

FIRST-GENERATION PEDAGOGY: A CLASSROOM STUDY OF FIRST-GENERATION
COLLEGE STUDENTS IN FIRST-YEAR WRITING

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to examine the motivations and attitudes first-generation college students held toward classroom interventions and written assignments. This classroom research took place during one semester in a single English 120 College Composition II class that included fourteen enrolled students with three students self-identifying as first-generation college students. The study was composed of two separate qualitative surveys: a pre-survey and a post-survey and all surveys. The pre-survey was distributed to all fourteen enrolled students during week three of the semester. The post-survey was distributed to all students during the final week of the semester. Based on the findings of this survey, and previous research conducted on first-generation college students, this study argues for three pedagogical interventions that can best engage the needs of first-generation college students. The pedagogical interventions include creating structured peer review groups, creating an empathetic space, or safe space, within the classroom, and demonstrates the importance of teaching genres that open up pathways for an emotional discourse in the classroom. These three pedagogical interventions best benefit first-generation college students, but may also benefit the learning of all students.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter provides insight into some characteristics that may typify a first-generation college student. A first-generation college student can be described as “a student who has had neither parent nor caregiver attain a four-year baccalaureate degree” (Darling and Smith 204). This chapter also begins the discussion that will continue throughout this dissertation that shares a rationale and context for creating pedagogical interventions supporting first-generation college students in our first-year writing classrooms. My approach posits that three pedagogical interventions may be useful to first-generation college students in the first year writing classroom. These pedagogical interventions focus on creating a safe space in the classroom, emphasizing the use of personal writing genres to help students better see themselves as writers, and creating gateways toward positive mentoring interactions and opportunities in the first year writing classroom. I use these particular pedagogical interventions because the first-year writing classroom presents a unique space where students often work in small groups, share writing with each other in the form of peer review, and encounter a smaller class size as compared to the large lecture hall general education course.

To begin this inquiry it may be useful to know how many first-generation college students are enrolled in our public institutions and understand some characteristics that further typify this student population. According to a recent study done by the Pell Institute, there are currently “more than 4.5 million low-income, first-generation college students enrolled in our public institutions” (Engle and Tinto 8). First-generation college students more frequently drop out, take longer to graduate if they choose to stay enrolled in college, are more likely to miss out on extracurricular student activities, and are not as aware of available academic students support services, when compared to peers whose parents have attained a four-year degree (Davis 17).

Data taken during the fall semester of 2005 suggested, “85% of racial or ethnic minority students also identify as first-generation college students” (Davis 15). A recent study from the Pell Institute confirmed that most first generation college students come from lower income households (Engle and Tinto 2). Additionally, Engle and Tinto argue in *Moving Beyond Access*, “first-generation college students are more likely than their multiple generation college peers to be older, be female, have a disability, come from minority backgrounds, be non-native English speakers and/or born outside of the U.S., have dependent children, have earned a general education degree, or be financially independent from their parents” (8). While these and other markers may typify first-generation college students, we need to remember that not all first-generation college students may fit most of these specific markers.

Jeff Davis in *The First Generation College Student Experience* also points out that though “universities have admissions processes that help to identify first-generation college students, these ways of identification are controlled by the student’s disclosure of first-generation status on admission forms and admissions tests,” such as the ACT (6). Despite these identifiers, it is still possible for universities to misidentify who first-generation college students are because many first-generation college students can’t be located by merely looking for minority or lower socioeconomic identifiers. Furthermore, instructors in the classroom have no safe process for helping to identify a first-generation college student outside of a student’s self-disclosure. As shared in research by Stuber, an overwhelming majority of first-generation college students also lack in understanding academic culture and university climates, as they have not had parents or siblings alert them to the systems of support the university offers nor were constant participants in extracurricular activities as children, and therefore do not often have the same social and cultural knowledge as their multiple generation college peers (4-5). A further indication for why

support of first-generation college students is needed comes directly from the Pell Institute study that confirms that “nearly half (or 43%) of low-income, first-generation college students leave without obtaining a degree” (2). This demonstrates a need to engage these students in our college classrooms. Before contexts for furthering these methods of student engagement are shared, some markers that typify first-generation college students need to be articulated.

Identifying and Engaging First Generation College Students

According to the Higher Education Act of 1965’s chapter on Federal TRIO programs, a first-generation college student is “an individual both of whose parents did not complete a baccalaureate degree; or in the case of any individual who regularly resided with and received support from only one parent, an individual whose only such parent did not complete a baccalaureate degree” (Chapter 1, section 402a). Darling and Smith’s scholarship on first-generation college students gives the most concise definition, and a definition I use to describe first-generation college students throughout this dissertation. Darling and Smith define a first-generation college student as “a student who does not have a parent who holds a baccalaureate degree” (204). This definition allows for a parent who has some college preparation, but who has never completed their degree at a four-year institution of higher learning. This definition of a first-generation college student sounds clear, but does contain limitations that are important to discuss for a full understanding. For example, the definition does not say anything about an absent parent who may not have a college degree, nor does the definition describe if the parent needs to be a biological parent. With this in mind, it is important to note that when discussing first-generation college students, we are discussing a student who has had neither parent nor caregiver attain a higher degree at a four-year institution.

In part because first-generation college students have had neither parent attain a four-year college degree, these students also encounter higher risk factors for dropping out of college. Vicki Stieha in “Expectations and Experience: First-Generation College Students and Persistence” notes that even if a first-generation college student doesn’t have the “high-risk factors for dropping out, such as minority status” these students still run a risk of attrition because of their lack of support and social capital (239). Coupled with the lack of parental and community support some of these first-generation college students face, significant learning barriers to academic success are created. Because of learning barriers of parents, community, and a lack of social capital, writing teachers must make pedagogical moves and opportunities to engage first-generation college students so that these students can be successful.

Because first-generation college students represent a unique, yet diverse population, my research focuses on implementation of the best pedagogical practices to help reach these students in the space of the classroom and further along guide these students in creating college-level writing assignments. Many of these pedagogical practices focus on building communities for these students through activities like creating positive mentorship opportunities within the classroom experience, teaching empathetic writing genres like memoir and ethnography, and creating spaces where writing, both collaborative writing and individual writing, can be shared and discussed in an inclusive and supportive environment. In creating a commitment to these pedagogical practices, writing instructors can create a supportive environment that will aid in the success of all students, regardless of their enculturation to the college experience and academic expectations.

As university writing instructors, we realize that not all our students are enculturated to college expectations, and as educators we do not want to miss a crucial opportunity to intervene

with students who may be capable of succeeding, but lack the same enculturation. Innovative pedagogies that both teach writing skills and enculturate college students to the college classroom are needed to engage first-generation college students in the four-year university, as Jeff Davis notes, “the first-generation college student experience can be the most intense at four-year degree granting institutions, both public and private [b]ecause students are likely to stay passive about [their] education” (20). I wish to encourage instructors to begin to ground their first-year writing pedagogies toward engaging underprivileged students in our classrooms. As instructors, we can still encourage our struggling students to visit the writing center on campus and other student academic support services if problems persist, but we must also recognize the amount of work we can do within our own classrooms. Many of us instructors do wish to help, but sometimes are unsure how to help our more underprepared students, such as first-generation college students.

The research from Davis as well as Tinto and Engle detail how many assumptions about first-generation students are incorrect. Davis points out that most universities rely on self-disclosed student admissions of first-generation college student status, and this self-disclosure suggests a “capricious attitude about verification” on the part of universities (7). Davis further argues that because many first-generation college students are misidentified, they are not becoming well integrated into the college environment. This misidentification of first-generation college students may be harmful to them. For example, Tinto and Engle’s study on first-generation college students argues these students are less likely to be engaged during their college years, with engagement identified as “being a part of study groups, interacting with faculty and college peers, participating in extracurricular activities, and using support services” (3). In order to fill the gap that currently exists between first-generation student needs and

current pedagogical practices, my study attempts to combine and test classroom interventions that have been recently designed to address the needs of first-generation college students in the writing classroom and seeks to explain why particular interventions may or may not be beneficial to these students. My research grows out of a concern for first-generation, first-year student achievement, and my work is designed for the classroom experience and to increase engagement among first-generation college students. University classrooms also need to be providing support for our more at-risk students, and creating encouraging, safe spaces for these students to academically grow is our first step as educators.

A strong advocate for first-generation college students and minority students in the university system has been Mike Rose. In *Lives on the Boundary*, Mike Rose identifies that many of the problems first-generation college students face are institutional, and many teachers face “serious boundaries in engaging minority and first-generation college students in their classrooms” (135). One thing that Rose advocates for strongly throughout his text is for teachers to spend one-on-one time with students they see struggling in classrooms. He advocates that this time should not only be spent on their writing and academic work, but also spent in ways where teachers get to know about the lives of these students. In the final chapter of *Lives*, Rose asserts that in order to create more effective learning institutions we teachers will need “a pedagogy that encourages us to step back and consider the threat of the standard classroom and that shows us, having stepped back, how to step forward and invite a student across the boundaries of that powerful room” (238). In this quotation, Rose appears to be advocating that the typical pedagogies presented in classrooms do not always engage the needs of first-generation college students. Perhaps, however, to many of us Rose sounds idealistic, and Rose admittedly does not give his readers a method for creating such pedagogy. The question remains as to what educators

can do to help first-generation college students cross various educational boundaries they encounter, and the research surrounding the population well illustrates complications in engaging their needs.

Much of the contemporary research on first-generation college students centers on larger academic needs, needs that are often met by institutionalized support systems, such as out of class tutoring or assistance that is provided in campus writing centers. In fact, according to a report by the Institute for Higher Education policy, the “supports for first-generation college students have broadened considerably over the years” with the continued financial support of Federal TRIO programs, like the McNair program (7). The McNair Program is a federal TRIO program funded at 151 institutions in the United States and Puerto Rico that is “designed to prepare undergraduate students for doctoral studies through involvement in research and other scholarly activities” (McNair “About” para 1). While programs such as McNair are necessary and important, Federal TRIO programs that target first-generation college students do not reach every student, and some students remain unaware that these programs exist (Institute for Higher Education Policy 7). According to the Council for Opportunity in Education, these Federal initiatives only support 11% of first-generation, low-income, or minority college students (Institute for Higher Education Policy 7). With only reaching a small minority of eligible students, college instructors need to encourage a personalized, empathetic instruction within their classrooms in order to reach beyond this small minority.

Personalized, empathetic instruction is needed in creating a set of pedagogical interventions for first-generation college students because of certain identifying characteristics that join them as a distinct student population. As noted earlier in this chapter, first-generation college students more frequently drop out, take longer to graduate if they choose to stay enrolled

in college, are more likely to miss out on extracurricular student activities, and are not as aware of available academic student support services, when compared to peers whose parents have attained a four-year degree (Davis 17). Further research has concluded that first-generation college students are also more likely to be less adept in study skills, more likely to encounter difficulties navigating the complexities of the university system and campus, and less likely to take advantage of student support services (Davis 2008; Wang 2012). These characteristics, however, do not have to define the first-generation college student population, because there are ways that college instructors can reach out to first-generation college students to help them succeed. For example, in the Pell Institute's white paper on first-generation college students, the authors advocate for colleges and instructors to focus on the first year to aid in the retention of first-generation college students (Engle and Tinto 25). This focus on the first year comes out of research that suggests, "being a first-generation college student confers its greatest liability in the initial adjustment to, and survival in, postsecondary education" (Pascarella 429). This assertion from Pascarella and Engle and Tinto drive my study in focusing specifically on the first year experience of first-generation college students. I further argue that while my study as presented focuses on first-year writing instructors, since that was the site of gathering my data, any college-level instructor can use the classroom interventions my study will share. Teachers can blend different pedagogical interventions to aid in the academic success of these students and to advocate for more inclusive success.

My Approach in Surveying First-Generation College Students

To better understand how classroom interventions can be beneficially combined, I developed and piloted a classroom research study instrumented through a set of two surveys to

understand the best ways to reach out to this student population. My data focused on one class of fourteen students enrolled in an English 120 College Composition II course during the spring semester of 2015. This classroom was not my own classroom. Instead, I surveyed a class of students from another colleague. The rationale for conducting this classroom research study with a class that was not my own class was to help ensure I would remain unbiased in interpreting my research data. In order to understand where interventions might have the most impact, my two surveys worked to measure motivations and attitudes first-generation college students held toward common classroom activities, such as peer review, writing conferences with the instructor, and other common classroom activities like small group discussion and time in class to work on assignments¹.

One pedagogical technique the surveys focused most on was the use of peer review groups in the first-year writing classroom. Peer review groups were examined because peer review practices ask all students to work in small, collaborative groups with their peers on their writing drafts and offering one another constructive feedback. First-generation college students benefit from mentoring opportunities, as seen in Wang’s research that focused on the memorable messages first-generation college students received and how these messages affected their college success (342). Wang noted that these memorable messages came from “mentoring relationships with multiple generation college students, their teachers, and others who were more familiar with the university experience” (345). Furthermore, aside from aiding in creating potential opportunities for mentorship through consistent peer group practices, tracking how first-generation college students responded to peer review groups reveals not only student attitudes toward peer review, but also how peer review may change their motivations toward academic writing practices. I chose to focus on the importance of constructing what might be

¹ The surveys can be found in Appendices A and B.

termed structured peer review groups (student groups that remain static throughout the life of the semester and the course) because of the research suggesting that first-generation college students show a “greater potential for a high level of academic success when they are well integrated into the campus and classroom environments” (Davis 72). I wanted to create a structured group setting in order to help first-generation college students better acclimate to the college environment, even if most of the peer communications occurred on the micro level of the classroom space. Chapter four, which shares my classroom pedagogy for structured peer review groups, shares more about how structured peer groups operate in the classroom, and how they can be structured, and even monitored, outside of the physical classroom space.

