

Arriving with Credit: A Study of 200-Level Writers and the Question of Equivalency

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This essay reports the results of an interview-based study of fifty-seven students enrolled in a 200-level composition course at a land-grant university, which focuses on their experiences in different locations of first-year writing. Students' accounts challenge simplistic notions of equivalency and demonstrate the need for more deep writing opportunities across students' college careers.

In the last ten years at our land-grant university, we've seen the number of students who arrive with equivalent first-year writing credit—either with a score of four or five on the AP Language and Composition test or, more commonly, with dual-enrollment credit from institutions around the country—reach over sixty percent. With the passage of the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act that provides federal funding for dual-enrollment programs, we expect this number will continue to climb. Consequently, one of the regular tasks for the WPA involves fielding requests for help with determining equivalency. More often, questions of equivalencies, including transfer from another institution, Advanced Placement (AP) and dual-enrollment courses (DE),¹ are handled by a transfer office and academic advisors, who check a course description or syllabus for key outcomes provided by our composition faculty: writing process, rhetorical approach, multiple forms and genres, audience awareness, etc. This means we, as composition faculty, know little about the writing experiences of students who arrive with credit and the degree to which that credit is “equivalent” to our on-campus course.

Of course, scholarship in our field sheds light on the significant contextual and cultural differences that prevent easy duplication of a college writing course in high school (Tinberg and Nadeau; Schneider; McWain). High school teachers must meet top-down requirements from multiple authorities—state standards, district standards, and AP and DE require-

ments—and are therefore required to cover a much larger scope of material than a college writing course. Indeed, research indicates that students experience key differences in the *focus* of the AP and DE courses versus university writing courses, with more emphasis in the former on literary analysis and on-demand writing than on rhetorical engagement and inquiry (Whitley and Paulson; Hesse; Scherff and Piazza; Hansen et al., “How Do”). As Christine Denecker argues, “composition is rarely taught in a stand-alone fashion in high schools as it is on college campuses” (32). Further, students at the high school and college levels typically occupy different stages of intellectual and emotional development, which may impact their orientation to the course material (Schneider; Anson). For this host of reasons, the NCTE policy brief *First Year Writing: What Good Does it Do?* contends that alternative routes to first-year writing “cannot fully replicate the experiences of FYW because high school students’ social and cognitive development is at a different level, and because none of the alternatives can provide the sustained attention to developing the habits of mind and strategies fostered in FYW” (2).

This difference bears out in our work with 200-level writing instructors, who teach a course that was designed to build on our first-year writing curriculum and now enrolls students who bring in experience from AP, DE, international baccalaureate (IB) or a community college writing course. Instructors struggle with how to pitch the class, given students’ range of familiarity with key practices in the field. As composition faculty who share WPA work on a rotating basis, we grapple both with the ongoing question of “equivalency” and, in our teacher-development and curriculum work, with a lack of knowledge about the range of experiences students bring to our 200-level course. Further, we often confront the powerful institutional and public narrative that students are better served by arriving with credit, which grants them cost savings, increases exposure to college courses, and allows flexibility in their undergraduate curricula. While we are aided by existing research that examines how students who arrive with credit perform in on-campus writing courses (Hansen et al., “How Do”; Tinberg and Nadeau), we sought to hear from students about how they connect their past and present experiences in writing courses; how they assess their own curricular paths; and how they articulate their own experiences, needs, and goals as writers.

To this end, we designed an interview-based study that would allow us to center student voices in the conversation of the gains and losses of arriving with credit. We were interested in what motivated their curricular choices and how they reflect on these decisions after some experience with college courses on our campus. We also sought to know more about

the experiences our students bring to our 200-level writing course. With Melissa Dennihy, we agree that in our efficiency-driven climate, “We are encouraged, if not required, to constantly look forward, to the skill students are expected to demonstrate at the end of our courses, which means few opportunities to look back, to where our students come from and the skills they learned in these contexts” (163). This study, then, was devised to offer deeper perspectives of our 200-level students’ histories as writers, more than is evident in an equivalency check, and to bring their voices to bear on the field’s discussion of the changing locations of first-year writing.

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Our IRB-approved² study involved twenty-minute interviews with fifty-seven students from randomly selected sections of English 254: Writing and Community, a composition course at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln which is a public, research-intensive institution. A total of 220 students were enrolled across ten English 254 sections in that semester. We include the full set of our questions in the appendix. The interviews, conducted by the two of us and two research assistants, were recorded and professionally transcribed.

