

THE NOT-SO-UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCE: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF REGIONAL AND
NATIONAL SECONDARY AND POSTSECONDARY STANDARDS FOR WRITING

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I analyze six sets of high school and college standards and outcome statements on students writing to identify how expectations of students writing vary in their respective educational levels. I include local samples from North Dakota and Minnesota as well as examples at the national level. Utilizing content analysis, I identify frequently used terminology in these statements to uncover trends in how college-level writing is envisioned through the standards and outcomes. Through this analysis, I explore how the terminology used in standards and outcomes frame writing and how these pictures of writing from the high school perspective and the college perspective are connected and disconnected. My findings note that while there is shared base terminology around writing (particularly ‘audience’ and ‘purpose’), the high school standards lean more heavily on product-focused terms while the college outcomes emphasis process.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Making a career teaching writing presents a lot of opportunities for an ever increasing and evolving understanding of the subject, but it presents unique challenges. The discourse around writing instruction has shifted dramatically across its history in academia and continues to be in perpetual flux. While this ever-changing understanding of the subject works to reflect the evolutions of the world we live in, it can become challenging to not have an agreed upon set of facts and rules about writing. It can be both exciting and frustrating for teachers attempting to keep up with the latest best practices. For students progressing through various academic spaces, it can quickly become a point of frustration; they may feel under- or ill-prepared for their current situation and perhaps let down by previous instruction. This can also lead to a sense of cynicism from students who see the lack of consistency as a feature of an arbitrary discipline that they will never be able to master.

The societal and academic spaces occupied by high schools and colleges are adjacent with limited overlap. Colleges and high schools are not only physically-separated spaces, but they also have different roles within society; K-12 school is legally required for students to attend until a certain age while college is an option that may be required for entering certain career fields. Organizations and publication spaces exist for teachers at each level (e.g., in English, National Council for Teachers of English [NCTE] at the high school level and the Conference on College Composition and Communication [CCCC] at the college level), and while they may be hosted in shared web/physical spaces, voices are most often relegated to their specific spaces. For institutional and structural purposes, this division is not entirely unreasonable. However, it can lead to rifts in two educational spaces that are closely related for

many students. I started my journey in education as an undergraduate in English Education where I was trained to teach reading and writing at the secondary level. Through practicums and student teaching, I had the opportunity to teach a wide range of classes from a 6th grade remedial reading course to dual credit speech. After completing this experience, I moved on to pursue a Masters degree in English where I was granted a graduate teaching assistantship to teach first-year college writing. Making this transition from teaching in the secondary classroom to the postsecondary one was quite easy for me. However, given my background, it became more apparent to me over the years that there was some level of misunderstanding of high school instruction from the collegiate side and vice versa. The facets that create and perpetuate these misunderstandings are extensive and complicated. Therefore, uncovering and remedying the situation is an equally extensive and complicated process.

One aspect to consider when talking about writing instruction is the standards and outcome statements that shape the direction and structure of instruction. Our current educational moment is dominated by standards and learning outcomes. Most K-12 schools require lesson plans with target learning standards while many are pushing for standards-based grading in which students are assigned scores on how well they demonstrate common core standards (typically a 1-4 scale) rather than a letter grade based on points or percentages. While these standards help provide a common ground and framework for content, they also come with a lot of challenges, particularly in subjects like writing where one of the biggest challenges is when standards aren't standard. But should they be? If standards for writing were consistent across every level and in every region, what would that look like? On a production level, this brings up questions of labor and authority. Who is qualified to provide input on standards? Whose time and resources go into creating and revising standards and how are they compensated? Who gets a

final say on making standards official? On an ethical level, educators face having to elect a singular view of writing as “the” one that should be taught. Scholars rarely agree on what “good” writing is and how it should be taught, so to agree on a uniform approach for all teachers and students would seem to be a Sisyphean task. If such universal standards were to be established and enforced, what kind of writing would it produce? Other questions to consider include where these standards are located, who creates them, who they are for, and how they are carried out varies across spaces. However, standards and outcomes do all serve to promote some value or idea of writing that ultimately can impact the instruction students receive. As an instructor who values a student-centered education, I think it is important to understand learning about writing from the student’s perspective and how their experiences are shaped by standards and outcome statements that influence and guide the instruction they receive.

I am looking to better understand how writing is conceptualized at different levels of education as well as what kinds of writing are valued in regional or national bodies. In this project, I have selected a sample of North Dakota and Minnesota state and national educational standards for high school English Language Arts and college-level statements and learning outcomes for writing. In analyzing these standards, I aim to identify where expectations match and where they are disconnected in ways that may lead students to be ill-prepared for the transition to post-secondary work. While my aim is not necessarily to provide concrete solutions at this point, this project is a first step. This work identifies a specific manifestation of the complicated situation of how writing instruction is dictated at the high school and collegiate levels. The trends identified through my project and the implications thereof reflect many of the challenges faced in the larger conversation of transition between high school and college. Through this project, I have found that the terminology in high school standards emphasizes

product-based, research-based, informative and argumentative writing. Conversely, college level outcomes emphasize analytic and situational writing as well as focusing on the writing process. In understanding the underlying trends that lead to mismatched expectations for student writing, we can create better and more meaningful solutions. Upon conclusion of my analysis, I will provide ideas for possible routes to take in making these changes as well as what spaces still exist for scholarship to fill.

1.2. Review of Literature

Through a previous project, I revisited the key textbooks used to prepare me to teach secondary writing (*Bridging English* 2012) and English 120, a first-year writing course at NDSU, (*Engaging Ideas* 2011). I uncovered the way high school teachers are taught to engage with writing through strategies heavily steeped in expressivist scholarship (like Britton 1970 and Elbow 1973) where writing embraces emotion and imagination, while graduate instructors approach writing from a more structuralist angle centering around genre and genre conventions (Sills 2018, Devitt 2014, Miller 1984). Writing often serves different purposes in the high school classroom than the college classroom. Generally, in high school, classroom writing is often intrinsically tied to literature as a holistic approach to language arts seen through assignments like book reports and research papers. Writing at the high school level is seen as a form of expression and identity (Milner et al 2012, Johnson and Dehaan 2021) while also being formulaic in nature by following prescriptive writing formats like the five-paragraph essay (Mosley 2006). Milner believes that in high school writing “opportunities for expressive writing should be frequent” (333) and pushes for more student-centric writing instruction. In the college space, writing is used to demonstrate understanding and engage with course concepts (Sommers and Saltz 2004), stands independently as a subject/class, and is largely placed in the context of

Writing Across the Curriculum (Schorn 2006). Due to the prevalence in writing in disciplines outside of English, Schorn specifically advocates for faculty to work together to establish writing standards as those “devised by a cross-disciplinary process are more thoroughly interrogated and better understood by all parties” (p. 333). Sommers and Saltz believe effective college level writing is “the cumulative practice and sustained instruction – the gaining of expertise – gives students opportunities to participate in the world of ideas” (p. 147) which fits well with Schorn’s ideas of cross-discipline writing. Attempting to bridge the gap between two fundamentally different writing spaces is no small feat. However, it does provide opportunity for varied and nuanced discussion to take place and requires voices from multiple perspectives, from those teaching in the writing and Language Arts classrooms at secondary and post-secondary level, those developing standard and curriculum, and the students themselves.