Another classroom technique examined were how we could create an empathetic, or safe, space in the classroom. As will be stated later in this dissertation, I describe an empathetic space as an area of support in a first-year writing classroom where students are encouraged to discuss and share personal feelings and experiences with other peers and the teacher in a supportive environment. This means that anything that occurs in the classroom, or is said in the space of the classroom, does not leave the classroom environment. Thus, students should have no fear in sharing their ideas and opinions, and receive respect for their different views. Developing an empathetic space is an important concern in a pedagogy that supports first-generation college students because these students often feel cut-off from the academic culture that non-first generation college students may be somewhat familiar with, through conversations with family and friends. While I recognize that empathy is something a teacher cannot necessarily teach to students, spaces and moments to encourage empathy is something a teacher can design within a classroom, and with this an empathetic space can be created. This concept will be discussed further within future chapters of this dissertation.

A third, and final, area of concern and study was in creating what I term as empathetic genres, or genres that create a space for a student to personally reflect on his or her experiences through writing while also learning valuable academic writing skills, such as secondary source use and the ability to successfully integrate outside knowledge and ideas. A priority in teaching first-generation college students may be to help introduce these first-generation college students to the varied tasks of writing, such as analysis, synthesis of sources, and learning about and understanding various academic research methods. Many first-generation college students may not immediately value academic research, but if we as teachers place the research within varied human experiences, we may be better at reaching the diverse writing needs of this student population. This is something we as teachers need to remember about creating a first-generation pedagogy in our classrooms. I'll elaborate further on this need in future chapters of this study, and further describe how and why we can develop a first-generation sensitive pedagogy for our college students.

While these surveys take place in a first-year writing classroom, the resulting pedagogical interventions are general enough to be used in multiple classrooms, and not just writing classrooms. As seen in the survey questions, many college-level instructors incorporate some of the classroom tasks I inquired about within my survey, such as small group discussion and in-class peer review exercises. The insight this classroom study brings will not only reinforce or extend the extant scholarship surrounding the needs of first-generation college students, but also serve to show the importance of guiding classroom pedagogies for students of all types of backgrounds and differing abilities. For example, many, if not all, of the supportive, engaging pedagogies I discuss in this dissertation will help a wide range of students in different learning

environments as they focus on empathy and a develop safer spaces in our contemporary college classrooms.

Overview of Chapters

The first-generation college student population is a diverse group, but an important one, to study. Because neither parent of a first-generation college student has attained a four-year degree, the student is often left to their own devices, often lagging behind their multiple generation college peers who have the necessary familial financial, social, and emotional support that many first-generation college students lack. Families may be proud of their first-generation college students, but they often do not know how to model behaviors that make college success possible, or how to support their children while they are at college since they never attended college themselves, or perhaps never completed a four-year college degree. My study is designed to extend the conversation on how we can help writing instructors better understand how to address the diverse needs of these students in their first-year writing classrooms. Because of their diverse needs, I wanted to identify ways writing teachers can better teach to this student population.

Chapter one, this introductory chapter, presents the rationale for my inquiry into first-generation college students' motivations and attitudes toward writing in the first-year writing classroom. This section also includes a brief introduction to my methodology. This methodology includes a survey that examines first-generation college students' motivation and attitudes toward writing by analyzing their responses to common genres that are often taught in the first year writing classroom, as well as the pedagogies first-year writing instructors enact to teach these genres to students.

Chapter two presents extant research into the pedagogical areas I examine with my survey. Section one of chapter two shares information on the use of empathetic genres in the first-year writing classroom. Section two of chapter two argues for the need to create empathetic spaces in the writing classroom, or the need to create safe spaces for open communication in the college writing classroom. The third section of chapter two documents ways to create mentorship opportunities for first-generation college students, which expands on the need for creating empathetic spaces in the college classroom.

Chapter three analyzes the data from the pre-survey and post-survey from both student groups—first-generation college students and multiple generation college students—to help understand what may be the pedagogical needs of first-generation college students. This data collection draws on a discourse analysis method to analyze the responses that will determine what pedagogical methodologies may best fit the diverse needs of the first-generation college student population in the first-year writing classroom.

Chapter four discusses how instructors of writing can implement a first-generation pedagogy in their classrooms to the benefit of all students. The first section of chapter four shares a generalized reading of the motivations and attitudes both student populations held toward writing and classroom tasks. Section two shares three themes in creating a first-generation pedagogy that focuses on creating empathetic, or safe, classroom spaces, teaching empathetic genres, and sharing learning opportunities that can be created by structured peer review groups. The third section provides a conclusion that summarizes a rationale for enacting a first-generation pedagogy.

Finally, chapter five provides concluding remarks focused on the results of my classroom study. This chapter further includes one section that discusses potential research opportunities for

future studies on the needs of first-generation college students in the first-year writing classroom. I plan to continue my research on the needs and instruction of first-generation college students and low-income student populations in the form of case studies and narrative research opportunities.

**CHAPTER TWO: EMPATHETIC GENRES, EMPATHETIC SPACES, AND
MENTORSHIP: AN EXAMINATION OF CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH ON FIRST-
GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS' MOTIVATIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD
ACADEMIC WRITING**

Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of relevant research on first-generation college students in higher education. I have divided this chapter into a number of sections to best organize my discussion. The first section shares recent information on the college readiness of first-generation college students, according to reports shared by the ACT and U.S. Department of Education. The second section details extant research within three areas of pedagogical intervention that can be used for engaging first-generation college students. These three areas include creating safe classroom spaces that allow for a greater empathetic discourse among both student groups: first-generation college students and multiple generation college students; genres that may work best to help ease students who demonstrate less college readiness into relevant academic discourse communities; and creating stronger opportunities for mentorship for first-generation college students. The conclusion gives a summary of the previous research, as well as articulates how these areas will be incorporated into this study to help inform pedagogical interventions that may benefit first-generation college students in the first-year writing classroom.

First-Generation College Student and College Readiness

This section gives relevant background on the college readiness of first-generation college students, shared by data from the U.S. Department of Education and American College Testing (ACT). According to recent U.S. national statistics, “first-generation college students are

a population that has continued to grow since the 1920s” (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1998). Recently, a study published in 2012 shared “roughly one-third of enrolled undergraduate students are considered to be first-generation college students” (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The reason for this growth since the 1920s is largely due to the influx of students enrolling in college after World War I, with more enrolling after the GI Bill became instituted after World War II. Because of the consistent growth of this population in universities, there is a real need to develop first-generation pedagogies that will address the needs of first-generation college students to help them grow as writers and see themselves as academically productive scholars in the university system. To better understand how to develop a first-generation-sensitive pedagogy, or a pedagogy that creates empathetic discourse among student, teacher, and multiple-generation peers, as well as create opportunities for mentorship, teachers need to understand the multiple identities these students hold in the classroom and beyond. If a teacher is aware of these diverse identities, that teacher can better instruct these students, and perhaps improve the students’ motivations and attitudes toward academic writing assignments.

Meanwhile, universities do receive information on how many incoming freshman are first-generation college students through answers provided on standardized tests. American College Testing (ACT) assessment is a college readiness evaluation that tests high school students for college readiness, and also asks students to identify the highest level of education for each parent (ACT 2015). Because the information from the ACT is sent to the university the students plan to attend, the universities do have this data. Further alone, according to the data from the ACT in 2013, it was shown that “just over half (52%) of high school ACT test takers who would be first-generation college students failed to meet any of the ACT College Readiness benchmarks” (Adams para 2). This data shows that there is a need for further educating and

engaging first-generation college students in our college-level classrooms that goes beyond placing these students in academic support services. These students must first be supported in our classrooms as they can be identified as a high-risk population, according to the data shared by the ACT.

Examining the college readiness of first-generation college students through ACT data is of interest, since the data shares appropriate college readiness benchmarks in four key areas: Mathematics, Science, English, and Reading. As for how many first-generation college students may be entering our college classrooms for fall semester of 2015, the “national 2015 ACT-tested graduating class had 18% potential first-generation college students, or whose parents did not enroll in postsecondary education” (ACT 3). In 2014, data showed that most first generation college students did not meet appropriate ACT College Readiness benchmarks. First-generation college students had 70% not meeting ACT College Readiness benchmarks in Mathematics and Science (ACT “Conditions of College Readiness: First Generation” 5). In testing ACT College Readiness benchmarks in Reading, 63% of first-generation college students did not meet appropriate benchmarks whereas 47% did not meet appropriate benchmarks for English (ACT, “Conditions of College Readiness: First Generation” 5). Of the first-generation college students who took the ACT in 2014, only 9% of these students demonstrated college readiness in all four areas (ACT, “Conditions of College Readiness: First Generation” 14). At the time of this writing, data is not yet available as to first-generation college students not meeting appropriate college readiness benchmarks for 2015, but it is likely that data may be remain relatively constant. Because of the presence of first-generation college students in our classrooms, with many of them not meeting college-readiness benchmarks, we as teachers of first-year writing need to create spaces where these students can feel academically and socially supported. Furthermore,

the final acknowledgement for change shared by the ACT College Readiness white paper was a call to action that argued for “federal, state, and local policy makers and agency heads to support the readiness of *all* students for college or career” (ACT 17, italics theirs). This call to action demonstrates the need for further academic support of all students. To create these need for potential support, I’ve researched three key areas: empathetic genres, empathetic spaces, and development toward mentorship opportunities to help create key criteria for developing pedagogical interventions that may meet the needs of first-generation college students. All these areas provide ways of extending support to first-generation college students through working with their peers and instructor to help them succeed in a college environment. Many of the areas I examine are areas that could potentially help improve on the lower scores first-generation college students receive in their writing and English, scores that are typically lower than their peers, according to data shared above from the ACT.

The First-Generation College Student Pedagogy in Three Areas: Empathetic Spaces, Empathetic Genres, and Mentorship Opportunities

Empathetic Genres in the First-Year Writing Classroom

Because of the unique and diverse individual and cultural backgrounds of first-generation college students, creating a pedagogy that benefits all of them will likely be difficult. However, as Engle and Tinto emphasize in *Moving Beyond Access: College Success for Low-Income, First-Generation Students* teachers need to find ways to “focus on increasing interaction and engagement in the classroom to make use of the only time some of these students spend on campus” (4). With this concern in mind, there are pedagogical strategies a teacher may use to help promote learning and engagement of students who may not have met all the benchmarks for

learning, such as seen in the ACT data. These pedagogical interventions may work to ease students toward more rational and academic discourses later in their academic careers. In this sense, employing a first-generation college student sensitive pedagogy in the first-year writing classroom may help to better engage the first-generation college student population. With increasing engagement, it may also be possible to see increasing motivation and attitudes toward writing tasks from these students. A first-generation writing pedagogy focuses on the teaching of empathetic genres, such as memoir and ethnography, establishing empathetic spaces for a meaningful, emotional exchange between first-generation college students, teacher, and peers, and creating mentorship opportunities for first-generation college students.

In this chapter, I'll explain the research behind each of these three areas that develop what I call a first-generation writing pedagogy. To be clear, a first-generation writing pedagogy provides pedagogical interventions that open spaces for first-generation college students to familiarize themselves with academic writing practices that are meaningful to diverse student populations, particularly first-generation college students who are often from low-income or working-class backgrounds, according to the research (Engle and Tinto 4). These writing assignments often employ the personal and political when introducing students to academic writing tasks. When teachers employ writing assignments that are empathetically designed, teachers also create environments where spaces of community can be created. These spaces of community can include writing labs, peer review groups, and student and teacher writing conferences. These empathetic spaces also build opportunities for mentorship opportunities, an important element of future academic success for many first-generation college students because of their diverse needs in navigating an unfamiliar academic environment.

One of the pedagogical goals for engaging first-generation college students is to provide them with genres that are familiar and reflective, giving first-generation college students the opportunity to ease into seeing themselves as academically productive scholars. One way to engage these students might be to include teaching genres that may be more comfortable or familiar to first-generation college students. These genres would be more personal in nature, such as a personal narrative or memoir assignment. As Nancy Mack has found in assigning an assignment she calls the “meaningful memoir” as documented in her article “Writing for Change”, in assigning more familiar, reflective writing tasks, first-generation college students has the potential to show increased motivation and a more positive attitude toward writing assignments because of the personal nature of the genre (28-29). First-generation college students will likely better know how to approach a more personal writing assignment as compared to a writing assignment these students may view as academic in nature. Nancy Mack has researched and taught ways of creating a memoir assignment introducing concepts such as source use into students’ more personal writing. Mack’s goal in her work was to engage student writers who feel they are not up to par with their college peers, a characteristic that defines many first-generation college students. Mack writes, in “Ethical Representations of Working Class Lives,” that first-generation and working-class students “frequently have trouble imagining themselves as scholars” (53). Mack also reminds teachers about how “a student’s motive to write is more important than the parameters of an assigned writing task” (“Writing for Change” 24). Because of some students’ inability to imagine themselves as scholars, it is important to give these students motivation and encouragement to write, and not just focus merely on the assigned criteria of a writing assignment. Instead, teachers must allow students who are first-generation to

grow and develop as writers, and instill within them a motivation to write, before concerning the student too heavily on not meeting selected writing task parameters.