Of the fifty-seven students in our sample, forty-two percent completed first-year writing at our institution. Sixteen percent arrived with credit from dual enrollment; five percent received credit for AP. Nine percent were transfer students who brought writing credit from another postsecondary institution. Finally, twenty-eight percent of the students enrolled in English 254 (rather than our 100-level course) to fulfill the university-wide general education writing requirement. The total number of students arriving with credit in our sample—thirty percent—is considerably lower than the overall percentage of incoming students with writing credit because our university-wide general education program requires only one writing course; therefore, many students are not required to take an additional writing course on our campus. Most of the students enrolling in English 254 are majors in our College of Arts and Sciences, and they do so to meet the college’s additional writing course requirement.

We focused our coding on how students described writing instruction in three sites: DE, AP, and first-year writing at our institution. We also analyzed how they perceived and named advantages and disadvantages associated with this location. In our first cycle, we employed *in vivo* coding to capture students’ direct language in articulating their experiences. In the second cycle, we used pattern coding, which allows for organization of the corpus and attributes meaning to that organization (Saldaña 235).

The patterns of experience emerged in categories of “best practices” for first-year writing such as teacher feedback, peer review, revision, and genres of writing. We also coded for further distinction within those patterns, which led us to name subcategories like lower- and higher-order teacher feedback. In addition, some students mentioned developing habits of mind, akin to those named in the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (CWPA, NCTE, and the National Writing Project), which emerged as another set of categories. We coded collaboratively: we identified students’ terms and determined together how to name the patterns. As we’ll detail below, our coding process allowed us to examine the range of experiences students bring with them when they arrive with credit and the extent to which they match the field’s goals for writing instruction.

ARRIVING WITH DUAL-ENROLLMENT CREDIT

Our interviews invited students to describe the writing projects, practices, and processes they experienced in their first-year writing course. We acknowledge that the participants may characterize the course differently than their instructors would, but it was important to us to understand how students remember and articulate their own experiences. We begin with those who received first-year writing credit through DE courses. Nine of the students in our study arrived with DE credit; only one of these courses was part of a program accredited by the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships, which establishes criteria for faculty credentials, curriculum, student assessment, student support, and program evaluation. In the case of the accredited course, however, the class was also designated as AP, and consequently, answered to many curricular pressures.

When asked to describe the writing assignments completed in their DE classes, three students mentioned rhetorical analysis, five described arguments, two named reflective writing, and one student specified a personal narrative. They also named descriptive writing, poetry, research papers, and timed writing—the latter in the case where the course was designated both DE and AP. Six students said their class invited low-stakes or formative writing.

While we didn’t explicitly ask students about the role of reading in the composition course, five of the nine students mentioned it. One student explained that assigned essays served as both models and inspiration; they showed students “what [the teacher] was looking for.” Three students described reading novels, and two mentioned plays and short stories, followed by analysis or timed writing. While literature is not centrally featured in our on-campus first-year writing course, we attribute its presence in DE

student experience to the course's dual nature, where state standards must be met in addition to DE requirements. And in our state, there is a heavy emphasis on literary analysis for high school writers. As teachers strive to cover reading-heavy standards, it follows that, as Denecker also finds in her study, writing instruction at the secondary level is often embedded in literature instruction (32).

In describing support provided during the writing process, five of the students said they'd engaged in peer review, often qualifying the experience as uneven or moderately useful. One student, who enrolled in her DE course during her sophomore year of high school, explained that the teacher placed all the papers at the front of the room; students selected one, wrote comments on it, and then returned it to choose another. They were not provided direction about how to focus their comments, and she felt her peers didn't take the practice "incredibly seriously"—thus, the feedback was rarely useful. Two students, who were enrolled in DE through the same community college, described "distance" peer reviews, where they provided feedback to students at another school; for these students, the function of peer reviews was to correct grammar and usage and to ensure the writing employed effective transitions. According to one student, the teacher "let the peers smooth it out" before it was graded. Another student contrasted the practice of peer review in her DE course with her current 200-level writing course:

The peer reviews were—now comparing them were probably what you'd consider a joke. . . . you'd exchange papers and just read over 'em and you'd have . . . questions you've have to answer, like, look over the paper for this, look over the paper for that. The generic "answer the questions," go through the paper lightly, whereas what we did for 254 . . . was more like, does everything add up? Does everything make sense? Kind of more subsurface level.