One challenge in creating this dialogue is working past an instructional blame-game, which tends to fall on high school teachers (Davies 2006; Carroll 2002; Denecker 2020) and while not always malicious, it oversimplifies the complexities of preparing student writers. Carroll (2002) describes the experience of a fellow professor blaming a student’s “poor performance” on a paper on the student’s high school teachers, while Denecker (2020) pushes back on assumptions that high school teachers are unable to teach college writing.

As I began to investigate these two separate spaces of writing, it quickly became apparent that voices from these spaces are often as separate as their classrooms. Davies (2006) also speaks to this issue when she notes about preparing high schoolers for college writing: “I tell them what I think they should know and be able to do, but in reality I know that the expectations vary greatly between colleges and even among professors in the same college. Also, there is generally little communication between high school teachers and college professors” (31-32). I find this

sentiment touches on some of the core disconnects between high school and college writing: a lack of understanding and communication between educators at the high school and college level.

Sullivan and Tinberg (2006) work to bridge this gap by bringing together a variety of voices from both spaces, additionally considering student voices. Sullivan notes in his introduction the vital importance of open dialogue in trying to navigate such a complex relationship, noting that “respectful, openminded discourse is particularly important for this discussion because of the many variables involved, and it will be essential if we hope to avoid ‘going around in circles,’ (15). While Sullivan and Tinberg’s project opens that conversation, over fifteen years later there is still much work to do in terms of identifying what causes and perpetuates inconsistencies in writing and writing instruction as well as how to make changes to improve the connection between high school and college-level writing.

Taking a different approach to the space between high school and college writing, Hansen and Farris (2010) narrow in on programs that provide college writing credit to high school students, investigating the value and practicality of these programs from the perspectives of teachers and students, in educational and financial terms. Works they include discuss the successes and challenges of Advanced Placement, concurrent enrollment, International Baccalaureate diplomas, and early college programs finding that while these programs can benefit students preparing for college, they are complicated by politics and funding. Their work reveals many of the complexities of the larger issue, even within one narrowed scope. Relatedly, the peer-reviewed journal *Teaching English in the Two-Year College (TETYC)* put together a special issue in 2020 focusing on dual credit enrollment that reveals the challenges in navigating the inbetween space, including students struggling with their identity while being enrolled in

dual credit courses (Wecker & Wilde) and challenges teachers face balancing the physical and curricular divide between high school and college when teaching college credit courses (Russo). Other articles discuss the efficacy of various programs, finding success through community engagement in dual enrollment courses (Ridinger-Dotterman, Rochford & Hock), and noting that dual enrollment both provides access to higher education and exacerbates inequality by advantaging already privileged students (Rafliff & Smith). This space of dual credit (and like) programs reveals an interesting bridge in spaces as well as a microcosm of the challenge in transitioning from high school to college writing. While not the focus of my project here, collections on dual credit programs like those put forth by Hansen and Farris and *TETYC* explore one of the in-between spaces of high school and college writing, exemplifying the varied stakes and stakeholders.

Overall, it is clear that the stakeholders in the space are plentiful, including students, instructors, and administrators and the stakes in developing and delivering writing instruction are equally varied from finances, education, job security, personal achievement and fulfillment, etc. making this space difficult to navigate on a larger scale. Because there are so many affecting and affected parties involved around the curriculum, there will never be a straightforward solution to fix all of the challenges that come with writing instruction. As noted by Sullivan: “we [teaching professionals] should, at the very least, clearly understand the full variety of factors that help shape this debate, and carefully explore the imposing complexities that make determining a working definition of something like college-level writing problematic. I would like to argue, furthermore, that acknowledging the full range of complexities related to this issue is a necessary first step toward engaging in productive dialogue about it.” (pg 2) Acknowledging these

complexities is an important first step in entering the conversation around writing instruction across the high school and college level.

The literature around the gaps in secondary and post-secondary writing reveal a tangled web of intersectional contributing factors that span pedagogy, institutional goals, school culture, national and state expectations, curriculum, local politics, and socio-economics. Through my reading, I found that, like most issues facing academia, there is no easy solution. Beyond that, I found there is still much work to do in unpacking and understanding the root causes of the existing gaps before effective solutions can be developed. My project looks to find one particular thread to unravel by examining standards and outcome statements on writing at the secondary and post-secondary level on a local and national level.

- In this project, I seek to answer three key questions:
- What particular terminology is used in writing standards/outcomes and what definitions and understandings of writing does that terminology promote?
- How do these definitions and understandings create varied expectations of and for writing?
- What alignments and misalignments can be found in these varied expectations?

2. PROJECT DESIGN

2.1. Sources

For this project, I ultimately decided on six documents to analyze spanning high school and college contexts at the local and national levels. This sample group of statements was selected to identify regional and national trends in addition to trends at the high school and first-year college levels. The particular regions I chose for this project were North Dakota and Minnesota. I have the most direct experience with North Dakota's standards and outcomes as I have personally taught to those. Wanting to include more than just one local sample group, I included Minnesota which is the most popular out-of-state post-secondary choice for ND high school graduates and vice-versa (insights.nd.gov, MN Office of Higher Education). Determining what to use for high school level writing was quite straightforward as there are both national and state standards for English Language Arts that specifically lay out expectations for K-12 education which each contain a statement on college and career preparedness. Finding statements at the college level proved to be more challenging as there are not government regulated/mandated projects as prominent and universal as the state standards at the high school level. However, I was able to identify some general education guidelines for both the Minnesota and North Dakota state college systems. As for a national level statement, I looked to the Council of Writing Program Administrators as a representative organization of first-year college level writing and writing instruction.

