families, since African-Americans were not allowed in the city after dark, according to my grandmother.	BW
The city's population remained largely Caucasian even after African-Americans were accepted into the community.	BW
I know this because I had few interactions with darker-skinned people up until middle school.	OW
I can't remember having any African-American classmates while in elementary school, and there weren't any dark-skinned people on my neighborhood block.	BW
I grew up in a low income, entirely Caucasian community in the west portion of Granite City.	BW
I can remember the first African-American I ever met.	OW
She was my brother's therapist, as we knew her only as Brinda.	
She was an extremely professional woman, and though she was technically my brother's therapist, she was always happy to help me with my problems.	
I was naturally drawn to her kind, sympathetic nature.	
I didn't realize she was "black."	AW

She was just another person to me.	<b>AW</b>
I was later exposed to racial differences via the media, through this exposure did not change my feelings toward Brinda.	<b>AW</b>
Instead, it showed me how Brinda and other African-Americans were being treated differently from Caucasian people.	<b>AW</b>

## Roberta: Essay 4

Sentence	Category
We've come a long way since the days of slavery and segregation.	TW
Of course, we still have a long way to go because let's face it – racism is still very much alive in our nation.	AW
According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, there were 7,783 reported hate crimes in 2008.	OW
And those were just the <i>reported</i> incidents – how many were never registered, never reported?	AW
And of those that were racially motivated, 72.6 percent stemmed from anti-black bias.	OW
Many people will agree that African-Americans are treated unfairly in our nation, that they are targeted more than any other ethnic group – and it's hard to argue with statistics from the Federal Bureau of Investigation.	AW
But some people do argue against these cold facts and are left wondering: Who's the real victim here?	AW

## Saul: Essay 1

<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Category</b>
During my time overseas [in the Army] I was around a lot of Iraqi's.	<b>BW</b>
I felt nervous around them, I was in a combat zone, where I needed to be alert, and America's more recent history with them had not been so great.	<b>BW</b>
Today I don't feel any different about my opinions.	<b>DW</b>
I am not a racist and believe that people are just human, not Hispanic, white, black, purple, or whatever color someone else might want to classify someone as.	<b>TW</b>
I could not imagine myself being friends with someone who is racist.	<b>TW</b>
It's just plain, cruel and useless for someone to be judged by their skin color and not who they truly are.	<b>TW</b>

Note: I took the last two paragraphs of his essay since he didn't talk about race directly until that point.

## Saul: Essay 4

Sentence	Category
Dear Joey, After reading through all the comments, yours stuck out for me the most.	<b>FW</b>
You go on to say "Jane Elliott explained how we as people moved across the globe and the further we went the lighter our skin got. That really struck me as interesting because if that's what really happened then we all are equal."	
I can see why that statement would attract someones attention, and I completely agree with what you said.	<b>BW</b>
On the other hand everyone as "human beings," we should not even have to think of why we are all equal.	<b>TW</b>
Then again racism is always going to be a part of any culture.	<b>TW</b>
Racism is imbedded so deeply into ones mind that no one even recognizes it.	<b>AW</b>
Even with a person who might claim to not be racist.	<b>AW</b>

## Night Class Student Data Charts:

Amy: Essay 1

Sentence	Category
Race hasn't impacted my life a whole lot, I lived in a neighborhood where there was only one black family and my school had a lot of white people in it.	<b>OW</b>
There was other ethnic groups but the white population was around 85%.	<b>BW</b>
My family only had white friends, and everyone in my family is white.	<b>BW</b>
There not racist that I know of that's just how things are.	<b>DW</b>
All of my life I was mostly around people of my race, if I can remember correctly I only had about 5 black friends in my whole life.	<b>TW</b>
My childhood neighborhood only had one black family in it, and the husband was white.	<b>OW</b>
I got along with them great, they were really nice people; I still see them to this day and I stop and talk to them, their kids and I would always hang out we loved to play basket ball together.	<b>TW</b>

## Amy: Essay 4

<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Category</b>
Le'Andra, I can relate with your comment about dwelling over how bad it was to have slaves.	<b>AW</b>
Slavery is something of the past and yet we still have to keep talking about it.	<b>DW</b>
We do still have racism.	<b>TW</b>
Some blacks hate whites and some whites hate blacks.	<b>TW</b>
Mexican's, Asians, Korean, Pakistan's and so on.	<b>BW</b>
All races have people in them that are racist.	<b>TW</b>
In this class I get the impression that it's only the whites that are racist and I know for a fact it not just white people.	<b>DW</b>