None of the students described receiving specific instruction about how to compose useful peer review, nor did any mention use of author's notes to provide context for the reviewer.

In terms of teacher feedback, eight of the nine students described response that focused on lower-order rather than higher-order concerns; for most of the respondents, this was a point of contention. As one student explained, teacher feedback was

just grammatical and then, like, maybe you should organize it differently, like just moving sentences or paragraphs. It was never radical revision. It was never like, "you need to change the entire idea." It was more like, "here's how you can polish it and make acceptable."

Another student compared the more limited feedback she received in her DE course with response provided by a previous high school teacher, who “analyzed the papers you wrote and instead of just the surface level . . . she would really pick ‘em apart and show you what you did here and what you did there. That was very helpful.” A student whose teacher “graded mainly on grammar” found the practice unfair: “Unless it’s being published somewhere, I don’t think [the paper] should be completely judged on grammar and spelling and all of that. I think it should be judged on the content . . . and the importance of what you wrote about.” This was contradicted by one student, who found the teacher’s corrections helpful: the teacher would

call up each one of us while everybody else was working, and we’d just go through, “Yeah, this is wrong,” . . . or just “You should have your thesis here,” or whatever it is. That really helped a lot. I learned a lot from that.

While most students in this group did experience elements of the writing process, they were presented as distinct, successive steps, rather than as part of a recursive, reflective process. Notably, none of the students who completed DE courses used the word *revision* in describing the processes engaged to support writing. Three explicitly stated that they were not asked to move their writing through a drafting process prior to submitting it for a grade.

As we’ll describe below, this differed considerably from the students’ descriptions of the revision process at our own institution, which we attribute, at least in part, to the differing material conditions that shape each context. As Katie McWain found in her study of first-year writing teachers in six different locations, the pressures on DE instructors in high school contexts constrain the amount and quality of feedback teachers have time to provide and the pedagogical choices available to them. She explains,

Participants . . . often mentioned the pressures they faced to assess large amounts of student writing quickly and efficiently, provide a variety of graded feedback, and report progress to students, administration, and parents—all labor demands that limited their range of teaching choices, even if indirectly. (417)

For further insight into students’ experiences of first year writing, we also asked our interview subjects to describe how they perceive the advantages and disadvantages of where they enrolled in composition now that they are on campus. Students were interviewed about six weeks into their 200-level writing courses, so their responses often reflect how they view their readiness for the work expected in English 254. Of the nine dual-enrollment students, five named cost or expedience as the key advantage. “I feel like I

[started college] ahead of the game,” said one student. “It just gets it outta the way,” another said. “It saves time and money. You start college with it done, and you don’t have to worry about it.” One student explained that, because English wasn’t an area he planned to pursue “or would need a whole lot later,” it made sense to “get it done” in high school. We were not surprised by rationales focused on cost and expediency. Indeed, they reflect both the rising costs of education and pressure to reduce time to degree. Doug Hesse reminds us that students’ “get it out of the way” mentality does not originate with them. Instead, it is grounded in the structure of the academy, which has not done well to establish writing as a vital cross-disciplinary enterprise. At our institution, for instance, first-year writing fulfills a requirement categorized under “intellectual and practical skills,” and no advanced writing course is required—reinforcing the idea that writing is a master-able skill that can be checked off the list.

But getting writing “out of the way” was not the only advantage students named. Two of the nine students described specific areas of writerly growth as a result of the DE course. One student valued her experience of writing research and persuasive essays and the opportunity to compose for “a different kind of audience.” A second student explained that he learned how to develop structure in his writing as well as how to clarify his ideas. For four students in this group, the benefit of the DE writing course was its role as a *transitional* learning experience. That is, they didn’t regard it as the equivalent to college writing, nor did they necessarily want an equivalent; they sought something in between, and the DE writing experience provided it. As one student said, the DE course served as a “stair step” to university work, a way to “get my feet wet.” This student regarded the DE course as “a lot easier” than English courses at the university but “also definitely harder than high school.” Another described DE as offering “exposure” to what college writing would be like, because, she assumed, “once you get to college, you’re held to a higher standard.”