While this is no means an exhaustive list, nor all of the statement types directly parallel in nature, this sample proves appropriate for the scope of this particular project while still unveiling patterns and trends when examined cross-sectionally. I kept my selection limited to six

statements for the scope and timeline of this project. The statements and standards I have selected are:

- Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing (**CCSS**)
- North Dakota English Language Arts & Literacy Content Standards: College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing 6-12 (**ND ELA**)
- Minnesota English Language Arts Standards: Career and College Readiness Statement (**MN ELA**)
- Council Of Writing Program Administrators Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition (3.0) (**WPA**)
- North Dakota University Systems (**NDUS**)¹
- ENGL 110 College Composition I Course Objectives/Competencies
- ENGL 120 College Composition II Course Objectives/Competencies
- Minnesota Transfer Curriculum Goal 1: Communication (**MnTC**)

CCSS were established in 2010 in response to states' calls for standards to better prepare students for college and career literacy before exiting high school. The project was led by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association, who posit that CCSS is "(1) research and evidence based, (2) aligned with college and work expectations, (3) rigorous, and (4) internationally benchmarked" (CCSS 4). CCSS provides educational goals to

¹ The ENGL 110 and ENGL 120 learning outcomes were ran through Voyant individually but analyzed together as one statement

help guide instruction at the k-12 level that states can individually choose to opt into. While not actual requirements for students to achieve, they set out benchmarks to scaffold student learning through elementary and secondary school. The current ND ELA standards were put into effect in 2017, were written by North Dakota teachers in a project coordinated by the Department of Public Instruction, and borrow heavily from CCSS. These standards are described by Kristen Baesler, then Superintendent of Public Instruction, as “best of North Dakota education: North Dakota teachers writing North Dakota standards in an open, transparent and diligent manner” (forward). The MN ELA standards were created in 2010 and reviewed in 2020 by the ELA Standards Review Committee per Minnesota’s Statutes requiring a review every ten years; this committee was made up by a variety of educators and organization representatives (1). While Minnesota did use CCSS in developing their state standards, however they have heavily revised the structure and some of the content within the standards. The WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition (3.0) was approved in 2014 and aims to set goals for first-year writing courses at the college level. This statement was headed by the CWPA Outcomes Statement Revision Task Force. The NDUS provides learning outcomes for English 110 and 120, the first-year writing courses at all two- and four-year colleges within the university system. The Minnesota Transfer Curriculum was originally established in 1994 (reviewed by the MnTC Oversight Committee in 2008) in collaboration with all public two- and four-year colleges in the state to “help students transfer their work in general education” and was designed by faculty representatives of the colleges (“The Minnesota Transfer Curriculum”). MnTC defines ten “goal areas” that represent the general concepts that each college area aims to teach students to ease in transfer of course credit across all public Minnesota colleges/universities. For this project, I focused on Goal 1: Communication which covers a number of courses including first year

writing courses. I limited my sources at the college level as explicitly as possible to first-year writing as that is typically where students first encounter college writing.

2.2. Voyant

The first stage of my analysis involves running the selected statements through Voyant, an open-source web-based text reading tool. This particular program was chosen due to ease of access being free-to-use and available online as well as my personal familiarity with the program. Voyant provides numerous analytics on inputted text; the most relevant data sets to my project is the document terms, which identifies the frequency at which each unique word is used throughout the text. This data in particular reveals the terminology favored and emphasized within the statements allowing me to more easily identify trends when performing my analysis. I ran each statement individually then in the following groupings:

- High School Combined (CCSS, ND ELA, MN ELA)
- College Combined (WPA, NDUS, MnTC)
- North Dakota Combined (ND ELA, NDUS)
- Minnesota Combined (MN ELA, MnTC)
- National Combined (CCSS, WPA)
- All Combined (CCSS, ND ELA, MN ELA, WPA, NDUS, MnTC)

The goal of these groupings was to better identify trends unique to the high school and college levels as well as regional and national trends. After running each corpus, I transferred the data regarding document terms into a spreadsheet for ease of comparison, adding notes, and color coding or tagging information as desired.

2.3. Analysis Plan

To approach this project, I have used content analysis techniques. This approach uses quantitative methods to identify patterns through the repetition of words and/or phrases which can help “discern a text’s focal concerns by noticing the words and phrases that repeat within it” or through omissions “account for underrepresented, downplayed, or altogether ignored matters” (Clary-Lemon et al. 78). After reviewing the Voyant results, I took notes on the trends specific to commonly used words and recorded my initial interpretation of specific terminology and where it is and isn’t used. In this phase, I also began referring back to the full statements to better understand the context of how and where terms were used. Using the results for each individual statement as well as the various combinations thereof, I can compare and contrast the terminology favored by each statement as well as trends at the high school/college level and at the local/national level. Throughout this process, I referred back to my research questions to see how the trends I identified could answer those questions. I interpreted the results by drawing on denotative/connotative understandings, contextual information, previous scholarship, and personal experience.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Voyant Results

Included in the following table are the fifteen most frequently used words in each individual statement that I am analyzing in this project. Some of the terms discussed in my analysis may not appear in this table as they only emerge as trends in combined searches or are commonly used but fall outside the top fifteen in frequency/alphabetically.

Table 1

Fifteen most frequently used terms in each statement

	CCSS		ND ELA		MN ELA		WPA		NDUS 110		NDUS 120		MnTC	
	Term	#	Term	#	Term	#	Term	#	Term	#	Term	#	Term	#
1	writing	13	writing	10	knowledge	6	conventions	16	writing	7	writing	7	writing	5
2	information	5	information	5	able	4	composing	15	students	6	students	6	speaking	4
3	research	5	analysis	4	skills	4	fields	10	use	6	use	6	communication	3
4	analysis	4	produce	4	texts	4	processes	10	competencies	5	written	6	appropriate	2
5	produce	4	research	4	value	4	texts	10	ideas	5	competencies	5	effectively	2
6	standards	4	standards	4	career	3	use	10	information	5	ideas	5	listening	2
7	students	4	students	4	college	3	students	8	style	5	information	5	students	2
8	write	4	range	3	critical	3	writers	8	work	5	style	5	use	2
9	range	3	sources	3	cultures	3	develop	7	purpose	4	work	5	view	2
10	sources	3	texts	3	identities	3	learn	7	resources	4	purpose	4	able	1
11	texts	3	use	3	learning	3	rhetorical	7	sub	4	sources	4	academic	1
12	time	3	write	3	perspectives	3	different	6	variety	4	sub	4	arguments	1
13	types	3	able	2	use	3	knowledge	6	written	4	audience	3	audiences	1
14	use	3	accurately	2	variety	3	reading	6	audience	3	evaluate	3	authority	1
15	able	2	career	2	wide	3	evaluate	5	author's	3	participate	3	base	1

which implies writing as a product; this process includes “research” and “analysis” as key features.

“For students, **writing is a key means of asserting and defending claims, showing what they know about a subject, and conveying what they have experienced, imagined, thought, and felt.** To be college- and career-ready writers, **students must take task, purpose, and audience into careful consideration,** choosing words, information, structures, and formats deliberately... They must have the flexibility, concentration, and fluency to **produce high-quality first draft text under a tight deadline** as well as the capacity to revisit and make improvements to a piece of writing over multiple drafts when circumstances encourage or require it.” (CCSS, emphasis added)

Here we see CCSS’s thesis of what college and career writing is: it is a way to effectively argue, demonstrate understanding, and communicate experience. Largely, I do find that most college and professional writing can be sorted into these categories or a combination thereof (a lab report demonstrates understanding, a literacy narrative communicates experience, a commentary argues a point, etc.) though something like a memo may be a bit more slippery to define by these three forms of writing as, situation dependent, it might not be arguing, demonstrating, or sharing experience. In a survey of thousands of college level writing assignments, Melzer (2014) found that the majority of the assignments were informative in nature, particularly having students reflect on or apply information and topics learned in class lectures and materials. Melzer also found persuasive writing assignments to be common, though less frequent than informative writing, and ‘expressive’ or ‘poetic’ writing assignments to be incredibly infrequent. I do think there is some merit in providing a general direction and purposes for writing, however limiting

that to three definitive avenues can ultimately tunnel a student's understanding of what writing is and for.