## Beth: Essay 1

Sentence	Category
What's the first thing that comes to mind when you hear of someone being racist?	OW
Typically you would think along the lines of race.	OW
Racist individuals are everywhere mind you.	TW
But I often ask myself, is it possible to be racist towards ignorance?	AW
You can have all the book smarts in the world with no common sense or vice versa, but you almost have to have both to be free of utter stupidity and even then sometimes you're still not in the clear.	AW
So if racism can be classified as ignorance, then I hate all idiots equally.	TW
Ignorance is not limited to any one gender, race, or social class. i.e. Caucasian, African American, Spanish, Asian, man, woman, rich or poor.	TW
Nor do these individuals congregate in any one place.	
You can find them at your local grocery store, mall, gym, etc.	
It might even be you.	
I have encounters with these imprudent individuals almost every day.	

## Beth: Essay 4

Sentence	Category
The <u>Complete Blue Eyed</u> film has already been a crucial eye opener on racism along with other isms to those who have already seen or been involved with the experiment.	<b>PW</b>
I agree with Ernestine when she says, "She makes us look at our society and what we all do to teach other. I feel this is true and that it should be done everywhere."	<b>AW</b>
The participants of Jane Elliot's experiment have had their outlook on racism forever changed.	<b>OW</b>
They are able to look at how they treat others differently.	<b>OW</b>
If she is able to do that to older people, why not do it to school age children and teach them this valuable lesson while their young minds can soak it up like a sponge?	<b>AW</b>
Jane Elliot's experiment should be implemented in our school system curriculum nationwide, with the focus being on middle school and high school age students.	<b>RW</b>
By doing so over a period of generations, she may lead us into the extinction of some isms by teaching humankind to think of others perceptions.	<b>AW</b>

## Bee: Essay 1

Sentence	Category
These words [she started with a quotation from <u>Black Like Me</u> ] paint a vivid picture of the night a black man walked the streets to find something to eat and was maliciously hunted by a white man whose only interest was making another man fear for his life.	RW
This excerpt captures a world where race matters and whichever race one belongs to ultimately decides one's entire future.	RW
This world that <u>Black Like Me</u> speaks about, although written more than fifty years ago, is not much different from the world that exists today.	AW
Even today children are still taught that there are two kinds of people in this world, those that are normal and those that aren't; those that are white and those that are not, and those that are not white are simply not normal, enough said.	AW
I have been raised to understand that there are varieties of people and that no one person is superior based on color, however, this realization came at a price.	AW

## Bee: Essay 4

<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Category</b>
Dear Le'Andra, the brown-eyed blue-eyed experiment conducted by Jane Elliot was the most fascinating and moving display of selflessness that I've seen in a long time.	<b>RW</b>
As she began to manipulate people's minds to see life through the eyes of the lesser privileged, whether they be another race, class, or gender, she made her point crystal clear.	<b>AW</b>
No one is treated equally in this country and there will never be true equality in this country.	<b>AW</b>
Le'Andra, you say that this documentary and even racism are "outdated."	<b>FW</b>
As long as there are people who discriminate and judge others based on their make-up, racism will never be outdated.	<b>AW</b>

## Carley: Essay 1

Sentence	Category
When I was a child I didn't know what society's standards were.	
I saw a girl who was different by skin color, but the same because she had no friends.	<b>OW</b>
In a way I saw myself, I saw a girl who was lost.	<b>AW</b>
And that year, in third grade I found someone who knew me and cared.	
It's only a person's weight.	
It's just the way they dress.	
What people see doesn't define us.	<b>AW</b>
It's just a small part of us.	<b>AW</b>
Someday, I know the invisible wall we have put up to protect ourselves will come crashing down, and everyone will realize we're all the same on the inside.	<b>AW</b>

Note: I used her last paragraph since she doesn't talk about race too much in the introduction (talks about her connection with being overweight and sticking out with the other girls in her class)

## Carley: Essay 4

Sentence	Category
"Can I play with you?" were the hopeful words a chubby eight year old would always ask enthusiastically, dreading the answer.	
"No, we don't play with fat kids ... sorry."	
With my head bowed, holding back tears I would walk away, friendless.	
That was a common routine I experienced daily in grade school and throughout my life.	
The comment that Matt made, "Just because someone is a different color, doesn't mean that they are different," makes me ask one question: then it is okay to treat someone differently if they're overweight, underweight, have a mental disability, or because of their religion?	<b>FW</b>
With that being said, I would have to say no, it's not okay.	<b>FW</b>
Treating someone differently because they don't look like you or act like you isn't okay.	<b>FW</b>
Making fun of someone or excluding them from parties, or play groups, or from your lunch table because they're not like you isn't right.	<b>FW</b>
Doing things like that can damage someone on the inside.	<b>FW</b>
Dealing with my weight has been a struggle and people should be aware by doing those such things what it can do to a person.	