Also acknowledging the differences between high school and college writing, two students argued that DE may not be the best choice for all students. For instance, one student explained if he majored in English, he would have enrolled in first-year writing at the university. He continued, the DE class “gave me the impression that . . . every type of writing that I’m gonna do is gonna be a certain way.” Another said DE worked for him, but “If you wanted to advance your skills as a writer then I wouldn’t do that.” When asked to explain, he added, “The high school class was nothing like [English 254]. . . . we would read a novel, or a play . . . and then write about that.”

The DE students articulated other disadvantages to this location for first-year writing, as well. In fact, all nine of the students in our study who arrived with DE credit indicated that they did not experience some component of writing instruction our field deems a “best practice.” Three students described lack of substantive feedback. As one student said, “What was missing from that class was I needed more feedback from my teachers and peers.” The feedback she did receive “was after the assignment was done or from peers that didn’t care about the assignment very much.” Another student named lack of “professor interaction” and limited feedback as a disadvantage. “At the high school level, they’re looking for a lot less than they’re looking for at the college level. The feedback was never as in depth as it is here.” The student continues to describe feeling unprepared for the writing process in his on-campus course. “The fact that we’re turning in multiple drafts for this and we are radically revising, that freaks me out. I’ve never done anything like that. . . . even in my college writing class.” Teacher-chosen topics, reliance on the five-paragraph essay, lack of discussion, and quality of instruction were other disadvantages named by students.

While DE students appreciated the perceived expediency of arriving with writing credit and some cite growth as writers, they name marked distinctions between approaches to writing instruction in their DE versus on-campus course.

ARRIVING WITH AP CREDIT

In our sample of fifty-seven students, only three earned credit for first-year writing based on their AP Language and Composition score. While few in number, the students’ voices contribute to the picture of prior writing experiences for students who enter our 200-level course. All three students described timed writing, built on shorter (mostly five-paragraph) arguments, at the center of their AP course. As one student explained, “Ninety percent of all those writings were [analysis] of a text, when you read a poem or you’d read an essay . . . and quote it . . . in a five-paragraph essay.” Another student recounted:

It was more analysis, so like, “read a passage and write about that.” . . . Then, they had document-based questions where we had like nine or ten different pieces of evidence, not too long. And we had to combine them into an essay to give some kind of argument about it. That was one of the essays that they do on the AP test, so it was practice for that.

The students’ accounts echo Hansen et al.’s characterization of AP English curricula in which “a major part of class time . . . is spent on preparing

students to pass the tests,” including the production of short, one-draft, analysis-driven essays (“Advanced,” 465).

The three AP students’ memories of teacher feedback reinforced the value of producing strong analytical writing quickly. When asked about receiving response from teachers or peers, one student explained, “It was mostly response at the end. Every now and then we would do rough drafts where we would do peer reviews or something. We normally didn’t turn them in to the teacher for her to comment on.” While all three students recalled brief evaluative comments and grades on final drafts, none of the three described receiving feedback from their teachers on earlier drafts.

The three AP students’ experience with peer feedback was more varied. One remembered generating writing ideas with peers: “we would get together and just talk about it. . . . It was more just get your ideas together.” While the remaining two described peer response to early drafts, they noted feedback that focused exclusively on lower-order concerns. “Student reviews,” one student explained, “. . . was mostly just to kill time. When they said ‘*student reviews*,’ they get in there, and you just look for grammatical errors, or something you highlight and just say, ‘I like this.’” The student compared this version of peer response to her current writing class: in English 254

I’ve had to do self-evaluations, where . . . you write, “What am I doing well? What do I need to work on? Where do I think my strengths are? Where do I think my weaknesses are in this piece?” . . . I think that’s a much better way to do it ‘cause then they already know what you’re looking for.

The three AP students in our study saw advantages to arriving with AP credit. Echoing the sentiments of some of the DE students, one named the high school learning environment as less stressful: “It allowed me to focus on getting the style down during an easier part of my academic career. Then, when I came to college, I’m not really worried so much that I can get everything to flow together because we focused so much on it in high school.” Moreover, the frequent practice of analytical writing seemed to build students’ confidence. One student explains, “The frequency of our writing made up for not having the constant feedback from the instructor during the writing process ‘cause we did so many of them.”