In line with my previous point on CCSS's goal for college level writing, their statement lays out three "text types" (informational, argumentative, narrative) and gives a brief description of the purpose of each. While I think these statements could broadly be considered mostly accurate, they are ultimately a restrictive and prescriptive understanding of writing, especially first-year college writing. Additionally, they fail to account for analytic writing; analytic writing could technically fall under the umbrella of "argumentative" however analytic writing has its own emphasis in first-year college writing, which would seem to suggest that it is important to understand as its own text type or an important subcategory of argumentative writing. Analytic writing requires a layer of evaluation that may not be entirely necessary for all argumentative writing (for example, opinion-based arguments based on personal preference or experience would not always require analysis or evaluation to be effective). There is a brief mention of evaluating sources in the side note of CCSS and noted in the MN ELA standards, however it is limited to evaluating sources for research purposes rather than an element of writing itself. Indicating a few general categories of text types can be helpful for prioritizing certain kinds of writing in space where it is unreasonable to teach it all, but the lack of nuance they are presented with can be rather limiting. I find that the genre approach taken at the first-year college writing level to be a more nuanced approach that still helps students understand the goals of writing but does not limit that understanding to three goals.

Table 2*Commonly used terms in high school standards*

Term	Combined Usage/ Percentage	CCSS	ND ELA	MN ELA
Information	12 (100%)	5 (42%)	5 (42%)	2 (17%)
Texts	10 (100%)	3 (30%)	3 (30%)	4 (40%)
Produce	8 (100%)	4 (50%)	4 (50%)	0 (0%)
Able	8 (100%)	2 (24%)	2 (24%)	4 (50%)
Purpose(s)	8 (100%)	4 (50%)	3 (38%)	1 (13%)
Content	6 (100%)	2 (33%)	2 (33%)	2 (33%)
Audience(s)	6 (100%)	3 (50%)	2 (33%)	1 (17%)
Task(s)	6 (100%)	3 (50%)	2 (33%)	1 (17%)

“Task, purpose, and audience” are the important factors to understand and consider to create effective writing. Audience in writing has always been a challenge because of its fictionalized nature (Ong 1975); writers typically do not come into direct contact with their audiences during the writing process and therefore must imagine their audience and how to address them using prior knowledge or outside information like feedback from an instructor (Ede & Lunsford 1984). The classroom also has an added challenge that the actual audience (the teacher) is often different from the intended audience. Teachers are currently being pushed to help students write for ‘real’ audiences (“Professional Knowledge,” “Definition of Literacy”), though how exactly that should be addressed is not specified in these particular standards. I personally find task v. purpose a tricky distinction to make and neither term is further explained or defined in any way in the document. My teacher education and GTA teaching experiences used “purpose” often in discussing writing instruction, which helped me develop a nuanced theoretical and practical understanding of the term. Since I did not have the same experience

with the term “task,” I struggle to define it separately than “purpose” and would be unsure on how to differentiate the ideas to students if I were to develop a lesson around these standards. This is just a personal example from my own experience, but I believe it highlights the challenge of these standards using common terms but not providing further elaboration on the terms. Within the CCSS, ND ELA, and MN ELA standards, “task,” “purpose,” and “audience” are grouped together, almost like a connected phrase or list, providing no additional context as to how these terms are understood by the creators of the standards. Particularly in the case of “task” and “purpose,” these high school standards would benefit from indicating how these terms are understood to be different in concept and praxis. While individual teachers could seek out further clarification of such terms in scholarship, using such terms without clarification of the terms makes it challenging to teach a universal understanding which is the goal of documents like CCSS, ND ELA, and MN ELA.

Beyond elements of audience and purpose, the CCSS/ND ELA standards have an additional note on the scope of writing products that students should complete. These two sets of standards contain an emphasis on a particular short-form version of writing in addition to longer-term projects. They do not include any sort of timeline for longer projects, but rather just the what should be completed in that timeframe (“time for research, reflection, and revision”), but provide a very specific one for short-term writing (“a single sitting or a day or two”). Whether or not intended, there lies an implication here that “research, reflection, and revision” are not necessary parts of writing done in a short time frame. Additionally, what kind of writing that is expected to be done in a “single sitting” is unclear, though the most ready application that comes to mind here are essay tests, either standardized or for a class. One obvious application of this style of writing would include the Advanced Placement (AP) English Language and

Composition exam, which students can potentially receive college credit for. The AP English exam includes a writing section in which students are allotted 2 hours and 15 minutes to write three short essays responding to prompts, one for each of the following categories: synthesis question, rhetorical analysis, and argument (CollegeBoard.org). In a similar vein, the ACT offers an optional writing section in which students have 40 minutes to write an essay responding to a provided prompt (ACT.org). Both of these timed writing tests are scored against rubrics designed by the test makers that evaluate both the form and function of the writing. In these scenarios, creating well constructed essays that constitute a final draft in a very short amount of time is a vital skill. Outside of these scenarios, such short-term writing projects do not seem to quite fit with the expectations of writing seen through the statements analyzed in this project, though that is not to say they are without merit. Perhaps this could be meant to include quick communicative writing like emails or low-stakes journaling or reflective writing. Ultimately, the trouble is the lack of direction on what this short-time-frame writing is meant to achieve.

While the ND ELA standards are pulled directly from CCSS, MN ELA bears little resemblance to CCSS in overall structure and differs in content. When the CCSS and ND ELA standards stand in contrast to the MN ELA statement, which covers all English Language arts and is not exclusive to writing, there is little terminology in common. However, they do share some focus on “content,” which serves as a fairly flexible term to refer to writing products, and “technology.” Each of these standards does emphasize the need for students to be able to effectively use “technology” in writing production in order to be prepared for college and career writing, though what is considered “technology” is not explicated on within any of these three sets of standards. What these standards do all have directly in common and frequently used in each is “texts” which in the context of the standards is used to refer to both the material produced

by students and the material used for research. High school standards also lean more into the term “able” when discussing actionable and measurable progress. I find “able” to be a baseline term that does not specify how well or to what degree students demonstrate a skill, but rather just that it can, in fact, be done. It also leaves some room for teacher interpretation in whether a student demonstrated that minimum requirement.