## Genny: Essay 1

Sentence	Category
Growing up in Mitchell, I did not recognize race issues.	<b>OW</b>
I grew up around white neighbors.	<b>BW</b>
I never had to experience the issues of race from my neighborhood.	<b>OW</b>
However, most children do not know the difference between the colors of skin whether they grew up around different races or not.	<b>OW</b>
The way you are raised has to do with you being racist or not.	<b>OW</b>
At first my family was not racist, but over the years they became racist.	<b>OW</b>
Not because of the color of the skin, but because of the attitudes displayed by the human race.	<b>AW</b>
It seems to me that people have negative attitudes throws the wrong thing.	<b>AW</b>
Some think that color makes a difference, but that is not it.	<b>TW</b>
My races attitude developed due to attitude of others.	
To me, color means nothing.	<b>TW</b>
Now being a college student and growing up, I have realized what my father meant about "racist towards attitude."	<b>RW</b>
It makes a difference in the way you look at a person if they are talking in slang or wearing their clothes below the waist.	<b>TW</b>
The world may never change, and we will always have problems with race.	<b>TW</b>

## Genny: Essay 4

<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Category</b>
I fully agree with Sam's comment.	<b>AW</b>
Blacks who blame whites for slavery it eventually leads to racism.	<b>AW</b>
Plenty of people talk about racism of blacks, but did anyone consider racism to whites?	<b>DW</b>
I believe that there are still people who have bad behavior to whites due to the past.	<b>DW</b>
I have seen the issue among myself.	<b>DW</b>
When walking down the halls of SIWC, there are blacks who block the hallway while talking.	<b>DW</b>
I have asked before for those students to move but, yet they still give me a "dirty" look and continue to stand in their place.	<b>DW</b>
Now this may not be a crime, but it sure does offend [offend] me.	<b>DW</b>
When the does the attudide [attitude] stop?	<b>DW</b>
Where does racism take affect?	<b>DW</b>

## Haley: Essay 1

Sentence	Category
I feel that everyone should get equal opportunity.	<b>TW</b>
An equal opportunity to make life a pure success, no matter who you are or where you are from.	<b>TW</b>
Race can mean so many things, but discussed with the wrong audience could mean something more serious.	<b>AW</b>
I believe very strongly in motivation and believe it is in all races.	<b>AW</b>
Sometimes we can lack it when it comes to being a positive, motivated member of our society.	
I believe that race is old news and also that the U.S. has become an opportunity for many non U.S. citizens.	<b>DW</b>
But our own citizens are still stuck on believing that they have a cultural disadvantage.	<b>DW</b>

## Haley: Essay 4

Sentence	Category
Dear Brianna, I liked your insight on Jane Elliott's Blue-Eyed experiment.	<b>AW</b>
I agree with you; Jane Elliott showed everyone how bad racism is and how they contribute and don't even realize it.	<b>AW</b>
I myself, actually teared up a couple times while watching it.	<b>RW</b>
The experiment moved me in every which way possible.	<b>RW</b>
Jane Elliott is a great role model.	
Especially for us younger females who are becoming more mature.	
Not just for women, but to everyone.	

## James: Essay 1

Sentence	Category
I went to Collinsville High School from 2005-2009 from going to a school that had many different "races" in it and numerous racial problems you learned many things you may not have come into the school knowing.	OW
I grew up all of my life in Collinsville and went a small grade school of about 115 kids and only a couple where not of a different race so I never encountered race problems till I was much older.	OW
When I was in Elementary there were not problems with race as there is in high school.	OW
We just where friends with everyone.	TW
The color of your skin mattered about as much as the size of your feet.	TW
People put to much focus on the way you look on the outside and don't take the time to look inside and see who a person really is.	TW
It's a shame what we have done to ourselves making something like race such a big issue, and the worse we make it the harder it will be to fix in the end.	AW
It makes me sometimes wish that I could go back in time to a time when such superficial things did not matter.	AW

## James: Essay 4

<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Category</b>
Dear Brianna Ragan, I agree with you in the movie, <i>The Complete Blue Eyed</i> , some people don't really realize how bad others are treat, and why?	<b>AW</b>
Because of the color of their skin that's why.	<b>AW</b>
There is no reason to treat some people the way we do based on the fact that their skin pigmentation is darker than ours.	<b>AW</b>
When you judge someone and try not to like them, do it on a basis that's a little more solid than skin pigmentation.	<b>AW</b>