Students also saw disadvantages to using the AP course for first-year writing credit, which centered on a lack of exposure to forms and approaches beyond the individually authored, analytical, timed essay typical of the AP exam. One student explained that she didn’t gain experience in her AP course working with different forms, a gap that became notice-

able when she enrolled in creative writing, which was “more personally expressive.” “I’m not used to that,” she offered. “[It’s] just different to be able to put your own voice into it. That can be hard if you haven’t done it a lot before.” Another student noted that he had been assigned group writing in college, and he felt unprepared for this kind of academic work: “[It] would probably have been nice to at least be exposed to [collaborative writing] a little bit in high school.” In short, the AP students developed confidence through their ability to hone a particular kind of text. At the same time, writing in college pushed them beyond a single genre and required them to engage in the writing process more deeply.

ENROLLING IN FIRST-YEAR WRITING UPON ARRIVAL

Of the twenty-four students in our study who enrolled in first-year writing at our institution, thirteen described rhetorically focused assignments as the center of their courses. Seven students named research as a component of these projects, with three of the seven describing original research like interviews or data collection. Three students mentioned personal narrative, and a number of different forms received single mentions: multi-genre essay, social issue (self-selected) paper, poster, symbol analysis, annotated bibliography, video commercial, identity-focused piece, research project, mystery story, imitation piece, analysis essays, remediation, and braided essay. Twelve students described low-stakes or formative writing. Our first-year writing curriculum is built upon a rhetorical framework, but leaves assignments and text selection up to individual teachers, most of whom are GTAs. Our general education writing outcome, which is fulfilled by first-year writing, requires students to write in multiple forms and for multiple audiences and purposes. Given these contexts, we weren’t surprised to see this array of assignments mentioned by students, though we did wonder if our students might be served by more consistency across sections.

Students in our first-year writing courses experienced more unified practices to support writing than did our DE and AP groups. For instance, twenty-two students described the presence of peer review or peer response in their courses. While we didn’t ask students to indicate whether the peer reviewers benefited their revision, five students described them as “helpful,” explaining that they facilitated further ideas and allowed for a degree of clarity difficult to achieve without a reader. Five different students also detailed the set-up or instructional process that facilitated generative peer review. For instance, as one student explained, “Our English 150 professor did a really good job of explaining what a good margin comment was. Like, ‘Don’t just say expand here. Give maybe a specific example of what

they could put here.’” Another student described the importance of having “adequate time” for the peer review process, which involved taking the piece home to read and respond, which allowed time to analyze the text and to provide an in-depth peer review. Several of the students indicated that the peer review took the form of letters to one another, requiring them to address higher order considerations in the writing.

Not surprisingly, three students named some problems with peer review. One student explained that although the teacher emphasized providing a “broad critique” in response to writing, peers nevertheless “tended to stick to one area and focus on what they knew and critiqued on that.” Another student complained that one peer responder was “grammar, grammar, grammar. That’s all she cared about.” The other, she explained, didn’t provide enough critique: “I don’t know if he didn’t want to hurt my feelings or something, which I don’t like; in writing, hurt my feelings. It’s all the better.” This student also indicated that these peer reviews, with a focus on grammar or too much praise, stood in contrast to the teacher’s response, which focused on higher order elements of the writing, like encouraging her to avoid arguments that didn’t address other perspectives. A third student said she preferred feedback from her instructors to her peers: “Not to be offensive, but I don’t necessarily know if they know better than me when it comes to writing.”

While peer review leaned toward lower-order corrections for students in both the DE and AP groups, the students in the university first-year writing course were guided by teachers to address higher order concerns, even if that didn’t always happen in practice. This focus was also reflected in how students described the teacher feedback they received. Twelve students explicitly mentioned their instructor’s approach to feedback and thirteen named individual conferences. The students often pointed to the role of teacher feedback in prompting new or deeper thinking about the piece. One student explained that while the teacher still commented on grammatical issues, “a lot of teachers in high school wouldn’t really ask questions. . . . They wouldn’t ask questions [for you] to think about more.” Another student similarly articulated in-depth feedback as a new experience: “This was the first time I was ever really questioned about what I was writing, like, why do you think this, explain more, go more in depth. Just in general, I felt like my writing got a lot better in class because of that.” Another student valued that the teacher was “just very critical.” It wasn’t that the teacher didn’t affirm the students’ work, she explained, but that she offered specific ideas and questions for improvement. With one exception, the students viewed teacher feedback as an important component of their

revision process; one student explained that she would have preferred the teacher fix things in her writing, rather than “just respond.”