To encourage students to write, Mack created an assignment that asks students to focus on a topic they find interesting, and one they have experienced, but an assignment that also asks these students to engage in using academic and other outside sources. Assignments such as this one can be found in Mack's meaningful memoir assignment. In creating assignments such as the meaningful memoir, an assignment detailed in her essay "Writing for Change: When Motive Matters," Mack is attempting to help first-generation college students "locate an academic voice" by joining their own experiences with researched history and folklore from their home areas (26). Mack also argues that writing teachers need to spend time "constructing the premise for writing and allowing students to help design some elements of the assigned tasks to promote student ownership" ("Writing for Change: When Motive Matters," 28). Mack's arguments for writing engagement provide direct ways to motivate and encourage positive attitudes surrounding writing tasks for first-generation college students. Mack's research is motivated by engaging the unique needs of working-class students; however, it is important to realize many first-generation college students come from different kinds working-class, or low-income, backgrounds. Some discrepancies between these two populations exist, as noted in Davis' *First Generation College Student Experience* where Davis denotes how each group has different reasons for attaining higher education. Davis shows how low-income students have a "survivalist attitude" toward their education, meaning an education is seen as a means to a better paying job and therefore being able to attain a better life (67). Meanwhile, Davis argues, first-generation college students see education as a symbol of status and that they feel "relatively entitled to a college education" whereas multiple generation college students reportedly feel "fully entitled to

a college education whether or not they have prepared themselves for one” (67). Davis takes much of this research from sociologists Richard Ochberg and William Comeau’s theories on important life decision-making, which included analysis of why people attend college (66). Despite various reasons for attending college, both populations need the types of pedagogical engagement that allow them to work with familiar writing genres to begin to feel ownership of their writing. Mack argues that the pedagogical concepts she suggests for writing teachers will help first-generation college students feel as if they are scholars, or academically engaged in their writing tasks.

A memoir or personal narrative assignment can be an instrumental genre for a first-generation college student because it is an *empathetic genre*. A memoir is an example of what I term an *empathetic genre*, or a genre that creates a space for a student to personally reflect on his or her experiences through writing and share them with others, such as the instructor, while also learning valuable academic writing skills, such as secondary source use and the ability to successfully integrate outside knowledge and ideas. While the memoir is a self-reflective genre, and can be seen as a confidence-building writing assignment, the memoir can also function as an empathetic genre because of the nature of sharing experiences between student writer and teacher, and occasionally between the student writer and their classroom peers. While memoirs can be intensely, and perhaps at times painfully personal, it is important to allow students a space for reflection in the writing classroom, even if that reflection is merely on their writing process for a particular assignment or if the reflection isn’t necessarily shared with others in the classroom. This reflection will allow students greater space to raise their own awareness of themselves as writers and help them start on their journey to seeing themselves as academic writers as well.

One important role of genres like the memoir is that they allow for self-reflection. Mack shares the importance of having students reflect on their lives and work because “reflection can help us link theory to practice, enabling both teachers and students the agency to make conscious changes for the better,” a skill that is particularly important to instill prior to students moving into more complex writing tasks within the classroom environment (Mack 74). Assignments that encourage reflection, like memoirs, also serve as a good starting point for a teacher to get to know students and help students get comfortable with the writing process before the students move onto more complex writing tasks. Having students reflect on the familiar in writing may help students feel more comfortable about a particular writing task; however, first-generation college students have a hard time envisioning themselves as college writers who are aware of academic writing conventions. Because first-generation college students have difficulties envisioning themselves as academic writers, a unique situation surfaces in finding ways to have first-generation college students write from their own experiences and viewpoints. In doing this, they also learn academic writing conventions through memoir assignments that ask them to think critically about their experiences to help motivate them in further writing tasks.

Motivating first-generation college students in personal writing tasks, such as memoir, is not the only way to teach the writing process to first-generation college students. The research of compositionists, such as Seth Kahn, has shown how ethnographic assignments help guide students toward socially reflective writing, which is another example of an empathetic genre. Seth Kahn, in his unpublished dissertation *Grassroots Democracy in Process: Ethnographic Writing as a Site of Democratic Action*, describes how ethnography assignments create democratic space in the writing classroom (8). Kahn argues that assigning ethnographic writing assignments allows students to learn about other cultural identities and the social barriers those

groups experience. In interviewing people from other cultural backgrounds and social experiences Kahn argues, “students develop an empathetic stance toward these populations leading to social reflective action” (22). For example, Kahn notes instances where students volunteer time and energies to organizations that focus on the populations they studied. Kahn also points out that sometimes students form bonds with their interview subjects that continue beyond the classroom exercise and “extend into cultural and social spaces of the participants choosing” (25). Kahn’s research establishes ethnographies as useful assignments in helping students empathize with diverse identities outside of their own cultural spaces.

In his essay, “Putting Ethnographic Writing in Context,” Kahn gives a contextual framework for teaching ethnographic assignments to first-year writing students. Kahn’s discussion of the rationale and context for teaching ethnographic writing assignments gives an example of ethnography as an empathetic genre assignment that helps build a first-generation pedagogy in the first-year writing classroom for all students. Kahn argues that ethnographic writing introduces students to the varied tasks of writing, such as analysis and synthesis, but also “highlights and emphasizes human relationships between participants and researchers” making the genre an empathetic genre (176). When ethnographic writing is successful, Kahn notes, the assignment can help students navigate relationships between different populations and improve the understanding students have of the different lives of people (176). Like Kahn, I believe this learning objective creates a meaningful experience for first-generation college students where they can work with familiar concepts, such as reflection and relationships, and also learn more about different cultures and populations.

Along with a deeper understanding of different populations, first-generation college students would also learn more about the writing process with ethnographic writing assignments.

Kahn argues that “because ethnographies require students to complete a number of tasks related to writing—such as interviews, field notes, pre-writing tasks, keeping a journal, among other tasks—first generation college students would become familiar with the multifaceted processes involved in academic writing” (176-77). Ethnographic writing assignments also help teach first-generation college students how to organize research, compile data, synthesize information, and communicate effectively, along with numerous other tasks associated with the writing process. Most importantly, the process of ethnographic writing is recursive, meaning first-generation college students will learn the workings of the writing process, instead of thinking of academic writing merely as creating a finished product, which also helps highlight revision as a key writing skill. Most writing teachers will tell you that students sometimes see revision as merely editing a paper for clarity, instead of making contextual changes. Ethnographic writing may be a key player in helping writers, particularly first-generation college student writers, see revision as a recursive, continuing process because ethnography requires ethical writing practices. For instance, students must not only research a specific community, like a community outside of their own familiar community, but also be ethical in how they represent that community. This means revision may focus on issues of context and content, rather than on proofreading practices. Ethnographies also supply students with a real-life contextual situation where first-generation students may learn more about how writing helps us view and shape communities in the public sphere.

Like Kahn, fellow composition researcher David Seitz, in *Who Can Afford a Critical Consciousness: A Pedagogy of Humility*, also argues that ethnographies create powerful spaces where students can “critically analyze cultures and engage in their own theory-building” (220). Seitz doesn’t directly link what he shares about ethnography assignments to first-generation

college students specifically, but does note how these assignments can help engage students who may not be exposed to outside cultural groups, which could benefit some first-generation college students who grew up in closed-knit communities or students who may not have experiences a wide range of cultural differences. In Seitz's conception of ethnographic assignments, students critically analyze different discourse communities to understand the complexities of identity and different social groups. Seitz argues how "ethnographic assignments help students examine the power relations, social structures, and group dynamics that exist in different social situations" (222). In completing these tasks, first-generation college students can better understand the social and political power structures that exist outside of their own social experiences. Not only do first-generation college students learn about outside experiences, but learning about the outside experiences of other populations and cultures help students better reflect on their own power and privilege (or lack of it), especially as individuals who will one day achieve a college education. Giving first-generation college students the opportunity to engage in analyzing power relations and social and group dynamics creates a powerful case for using ethnography to better engage first-generation college students, or working-class, students because it allows students to critique and examine the social power structures that create economic and social capital barriers for first-generation college students and other minority students allowing for reflection on power, privilege, and class status. With this in mind, it is possible to combine this type of teaching with critical pedagogical methods.

What is missing from the research contributions by scholars such as Nancy Mack, Seth Kahn, and David Seitz, however, is data that examines first-generation students' personal attitudes and writing motivations toward ethnography aside from instructor observation and evaluation. None of the researchers that I encountered during my survey of literature have

conducted classroom studies to validate how empathetic genres contribute to first-generation college students' motivation and attitudes toward academic writing tasks. In other words, no researcher in my literature analysis has measured through a Likert scale test how motivated first-generation college students report to feel toward their first-year writing assignments, such as the memoir. Though my research sample is small, this study attempts to remedy this gap by examining first-generation college student attitudes toward auto-ethnographic assignments, such as the memoir and personal narrative, and analyzing how these assignments affect motivation for writing in these students. The data was gathered through surveys distributed to this student population. This data will be shared in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of this research study.

Empathetic Spaces in the First-Year Writing Classroom

In working with first-year students who are often new to the college environment and some students living away from family members for the first time, emotions can be commonplace in the first-year writing classroom. Emotions can especially play a role in situations where expressive styles of writing are at play, such as with memoir or personal narrative assignments where students share stories of struggle and loss. In this sense, emotions are not foreign to the first-year writing classroom, where much of the pedagogy involves active learning strategies, such as peer review, small group work, and class discussion. As a rationale for this, the composition professor and researcher, Janet Bean draws on lessons learned in instructing first-year writers at Akron to argue that, “emotion can function as a powerful tactic when introduced to academic discourse because it disrupts—at least for a moment—the privileged position of rationality” (104). By giving an opportunity for affective discourse in the writing classroom, an empathetic space is developed where teachers can encourage students to

share affective discourses around topics before moving on to a more academic, rational discourse.

Along with Janet Bean, Julie Lindquist has focused her work on the experiences of working-class students and examining rhetorical structures in the classroom that aid in building what she terms *strategic empathy*, as stated in her essay, “Class Affects, Classroom Affectations: Working through the Paradoxes of Strategic Empathy.” Lindquist writes of the importance of emotional connection and emotional displays in the writing classroom, especially when a teacher is working with working-class and first-generation college students. Lindquist’s goal, and a goal that can be extended to all teachers of first-generation college students, is “to provide an inquiry into how teachers might perform emotional engagements that students find authentic” (188). Learning how to position us as teachers of writing to open up space for emotional discourses is pertinent to the success of our underprepared students in the first-year writing classroom, especially when working with first-generation college students who may value a more emotional discourse over an academic discourse because of their familiarity with more emotional types of discourse. Thus, allowing space for emotional discourse, within the space typically reserved for academic discourse, becomes necessary. This need opens up a gateway for creating what I term empathetic spaces, which are defined and discussed below in this section.

As seen from my previous discussion, empathetic genres work to connect first-generation college students to the multifaceted process of writing, as well as work with informal and formal types of writing, but in order for empathetic genres to be supported, *empathetic spaces* need to be a part of the first-year writing curriculum. I define *empathetic spaces* as areas of support in a first-year writing classroom where students are encouraged to discuss and share personal experiences, along with sharing their experiences as writers, with other peers and the teacher in a

supportive environment. In creating empathetic spaces, one factor that is important is to have all students consciously and continually practice listening rhetoric within the space of the classroom. Wayne Booth describes listening rhetoric as paying attention to opposing views and “listen to the other side and listening even harder to our own responses” (Booth 21). In practicing listening rhetoric in the classroom, it is imperative we create classroom policies where differences are listened to, but where we also pay the same, if not more attention, to our own biases. With this practice in mind, it is obvious that empathetic spaces may occur best through teacher support and encouragement with the teacher working to foster the classroom as a space where students can openly discuss current events and their personal reactions to daily events, but also discuss their motivations and attitudes toward various writing assignments and their conditions. While empathy is something a teacher cannot necessarily teach to students, spaces and moments to encourage empathy is something a teacher can design within a classroom, such as by creating course policies designed around this practice and by encouraging open sharing in the space of the classroom.

To further describe what I mean by empathetic spaces, first looking at Mary Louise Pratt’s essay “The Art of the Contact Zone” becomes useful. Pratt defines a “contact zone” as a space where “social spaces where disparate cultures clash, meet, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination” (Pratt 16). The contact zone is an important concept to be aware of as teachers of first-generation college students because frequently first-generation college students enter our classrooms with different values and a different understanding of the purpose of higher education, as compared to the values and perceptions of their multiple generation peers. For example, Jeff Davis in *First Generation College Student Experience* has shown that first-generation college students see higher education

as a way to a better life and often make very thoughtful choices about majors (67). His research has also found that many first-generation, low-income students typically choose majors in STEM fields, as these fields have a good chance of career stability and are known to be higher paying careers (28). This means that many students may come with different attitudes toward the college experience, but if the classroom commits to practicing listening rhetoric, it may be possible to create the classroom into a more empathetic space, and open gateways to more effective communication within the contact zone of the classroom.

Another way, aside from listening rhetoric, to negotiate contact zones is through centering the curriculum on working to create empathetic spaces in the physical space of the classroom. Davis describes the importance of negotiating the physical space of the classroom for first-generation college students because “the physical space [of the classroom and campus] can make the acclimation process more difficult for first-generation college students, even exacerbating feelings of confusion and isolation” (65). It is important to remember that the numerous, open spaces of a college campus can remind first-generation college students of the loneliness and isolation they may be experiencing. Because of the potential of first-generation college students feeling confused or isolated within the spaces of the college environment, creating a space of empathetic practice within the classroom may be imperative to first-generation college student success. To understand how empathetic spaces can function in the classroom, looking at Jeff Grabill’s analysis of the classroom as a space not just filled by the technologies of table and chairs, but also a space filled by a multitude of attitudes, opinions, and experiences (Grabill 465). Grabill refers to this as the classroom’s inherent infrastructure, which Grabill notes is something beyond just a static space, but instead is a space constantly in flux, in movement. Because part of a teacher’s job exists to negotiate the multifarious movements of the

classroom, creating empathetic spaces in the classroom can be a strategy to better engage first-generation college students. Empathetic spaces are spaces where instances of community open up that can directly engage all participants.