## Jill: Essay 1

<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Category</b>
I was born in the 1960's and raised in Granite City, Illinois to a Caucasian-German/ Welsh family.	<b>OW</b>
Although raised in a predominantly prejudiced community, my family was open-minded and accepting of various ethnic groups.	<b>TW</b>
As a result, I grew up non-judgmental of persons based on ethnicity or skin color.	<b>TW</b>

## Jill: Essay 4

Sentence	Category
Dear Angel, I'd like to address your comments on the article "White Girl."	<b>AW</b>
You commented that you could relate to this article as a result of having a biracial son.	<b>AW</b>
You also commented on how you "are always wondering what things are going to be like for him as he grows up. Is he going to adapt more towards the white culture, or is he going to be more towards the black? Or is he going to fit in with both cultures? Why should he have to choose between the two?"	
Angel, you have a legitimate concern about your son fitting into society.	<b>AW</b>
As a mother, I was concerned about raising children who were considerate, compassionate, trustworthy, generous, etc.	
I never once had to think about which ethnic group would accept him.	<b>AW</b>
You, on the other hand, have an additional challenge with a biracial son.	<b>AW</b>
As the most influential person in his life, you will dictate his ethnicity.	<b>AW</b>
Society will see your son as African American even though he is biracial.	<b>AW</b>
As such, you should raise your son to be prepared to live his life as an Africa American.	<b>FW</b>
You not only have the role but the obligation of a parent to prepare your child for the world they must live in.	<b>AW</b>

## Joey: Essay 1

Sentence	Category
Growing up as the youngest in my family; I guess you can say I learned from my brother's mistakes.	<b>PW</b>
To me, race was never an issue but being the youngest I got to learn what race was.	<b>PW</b>
As I said before race has never been an issue with me.	<b>TW</b>
Growing up I figured out that the rest of my family had a problem with the fact that there was a different race of people living, breathing, and working in the same neighborhood.	<b>OW</b>
I remember there being talk about my brothers being in a "white superiority gang."	<b>OW</b>
My brothers being in a white power gang brought them a lot of trouble with the cops, different types of ethnic backgrounds, and my family all because they claimed this gang was so important to them.	<b>OW</b>
I'm guessing that they formed this gang just like the reasons any other gang that I've heard about formed unity, power within the gang, and a sense of closeness that was lacking elsewhere.	<b>AW</b>

## Joey: Essay 4

Sentence	Category
What's the difference between people?	<b>AW</b>
What's the difference between White, Black, or brown?	<b>AW</b>
To me, there is no difference.	<b>TW</b>
I have friends that are White, Black, Mexican, and Asian.	<b>BW</b>
You can't judge someone by the color of their skin or by the way they look.	<b>TW</b>
That's why I agree with you, Matt.	<b>AW</b>
I think you have a good point of view that's similar to my own.	<b>AW</b>
"A person is a person to me no matter the skin color or the way they look."	
That couldn't be truer.	<b>TW</b>
That one comment to me seems to beat racism.	<b>TW</b>
It defines to me that if someone is racist to someone else because of the way they look or because of their heritage that just means that there is something about that one persons self being that they themselves hate so why not portray it onto someone else!	<b>AW</b>
"I'm feeling bad, why not make someone else feel as bad or if not worse than me!"	

## Jesse: Essay 1

Sentence	Category
If I'm lucky I'll have the two car garage, the dogs, kids, and a wife.	
When I picture that life I do foresee my family white.	<b>BW</b>
The only explanation I can come up with for that is that it's all I know.	<b>AW</b>
Every relative known to me is white.	<b>BW</b>
I don't want to change my ideal family that's how I was raised.	<b>AW</b>
It's sad that racism still walks this earth, but hate doesn't disappear.	<b>TW</b>
But I believe that I'm proof that there is hope.	<b>AW</b>
Here's a kid that was raised around conflicting views on prejudice and yet I am accepting.	<b>AW</b>
No matter how much information gets drilled into your head you still develop your own ideas and feelings.	<b>AW</b>
Maybe that can help our country grow but I'm not holding my breath.	<b>AW</b>
It's been years since America's been free and racism is still relevant today.	<b>TW</b>
My opinion is that improvement is welcomed but not expected.	<b>AW</b>
The world is too hateful to disregard black, white, yellow, or brown.	<b>AW</b>

Note: I used the end of his essay because he more directly addressed race.