In this group, thirteen students recounted moving their work through multiple drafts as part of a revision process that involved conceptual work, not only editing. As we discuss above, we ascribe the difference in feedback students received in the DE and AP versus the university group to a number of contextual factors: the instruction our GTAs receive on the practice of feedback in our required Composition Theory and Practice course, as well as in our pre-semester workshop; the ability of instructors in the college setting to focus solely on writing; the time they are afforded—even with the demands of graduate school—to provide feedback and meet with students individually.

Another striking difference in the data was students’ references to the habits of mind fostered by the first-year composition course. While none of the DE or AP students used dispositional language to describe affordances of their first-year writing course, seventeen students in the university group did so. These references occurred either when the students described the course or when they discussed advantages and disadvantages of their chosen location for first-year composition. In our coding process, we first marked a category or pattern focused on habits of mind. Then, we grouped those into subcategories using the habits of mind named in the *Framework for Success*:

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

In some cases, we coded a student’s language as referencing more than one habit of mind. One of the most commonly referenced habits of mind (five times) was openness (which we view as intertwined with curiosity),

with students articulating the advantage of the university first-year writing course as revealing new possibilities for their thinking or writing. One student explained that while she learned “ X plus Y equals XY ” in other classes, “in that English class it really, really opened my mind to new things” or what she later called thinking “outside the box.” Another student described learning new perspectives as the instructor introduced local and national issues:

I think with [first-year writing], you were able to get a broader perspective of the world, because the professor introduced new issues like the pipeline and different laws. I was taking it during the election, so understanding why people were voting for this person instead of this person.

The student explains that this ability to understand what shapes others’ perspectives is a way to get “behind the scenes of an argument.” Another student characterized the class as learning to “ask questions” by exploring an issue without trying “to find a definitive answer.” And yet another observed that as a result of taking first-year composition, “I feel like I’m more open.”

Three students also described the importance of experiencing new written forms and genres—particularly beyond the five-paragraph essay—as an advantage to the course, which we coded as “creativity” based on the *Framework* definitions. Five students valued increased rhetorical awareness facilitated by the course, which we coded as “flexibility.” Explained one student, “I was really able to get a better understanding of really writing with a purpose and focus on my audience.” Another student explained that first-year writing represented a shift from writing for the teacher to writing for a range of audiences.

Two students mentioned gaining awareness of their roles as writers in relation to others, or responsibility. One explained that because the course required a lot of interactive work with classmates, it provided her with experience in being a good collaborator. Another described learning to be “more aware” of other people’s perspectives when he makes an argument. Two students referenced writing from their own commitments, or engagement, as an advantage.

Before [this class], I would just think it was just an assignment. I have to get it done with. . . . I didn’t really put a lot into it. Now, I’m starting to see it as more of like, “Okay, this is more than just an assignment. Let me do this well.”

Another said that first-year writing helped him understand that he could take on controversial topics in his writing, even, he said, “if it makes other people uncomfortable.”

Interestingly, four students also used the word “depth” in describing what they’d gained from first-year writing. While we couldn’t easily match this term to the *Framework* document, we found it worth mentioning. For these students, depth marked a contrast between high school and college writing. Explained one, writing “does get a lot harder, and a lot more in depth—I wouldn’t consider it be the same as what I had done in high school. . . . I feel like the expectations were a lot higher.” The other explained that her first-year writing class required her to look more in depth into the subject of her writing than she’d been asked to do in high school. And the third described his writing class in college as requiring deeper and more abstract thinking. The fourth student explained that the college writing class presented you new ideas “that maybe you weren’t introduced in high school” and required a deeper level of analysis. This trend is also reflected in Denecker’s findings, which showed students referring to a kind of “deep writing” required in college. She observes,

while students in this study were awarded for and accustomed to a routine of formulaic reporting and editing for surface errors, these strategies stand in sharp contrast to the ‘reflective-revision’ skills necessary for the “deep writing” they were being asked to do at the college level. (37)

In addition, students also mentioned gaining confidence in first-year writing and learning processes that aided them in other settings.