I would describe the goals in the MN ELA standards as more abstract than those in the CCSS and ND ELA standards; notably, writing is not mentioned at all in the CCRS statement; rather, this statement focuses on learning and gaining/demonstrating “knowledge,” which is not strictly defined in this document. Many of the references is to knowledge in the MN ELA statement are contextualized with the reading aspect of English Language Arts; however, the statement also holds that students should “communicate strong content knowledge” and “refine and share their knowledge.” This particular phrasing puts writing as a vehicle for knowledge rather than a way of *creating* knowledge as conceptualized in college-level writing texts like Naming What We Know. Heidi Estrem argues “Understanding and identifying how writing is in itself an act of thinking can help people more intentionally recognize and engage with writing as a creative activity, inextricably linked to thought. We don’t simply think first and then write. We write to think” (19). Comparing the framing of writing and knowledge in the MN ELA statement to Estrem’s assertions shows the subtle difference in phrasing that reflects quite different understandings of what role writing serves in the classroom.

apply to all areas of English Language Arts; neither statement is exclusively/explicitly about writing. NDUS's outcomes for ENGL 110/120 sit right in the middle in terms of statement length and have the most specific application as they lay out learning outcomes for two specific writing courses within the university system.

As we move to look at the first-year college level statements, there is a bit of a shift in how writing is talked about. There is a much greater emphasis on process with actionable terms like "composing," "work," "evaluate," "learn," and "develop" all of which are among the 20 most frequently used terms across the college statements and used rarely, if at all, in the high school standards. Envisioning writing through such verbs emphasizes the doing of writing rather than the product of writing. Process is more explicitly discussed in the first-year college level outcome statements than the high school standards. In fact, the WPA outcomes have an entire sub-section dedicated to the discussion of 'processes' in which they discuss drafting and revising as well as collaborative and environmental aspects of the writing process. NDUS and MnTC also highlight writing as a process including drafting and revising.

Unlike the high school standards, the college outcome statements shy away from explicitly labeling limited categories of writing. In the first-year college level learning outcomes, we see terminology that lends itself to more flexible understandings of writing; the WPA statement was designed specifically to allow for shifting technologies in that the "language can be read for both analogue and emergent composing technologies, but it more consistently emphasizes the interrelatedness of composing technologies and processes" (Dryer et. al 139). This reflects a more multimodal writing process and an embedded use of technology rather than the explicit call for it in standards at the high school level. While the CCSS, ND ELA, and MN ELA standards all call for students to be able to use technology in writing to be prepared for

college and career writing, the ways in which high school teachers are taught or advised to use technology in the classroom can feel inconsistent and unclear. In a position statement published by NCTE, “Beliefs for Integrating Technology into the English Language Arts Classroom (2018),” teachers are encouraged to teach technology more holistically as a method of composition including design, fair use, and other elements of multimodal writing. This approach serves to center technology in the learning and writing process. Meanwhile, the textbook used in my own teacher education, *Bridging English* (2012), notes that technology should be used as a tool for writing, but using it should not be a goal in and of itself (p. 51), which serves to decentralize technology in the learning and writing process. Ultimately, teachers may find it frustrating to navigate these expectations leading to teaching using their personal experience and best judgment, which while not inherently a bad thing, can result with students having drastically different skills and conceptualizations of technology in the writing process.

Table 3

Commonly used terms in college outcome statements

Term	Combined usage/ percentage	WPA	NDUS ENGL110	NDUS ENGL120	MnTC
Process(es)	14 (100%)	10 (71%)	1 (7%)	1(7%)	2 (14%)
Work(s)	15 (100%)	5 (33%)	5 (33%)	5 (33%)	0 (0%)
Audience(s)	13 (100%)	5 (38%)	4 (31%)	3 (23%)	1 (8%)
Purpose(s)	13 (100%)	5 (38%)	4 (31%)	4 (31%)	0 (0%)
Learn(ing)	15 (100%)	8 (53%)	3 (33%)	4 (27%)	0 (0%)
Develop	10 (100%)	7 (70%)	1 (10%)	1 (10%)	1 (10%)
Evaluate	12 (100%)	5 (42%)	3 (25%)	3 (25%)	1 (8%)

Beyond process, there are two important concepts that become prevalent at the first-year college level that are largely or entirely void from the high school standards: “rhetoric” and “evaluate.” Evaluation is very explicitly defined and broken down as the key focus of the Critical Thinking section of the WPA statement, laying out when and how to use evaluation in writing. NDUS asks for evaluation of sources in research as well as writing evaluative pieces of a text, clearly indicating what texts students are expected to evaluate and by what metrics (i.e. source validity; an author’s style, organization, source use, etc). MnTC also mentions evaluation, though it is in an incredibly vague statement that allows interpretation of how to apply the standard. The statement only clarifies the texts students should evaluate (“diverse sources and points of view”) but does not indicate what that evaluation should include. These ideas of rhetoric and evaluation can be key in helping students understand not only *what* makes writing effective but *why*.

3.4. Trends at the Local/National Level (ND ELA, NDUS // MN ELA, MnTC // CCSS, WPA)

3.4.1. North Dakota

As I begin looking at the statements/standards from North Dakota, I do keep in mind that the ND ELA standards are directly pulled from CCSS. No where in the document containing the ND ELA standards is it explicitly acknowledged where these statements are from, however they are copied from CCSS nearly word-for-word (the exception being a footnote from the CCSS document regarding examples in an appendix which ND ELA does not include). Overall, ND ELA very closely follows CCSS in both content and structure.

Across the North Dakota statements, “information” is the most commonly shared term. The majority of the uses of “information” is in reference to using sources/texts, though some are more focused about the communication of ideas. Overall, this reveals a very informative-centric

3.4.3. National

Proportionally to the statement lengths, “students,” “texts,” and “develop” are the terms that are in common between the two national level statements. Overall, I do not find these terms to be particularly telling, though “develop” does carry a connotation of process. More equally shared terms include “research,” “evidence,” “range,” “sources” and “purpose.” Again, we see an emphasis on informational and research-backed writing.

Otherwise, it seems that each of these statements tend to favor different language. The WPA includes far more details on expectations of/for writing which the length of the WPA statement lends itself to. As this document serves more as a tool to inform instruction, it benefits from providing lengthier, more detailed descriptions to better help instructors incorporate it into their own curriculum. The WPA provides outcomes at an educational level at which most students are specializing in a particular field of study and learning job specific tasks, including honing in more general skills like writing. CCSS offers more specific goals for writing elsewhere in the standards, but those focus on goals for high school level writing. As the CCSS doesn’t actually intend to teach college level writing but rather *prepare* students for college level writing, it does make sense to spend less time developing specifics on college level writing. It is also worth considering that high school is legally required for students to attend (to what extent varies by state) and have more generalized goals for teaching students to either prepare them for the workforce or continue on to higher education.

3.5. Other Trends

Looking at a global view of this sample group of statements, “writing” and “students” are the most common terms across all statements. Simply, this is what these statements are about and who they are about. While these statements are explicitly *about* students, they are not necessarily

who they are for as most of these standards and statements note that, while accessible to a larger audience, they are for instructors to build instruction around.

“Information” and “sources” are also trends across all of the statements. Information and sources have a particular alignment with a view of writing that is more research based and informational in nature. This generally implies a practical understanding and use for writing at the first-year college level. We also see “purpose” as a common term, most uses of the term encouraging students to understand the intended outcome of a piece of writing. This does allow for quite a bit of flexibility in writing in that any form of writing may be acceptable so long as there is a clear purpose that is understood.