## Jesse: Essay 4

<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Category</b>
Dear Geneva, I read your comments on the movie with a great deal of interest.	<b>AW</b>
I understand what Jane is trying to say as well, and I don't judge people by their skin color either.	<b>TW</b>
You indicated that you judge people more by attitude and I judge people not only on attitude but how people accept and handle responsibilities.	<b>AW</b>
I am not a racist but I agree with you as I do not like people black or white to think they have a right to be given special treatment.	<b>TW</b>
Responsible people do not ask for special treatment, i.e. a different test for job entry, or your example of people having the right to stand and block the hallway.	<b>TW</b>

## Kerri: Essay 1

<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Category</b>
How many times a day do you hear a racist comment or joke?	<b>OW</b>
I'm almost sure it's more than once.	<b>OW</b>
I work in a bar and it really is insane the people I hear making the comments to me.	<b>OW</b>
We are all people.	<b>TW</b>
We all have the same organs, we all need the same things to live, and all of our bodies work the same way to keep us moving.	<b>TW</b>
Why should one person be treated differently because of their family traditions or skin color?	<b>AW</b>
I normally don't notice if someone is Black, White, Hispanic, or Asian.	<b>TW</b>
I do think that racism is mostly blamed on White people.	<b>DW</b>
Every race has at least one person that doesn't like people of another religion, color, or any other reason that could make somebody different.	<b>DW</b>

## Kerri: Essay 4

Sentence	Category
When I watched <u>The Complete Blue Eyed</u> in class I thought that Jane Elliott had no idea what she was talking about.	<b>FW</b>
After the video when we had the class discussion it really hit me though.	<b>RW</b>
I was listening to people talk about it and I heard someone say that I may not understand because I'm white and black people really do go through a lot and are treated a lot differently.	<b>RW</b>
Brianna's comment from the M/W/F class said, "Personally I thought the movie made a good point. So many people don't realize how bad racism is, and a lot of people contribute to it and don't realize it either. My first impression of Elliott was, wow shes a bitch, but she had to get her point across some how, and she did it well. I wouldn't have guessed that her family had to go through all of the hatred when she did the project with her third graders. That's crazy."	
I completely agree with her.	<b>AW</b>
I though Jane Elliott was stubborn and on a power trip but as I watched the video a little longer I began to like her and feel sincere for her.	<b>RW</b>
After what she was put through after her experiment with the third graders, a lot of people in her situation would have caved and said whatever the critics wanted to hear.	<b>AW</b>
Jane stood by her decision to do the experiment and she continued to be herself even after the torture she was put through.	<b>AW</b>

## Mary: Essay 1

Sentence	Category
The world is made up of people from many different races, social backgrounds, and religions.	<b>BW</b>
We should be proud of where we come from; race should only be important to each individual because it is a part of who we are.	<b>AW</b>
I am grateful that I grew up without prejudice because I was able to decide for myself that it is okay to be whatever race we are.	<b>AW</b>
The most important thing is to treat each other with kindness and respect.	<b>TW</b>
I would have missed knowing some wonderful people if I would have looked only at the color of skin.	<b>TW</b>
Children learn what they live, and we should teach our children tolerance and indifference from day one.	<b>TW</b>
Maybe we can stop prejudices of all kinds.	<b>TW</b>
I know that will probably never completely happen, but I hope, someday, we can come close.	<b>AW</b>

## Mary: Essay 4

Sentence	Category
I read your response to "White Girl."	
I agree with you that we should know the history of slavery.	<b>AW</b>
We should also know the history of the United States.	<b>AW</b>
Slavery was just one of her many injustices.	<b>AW</b>
For example, my uncle was killed in World War II when his ship was hit by a torpedo.	
I'm sure my father's generation had prejudices against the Japanese but I don't.	<b>TW</b>
I'm sure most of these people are dead now and I don't feel I can hold the present generation accountable for their actions anymore than African Americans can hold me responsible for slavery.	<b>AW</b>

## Sherice: Essay 1

<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Category</b>
Racism is the belief that people of different races have different qualities and abilities, and that some are inherently superior or inferior.	<b>OW</b>
However, the black and white races seem to be a big issue among Americans.	<b>BW</b>
My assumption was after Abraham Lincoln passed the Emancipation Proclamation it would slowly disperse.	<b>TW</b>
Then again, I was wrong because racism is still running rapid in America today.	<b>AW</b>