In researching ways to engage first-generation college students, it is worthy to examine work within disability studies as Margaret Price's work in disability studies provides the inspiration for creating these community-opening spaces. Price describes what she calls a "*kairotic space* in the classroom where most or all of the following factors should be present: a real time unfolding of events, impromptu communication that is required or encouraged, in-person contact, a strong social element, and a high stakes learning situation" ("Ways to Move" Price, 61). Price values most or all of these factors because "the classroom boundaries are neither rigid nor objectively determined as such instances can occur in online discussions that do not exhibit in-person interactions" and also shares, "attention to relations of power is of great importance in understanding kairotic space, as is recognition that different participants in kairotic spaces will perceive those relations differently" (61). Price is arguing that instructors must value the space of the classroom as a space for communication and a sharing of common goals, hence developing a potential space of empathetic development through the interactions from participants and differences of authority between the participants. In other words, teachers need to be aware of the changes of attitudes, perception, and knowledge that exists within the space of the classroom in order to create an effective learning environment for all students.

My concept of empathetic spaces in the classroom is slightly similar to Price's notion of kairotic spaces. Instructors need to be aware and attuned to potential differences in the classroom, and be a good listener to those specific needs and differences. This is partially why I advocate for instituting low-stakes writing assignments that ask for personal reactions to written

assignments and other ideas while in the classroom environment. In this sense, instead of always asking students to participate in high-stakes learning situations where they are graded solely on papers and verbal classroom participation, I argue for low-stakes learning, at least at the start of the semester, in efforts to help students, especially first-generation college students, to begin to learn to move in academic discourse communities. For example, the previous research shared from Mack and Kahn all relate that having students work on low-stakes assignments first, such as the memoir, can help underprepared students begin to feel more adept at academic writing tasks, allowing the class to move on to more complex writing assignments. Because of this previous research, I focus more on low-stakes tasks because low-stakes tasks better encourage participation from students who may not have much confidence to share their ideas. This allows students to feel free to fail, falter, and learn in an environment that isn't focused on high-stakes writing tasks where a large percentage of their grade may be affected. These low-stakes tasks will also allow students to start to build rhetorical knowledge and practice before moving on to more complex assignments, such as a research paper. Low-stakes learning also opens up in-class writing and discursive practice, such as think-pair-share activities that work to invite more student participation.

To give an example of creating a low-stakes environment, an example that can be shared is something that an instructor can do at the start of class. To begin class, an instructor could create what Michael A. Nussbaum terms a “conversation starter” or “note starter,” which are specific prompts that create student discussion and participation around the day's topic or lesson (Nussbaum 116). The conversation starters can be simple, such as an “I need to understand” statement that encourages further discussion and questions surrounding a topic. These can also be more complex, allowing students to share thesis statements or main arguments they are

making in their paper. Students can share these arguments and have the instructor and other students in class help them fine-tune the argument or even present counter-arguments to the topic the student is proposing. With the instructor as a guide, the conversation starter would encourage participation from all students and also teach these students about academic and democratic discourses.

To better encourage democratic discourse, a discussion around personal, social, and cultural identities could be useful in creating the classroom as an empathetic space. Irvin Peckham, for example, is a composition scholar who is well known for his progressive ideologies in teaching and learning in the classroom. In his book, *Going North, Thinking West: The Intersections of Social Class, Critical Thinking, and Politicized Writing Instruction*, Peckham argues for more clarity and critique in the writing classroom when teachers discuss different social identities. Peckham also argues for the importance of teachers themselves to critique their own social identities, and often admits that while he aims for progressive ideologies in the classroom, he also knows he is speaking from a position of privilege (19). Peckham furthers his argument by sharing relevant data regarding college completion rates from low-income students, many of who are first-generation college students: “one out of fifteen students in the low-income quartile make it through college, compared to one out of two from the higher income quartile” (5). If a teacher is open to examining and interrogating his or her privilege, however, it can open an empathetic space for students and the instructor to discuss their own privileges, or lack of privileges, which could become an empathizing activity for first-generation college students and their multiple generation college student peers in how each begin to see how the other is affected by privilege.

As teachers of writing we need to encourage creating a space for emotional discourse, and also have students know that the classroom is a safe space for this type of sharing, meaning nothing a student will say will be shared outside of the space of the classroom. A way to create this emotional discourse can be by sharing personal experiences with personal positions of privilege. By interrogating privilege, first-generation college students can also start to interrogate class and class systems. Peckham defines class as “a system of social relationships within which people act toward each other, sorting each other on the basis of occupation, level of authority, assets, level of education, and social relationships” (26). Identifiers of class, as listed by Peckham, are useful contexts for first-generation college students to utilize in analyzing and observing social and cultural barriers they may face. By analyzing these barriers, multiple generation college students could come to understand first-generation peers better, according to Peckham’s argument. Furthermore, for first-generation college students, the opportunity to provide a cultural critique of their status, whether related to their educational background or not, presents an important analytical skill in that it combines personal perception with outside knowledge leading to the ability to synthesize information with the ultimate goal to help first-generation college students become academic writers.

Many expressivist methods in writing may help underprepared students grow more comfortable with writing because expressivist methods, as Elbow posits in *Writing without Teachers*, are not “focused on writing correctly,” as much as they are focused on “getting started with the act of writing” (23). Elbow’s overarching advice focuses on the “process of writing” and not necessarily on correctness, which can possibly move first-generation student writers out of their writing anxiety, if they have any writing anxieties (31). Instituting expressivist writing methods is valuable because it may be that key in unlocking the door toward more extensive

writing practices in the academy. After all, expressivist writing is focused on finding the “authentic self” of the writer, and this may be of interest to first-generation college students who are new and unfamiliar with academic writing genres, and may help them progress into more unfamiliar writing genres later on (Elbow 73). Further, these writing mechanisms may help first-generation college students unlock an empathetic discourse with other students toward their own experiences and motivations. For example, if a first-generation college student is given an opportunity to share a focused freewrite on her educational experiences, other multiple generation college students may start to express their own educational backgrounds and privilege allowing them to better recognize the needs of their first-generation peers. This exercise may also help instructors better evaluate the needs of first-generation college students in their classrooms. Expressivist writing methods may help first-generation students to move onto more higher-stakes writing tasks and much of the first generation pedagogy I will report on in the following chapters include expressivist-style instructional methods.

Another important way to build empathetic spaces in the first-year writing classroom is to begin class with students writing freewrites about their responses to a prompt and having students discuss their responses in small groups and later with the class as a whole. Peter Elbow in *Writing Without Teachers* describes freewrites as a significant genre for getting students to become more comfortable with writing tasks as “freewrites introduce students to the *process* of writing” (14, italics Elbow). In using short freewrites, an instructor encourages participation from more introverted or alienated students who may have to think more about a response before they share it with a small group, before moving on to share their thoughts with the class. In this way, freewrites can build empathetic spaces in the first-year writing classroom by promoting self-reflection and group discussion among different personality types.

Elbow posits in *Writing Without Teachers* that freewriting activities are also useful to help less academically prepared students become more aware of the writing process and writing strategies (16). Elbow suggests that freewrites are useful to underprepared students because it gives them a chance to write outside the confines of a graded assignment, allowing for a low-stakes writing opportunity. Freewrites give underprepared students a chance to practice writing in an environment outside of formal, high-stakes assignments while also being among other peers who are involved in the same tasks, with the support of a teacher in the room. Freewrites, therefore, provide a unique writing experience for first-generation college students that are typically enacted in first-year writing pedagogy.

To better articulate how expressivist writing methods may appeal to students, examining the work of Lad Tobin may be useful. In Tobin's essay, "Process Pedagogy," he accounts for the benefits of instituting expressivist styles of writing instruction in the writing classroom. Tobin posits that in focusing on the process of writing, "students will adopt more productive attitudes and practice (e.g. starting earlier, employing freewriting and other invention strategies, seeking feedback, relying on revision, to name a few) that may take time to integrate but that will remain long after the course has ended" (12). Process pedagogy, or expressivist writing pedagogies, are of use in the first-year writing classroom, particularly in regards for first-generation college students because if these student populations do feel underprepared for college, the process pedagogies can help these underprepared college writers develop strategies for writing, as Tobin articulates. Tobin further argues that while concepts such as "positivist notions of agency, authorship, voice, and self may be philosophically naïve, they can still be pedagogically powerful" (15). In other words, Tobin is arguing a student writer can find moments during the writing process where she thinks she has an authentic voice in her writing style that is entirely

her own creation, and did not originate, or finds itself subject to, a certain discourse community. If someone is a beginning writer, it may be beneficial to them to feel that they have some authority over their writing style. From this feeling of authority and perhaps confidence, they can begin to grow as a writer, and start to learn more complex forms of academic discourse as they progress through their lives as college writers.

Criticisms of expressivist pedagogies persist, despite the benefits some students may draw from the classroom practice of expressivist writing. Writing teachers view expressivist-style writing methodologies as outdated. Tobin discusses how many writing instructors argue it is outdated because of its inherent “focus on the writer as a singular, autonomous self” (12). In this sense, some instructors view expressivist modes of teaching writing as perhaps not useful to student academic writing development since these tasks focus more on personal writing than academic writing. The most cited concept of this critique of expressivist writing methods comes from David Bartholomae’s “Inventing the University.” In his argument, Bartholomae writes of the importance of introducing students to “academic discourse” and “academic styles of writing” immediately so that they learn to “appropriate specialized kinds of academic discourse” (456). While I find Bartholomae’s insistence thought-provoking, I also feel that because of the underpreparedness of first-generation college students (and other students as well), it is important for writing instructors to offer a number of writing methodologies to their students in hopes of successfully engaging as many students as possible. Therefore, I do not want teachers of writing to forget Bartholomae’s advice, and still insist that students work on developing the discourses that are necessary to the academic and professional communities they will enter. In conclusion, I find all these methods of teaching writing valuable, in one way or another, but also contextual. When it comes to teaching first-generation college students, using a variety of methods while

also scaffolding these methods, may prove most useful. For example, it may be beneficial to start a writing assignment with expressive methods before moving on to more critical methods, like unpacking genre. These methodologies can be used to help create a space where students can freely share ideas and learn to be comfortable in academic spaces.

An academic and teacher who examined how to create such empathetic spaces in the academy is Julie Lindquist, a professor of Rhetoric, Writing, and American Culture at Michigan State University. Lindquist has focused her work on the experiences of working-class students and examining rhetorical structures in the classroom that aid in building what she terms *strategic empathy*, as stated in her essay, “Class Affects, Classroom Affectations: Working through the Paradoxes of Strategic Empathy.” Lindquist writes of the importance of emotional connection and display in the writing classroom, especially when a teacher is working with working-class and first-generation college students. Lindquist’s goal and purpose in her essay is “to provide an inquiry into how teachers might perform emotional engagements that students find authentic” (188). As Lindquist notes, the composition classroom has often been a place of “rational inquiry” and treated as a largely middle-class enterprise where students learn the beginnings of academic and professional discourses (188-89). In reality, however, a fair amount of emotional labor takes place in a first-year writing classroom, as Irvin Peckham and Peter Elbow have sought to illustrate.

As argued in the extant research, providing students an opportunity to practice their emotional labor in the first-year writing classroom opens up a space for first-generation college students to rhetorically practice and analyze their affective responses and better move on to more formal, academic critiques. By giving an opportunity for affective discourse in the writing classroom, an empathetic space is developed where teachers can encourage students to share

affective discourses around topics before moving on to a more academic, rational discourse. This activity is particularly useful to first-generation college students who may not immediately value rational, academic discourses, or be as familiar with them, as they are with more pathos-inspired rhetorical appeals. The instructional concept that Lindquist, Bean, and other pedagogues for emotional discourse in first-year writing argue for is that if students understand their own emotional responses to events and topics, these students, particularly first-generation college students, are better able to rationally analyze these events in later assignments and in-class activities.

Lindquist's work is of relevance in discussing pedagogical imperatives for first-generation college students because her work shows emotional responses are useful in moving toward underprepared students toward academic and logos-related responses. As I'll discuss further along in this chapter and have discussed previously, much of the research surrounding first-generation college students argues for the positive, instructional use of pathos arguments and appeals for instructing academic writing to first-generation college students and other underprepared college students. Many teachers also view emotional rhetoric as less important than logical, rational appeals because these teachers consider emotionality not as a logical response, but simply an emotional one aside from logic. One must remember that pathos is still a rhetorical construct worthy of inquiry and a rhetorical approach that is highly valued by working-class students and first-generation college students because of the students' familiarity. While Lindquist describes no clear methodology for developing a framework for incorporating strategic empathy that other writing instructors can use, she does effectively argue for the importance of primarily emotional rhetoric and for building spaces for empathetic discussion in the writing classroom is important to the intellectual development of all students.

Creating Opportunities for Mentorship in the First-Year Writing Classroom

Another area that provides a potential pedagogical intervention for first-generation college students is in creating opportunities for mentorship in the first-year writing classroom. To create spaces where mentorship practices may happen, emotion again plays an important role. For example, Julie Lindquist's focus on empathetic pedagogical approaches in the writing classroom can create a strong starting point to help a teacher put students into stable, productive, small peer groups, a teaching strategy that could help first-generation college students acclimate to the academic classroom setting. These stable, small peer groups can serve as mentorship gateways for first-generation college students because it will pair these students with multiple generation college peers, who can help first-generation college students adjust to the busy college life the university culture creates. Lindquist's work shows the importance of connecting with students in the classroom and how that connection can help build empathetic spaces. These empathetic spaces can be used to engage students in small, productive peer groups to help and guide students in their academic writing practices. Creating small peer groups for in-class writing assignments are also be beneficial for engaging first-generation students in helping these students maintain positive motivation and attitudes toward writing. By creating peer groups that remain throughout the semester, first-generation students can create interpersonal networks and learn from multiple college generation peers.