Only five students named a disadvantage to enrolling in the traditional first-year course. Two mentioned the cost or time savings allowed by arriving with credit. One indicated that because college writing is different from high school writing, “you’re kind of thrown into the fire”—required to engage in more independent work and time management than previously. Another student pointed out that unlike in high school, where classmates were familiar, it can be “weird” to conduct peer reviews with students who you don’t know. Finally, one student said that class had a lot of “political focus; sometimes, the political bias was too much.” The student did not elaborate on this point, but we know that in an increasingly politically fraught environment, engaging in debates about public rhetoric and argument feels uncomfortable for some students.

As we look across the data, the students’ description of quite distinct experiences in each site complicate easy notions of equivalency, particularly in their engagement of the writing process, which impacts both the fostering of the habits of mind our field values, and the “depth” of writing experiences that result. We turn now to further examine these findings.

WHAT WE LEARN FROM STUDENTS ABOUT ARRIVING WITH CREDIT

As we compare the experiences of students across DE, AP, and first-year writing at our university, we find two key differences: (1) surface versus deep engagement of the writing process; and (2) presence or absence of habits of mind required of active learning (CWPA, NCTE, and the National Writing Project). Regarding the former, we found that while DE and AP students may have experienced components of process-based instruction, the writing process was treated more as a linear path toward correctness than a recursive, reflective process that involves rethinking one's ideas and re-seeing the draft. This, in turn, affects the depth of engagement required and enabled in each context. As Ellen Lavelle and Anthony J. Guarino found in their study of the writing attitudes and behaviors of 517 college students, "active, comprehensive revision is the defining element of deep writing" (302). Deep writing is inseparable from "reflective revision," which involves "seeing oneself as a maker of meaning, with respect for the powerful role of revision, and an awareness of revision as a tool for reshaping thinking via writing" (302). While we found evidence of deep writing and reflective revision in our group of students who enrolled in first-year writing at the university, we did not see this in the DE and AP groups. We believe that this is due to the material and structural constraints at play in these locations, where teachers do not have the time or curricular freedom to make the writing process the center of their classrooms. Indeed, Denecker argues that "'reflective revision' is unlikely to happen among writers at the secondary-level given teachers' heavy instructional loads and differing definitions of (as well as approaches to) process" (39). This is not to say that it is not possible to engage in reflective revision and deep writing in DE classes; in fact, Denecker describes a well-supported model of DE that makes this possible. But the students in our study did not report experiencing these opportunities.

Because the habits of mind named in the *Framework for Success* are facilitated by developing rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking, flexible writing practices, knowledge of conventions and composing in multiple environments, it also follows that the contexts in which the DE and AP students learned did not likely provide enough experience in these areas to foster dispositions like openness, curiosity, flexibility, and so on. While three students in the DE group mentioned writing a rhetorical analysis and five said they wrote arguments, for instance, they did not describe accompanying rhetorical or critical engagement that would enable a shift from "surface writing" that involves minimal involvement and adherence to rules (Lavelle and Guarino 298) to "deep writing," which involves making a contribution

to an ongoing conversation (Denecker 35). In contrast, the students in the traditional first-year writing group described learning to analyze audience, purpose and meaning and repeatedly emphasized teacher prompting to think deeply about their own and others' position in relation to the issue under study. "In high school," one student said, she focused on "checking off rubric requirements," whereas in college, she had to look "into what our piece actually meant to us." Another student explained that college writing is more focused on "what you want to write" instead of the teacher "setting out things that you need to write." As a result of this deeper engagement, many in the group felt dispositionally "changed" by the course. Our findings, then, support a central claim of the NCTE policy brief:

Allowing college credit for writing courses completed while in high school will not help students to fully develop capacities for engagement, persistence, collaboration, reflection, metacognition, flexibility, and ownership that will help them to grow as writers and learners. (3)

While we would argue that under the right conditions, DE courses could be designed to facilitate habits of mind, we are concerned that within the current climate, where there is a lack of coherent curriculum and oversight of DE courses, as well as lack of consistent teacher preparation for DE teachers, it is difficult to ensure students such experiences.