## Sherice: Essay 4

Sentence	Category
Dear Lisa, I enjoyed watching the <i>Complete Blue Eyed</i> experiment.	RW
It gave me a feeling of instant gratification.	RW
The blue eyed people are finally feeling the torture of a brown eyed person.	AW
However, it was only for one day and they couldn't even handle it.	AW
Just think how it feels for a lifetime.	AW
Most blue eyed people can't even fathom.	AW
Your comment said, "I don't see racism as being as relevant or as large scale of an issue."	
I strongly disagree with you.	FW
It's not a vital issue in your life but it is for others.	FW
Blue eyed people experience racism only a few times in life and brown eyed people experience it for the rest of their lives.	FW

## Terry: Essay 1

<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Category</b>
When I entered high school in 1961, I was not aware of any racial issues in our segregated community.	<b>OW</b>
I had very limited exposure to racism.	<b>OW</b>
Very little was mentioned at home about this issue, so it was never on my mind.	<b>OW</b>
However, my lack of knowledge and attitude towards racism changed dramatically during my high school years.	<b>AW</b>

## Terry: Essay 4

Sentence	Category
Dear Nikki, I enjoyed reading your comment you posted on our class website, covering the video "Blue Eyed" Experiment, our class recently viewed.	<b>AW</b>
We are in agreement with the manner in which the author, Jane Elliott, presented her experiment to the Training Seminar group of professionals.	<b>AW</b>
You indicated how tough she was with the group, but saw she had to be to get her message through.	<b>AW</b>
I agree, it is sometimes necessary to go one step further in order to get our audience attention.	<b>FW</b>
Her intense abruptness was necessary only because she had to make an impression upon the Blue Eyed group, one they'll never forget.	<b>FW</b>

**APPENDIX D**  
**CONCENT FORMS AND COURSE SURVEYS**

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**INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM**

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**TO:** SWGCC ACADEMIC COUNSELORS  
**FROM:** DIANNA ROCKWELL SHANK  
**SUBJECT:** ENG 101 COURSES FOR SPRING 2010  
**DATE:** 11/1/2009

I just wanted to be sure and let you all know that the two sections of ENG 101 I will be teaching during the **Spring 2010 semester** will entail students receiving **free texts and materials**. I have been given a Title III grant to complete my dissertation research and this grant covers all materials (including a free flash drive) the students will need to complete the course. I think this is a fantastic opportunity for our students on this campus!

The two classes I will be teaching include the following:

ENG 101-062	MWF	11:00-11:50 AM	Room 344
ENG 101-067	M	4-6:50 PM	Room 344

I would appreciate that as you sign up students for classes, please relay this information to any students considering ENG 101 in their schedules. Both classes will be focused on issues of race and diversity and both meet in the English computer lab.

If anyone has any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [Dianna.Shank@swic.edu](mailto:Dianna.Shank@swic.edu) or at my extension 6685.

Thanks for passing this information along!

**Informed Consent Form for Dianna Shank's ENG 101 Courses (Spring 2010)**

I am both a full-time faculty member at Southwestern Illinois College at the Sam Wolf Granite City Campus and a doctoral candidate at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. Enrolling in this particular class places you in a pool of potential research subjects. However, your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to cease at any time and without penalty.

This is a study designed to investigate the effectiveness of writing topics like race/ class/ gender in English 101. Although this class will include all the components of a regular section of English 101, we will focus our writing assignments on topics that might make people feel more uncomfortable. Your participation will help me, as a writing instructor, determine if critical thinking and writing can be better facilitated by using a social and political focus.

Again, your participation is strictly voluntary. Throughout the semester, I will be taking notes on what happens in our class sessions, as well as analyzing how our assignments are meeting the goals of English 101. The data I will be collecting will include your essays, survey responses, online discussion comments, interviews, and videotapes of the course). I can assure you that your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings. I will assign a pseudonym (code) for each student in the class. I will take all reasonable steps to protect your identity. Because I will be using a code in place of your name, I will not know which of you have agreed to participate until final grades are submitted at the end of the semester.

If you have any questions about, or would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is completed, please feel free to contact the researcher named below and/ or her supervising professor:

Dianna Rockwell Shank  
Principal Investigator  
Southwestern Illinois College  
4950 Maryville Road  
Granite City, IL 62040  
618-931-0600, ext 6685

Dr. Lisa J. McClure  
English SIUC  
SIU - Carbondale  
Mailcode: 4503  
Carbondale, IL 62901  
618-453-6837

---

(Signature of participant)

With this signature, I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and have received a copy of this form to keep.