Creating interpersonal networks between multiple college generation peers and first-generation peers is an important gateway toward mentorship, which is the third and final pedagogical imperative for improving the instruction of first-generation college students. For example, Pascarella posits in discussing the effect of mentoring on students that, "mentoring first-generation college students helps students feel more connected and engaged on campus,

which can ultimately improve student outcomes” (547). The data shared earlier in this chapter on results from the ACT demonstrate that any mentoring contact that we, as college instructors, can do to help engage first-generation college students is crucial, since these students are shown to be the least academically prepared of their peer cohorts. As stated earlier in this chapter, some first-generation college students also tend to feel isolated from family members who have never attended college and therefore cannot relate to their struggles while in college. Many first-generation college students also find difficulties in navigating the diverse structures of the university, both socially and occasionally in navigating the university academically. Because of these and other situations, building mentorship practices into the first-year writing classroom can serve as a much-needed support in the lives of first-generation college students.

Before discussing mentorship, one must discuss what the term “mentor” implies. Tiffany R. Wang’s research argues that a mentor is one who conveys a “memorable message about the importance of education to a first-generation college student” (335). Wang notes mentors can be on-campus or off-campus, but are typically on-campus individuals, such as teachers, fellow students, or advisors. Pascarella in “Student-Faculty Contact and Outcomes” defines a mentor as one who connects the first-generation college student with the campus community (546). For this study, I will describe mentorship and a mentor as one who helps connect students academically and socially with the multifaceted experience of the writing classroom and the wider higher education experience. In this definition, a mentor doesn’t have to be the instructor. A mentor could be a fellow student who has more social capital and academic experience than the first-generation college student in question. The important aspect to realize is that mentorship has an important role for the first-generation college student and often is the key to that student’s academic success because of the lack of familial support or academic and social capital.

One way to create positive mentorship practices is through the incorporation of peer groups. Peer groups create a support system for these first-generation college students inside the classroom, which can perhaps extend outside the classroom as well. These support systems can help positively motivate first-generation college students in their writing tasks leading them toward academic writing success. The research done by Jessica M. Dennis, Jean Phinney, and Lizette Chuateco, for example, argues for the importance of peer networks for first-generation students in the classroom. For instance, Dennis, Phinney and Chuateco argue in their collaborative study, “The Role of Motivation, Parental Support, and Peer Support in the Academic Success of Ethnic Minority First-Generation College Students,” that peer groups will help increase motivation and help first-generation college students better adjust to college life (224-25). In their study, they found that the “support of peers, even when compared to the support of parents, was more important to the success of first-generation college students’ academic success and retention” (Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco 226). This finding supports the concept that in creating strong peer networks in the classroom environment, such as through instituting static peer review groups, writing instructors can help better support first-generation college students in their classrooms. By examining the role of such groups in first-year writing at North Dakota State University, we can better understand how these peer relationships affect the motivation and attitudes of first-generation college students, which will be discussed in more detail within chapter three.

The important role of mentorship in a first-generation college student’s life is not limited to peer networking as the teacher or instructor also serves an important role, and the most important roles in the classroom. In researching engagement and retention of first-generation college students, K.M. Soria and M.J. Stebleton found that positive mentorship by the instructor

helps first-gen students see the instructor as a “real person” if that instructor engaged the first-gen student in “informal interactions” outside of classroom tasks (682). By viewing the instructor as a person, Soria and Stebleton found that the first-generation student was more likely to use the instructor as a resource in navigating the diverse networks of academic culture causing the first-gen student to be more successful in their academic pursuits.

In conferencing with students on their writing, instructors can begin to create that “real person” role for the first-generation college student. One-on-one student-teacher conferences are often considered a hallmark or a signature pedagogy in the context of first-year writing because it allows for real-time feedback and in-person discussion of a student’s progress in the course. These instances are particularly beneficial to first-generation college students’ motivation and attitudes toward writing because student-teacher conferences play into the students’ personal beliefs regarding in-person, straightforward communication. Mottet and Bebe in their study regarding student-teacher relationships argue that the teacher-student relationship can “create shared meanings regarding the positivity of the educational experience” and thereby aid in motivation and attitudes toward writing tasks through the writing conference (299). Conferences also give the opportunity for first-generation college students to ask questions and voice concerns in a space away from the classroom environment, creating its own empathetic space, if you will, where the student and teacher can discuss aspects related to the class in a space the first-generation student may feel more comfortable in since the time is reserved for just that student and teacher.

Structured spaces that encourage gateways toward mentorship, such as the writing conference, provide opportunities for creating what Tiffany Wang calls “memorable messages,” or moments where first-generation college students felt supported during their time at school

(335). Wang found these memorable messages held a number of common themes that included encouragement about pursuing academic success, valuing school, education as a way to increase future potential, and recognizing the importance of social networks (338-39). Wang argues that these memorable messages help to influence first-generation college students' approach to academia since the responses from family members about school can be supportive, but also contradictory since the family unit has little to no experience in college classrooms (351). In connecting the concept of memorable messages to mentorship, teachers must realize that the messages they share with students can have an effect on students' progress through academic life. By realizing what first-generation college students have responded to, and found memorable, instructors can utilize these themes to work with first-generation college students to encourage and further their academic success. While memorable messages are important, my study doesn't directly confront these messages because often students require more reflection on messages shared by mentors to understand the role the messages played on their life at college.

Another important aspect of mentorship for first-generation college students exists in "communities of belonging," which are instituted support systems that directly engage the first-generation college student population by providing services and opportunities geared toward the needs and success of first-generation college students (Cartney and Rouse 82). While these systems of support were not included in my study, I will take a moment to discuss them within the literature. I will discuss these "communities of belonging" to further emphasize the multifaceted ways universities can aid in the success of first-generation college students, and other students who may be viewed as underprepared for college life. I view these "communities of belonging" as potential opportunities to further engage the needs of first-generation college students in the academic environment. An example of a community of belonging could be an

extracurricular, student-run on-campus organization, or a college sports team a student participates in. These communities function as social spaces where students connect with one another to form meaningful relationships.

Along with organizations, these “communities of belonging” can also be campus or university initiatives. These initiatives can take the form of “first year seminars and new student initiatives designed to fully engage first-generation students” and as Soria and Stebleton note “first-generation students tend to thrive from involvement in educational practices such as learning communities” (682). Practices that create “communities of belonging” for first-generation students have a high success rate because they often combine both the social and academic engagement that first-generation college students need. The most successful of these practices include learning communities because first-gen students both live and study with their other first-generation college student peers. Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, and Leonard in their study titled, “Living-Learning Communities and First-Generation College Students’ Academic and Social Transition to College” have noted that living learning communities have provided some of the best support systems for first-generation college students because these communities provide both the academic and social support first-generation students need in order to be successful (407). Learning communities also find success in giving the first-generation college students educational opportunities, such as first-year experience classes, that are specifically designed for their academic needs. While my study does not comment on creating learning communities in the first-year classroom, or ask participating first-year students their attitudes or motivations on learning communities, I share previous research on learning communities specifically to illustrate how the communal structures can benefit first-generation college students. I will add, however, that a classroom may function as its own community of belonging. In the typical space of a

writing classroom, students encounter numerous opportunities to discuss everything from what is rhetoric to recent social and cultural events. In these discussions, various viewpoints are shared and occasionally viewpoints find themselves in disagreement. However when students have the opportunity to share their thoughts, they also form bonds with one another. These bonds can be strong enough in the context of the writing class to continue to grow outside of the boundaries of the writing classroom.

Conclusion

The three areas of support discussed in this chapter—empathetic genres, empathetic spaces, and mentorship—all provide gateways for engaging first-generation college students in their first-year writing tasks. One important reminder is that my study will not test all of these gateways for engaging first-generation college students in the first-year writing classroom. Instead, I will focus on how structured peer review groups can help create mentorship practices and opportunities between first-generation college students and their multiple generation college peers. I will also examine how we can best create empathetic, or emotional, spaces in the first-year writing classroom. Further, I will show the importance of having empathetic genres as instructional writing tasks to help ease first-generation college students into more complex forms of academic discourse. My study explores whether and how these three areas help to not only engage first-generation college students in their academic writing, but also might help to change their perspective on academic writing tasks. The following chapters of this dissertation document how this occurs in a selected first-year writing classroom at North Dakota State University through sharing data that suggests what our students are finding valuable in their first-year writing classroom.

**CHAPTER THREE: SURVEY STUDY ON FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE
STUDENTS IN THE FIRST-YEAR WRITING CLASSROOMS: METHODS, RESULTS,
AND DISCUSSION**

Introduction

This chapter presents the results and discussion of my classroom study of first-generation college students. For this study, I used a class of English 120 College Composition II, and I was not the instructor of record for the class I surveyed. I utilized two classroom surveys for the data collection—a pre-survey and a post-survey. I wanted to understand if and how students' motivations and attitudes changed toward writing assignments and classroom activities and so I created two surveys to collect this data: a pre-survey and a post-survey. The data was collected from students enrolled in a single English 120 Composition II course at North Dakota State University during the spring semester of 2015. This study was conducted to better understand the attitudes and motivations first-generation college students have towards academic writing activities in their first-year writing class. My study focused on the attitudes and motivations first-generation college students held toward writing. My study also examines the ways class activities provide writing instructors with responsive ways of improving writing instruction for these students. While I know it is difficult, if not impossible, to create a pedagogy based on these results, I draw heavily on existing research to present a set of pedagogical interventions that can be done in a first-year writing classroom that may work to meet the diverse needs of first-generation college students in the first-year writing classroom.

To better understand the needs of first-generation college students, I surveyed all fourteen students in one English 120 class during the spring semester of 2015 to see if there were cross-sectional differences in motivation and attitudes toward academic writing genres held by

multiple generation college students and first-generation college students. In preparing for my study, I suspected there would be strong differences in many first-generation college students preferring more personal writing genres, like memoir or personal narrative, and multiple generation students preferring more academic genres of writing. This assumption of first-generation college students' perspectives toward academic writing comes out of research done by Mike Rose in *Lives on the Boundary* that concludes that many first-generation college students enter our classrooms as “underprepared” students, and therefore feel intimidation or anxiety about college-level writing tasks (Rose 41).

To give students additional academic supports, one may look at the work of Nancy Mack. Mack's work on creating assignments that engage at-risk college student populations (namely working-class and first-generation college students) provides an important pedagogical foundation. Mack's innovative memoir assignment asks students to not only write about their own experiences, but challenges students to incorporate outside sources into their memoirs (52). The need to speak from personal experience is an important way to engage first-generation college students, since they already are familiar and find value in personal writing genres. From research done by Nancy Mack and Mike Rose, I collected a number of keywords that I would be looking for in the data results from first-generation college students. These keywords or key phrases included influences of family to attend college or not to attend college, motivation to succeed in college in efforts to have a better life, and words or phrases that indicate engagement and mentoring with the assignments or the classroom activities with peers. I chose these keywords, as they were common success themes that emerged in previous studies on first-generation college students from Mack and Rose.

Along with isolating potential keywords or phrases that would indicate engagement or feelings of isolation in the classroom environment, three fundamental goals also drove the collection and analysis of this data. One goal was to better understand the motivations and attitudes first-generation college students had toward classroom activities in a first-year English class. A second goal was to learn which writing assignments first-generation college students were most motivated by. A third and final goal was to use this data to create a first-generation pedagogy for any writing classroom, whether it is a first-year writing classroom or an upper division-writing classroom, though all the data presented is taken from a first-year writing classroom and discussed as being implemented within first-year writing curricula.

Response Rate

This section will give some data on the response rate from the students enrolled in the course. All the students I surveyed were enrolled in an English 120 Freshman Composition course. There were a total of 14 enrolled students in the course, including three of these students claiming a first-generation college student status. For both surveys, all 14 students responded to the surveys, keeping my number of first-generation college student responses constant. This left a 100% response rate for my data collection. The only deviation of this response rate was with the multi-generational college student population where one student was absent from one survey data collection, leaving me with a response rate of 93% for the pre-survey results. The instructor of the course, who gave students daily work points if they completed the survey during class time, aided the success of my response rate for my classroom study. Because this was part of the student's individual participation grade for the day, all students responded to the surveys.

Organization of Survey Data

To situate my discussion regarding my survey results, I'll examine the responses from the students who did not identify as a first-generation college student, or those who are a multiple generation college student in the first section. This section is divided into pre-survey and post-survey summary of the data sets. I choose to start with this more typical population because they will act as a control group for looking at the more specific needs of the first-generation college students who took part in my study. In the second section of this chapter, I'll share the results from the first-generation college student population. In the final section, I'll discuss the results from both groups using the method of discourse analysis.

Research Questions and Rationale for the Survey Study

Both of the surveys for the study I conducted focused on gathering qualitative data that helped me understand first-year writing students' reactions to commonly taught genres in a single, first-year writing classroom. I based my surveys off of the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the motivations and attitudes of first-generation college students toward commonly taught genres in the first year writing program at North Dakota State University, and do these motivations and attitudes change during the course of the semester?

RQ 2: What classroom activities do first-generation college students respond more positively toward in regards to motivation and attitudes, and do previously held motivations toward classroom activities change during the course of the semester?