As our group under study is quite small, and our observations are particular to our state's educational context, we can't draw broad conclusions about AP and DE courses nationwide. However, this study does underscore the need to hear more from students about their experiences in classes deemed equivalent to first-year writing. We encourage our fellow compositionists, then, to both study and talk with students about how they perceive demands of college writing relative to the writing they've been asked to do in the past. This inquiry also aids us in considering how best to build on students' prior experiences and how to engage in more productive institutional conversations about notions of equivalency. As we think about our own 200-level writing course as well as other writing opportunities at our university (or lack thereof), our data supports the need for more instruction in "reflective revision" and, therefore, opportunities for "deep writing" across students' college careers (Lavelle and Guarino). We also need richer conversations with transfer offices and administrators about the complexities of equivalency. While top-down decisions are more efficient, it is crucial that the WPA, who can bring research to bear on this topic, plays a vital role in the process of granting course equivalency. As WPAs, we have found it useful to meet regularly with representatives from our transfer office

and academic advising to discuss how equivalency credit is awarded. In so doing, sharing documents like the *WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition* and the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* can help to foreground research-based best practices in first-year writing that foster students' development as writers and thinkers.

And because we see fewer students in our first-year writing curriculum, it is important for WPAs and composition faculty to advocate for robust WAC/WID experiences. If administrators aren't convinced of this based on the merit of writing, alone, they may be swayed by the clear evidence that employers value writing in making hiring decisions. A study of business hiring practices by the National Commission on Writing found that "50 percent of respondents take writing into consideration when hiring professional staff and 80 percent of corporations with employment growth potential assess writing during hiring" (Moore). Malek and Micciche suggest that as part of expanding the base of stakeholders who support "sustained, thoughtful writing instruction," we might consider allying with local businesses and employers to make the case for cross-disciplinary writing (91). Additionally, compositionists might consider this an opportune moment to establish writing concentrations, minors, or majors that would allow students to connect their majors with vertical writing experience and study. At our university, we have begun work with colleagues in communication studies on a shared minor, with the hope that students may choose to enhance their major with a set of courses focused on writing and communication.

Because there is no consistent professional preparation for DE instructors, teachers and students alike would benefit from more robust teacher development opportunities shaped by our field's shared statements. We also heartily agree with our colleagues in the field who advocate for more and deeper reciprocal dialogue between and among dual-enrollment and college instructors (see, for example, Denecker; McWain; Thompson; Jennings; Taczak and Thelin) that may ensure there is more coherence in writing instruction across institutional locations. We have found our state's National Writing Project site to be a wonderful avenue for these exchanges, particularly as our site has engaged with the NWP's College, Career, and Community Writers (C3WP) program. C3WP offers professional development opportunities for middle school, high school, and college instructors on evidence-based argument, employing many practices that mesh with the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Education* and supports deep, engaged writing. In addition, we agree with Howard Tinberg and Jean-Paul Nadeau about the critical need for NCTE to work with NACEP to

create shared curricular goals and practices that are built upon disciplinary expertise (721).

With the growing trend of students arriving with credit, we want to ensure that they don't lose opportunities for deep writing: to engage in meaningful conversations with peers and instructors about their writing; to expand their perspectives and ways of knowing; and to experience revision as a process of re-seeing their writing and the views that shape it.

NOTES

1. We recognize that dual-enrollment courses are named in a variety of ways depending on location: dual-enrollment, dual-credit, early college high school, concurrent enrollment, College Credit Plus, etc. For consistency, and because of its designation in our region, we use dual-enrollment (DE).

2. This study was approved by the University of Nebraska–Lincoln IRB under protocol number 20161116700EX.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How long have you been at UNL? What year are you? What is your major?
2. What kind of writing have you done in classes here?
3. What kind of writing do you do outside of school (including social media, tweeting, blogging, etc.)?
4. Is writing something you enjoy doing? Can you say more about that?
5. What experiences did you have in high school in writing-focused courses?
6. What kind of response to your writing did you receive from your teacher and your peers?
7. What experiences did you have with writing intensive projects in other high school courses?
8. Where did you take first-year composition? Why did you enroll in it in this location?
9. What formal writing projects did you complete in this class?
10. What kind of response to your writing did you receive from your teacher and your peers?
11. What other informal writing did you do in this class?
12. Do you see advantages to taking first-year writing where you did? Disadvantages?
13. How did (or didn't) your earlier writing courses prepare you take English 254?
14. What experiences would you say have most helped you as a writer?