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\_\_\_\_\_  
(printed) \_\_\_\_\_ Name of participant

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Research Development and Administration, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. Email [siuhsc@siu.edu](mailto:siuhsc@siu.edu)

## Survey One

Name:

Phone Number:

Email Address:

Optional Questions:

Sorry ... I have to ask! How old are you?

How do you racially identify yourself?

Where were you primarily raised? (location)

Who do you live with?

As you can see from the syllabus, I will be doing research in our class this semester. Would you be willing to let me interview you outside of class? (short amount of time)

Are there any fears or reservations that you have about this class so far?

**Survey 2**

ENG 101

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Mid-Term Survey**

We are now half-way through the semester. How is the class going for you? Is there anything you would like to make sure that we talk about or discuss before the end of the semester? (related to essay writing)

\*\*\*\*\*

What kinds of experiences have had in the past with multicultural readings, classrooms, or activities? When did you begin to learn about issues of race? What was your first memory of learning about race? How do any of those experiences compare to this class?

Have/ has the readings or other texts shown you anything about race that you hadn't heard or known before?

Has the class discussion "done anything" for you at all?

How would you describe the other students in this class? Are you friends with anyone of the other students?

Do you think that this class, ENG 101, can have any impact on you as a student, professional, or citizen outside of this class?

**Survey 3****ENG 101 (Spring 2010)**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

The information on this survey will remain confidential and will help me identify patterns in our writing class so that I can, hopefully, determine whether theme-based ENG 101 classes work more effectively at engaging students in productive academic writing. You will notice that this survey is divided into three main sections: (1) General Demographics, (2) Our Writing Course, and (3) Race as a Course Theme. Thank you for your help.

**General Demographic:**

Age?

If you graduated from high school, which high school was it and what year? If you were homeschooled or received your GED, what year did you complete these qualifications?

If you took writing classes in high school, do you think they prepared you for college level writing? (Can you briefly explain your answer?)

What semester is this for you at SWIC? (first, second ...?)

Have you ever attended any other college or university? If yes, could you briefly explain?

Full-Time or Part-Time student?

Intended degree or future profession?

\*\*\*\*\*

**Our Writing Course:**

Here is the catalog description for ENG 101 here at SWIC: "English 101 is designed to help students write papers for a variety of general and specific audiences. Students will learn to recognize features that make writing effective, and learn different strategies writers use while prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. Students will learn to read their own work more critically and to constructively criticize the work of others. The course also provides a brief introduction to the writing of source-supported papers and methods of documenting sources."

How do you think that this class met this specific description?

Have you ever enrolled in ENG 101 before? If so, could you give me any details? What made you complete this course this semester?

Have you done much college-level writing outside of ENG 101? If so, have you noticed that your writing has changed in any way? Or have the writing assignments been completely different than what we have talked about in our class?

As a result of this class, what traits/ characteristics would you say are the most important when approaching any college writing assignment? (Be as specific as you can!)

On a scale of 1 to 10, how hard do you think you worked this semester? (1 = didn't work hard at all; 10= worked as hard as I could).

On the first day, I was able to provide you with a free text for the course as well as a jump-drive. Do you think this "gift" had any influence on your participation/ enrollment/ academic work in this course?

Is there something you wish this class would have covered? In other words, is there anything you would have changed about this particular course?

**Race as a Course Theme:**

Was the theme of this course distracting? Explain your answer.

Do you think your approach to the concept of "race" has changed/ been modified in any way as a result of your experience in this class?

Was Black Like Me a good text for this course? Would you assign it if you were a teacher? Explain.

\*\*\*\*\*

By checking this box, I give permission for Dianna Rockwell Shank to use my work in her academic study.

If I use your quotations from any of your essays in my eventual study, how would you like me to refer to you? (I will only be using a first name) By your real first name? Or would you prefer that I use a different name? (if so, do you have one in mind that you would suggest?)

List a phone number or email address that I can use to contact you after the completion of this semester (I want to be able to let you know about the results of the study).

If you would prefer that I not use you at all in my study, please check the following box and I will shred any of your essays that I copied.

By checking this box, I do **not** give permission for Dianna Rockwell Shank to use my work in her academic study.

## APPENDIX E

### WPA OUTCOMES STATEMENT

WPA Outcomes Statement for First Year Composition Adopted by the Council of Writing Program Administrators, April 2000; amended July 2008.

This statement describes the common knowledge, skills, and attitudes sought by first-year composition programs in American postsecondary education. To some extent, we seek to regularize what can be expected to be taught in first-year composition; to this end the document is not merely a compilation or summary of what currently takes place. Rather, the following statement articulates what composition teachers nationwide have learned from practice, research, and theory. This document intentionally defines only "outcomes," or types of results, and not "standards," or precise levels of achievement. The setting of standards should be left to specific institutions or specific groups of institutions.