To better track change, as the research questions attempt to measure potential changes in motivations or attitudes, I created and shared with students two surveys: a pre-survey and a post-survey. These surveys included short-answer questions and also included students sharing how high or low they rated activities on a Likert scale to better understand their motivations and attitudes toward writing in commonly taught genres in North Dakota State University's first year writing program.

To better analyze the responses to genres, I took from Carolyn Miller's (1984) work on genre theory. Like Carolyn Miller, I define genre as "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations," but also believe genre and the creator or writer of the genre are interdependent. Because of this belief, I wanted to see how the students reacted in terms of motivation and attitudes to select genres in first-year writing classrooms (personal narrative, memoir, profile, annotated bibliography, and ethnography). From this, I noted any self-perceived changes from the students regarding their motivations and attitudes toward selected writing genres and classroom methods.

In order to analyze the short-answer questions that required a more in-depth analysis of students' responses, I used James Paul Gee's (1999) method of discourse analysis to locate selected themes that emerged from the students' discussion found in the qualitative portion of the pre-survey and post-survey data. I used Gee's discourse analysis method because he examines how language helps us enact personal and social identities (22). I needed to examine how the social and personal identities between the first-generation college students and the multiple generation college students were similar or different from one another. To categorize these differences, I then identified a number of themes to be discussed within my survey data. The themes that I hypothesized may result from my data came out of previous research done by

scholars like Mike Rose, Jeff Davis, Nancy Mack, and Seth Kahn, who have all identified the obstacles that first-generation college students, and other at-risk students, face when they first enter a college classroom. From this previous research, I further hypothesized that first-generation college students would often cite family or parents as being a strong motivator for attending college, since they are the first in their families, and may feel a sense of pride and opportunity in being the first in their family to attend college, despite the lack of knowledge about college life shared with them by family members (Davis 26). I also hypothesized that the first-generation students would use language that demonstrated feelings of isolation or need throughout the surveys, since much of the research on first-generation college students' feelings of isolation from larger academic culture, or feelings of confusion. As for discussion of career goals, or what first-generation college students felt was the purpose of attaining a college education, I concluded that many of them would see college as merely a gateway to a better life, so themes of doing better than their parents would emerge from the surveys and they would be using themes of having a better life than what their parents had. Finally, I theorized that many first-generation college students would write of having more motivation and positive attitudes toward genres that were less academic, and more personal, when compared to multiple generation college students.

For the multiple generation college student population, I considered a number of initial potential themes that might emerge from the pre-survey and post-survey data sets. I hypothesized that I would find themes where motivators for going to college were family, but could also be extended to teachers and brothers and sisters. I imagined their motivations would be more direct in that they saw siblings or parents attain higher degrees, and might find that motivating for their own futures. When it came to discussion of career goals, I hypothesized that the theme of having

defined career expectations would emerge from multiple generation college students, along with feelings of some anxiety about the future job market they will enter. I estimated that multiple generation college students may have higher motivation and attitudes for academic-based genres, and group work, in the first-year writing classroom because of their previous experience with these genres, or at least familiarity of some academic discourse.

From analyzing the survey data, I came across a few common themes that included various motivations for attending college, first-generation college students showing higher levels of motivation for classroom activities and yet less motivation for peer group activities, though this was shown to change in the post-survey data set, where they commented on finding peer work useful to better acclimate to academic discourse, such as learning how to cite academic sources correctly and what makes a valid academic source. To organize these themes, I divided my discussion using subheadings. The subheadings include interest levels for taking a general education English course, motivations for attending college, genre familiarity, and motivations and attitudes toward various forms of classroom pedagogy. Before I share in the discussion of the survey data, I'll break down the methods of my study by sharing more detail on the survey data sets, participants, how student learning was assessed, and the limitations of my study.

Methods

Introduction and Method of Analysis

My goal in this study was to create better pedagogical interventions for first-generation college students, or to start to create what I call First-Generation Pedagogy. A discourse analysis method was used to code and analyze the study data. Discourse analysis proved the most useful method because of the qualitative nature of the survey. Discourse analysis also allows the

researcher to interpret the data with greater sensitivity toward divergent student populations by analyzing diction, tone, and other various modes of found in various discourse communities. To analyze the discourse in my surveys, I looked for repeating phrases in the students' responses. From the repeating phrases, I created categories. Categories included preferences toward particular writing genres, like the memoir, and motivations and attitudes toward peer review groups. I then examined how the views of students differed between the two groups of self-identified first-generation college students and multiple generation college students. Categories I created included a preference toward individual activities over group activities, a turn toward more personal writing styles, and a preference toward group work. I came up with these categories based upon the responses students gave for sharing what motivated them more toward completing their writing assignments. For example, did some students feel more motivated toward a writing assignment if they were able to generate ideas for the assignment in small groups or not. For the quantitative portion of my data, I utilized Likert scale questions to calibrate students' motivations and attitudes toward various classroom and writing tasks. The Likert scale questions asked students on a scale of 1-5 to rate their motivation and attitudes toward commonly taught genres in first-year writing classrooms. All my results from the classroom study will be described later in this chapter.

Participants

All students who completed the surveys were enrolled in a section of English 120 at North Dakota State University during the spring semester of 2015. I was not the instructor of record for the class I surveyed in efforts to keep me from reading biases into the survey data. The course had an enrollment of fourteen total students. All students in the course completed at least

one of the surveys. The surveys were distributed near the end of two separate class days, one during the third week of the semester and another one during the final week of the semester.

In my survey data, I purposely included no questions that identified gender, race, or class. The reasoning for not asking these questions was because of the complex history of race, class, and sex. The survey instrument also did not ask participants to identify themselves on the basis of race, class, or sex. Instead I merely asked students to share the educational backgrounds of their parents by asking if either one of their parents had obtained a four-year college degree. The aims of the classroom study were to disclose pedagogical factors that might uncover best practices for engaging first-generation college students in the first-year writing classroom and because of the complexities of race, class, and gender, the survey left out these identifying factors. Despite leaving out identifying factors like race or gender, follow-up studies could be done to examine the effects of race, gender, or other identifying factors to further understand first-generation college student needs and perceptions. For example, one could study the effects of gender on first-generation college students as it may be beneficial to examine such cultural and sociological perceptions on gender in families of first-generation college students.

Data Set: Pre-Survey

The pre-survey was done before any students handed in an English 120 writing assignment. I conducted a pre-survey at the start of the semester to better gauge attitudes and motivations students held toward academic writing before any pedagogical intervention in the course. I opened my questionnaire with questions about the educational backgrounds of each parent, which included questions #1-3. Question #4 asked what motivated the student to seek out a college-level education. Question #5 asked students if they felt they arrived at NDSU with

adequate preparation for college-level work, and asked a follow up as to why they responded as they did. Question #6 asked if the students felt they arrived at NDSU with strong study skills, and why or why not, with question #7 asking students who answered with a no to question #6, if they felt motivated to learn better study skills. Question #8 asked about students' interest in taking a general education English class. Question #9 asked students about their levels of familiarity with commonly taught genres in a first-year writing class. Students had to indicate their levels of familiarity on a Likert scale with 5 being very familiar and 1 being not familiar at all. Genres included were memoir, ethnography, annotated bibliography, and commentary. Question 10 asked about classroom activities students felt the most positive motivation toward. Students rated their level of motivation by rating them 1-5, with 1 being their first preferred classroom activity and five being the least preferred classroom activity. Activities listed included small group classroom activities, time to work alone on writing assignments in class, time spent in whole class discussions, having time to conference with the instructor about their writing, and having their writing reviewed by their peers. The final question in the pre-survey, question 11, asked why they felt motivated by the top activities they listed in order to get more of a response on why students may be responding in the way in which they were.

Data Set: Post-Survey

The post-survey was distributed to students in the last week of class, during final exams. The focus of the post-survey prompted students to indicate if, and perhaps how, their motivations and attitudes toward writing had changed, and what, if any, struggles they had during the English 120 course in regards to their motivations and attitudes toward writing. Like the pre-survey, the questionnaire posed the same questions about the students' parents' educational backgrounds.

The post-survey also revisited the student's motivation for receiving a college level education, not to necessarily see if their motivations changed, since the surveys held no easily identifiable information such as names or student numbers, but to see if responses begin to vary or were similar to the first set of responses. The post-survey also asked students if they felt their study skills had improved because of their English 120 coursework and generally asked if their motivations and attitudes toward writing had changed because of what they had learned during their English 120 coursework. I again asked students to indicate their level of familiarity with the same genres of writing I listed in the pre-survey. For the post-survey, I asked students to do more complex work in answering questions about motivation and attitudes toward writing, however. First, I asked about which classroom pedagogical activities, such as student-teacher conferences, peer review, and writing labs, the instructor had engaged students in. Secondly, I asked how motivated the student felt toward each activity and if it changed their attitudes on writing. For example, did the student enjoy writing more if the student wrote a paper with a small group or if the student was invited to conference with their instructor on a piece of writing for class. I also had students answer an open question regarding why they found one activity more motivating than another. Finally, I asked each student what genre of writing they found to be most motivating and why they felt that way about that particular genre of writing. The survey concluded by asking students if they felt more motivated to learn other concepts of writing in future classes. The final question of the post-survey asked if the student felt his or her study skills had improved and why he or she felt his or her study skills had improved over the course of the semester in first-year writing. As with the pre-survey, all responses were kept anonymous to protect students' identities and privacy.

Students' Reflective Assessment

Students shared their own responses and understanding of the course materials by reflecting on changes they felt they noticed, whether these changes were in their personal study habits or an increased understanding of writing genres taught in their first-year writing class. These reflective assessment questions were asked in the post-survey to better complete a content analysis on any changes that were perceived between the two survey interventions. In brief, two specific questions from both surveys ask students to perform a reflective assessment. Furthermore, the post-survey's main purpose was not to have students specifically assess their own learning in the course, but instead simply provide a reflection on how they either better understood a particular genre of writing, or not. For example, question five in the post-survey asked students if they felt better prepared for other college level writing assignments after taking English 120 College Composition II. Students were also asked to respond to this question by elaborating on their yes or no response as to why or why not they felt better prepared for future college writing assignments after completing their English 120 College Composition II course. Question six in the post-survey was similar to question five in that this question asked if students felt their study skills had improved at the end of their English 120 course.

Many of the survey questions are similar in both the pre-survey and post-survey, and they remain similar in attempts to recognize any changes in the behaviors and motivations of first-generation college students' attitudes toward academic and personal writing tasks and activities. The questions also asked if first-generation college students felt that their study skills have improved during their participation in the course. Skills such as time management become important to students in a writing course because they need to turn in written assignments on time and work on more than one assignment at a time. For example, data may show increases in

study skills after completing their English 120 College Composition II course, or report that their study skills remained unchanged because of the course.

Limitations and Gaps in the Research

My findings from the survey cannot be generalized to represent the two populations of first-generation college students and multiple generation college students. However, the results confirm some earlier research and provide a qualitative window into the experiences of a few students from one, single English 120 Composition II course at North Dakota State University. As is true with all research, both surveys, the pre-survey and the post-survey, had several limitations that should be addressed to better understand what more can be done in future research, which I will share in the following section of this chapter. To begin my discussion, I'll discuss the limitations of my research in the following paragraphs of this section. In discussing these limitations, we can begin to see what avenues we can take to further research the diverse needs of first-generation college students in our writing and college classrooms.

One of my primary limitations occurred because of the nature of my classroom study that relied primarily on gathering anonymous qualitative survey data. Limitations also occurred through this method because of the nature of the Likert scale questions that did not always ask for follow up responses as to why students rated particular classroom tasks or written assignments as they did. Some of these gaps, or limitations, in the research could have been further analyzed through conducting personal interviews with a select few of the research participants. With my classroom study being of an anonymous nature, however, I was not able to reach out to select participants, who were first-generation college students, primarily because I had no identifying information about them. In gaining some identifying information, however, I

would have likely wished to follow up with a few of these students to better understand why they answered select questions the way they did. For example, I could have asked first-generation college students questions about why their motivations for taking an English 120 College Composition II course did not change during the course of the semester, as they did for the multiple generation college student population. Learning this would tell me, as a researcher, more about the motivations of the first-generation college student group in taking English 120 College Composition II, and give me further information as to why they held the consistent motivations they did. Because I did not conduct any personalized interviews with the survey subjects, leading to some identifiable gaps in my findings that I will discuss further along in this section. In conducting interviews, I could have further elaborated on the results of my survey from the first-generation college student population.

With the limitation of the study listed above, there were some gaps I noticed when looking over my qualitative survey data during the coding phase of my research process. For example, this limitation left me with particular gaps that did cause me to be left to speculate on potential reasons for students' responses. For example, one speculation I made occurred in my efforts to better understand the change in a student's level of interest in taking a writing-intensive English class between the pre-survey and the post-survey. While the interest levels of the first-generation college students did not change, the interest levels in the class of the multiple generation college students did. I did not ask students to elaborate on why they answered as they did with the level of interest in taking the course. Only one student admitted she had a high level of interest because she was an English major.

As I have noted, I focused my classroom surveys on examining the motivations and attitudes of first-generation college students in the first-year writing classroom. With this

particular research focus, a major theme in my research inquired about students' motivations for attending college and obtaining a higher degree. In this question, I had students articulate who or what motivated them most to attend college. Many students cited parents, family members, teachers, or career goals in their responses. While I received a rich array of responses, not all students elaborated further on why the individuals mentioned or career goals functioned as strong motivators for them to attend college and obtain a higher degree. Furthermore, while all multiple generation college students cited career goals as motivators for college, I did not inquire further as to why else they may be motivated to achieve a college education, or what would happen if their career motivations changed during their college tenure. I was not also able to further ask about what first-generation college students interpreted as having a better life, aside from seeing college as a gateway to further career opportunities and receive a higher paying job than they would with just a high school education. These questions would be excellent to ask within a structured interview, or gain through narrative research on first-generation college students and multiple generation college students in a future study.