3.6. Moments of Interest

WPA does not use “writing” but rather uses “composing” which is an interesting choice. Composing has a more artistic connotation (one “composes” a piece of music or artwork) despite a neutral denotation of creation to any means. This wording choice was made explicitly to move to a multimodal understanding of writing in response to digital technologies and their prevalent role in composition (Dryer et al.). By using an intentionally ambiguous term, the WPA outcome statement also allows for further interpretation of writing beyond the current standard of keyboard and word processor.

Another word choice WPA emphasizes is “conventions” which the statement defines as “the formal rules and informal guidelines that define genres, and in so doing, shape readers’ and writers’ perceptions of correctness or appropriateness” and which “rise from a history of use and facilitate reading by invoking common expectations between writers and readers.” This brings up a few different points that I’ve discussed previously. The first is the cultural aspect of writing, which the WPA explicitly acknowledges in their definition of conventions. The term

“convention” itself denotes an agreement of some body; the WPA explains in writing, this body are “writers and readers.” The use of conventions is one that allows for a rather flexible application of the idea of “rules” in writing by defaulting to the “writers and readers” of a particular genre. Overall, I think this focus on conventions, particularly in regards to genre, allows students to understand their writing in a categorical manner without boxing it into three broad and incomplete categories like the high school standards do.

Students who have shaped their perception of writing around three text types as premised by standards in CCSS may struggle when they encounter writing that is outside of those categories, or even writing that serves as a combination of text types. In combination with the lack of critical evaluation skills, students may be entering their first-year writing courses with an incredibly narrow understanding of writing. This could make the transition to genre-based instruction difficult as students might continue to mentally sort their writing into the three categories they were taught in high school. There appears to be a total shift in how students approach identifying writing types rather than a scaffolded understanding in the transition from high school to first-year college writing. Rather than teaching three selective text types, I think introducing a similar context-based approach to writing at the high school level would better prepare students for how many first-year writing courses are structured. Such an approach would also work well with incorporating basic rhetorical evaluation skills at the high school level by considering what makes writing successful in its specific context rather than trying to assign writing to a predetermined category.

4. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

4.1. Discussion

4.1.1. How Do These Definitions and Understandings Create Varied Expectations of and for Writing?

The results of my content analysis showed one the most notable differences between high school and college standards were rhetoric and evaluation, two ideas largely or entirely absent at the high school level. Perhaps these skills are viewed as more general critical thinking skills and therefore are not imagined by high school instructors to be a piece of college level writing. Perhaps they are intended to be implicit to the standards or “critical thinking/analysis” does not need to be directly included in writing specific standards. Whatever the reasoning, this may result in students who are underprepared to undertake projects such as rhetorical analysis, critical reading, comparative analysis, commentaries, and more. While the high school standards do discuss style, audience, and purpose, the lack of specific discussion of rhetoric leads me to believe that students might understand the mechanics of those elements of writing but do not understand how and why those elements are or are not successful in a particular piece.

Table 4

Usage of “rhetorical” and “evaluate/evaluating”

Term(s)	Uses in college outcomes combined	Uses in high school statements combined
Rhetorical	8	0
Evaluate/Evaluating	12	3

Notably, “audience” and “purpose” are used frequently in all six standards, which perhaps indicates there is a more universal understanding of those concepts than some of the other terms used in discussing writing. Audience and purpose neatly translate to the simple

questions “for who?” and “what for?” which can generally be answered in a relatively definitive, objective manner. How exactly these terms are handled in the standards and outcomes I will discuss further later in this section. Seeing these terms in common indicates a reliance on audience and purpose as universal key concepts in communication. However, by not providing more specific definitions of what audiences and purposes, these standards seem to rely on educators bringing their own nuanced understandings of these terms to their instruction. Teachers may rely on personal experience, their educational training, and/or professional resources and scholarship to bring in nuances beyond “for who?” and “what for?” when teaching audience and purpose.

However, many other elements of writing are not so succinct. Terms like “style” and “design” are subjective in nature and what is considered “good” style and design is shifting and culturally dependent, much like writing itself. Culturally we have decided some general principles for “good” design, whether through strictly decided conventions in style guides or advice through design textbooks (e.g. *The Non-Designer’s Design Book*), though even across those systems there are differences in preference. Style is an even trickier term than design; Milner goes so far as to argue it is the most difficult element of writing for students to understand as it can encapsulate so many different aspects such as diction, inclusion of details, use of imagery, transitions, and figurative language (p. 361). CCSS and ND ELA do not provide any elaboration on how style should be taught, only that students should be able to use it ‘appropriately.’

While “style” and “design” seems to be more concerned with the product within the statements and standards, “technology/technologies” are terms that have more to do with process. CCSS/ND ELA standards simply denote that students must be able to use technology as

part of the writing process and production, whereas MN ELA and WPA statements also indicate a need for critical understanding of technology. MN ELA has the specific goal that students “become responsible digital citizens” and the WPA statement discusses technologies as a means of composition and publication as well as a research tool. Overall, the use of technology at different levels is apparent, though the use and application of it is inconsistent. How technology is understood, taught, and valued at the secondary and postsecondary level is an important conversation to continue that reaches beyond just the writing classroom. Standards and outcomes ask students to learn to effectively communicate through digital technologies despite the waning education for basic skills like keyboarding (Gong, Zhang, and Li 2022). Technology in the classroom is a very large conversation, but within the confines of writing standards and outcomes, a step forward could be providing more explicit expectations of skills students should learn in order to be successful at their current educational levels. As previously discussed, the high school standards are more explicit in their calls for students to be able to utilize digital technology in their writing, while college outcomes take a more integrated approach. Notably, this integration of technology into other aspects of writing (rather than a stand-alone goal) was an explicit choice in the current version of the WPA outcomes which removed the previous version’s “Composing in Electronic Environments” outcome, but reworked the concepts into sub-goals under other outcomes (Dryer).

A particular moment I want to turn to next is the treatment of drafts in writing in the CCSS/ND ELA standards: “They [students] must have the flexibility, concentration, and fluency to *produce high-quality first draft text under a tight deadline* as well as the capacity to revisit and make improvements to a piece of writing over multiple drafts when circumstances encourage or require it” (emphasis added). In contrast, the WPA statement only includes discussion of

completing multiple drafts of a project and while the NDUS outcomes for ENGL 110/120 do not explicitly discuss drafting, the program specific text for those courses at NDSU, *Writing Critically*, does specifically teach Anne Lamott's concept of "shitty first drafts." Similar sentiments are expressed by Collin Brooke and Allison Carr in *Naming What We Know*: "We often forget, however, that successful writers aren't those who are simply able to write brilliant first drafts" (62). The idea of a "high-quality first draft" seems to be exclusive to these high school standards, which indicates that CCSS/ND ELA imagine it to be a part of college-level writing to some degree despite the lack of emphasis in college-level writing outcomes and scholarship.