Learning to write is a complex process, both individual and social, that takes place over time with continued practice and informed guidance. Therefore, it is important that teachers, administrators, and a concerned public do not imagine that these outcomes can be taught in reduced or simple ways. Helping students demonstrate these outcomes requires expert understanding of how students actually learn to write. For this reason we expect the primary audience for this document to be well-prepared college writing teachers and college writing program administrators. In some places, we have chosen to write in their professional language. Among such readers, terms such as "rhetorical" and "genre" convey a rich meaning that is not easily simplified. While we have also aimed at writing a document that the general public can understand, in limited cases we have aimed first at communicating effectively with expert writing teachers and writing program administrators.

These statements describe only what we expect to find at the end of first-year composition, at most schools a required general education course or sequence of courses. As writers move beyond first-year composition, their writing abilities do not merely improve. Rather, students' abilities not only diversify along disciplinary and professional lines but also move into whole new levels where expected outcomes expand, multiply, and diverge. For this reason, each statement of outcomes for first year composition is followed by suggestions for further work that builds on these outcomes.

#### Rhetorical Knowledge

By the end of first year composition, students should

- Focus on a purpose
- Respond to the needs of different audiences

- Respond appropriately to different kinds of rhetorical situations
- Use conventions of format and structure appropriate to the rhetorical situation
- Adopt appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality
- Understand how genres shape reading and writing
- Write in several genres

Faculty in all programs and departments can build on this preparation by helping students learn

- The main features of writing in their fields
- The main uses of writing in their fields
- The expectations of readers in their fields

### Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing

By the end of first year composition, students should

- Use writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating
- Understand a writing assignment as a series of tasks, including finding, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing appropriate primary and secondary sources
- Integrate their own ideas with those of others
- Understand the relationships among language, knowledge, and power

Faculty in all programs and departments can build on this preparation by helping students learn

- The uses of writing as a critical thinking method
- The interactions among critical thinking, critical reading, and writing
- The relationships among language, knowledge, and power in their fields

### Processes

By the end of first year composition, students should

- Be aware that it usually takes multiple drafts to create and complete a successful text
- Develop flexible strategies for generating, revising, editing, and proof-reading
- Understand writing as an open process that permits writers to use later invention and re-thinking to revise their work
- Understand the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes
- Learn to critique their own and others' works

- Learn to balance the advantages of relying on others with the responsibility of doing their part
- Use a variety of technologies to address a range of audiences

Faculty in all programs and departments can build on this preparation by helping students learn

- To build final results in stages
- To review work-in-progress in collaborative peer groups for purposes other than editing
- To save extensive editing for later parts of the writing process
- To apply the technologies commonly used to research and communicate within their fields

### Knowledge of Conventions

By the end of first year composition, students should

- Learn common formats for different kinds of texts
- Develop knowledge of genre conventions ranging from structure and paragraphing to tone and mechanics
- Practice appropriate means of documenting their work
- Control such surface features as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Faculty in all programs and departments can build on this preparation by helping students learn

- The conventions of usage, specialized vocabulary, format, and documentation in their fields
- Strategies through which better control of conventions can be achieved.

**VITA**

Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University

Dianna Rockwell Shank

Dianna.Shank@swic.edu

St. Martin's College  
Bachelor of Arts, English, May 1991

Central Washington University  
Masters of Arts, English, May 1997

Special Honors and Awards:

Selected as a participant in the Dartmouth Seminar Seminar in Rhetoric and  
Composition

Studies, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, July-August 2012.

Selected as a participant in a National Endowment for the Humanities Landmarks

Workshop, "Progress and Poverty: The Gilded Age in American Politics and  
Literature, 1877-1901," Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Library, Fremont, Ohio,  
May 2010.

Selected as a participate in a Fulbright-Hays Fellowship, "In Search of Ghandi's India,"  
Summer 2008. (Traveled and studied throughout India for six weeks)

Selected as Illinois Consortium for International Studies and Programs (ICISP) Faculty

Exchange (Canterbury Christ Church University College, Canterbury, England),  
Spring Semester 2007.

Dissertation Title:

“I Don’t Want to Hurt Anyone’s Feelings”: Using Race as a Writing Prompt in First  
Year  
Writing

Major Professor: Dr. Lisa J. McClure

Publications:

Rev. of *Save the World on Your Own Time* by Stanley Fish. *Teaching English in the  
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