Another limitation in my study occurred in the short answer questions where students did not or chose not to elaborate further on their responses. For example, in a post-survey question one multiple generation college student responded that he often had a hard time studying, and therefore did not feel he had adequate study skills required for college coursework. This particular student did not elaborate on why he had a hard time studying, which is an answer that could allude to a potential attention-deficit disorder or another situation the student found himself facing. Because the student did not further elaborate on why he struggled with studying, I was not able to better understand what gaps he felt he was encountering in his study skills when performing college-level coursework.

A final limitation in my research, and perhaps the most important limitation to discuss, can be seen in the small sample size of my data results and the overarching assumptions I make considering the data results. While I did use my data to create what I term a first-generation pedagogy, I want to remind you that this pedagogy is consisting only of pedagogical interventions. In other words, these are pedagogical interventions a teacher could institute in her classroom, as she sees fit, and as students demonstrate a need for them. For example, not all first-generation college students find themselves struggling academically in the university, and they may find the pedagogical interventions I list, such as structured peer review groups, as mere “busy work” or even as unwelcomed. With this in mind, please remember it is important to take the needs of the students in your classroom into consideration and apply the pedagogical interventions I discuss in a thoughtful way where you consider the needs of your own students and the learning outcomes your course must meet.

A final issue to take into consideration regarding the overarching pedagogical assumptions I made in this classroom study is to remember the purpose and nature of my classroom research. My research may be described as “*qualitative descriptive research* [that] tries to answer questions by closely studying individuals, small groups, or whole environments,” which makes the nature of my study smaller, but also quite diverse since whole environments can also be included (Lauer and Asher 23). This research also examines situations “as they occur” meaning that the data a researcher often receives in a classroom study can be small, and yet also still significant, as the data is collected during a specific implementation process, with my case study examining students’ motivations and attitudes on classroom practices during the course of the semester (Lauer and Asher 23). Considering the pedagogical nature of my research, it may be helpful to create future studies to survey a greater amount of first-generation college

students to better understand their needs. Out of a class of fourteen students, I was only able to receive responses from three self-identified first-generation college students. While this does account for around 21% of the student population, gaining further perspectives from other first-generation college students enrolled in various first-year writing classes at North Dakota State University would have been valuable to continue to articulate gaps in student engagement and learning for this student population. In gaining a larger sample size, I would have also decreased this limitation involved in my study by having a more diverse array of responses as to motivations and attitudes first-generation college students and multiple generation college students held toward assignments and classroom activities in first-year writing at North Dakota State University.

In finding ways to close these gaps, other research needs to be done. Some potential research methods could include structured interviews with first-generation college students and multiple generation college students to better understand what the needs and risks of each are in attaining future academic success. Another potential research method is performing narrative research to better understand the background and experiences of first-generation college students to further analyze their potential academic needs and concerns. In the next section, I give further details for completing this future research.

In the following section, I'll briefly summarize the results from both of my surveys: the pre-survey and the post-survey that were distributed during the spring semester of 2015. The results are separated between first-generation college students and multiple generation college students. My discussion of the results combines both student groups and shares a comparative analysis of their responses.

The Results of the Study

Multiple Generation College Students—Pre Survey and Post Survey Results

For multiple generation students, motivating factors for attending college were split between career goals and parents in both the pre-survey and the post-survey. All students surveyed felt academically prepared for college coursework. Some of these students felt this way because of AP courses offered through their high schools and others reported feeling this way because of the support of their high school teachers and family members who had attended college. Multiple generation college students also shared mid-range to high range levels of familiarity with commonly taught genres (memoir, personal narrative, annotated bibliography, and commentary) in the first-year writing classroom in both surveys with very little change between familiarity aside from a point increase if that genre was taught within the structure of the course. Classroom activities this student population found the most motivating included writing conferences with the instructor because of the potential for direct feedback on their writing assignments. This particular group of students felt that time with the instructor helped guarantee them the possibility of higher grades. Multiple generation college students also rated class discussion and working in groups as highly motivating activities, and activities they also had positive attitudes toward. All results are shown in Table 1: Pre-Survey, Multiple Generation College Students and Table 2: Post-Survey, Multiple Generation College Students in the following tables below.

Table 1

Pre-Survey: Multiple Generation College Students responses to Likert Scale Questions

Question	1	2	3	4	5
Interest level in English 120		1	5	3	1
Academic Preparation for College				1	9
Memoir/Personal Narrative			2	6	2
Annotated Bibliography		1	6	2	1
Ethnography	5	1	4		
Commentary		2	4	3	1

Table 2

Post-Survey: Multiple Generation College Students answers to Likert Scale Questions

Question	1	2	3	4	5
Interest Level in English 120	2		3	2	1
Motivation for Memoir/Personal Narrative		1	1	4	6
Motivation for Ethnography/Profile	1	1	6	1	
Motivation for Commentary		2	1	3	5
Motivation for Small group Discussion		3	2	5	2
Motivation for Whole class discussion		1	6	3	1
Motivation for Instructor conferences	1	1	2	5	2
Motivation for Peer Review	1	2	4	3	1
Attitudes toward Memoir/personal narrative			2	2	7
Attitudes toward Ethnography/Profile		1	5	3	1
Attitudes toward Commentary		2	1	4	4
Genre familiarity with Memoir/PN				1	10
Genre familiarity with Ethnography	5	4	1	1	
Genre familiarity with Annotated Bib	1		5	3	2
Genre familiarity with Commentary				1	10

First-Generation College Students: Pre-Survey and Post-Survey Results

In my survey results, I had a total of three first-generation college students out of the 14 total students in the English 120 class. Motivating factors for attending college were family members and all students commented on viewing a college education as a gateway to a better life. All students surveyed answered that they did feel prepared to take on college coursework and also felt that what they learned in English 120 prepared them for future coursework. As suspected, all first-generation college students, just like their multiple generation peers, listed their greatest genre familiarity with personal narratives and memoirs, or genres that are viewed as less academically rigorous. In both surveys, first-generation students answered that they had the strongest motivation and attitudes toward writing activities that either involved individual work time (for example, individual pre-writing activities) or involved instructor feedback. Many first-generation college students expressed anxiety about group work, or at times even receiving instructor feedback. Overall, all first-generation college students reported that they felt more motivation for completing in-class work and other associated writing tasks while enrolled in their English 120 course as compared to multiple generation college students. In the discussion below, I'll share the response rates and discuss how the results from first-generation college students compared to that of multiple generation college students, and if there were any noticeable changes in motivations or attitudes during the course of the semester in English 120. All results are displayed in Table 3: Pre-Survey: First-Generation College Students and Table 4: Post-Survey: First-Generation College Students found below.

Table 3

Pre-Survey: First Generation College Students responses to Likert Scale Questions

Question	1	2	3	4	5
Interest level in English 120	1		1		1
Academic Preparation for College				1	2
Memoir/Personal Narrative				2	1
Annotated Bibliography	1		1		1
Ethnography	2	1			
Commentary				1	1

Table 4

Post-Survey, First-Generation College Students responses to Likert Scale Questions

Question	1	2	3	4	5
Interest Level in English 120	1		1		1
Motivation for Memoir/Personal Narrative					3
Motivation for Ethnography/Profile			1	1	
Motivation for Commentary		1		2	
Motivation for Small group Discussion			1	1	1
Motivation for Whole class discussion			1	1	1
Motivation for Instructor conferences				1	2
Motivation for Peer Review		2			1
Attitudes toward Memoir/personal narrative					3
Attitudes toward Ethnography/Profile		1	1	1	
Attitudes toward Commentary		1	1	1	
Genre Familiarity with Memoir/PN					3
Genre Familiarity with Ethnography	2	1			
Genre Familiarity with Annotated Bib	1	2			
Genre familiarity with Commentary				2	1

Discussion of the Results for both Multiple and First-Generation College Students

Interest Level in an English General Education Course

To begin a discussion of the results, I'll share insight into the interest multiple generation college students felt toward taking a general education English course, in this case English 120. Their responses were calculated on a Likert scale with five (5) on the Likert scale to designate a very high interest and a one (1) to indicate the student held no interest in taking an English course (Appendix A, Appendix C, Table 1). The pre-survey held zero students indicating a 1, one student indicating a 2, five students indicating a three, three students sharing a result of 4, and one student with a scale of 5. The responses were distributed over a wide range likely because of the nature of the first-year writing course, where English 120 functions as a general education requirement for all students. Because English 120 (or equivalent) is a required course needed to graduate, there likely will be a spread in regards to interest in taking a general education, required course, such as English 120. This wide range of interest may be especially true for all college students who occasionally see a required course as a hurdle to overcome before they can start taking courses in their intended major.

The results for the post-survey question revealed two multiple generation college students giving a 1, three students giving a response of 2, three students citing 3, two students sharing a 4, and one student indicating a 5 for level of interest in taking an English class. As in the pre-survey, the responses are again distributed widely because of the nature of the first-year writing course, where it is a general education requirement for all students, and thus there will be a wide distribution for level of interest. In comparing these findings, I noted that interest in the first-year writing course for multiple generation college students decreased over time, perhaps due to end-of-semester exhaustion, grades that weren't as high as anticipated, or other concerns. I asked

students to share no follow-up based on their results and so have no documented evidence for why students may have slightly altered their interest level over the course of the semester. I can only speculate that some students may have received lower grades than anticipated, especially considering the concern multiple generation college students shared regarding receiving high grades in the course, mainly As and Bs, that will be discussed later in this discussion.

In contrast with the above, first-generation college students demonstrated a higher level of interest in taking a general education English course despite also having a wide range of interest. One reason for the higher levels of motivation is likely because one student in the first-generation college student cohort identified herself as a declared English major, and that she was “looking forward to taking a class in her chosen field, even if it was a general education requirement.” Aside from this response, it should be noted that first-generation college students often did demonstrate higher levels of motivation for classroom tasks and writing assignments, which shows that these students may not be seeing their general education requirements as a hurdle to jump through, but instead as a learning experience. First-generation college students are also less likely to see their college education as a right, but as an opportunity, and in this sense, first-generation college students view earning a college degree as a form of “upward mobility” allowing for the potential of a better economic future (Kupfer 59). As I will discuss below, the motivations for attending college are not as career-driven as the goals of the multiple generation college students that were surveyed. This finding opens up an area of discussion concerning gaps that instructors may be seeing between the two groups of students, where one group is highly motivated to attain a college degree simply for a particular career, whereas the other group views the college degree as a way to achieve a better life, or a life better than what they experienced growing up. The language regarding a “better life” shared by first-generation

college students is likely related to economic well-being, or the amount of pay they can receive in a job that requires a college education.

Motivations for Attending College

As in the previous section, I'll begin my discussion with the multiple generation college students who were surveyed, and end with the discussion of the first-generation college students who were surveyed. For the multiple generation college students, the motivations for attending college were a relatively balanced mix between citing parents/family and career goals as primary motivations for attending college and receiving a higher degree (Appendix A and B). In the pre-survey, five multiple generation students cited career pressures as being motivators for a college education and five students cited parents or family as their overarching motivations. The post-survey results were one off from an even mix between citing parents and family and career goals. The post-survey resulted in six students sharing that their main motivation for a college education were "parents" whereas five students cited specific career goals as their main motivation for obtaining a college degree. This data appears to show that all the multiple generation college students were motivated by either seeing their parents or older siblings benefit from their college educations or knowing that their future employment options required them to obtain a college degree. These responses showed their motivations were not focused on individual goals as much as they were focused on societal and familial expectations.

First-generation college students, meanwhile, responded in some similar ways, but also in some different ways when they were asked to share their motivations for attending college. The responses of first-generation college students were often focused on their future self and wanting their "future to be better", both socially and economically, than their past experiences and better

than what they saw their parents experience. All students surveyed commented that they felt a college education would guarantee them a “better life than what their parents had” or a “better life than what [they] had growing up.” So, while these students still cited parents and family as motivators, they were motivators for reasons that were expressed differently from their multiple generation college peers. This documented gap in motivation supports previous research from Pascerella, et. al regarding the different motivations for pursuing a college education between first-generation college students and multiple-generation college students (Pascerella et al 253). Instructors need to understand the different motivations students have for attaining a higher degree so that they can more directly help a student who finds himself or herself struggling in a particular class or assignment. If an instructor understands why the student is enrolled, they can better help the student keep their original motivators in mind as the student accomplishes tasks that may be more difficult for them.

In terms of responding to what or who motivated the first-generation college students to attend college, their answers were split between citing parents or other family members and the opportunity a college degree affords with being able to have a better paying job, and therefore a better life overall. First-generation students cited family as being a motivator because, as one student wrote, “I don’t want to stress about money as much as my mom did” and added, looking forward to her future, “I want my future family to live the way they should live” (Appendix A, pre-survey). Another intriguing aspect about the first-generation responses is that these responses are centered toward the self and familial roles, and not necessarily toward outside pressures or obligations, as in the case of the multiple generation college student responses that were mainly centered on career pressures. In fact, most of the first-generation college students surveyed noted that financial concerns were a large motivator in getting a college education, by responding how

they “did not want to live the way their parents had to live” financially, or the way they used to live financially, because their parents did not have a college education, and therefore had less opportunity for career enhancement or better paying jobs. From the results, it also appears obvious that parents, who did not have a college education, also pushed their children to achieve a college education because of the perceived opportunities a college degree could afford. As one student from the survey related, “it wasn’t a question that I went to college.” In this response, the first-generation college student shared that he or she felt she had to attend college, regardless of other goals.