4.1.2. What Alignments and Misalignments Can Be Found in These Varied Expectations?

Here I return to my question of where these standards do and do not align. I found that on a first glance of each statement, they were not terribly different from one another. There is a consistent focus on communicating ideas, understanding purpose, and using sources; research-based informative and argumentative writing is presented in nearly every statement. It would track that this kind of writing is the easiest to view as transferable as research is relevant in any field of work or study. I find this does quite well match my experience teaching first-year writing as students tend to have very strong research report skills; they are generally very adept at writing summaries of sources. However, this does present a challenge when students are asked to move past summaries and make judgements on a source, consider the use of rhetoric in a source, or understand how to employ rhetoric in their own writing. Students often lack the skills to conduct an analysis, most often not conceptualizing the difference between observation and analysis. I agree with Dirk, who argues that rhetorical knowledge is essential to understanding the writing beyond its form to determine what is appropriate for its function. If high school

students are asked to write “appropriately” for audiences and purposes, they should be given the tools that help them understand what is appropriate. Introducing the basics of rhetoric at the high school level also serves to put students on better footing when they enter their first-year college writing courses where they may otherwise be asked to rhetorically evaluate a piece of writing in their very first encounter with rhetoric as a concept. Courses like AP English already introduce basic rhetorical concepts at the high school level, and I believe extending those basics into the expectations for all high school English classes may better prepare all students for entering first-year college writing. I would suggest at the high school level, rather than teaching watered-down versions of concepts like ethos/pathos/logos, teaching students to carefully consider elements of their writing like word choice, tone, and presentation work to different effects in different contexts. Discussing common situations where students encounter writing (eg. social media posts, news articles, instruction manuals, etc.) and what factors writers need to consider in that situation help build the critical thinking skills that can then be later developed into more technical rhetorical understandings later.

While the rhetoric and evaluation pieces are notably missing as part of the content taught at the high school level, there is also a discussion to be had about how the act of writing itself is handled. A noticeable rift that I observed when looking through my results was the emphasis on product v process. The high school standards had a noticeable lack of process detail beyond standard 5: “Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.” Even that standard is under the “Production and Distribution of Writing” subheading, which explicitly highlights product over process by choosing the term “production.” This emphasis is not coincidental; the introduction to the CCSS standards clarifies the intent of the standards:

A focus on results rather than means: By emphasizing required achievements, the Standards leave room for teachers, curriculum developers, and states to determine how those goals should be reached and what additional topics should be addressed. Thus, the Standards do not mandate such things as a particular writing process or the full range of metacognitive strategies that students may need to monitor and direct their thinking and learning. Teachers are thus free to provide students with whatever tools and knowledge their professional judgment and experience identify as most helpful for meeting the goals set out in the Standards. (4)

Having this additional context confirms the trends I noticed in the CCSS/ND ELA standards with the focus on product over process. MN ELA, which does not rely on CCSS, does not have a similar note. The real trouble comes when teachers working to follow standards like these are left without guidance on teaching process (thinking back to high school teachers just giving it their best bet as to how to prepare their student for college level writing) and it may ultimately be left out of instruction all together. High school teachers are often either expected or reduced to checking boxes that standards create (Jolley 2014), meaning if the box of teaching process does not exist, it may be neglected. In schools where lessons are required to be tied to specific standards, teachers may find it difficult to spend significant time discussing the writing process with their students. This is not a surprising trend to me as I often hear from students at the end of the semester of first-year writing that they are not accustomed to completing so many drafts or even spending as much time as we do on each essay/project. In fact this specific gap in drafting is apparent in the wording of the standards, as none of the high school standards discuss the act of drafting, only CCSS and ND ELA briefly noting that students should be able to create one or multiple drafts. This again highlights the focus on product over process.

While CCSS explicitly notes their reasoning for leaving out process is because they believe that aspect should be left to the teacher's discretion, there may be other factors that continue to contribute to the emphasis on product. Standardized tests, both those that are optional and required to be used in a variety of contexts, have been at the center of educational discourse and praxis for much of the last two decades. National and state standards may not be designed to teach directly to these kinds of tests, however they do operate within the same structures and push for standardized education. To this end, product is easier to standardize than process, which CCSS seems to recognize given the above statement. This standardization of writing as product may be how many students will enter first-year college writing classes knowing little beyond the five-paragraph essay and having minimal experience with creating and revising multiple drafts of a project.

Despite these contrasting emphasis on process v. product, there are some strong correlations between all of the standards; every single statement discusses 'audience' and all but the MnTC statement talk about 'purpose'. These stand out as the non-negotiables on writing as envisioned by the standards. I believe audience and purpose are universal building blocks no matter the form or function of writing, meaning that regardless of how writing is envisioned these two ideas can be included. However the vagueness with which these terms are handled in the standards and outcomes I've analyzed is somewhat frustrating. None of the six standards and statements clarify what audiences are or which ones students should be reaching, just that they should be communicating with an audience effectively. Purpose is also handled very generally with students asked to address their purposes effectively, and in the case of the NDUS outcomes analyze an author's purpose. The WPA does provide more context than on purpose, noting that students should investigate purposes for writing specific to their fields of study. While 'audience'

and ‘purpose’ are used rather universally, these documents could benefit from defining such terms to clarify their exact expectations for how students should handle those elements of their writing.

4.2. Implications

So who does this all really effect? Students and ELA/writing instructors are the stakeholders most greatly affected by these standards. At the high school level, teachers are required to connect every unit/lesson to state standards, including those laid out in college/career readiness standards; their instruction is ultimately dictated by standards even if there is flexibility in how those standards are met. At the college level, there may be regular department assessments of student portfolios to determine how well the learning outcomes are being achieved by students. And at the other end of all of this are the students themselves, subject to however their teachers determine is the best way to meet standards and learning outcomes; whether there to simply get the grade and move on with their degree or to genuinely be invested in developing their writing skills. When the expectations are not consistent across different levels of education, students notice the inconsistency as they progress throughout their academic careers. On the other hand, teachers notice when students are not prepared for their classes.

What I have noticed through my investigation is that how high schools imagine college level writing and what goals colleges actually have for writing are disconnected in a few key places. High school standards emphasize product-based, research-based, informative and argumentative writing as what students should learn in order to be prepared for college level writing. First-year college level outcomes emphasize analytic and situational writing as well as writing as a process.

All but the MN ELA standards use “appropriate” as a couching term at some point. This does seem to be a reasonable way to avoid lengthy discussion of writing conventions within statements that are limited to a couple hundred words each. However, it does push the burden of determining “appropriate” onto teachers. One benefit of using subjective terms is that it gives flexibility to rapidly shifting culture, particularly considering these statements and standards may see up to five-ten years between revisions. It also allows for a wide variety of writing to be taught under the umbrella of “appropriate” and gives greater power of discretion to individual teachers. This exact point is also one of the dangers of such intentionally vague terms; it creates incredibly varied experiences for students based on preferences, knowledge, and resources of each school and teacher. Often the solution comes in the form of overly prescriptive writing instructions where students are provided 5-paragraph essay outlines with sentence starters provided in each section. Here lies the greatest challenge in navigating writing instruction:

How do we create a consistent experience for students without having them fill in blanks and call it writing?

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. What Can We Do Next?

Having spent significant time with my sample group of writing statements and standards through this project has certainly helped shift my understanding of the gaps between high school and first-year college level writing expectations from one only of personal experience to one that considers where those gaps are (and are not!), and how they are created or perpetuated through the policy/guiding documents for instruction. I am better able to locate and articulate the differences between how high schools prepare their students for college level writing and what is actually expected of students in their first-year college writing courses; in that, it has also become easier to see potential paths forward in navigating this space between high school and college to create a better system for students.

One of the extensions of the in-between space that I have not had time to fully unpack in this project is dual credit and AP courses. Such courses, which come in a variety of designs and delivery methods, can serve as a bridge to better prepare students who plan to continue on to higher education. The successes and challenges of these programs, including their varied effectiveness, labor and funding concerns, and their physical and curricular situation in schools, have been discussed through collections like those from Hansen and Farris as well as in *TETYC*. This conversation could benefit from including discussion of standards and outcomes, specifically what standards or outcomes should dual credit programs adhere to (high school v. college). Navigating standards through these spaces may also be a great opportunity to discuss and develop standards that explicitly bridge between high school and college.

The words we use to describe writing are important. A lot of considerations go into the presentation of standards and statements like those I've analyzed here (Dryer et. al, "Minnesota

Transfer Curriculum”, “Common Core State Standards”) including the particular terminology and phrasing to convey explicitly and implicitly the expectations for student writing. The trouble comes when the language is not consistent across spaces. I hesitate to suggest more consistent language across the board when discussing writing as that is a topic that is constantly in flux, be negotiated and renegotiated by scholars and educators. However, I do think there should be more transparency on how key terms are understood by the document authors. The WPA makes moves in this direction by explaining what is meant by “composing” in the opening to their outcomes statement. In terms of practicality, providing a small glossary to statements would be a relatively straight-forward step, though likely minimal in impact.

A larger scale solution would be to push for more open and consistent dialogue between high school and college educators. Educators and scholars (and, in turn, students) could benefit if professional conversations of the inbetween space moved beyond special issues and panels. There is room for more structured, consistent, and sustained conversational spaces to allow for on-going conversations to evolve (Rueker 2015) With writing and its instruction constantly evolving, the spaces for educators should not only allow for, but should actively encourage to collaborate across institutional levels. In addition to the professional spaces, it may be in the interest of institutions to work towards more local collaboration. For example, North Dakota is currently in the process of reviewing and revising their ELA standards; taking advantage of these revision processes to collaborate with college writing instructors/faculty could be an opportunity to create more cohesive standards/outcomes in a state where 70% of college-bound high school students attend one of North Dakota’s public colleges (insights.nd.gov). While the state may prefer or require that some national Common Core standards stay intact, there may be room to include standards that are more aligned with the goals of local colleges. Obviously this is not a

universal fix, though it could provide a more cohesive experience for a majority of students while still providing a strong base of understanding for all students.

Another conversation to be had is how the standards are actually being used and interpreted. Hammond and Garcia explore the role of micropolitics in the application of CCSS in secondary schools by interviewing field instructors, mentor teachers, and student teachers on how they view and use standards. They find that CCSS is beneficial for providing ‘common language’ for teachers to use when talking about writing, but ultimately CCSS disregards many of the nuances necessary for robust education. As a solution, Hammond and Garcia discuss partnership programs between local secondary and postsecondary schools to create a more cohesive transition between high school and college curriculum. One specific area they highlight as an avenue for collaboration are teacher education programs as it is a space where overlap between secondary and postsecondary schools already exists. I believe direct, local collaboration could be a great opportunity to open and continue discussions between high school and college teachers, and by making use of ever increasing access to virtual learning/communication in schools, that opportunity could be afforded to both urban and rural schools.

5.2. What Research Can Still be Done?

In order to explore further ways to address inconsistency in writing standards and outcomes, additional research must be done. In this project, I only looked at a small sample of standards and outcome statements and focused locally on only two states. Similar projects that take on a wider range of standards and look to other regions across the country could help further identify trends and perhaps map how writing is discussed regionally. Having a broader collection of analyzed standards and outcomes may also help in creating solutions as it would be more apparent what terminology is most popular and could be more universally adopted.

Another aspect of this project that could be expanded on is the analysis of high school standards. For this project, I looked at a very small piece of the selected standards documents to focus specifically on how each document imagines college and career level writing; however, there are dozens of individual standards and substandards for writing broken down at the grade level that have not been included in my work here. If the goal is to have students be prepared for college level writing by the time they finish 12th grade, how do other standards contribute or scaffold to that goal?

Finally, I think the conversation could be brought back to the role of standards in general. Standards are ultimately a tool of assessment; they serve as a method to measure student success. Assessment is a sticky subject in scholarship and in practice as chronicled by authors like Russel Durst (2006) and Andrew Moos (2021), and is often a subject of conversation. Researcher and educator Norbert Elliot in 2016 put forth a “Theory of Ethics for Writing Assessment” as a way to move forward in and a new discussion of assessment that could be implemented into new systems of assessment (Poe, Cogan 2016, Broad 2016); however, these assessments ultimately are still gauged against establish curriculum and standards (Slomp 2016). As I’ve noted throughout this project, standards are not consistent and can lack clarity on key terminology, meaning that assessment based on these standards can be faulty in the same manner. So while the overall design of assessment may have a very solid ethical base, any standards that are used for assessment must be considered incredibly carefully. Another issue with standards-based assessment is which demographics benefit most. Standards and outcomes are developed first, then assessment is designed to evaluate achievement, and those standards being developed by small and often privileged groups perpetuates practices rooted in colonialism (Cushman 2016). Some groups are making moves to create anti-racist and more equitable standards, including

suggesting revisions to the WPA first-year writing outcomes. These suggestions include introducing “linguaging” as a key term to refer to communication practices, elevate the role of students’ experiences, and explicitly address systems of oppression in language as a way to decenter white ideology in first-year writing courses (Beavers et. al). I do believe this is important work that recontextualizes existing structures through culturally informed and responsive practices, but at some level it does feel like continuing to put a fresh layer of paint on a rotting foundation. While a massive and difficult undertaking, I think it is time to have those hard conversations of what value standards and outcomes in their current form still have. Great efforts have been made to revise and update standards and outcomes, I would love to see research that looks at alternatives to standards entirely. In an educational and cultural moment where we appear to be moving away from standardized testing (Cai 2020), is it also time to move away from learning standards as well?

Ultimately standards and outcome statements provide educators and scholars much to discuss. For as long as they continue to be a pillar of our current educational system, we must carefully consider how they are designed, what they promote, and how they are used and implemented in this classroom. I hope my work serves as a place to continue those conversations and provide a new perspective on the language of standards.

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