The motivations of multiple generation college students are different from the first-generation college student group because they are focused on the former college achievements of parents and focused career goals. Many of these students responded with phrases like, “I am going to college to become a nurse to heal people,” or “I am in college because I want to help others as a teacher.” First-generation college students who responded had strongly different motivations for attending college than their multiple generation peers. First-generation college students instead answered that they were motivated to attend college simply to have a better life than what their parents had and to not “live paycheck to paycheck.” First-generation college students in their responses were focused on survival in an economically driven society that is often full of technological and social changes. The most interesting finding from the responses to the question of motivation to attend college was that the first-generation college students never shared specific career goals in their responses, like how the multiple generation college students did, but instead focused on vague concepts of being able to support oneself simply because they had a college degree and likely could then gain better employment opportunities. In not sharing specific career goals, the first-generation college student responses are pointing to a gap in how

we support students from low-income, minority backgrounds in public education. This gap is also likely apparent in how the parents and family of the first-generation college students talk about what a college degree can do, as the parents likely only see the purpose of the degree as a way for their children to make more money than they did, and therefore have a chance at a better life. Again, the concern toward upward mobility is expressed in the first-generation college student cohort.

With these responses, a definite gap exists in the motivations and goals these two diverse student groups have for attending college. In this study, the multiple generation college students are shown to have a focus on future career goals with specific career options often in mind, such as nurse or teacher as shared above. Multiple generation college students also view their parents as motivators to obtain a college degree because of their parents past successes in employment and economic security. Meanwhile the first-generation college group is focused on economic insecurities where they view a college degree as a symbol of hope for gaining a better life in terms of increasing employment opportunities, even if they do not have a focused career goal in mind. Parents and family members are not a primary motivator for first-generation college students because they have not seen family members attend college. Instead they are the first ones in their family to attend college.

With the responses above, the concern multiple generation college students all share regarding careers and future employment is obvious. One can also note this from their responses for motivations for attending college, as all their responses were family or career-based. For instance, all of the multiple generation college students surveyed shared specific career goals in discussing their motivations for attending college (become a nurse, teacher, or social worker) and their motivation to succeed in college was focused primarily on getting a degree for the career

fields that held their interest. The responses from first generation college students were different in that their responses focused on maintaining a standard of living that was different from what they saw their parents, and themselves as they were growing up, experience. Their motivations for attending college are centered on economic survival and having more opportunities for employment, not necessarily on focused specific career goals.

College Preparation and Study Skills

My original assumptions included that multiple generation college students would all feel prepared for the expectations and requirements of college-level coursework, whereas first-generation college students may feel some concern regarding their own level of college preparation. My assumption was correct for the multiple generation college students, but the responses from the first-generation college student cohort surprised me because the first-generation college students reported that they did feel prepared for college coursework and further shared that they felt their study skills were adequate. Formerly, I had noted that the first-generation college students may comment on not feeling as prepared for college coursework as perhaps their multiple generation college peers, and may also be lacking in essential study skills, which comes out of research conducted by Mike Rose in *Lives on the Boundary* in which he documents how he sees minority and low-income students struggle academically (Rose 2-5). Rose's research points toward students who are often minorities and from low-income households, which also represents the majority of first-generation college students.

In both surveys, all the students who were surveyed were asked if they felt that they received adequate preparation for college, and why or why not that student may feel adequately prepared (Appendix A). I defined college preparation as having strong study skills with good

time management, and feeling as if they understood basic academic writing conventions. To organize my discussion, I'll share information from the multiple generation college students first, and compare their answers to the responses from the first-generation college students who were surveyed.

In the pre-survey, all but one respondent from the multiple generation college student population answered yes to feeling they had good college preparation during high school. As for the single multiple generation student who answered no to the question of adequate preparation in the pre-survey, the student elaborated in the following way:

In high school, many of my teachers would set strict guidelines for assignments, give unreasonable amounts of time [for assignments], and explain it was all for college preparation. I had a very difficult time adjusting to the individually focused study methods, i.e. self-motivation, self-discipline.

This multiple generation college student appears to share the assumption that high school did not adequately prepare him or her for the skills needed in college courses, but instead simply gave students “more time” to complete work. The student found this practice of giving extensions on assignments as counter-productive as it meant more time to procrastinate on assigned classroom projects. It also appears from the comment that though the guidelines for assignments were “strict,” these guidelines were not a good representation of college-level work, according to this student who was surveyed. This self-report shows that this particular multiple generation college student felt that their high school was not a good fit for college preparation.

In regards to study skills, the remaining multiple generation college students answered that high school gave them adequate preparation for college entrance by giving them study skill tools. The study skill tools they mentioned included concepts like how to take good class notes

and having access to Accelerated Placement (AP) classes that they completed in high school. One multiple generation college student gave both a yes and no response to having good study skills with the reasoning that he or she learned only how to regurgitate information in high school, but learned little skills in critical analysis. This same student also felt that he or she didn't learn any project management or time management during high school. Three multiple generation college students responded to the question regarding college preparation and adequate study skills with a no response. Two of these multiple generation college students claimed they felt high school was easy and felt they did not have to study much in order to do well in their high school classes. A third student responded that they have a "hard time studying" anyway, and because of this hardship felt that they had no adequate preparation in high school for study skills required for college-level coursework. This particular multiple generation college student did not elaborate further on their answer.

The survey also inquired if the multiple-generation college student population felt motivated to improve their study skills, even if they felt they had adequate study skills. Half of the multiple generation college students surveyed responded that they do feel motivated to learn better study skills. Most responses claimed their motivation existed because of intrinsic motivation where they wanted to "improve their own study skills and study habits for future college classes." One student responded with the belief where he or she worried a degree in her field of choice "may not be enough to guarantee her successful employment" in her chosen career. Because of this concern, she felt motivated to improve grades by learning "how to improve [her] study skills." This student felt that then she could share her high grades in college, such as sharing that she had achieved a 3.8 or higher, on a resume to better impress potential employers. This concern toward career again shares how multiple generation college students see

earning a higher degree as a gateway toward a particular job or career, and not necessarily as a learning experience.

First-generation college students, to my surprise, did feel that their past educational experiences prepared them for college-level coursework, which shows that first-generation students do not see themselves as an academically at-risk college population. Their response also resonates with research done by first-generation scholars, such as Jeff Davis, which illustrates that first-generation college students feel as if they have a right to be in college and therefore do feel as if they are adequately prepared, especially since many of the first-generation college students surveyed seemed to share in having taken similar classes to their multiple generation college peers in high school (AP courses, for example, were mentioned by both student groups). In other words, first-generation college students feel a sense of pride in being the first in their family to go to college, and thus feel a sense of entitlement. Davis argued that low-income college students, even if they are first-generation college students, do not always feel this same sense of entitlement to a college education (Davis 48). Another reason for this response is likely because this survey was shared during the spring semester, meaning all these students had taken classes during the fall semester and already had learned some time management skills for helping them succeed in their college coursework.

As for learning better study skills, all the first-generation college students surveyed shared that they felt motivated to learn better study skills in order to “further succeed in their college coursework.” In sharing their responses, two of three students answered yes, they did feel motivation to learn better study skills. One student responded with a no, potentially backing up the data that first-generation college students are an academically at-risk population since they seldom enter with adequate study skills for college level work, as shared in research from Mike

Rose in *Lives on the Boundary* (2-5). The two first-generation college students who responded optimistically had also noted their previous and present interest in academics. One student commented that in high school, she did the “minimum that was required, mainly because [she] lacked interest in most of her high school coursework.” This same student noted, however, that she found college academics more “fun,” and that once she figured out what type of learner she was, she found learning easier at times. This comment does help to illustrate that many first-generation college students may only learn necessary academic skills later in their education, as compared to multiple generation peers, as Wang noted when she argued that some first-generation college students “lag behind” their multiple generation college peers in terms of good study habits (Wang 352). Another first-generation student simply commented that she always has taken academics seriously and that is why she answered yes to having strong study skills. A third student, who was the only respondent to answer with no, furthered her response by explaining that she has never been good at focusing on one task for long periods of time, but did add that she never had to do much studying before college. While this response could be representative of other learning concerns, such as Attention Deficit Disorder, it could also be related to the inadequate study skills of first-generation college students. Many first-generation students arrive with underdeveloped academic skills, such as having good time management skills, because they have either never been taught or have had to practice these skills as one does for college-level coursework (Prospero and Gupta, 2007; Davis, 2008). First-generation college students have also lacked the parental support, and other supportive academics systems that their multiple generation college peers have likely received.

An obvious concern of many first-generation college students that my data has already shared is future financial stability. All three of the first-generation college students reported to be

concerned about their financial futures in their survey data, either by commenting about how they didn't want to be "poor like [her] parents" or by stating she "didn't want to live like my parents." This future financial concern was echoed in the response from one first-generation college student who was surveyed. This first generation college student replied that he felt motivation to learn better study skills because he realized college classes would be more complex than high school courses, but his response also left something interesting for further analysis, something that would be unique to first-generation college students. He mentioned financial concerns because he is paying for his education in paying out-of-pocket for his tuition costs and textbooks, as well as all university fees. He commented on how he needed a well-paying job in the future so that he could manage to pay off future college debt, and still live comfortably. He also identified how he did not want live paycheck to paycheck like his parents. None of his multiple generation college peers commented on financial concerns outside of one multiple generation college student remarking on potential college debt after graduation. This first-generation college student's response posits a generalized financial anxiety certainly faced by many first-generation college students that many of their peers may not face, particularly if they have never experienced financial hardships.

Responses from multiple generation college students and first generation college students also differed when the first-generation college students were asked to elaborate on college preparation. First-generation college students gave responses that actually showed that they did not feel a strong sense of college preparation, and noting their responses, some of these students could have answered maybe or unsure as many shared concerns about "managing time well" or "being able to work and go to school" successfully. A big concern in the first-generation college student population was in regards to time management with balancing life and school concerns.

Many of these students had family concerns where they would have to visit family often to help support their parents or siblings, while also working many hours as well attending classes and completing their homework. Having many hours at their job was necessary for these students because they relied on that income to help pay for tuition, books, and other costs associated with a college education. The multiple generation college students did not have these same concerns, and some reported having no jobs yet. One multiple generation student commented by saying that “my job is going to school,” meaning all he was expected to do was do well in school and all his costs of living would be taken care of by his parents or through other forms of financial aid.

First-generation college students did share some positive responses to the college preparation question. All of them responded that they knew college would be different from high school, and thus would have to spend more time studying and preparing for their coursework. One student stated she took accelerated placement (AP) classes during high school, and felt this experience gave her adequate preparation for college. All students commented on how they appreciated having the freedom to study what they want, and focus on where their academic interests lie. Most importantly, all first-generation college students felt academically supported in college, and felt they sometimes didn’t get that same level of support from teachers during high school. Because of the academic support, one first-gen student found college “easier” since she felt that she got help faster when she requested that she needed help in understanding an assignment. Another student commented that he felt college was more of an “open-minded” environment, since he had a lot more freedom to choose what he wanted to study, and this helped him prepare for his coursework. These responses help to illustrate what colleges are doing right by first-generation college students in that these students already feel more supported in the

university environment. The next goal is to create a pedagogy that further communicates this support within the classroom environment, which will be developed in Chapter 4.

Written Genres in First-Year Writing

Another area of inquiry from both surveys focused on students' familiarity with written genres that are typically taught in first-year writing classrooms. In efforts to obtain the best data, I chose to list genres that were typically taught in the first-year writing classroom at North Dakota State University. Respectively, the genres my survey inquired about included profiles or ethnographies, personal narrative or memoir, commentary, and annotated bibliography. I asked about genre familiarity first to specifically see what genres the two student groups were more comfortable with, and had more knowledge about, to better see what gaps I could recognize in the student learning and knowledge. In understanding what genres students felt more familiar with, I felt I could create a pedagogy that could better accommodate student needs, particularly in regards to the first-generation college student population. For example, I imagined that all students would be highly familiar with more personal writing genres, like the memoir, and less familiar with genres that required more academic-centered discourse, such as annotated bibliography. I also wanted to receive data on genre familiarity so I could perhaps better understand the responses to classroom pedagogy that students felt strong motivations toward and use these motivations to help move them into more complex, critical genres that are often used in academic discourse communities.

As stated above, both surveys asked students about their familiarity with different genres of writing that are typically taught in first-year writing courses at North Dakota State University (Appendix A and B). As suspected, all the multiple generation college students surveyed

responded with a high level of familiarity for the memoir genre. The genre of ethnography showed the least familiarity with the multiple generation students surveyed, likely because students were never given an ethnographic assignment for the English 120 course, so any familiarity students show toward this assignment likely comes from another course or source. For familiarity with the annotated bibliography genre, multiple generation college students shared a mid-range level of familiarity, but for the post-survey shared a higher level of familiarity since an annotated bibliography was included for their final assignment in the course. The final genre listed was commentary, which had a high-range level of familiarity likely because commentary is a genre of choice for teaching first-year writing at North Dakota State University, but also is a common popular online genre as commentaries are included on popular online news sources, for example.

In both surveys, first-generation college students shared similar responses to genre familiarity when compared to the multiple generation college student group, though they did demonstrate greater familiarity with personal genres, such as the memoir. All students responded on a 1-5 Likert scale with 5 designating the highest level of familiarity and 1 signaling no familiarity. All first-generation college students showed a high level of familiarity with memoir genre with two students designating a 4 and one student sharing a score of 5. The genre first-generation college students showed the lowest level of familiarity with was ethnography with two students designating no level of knowledge with a score of 1, and one student indicating a 2, showing that they had some level of understanding. Annotated bibliography and ethnography held highly mixed results to very low results for genre knowledge in both surveys as the first-generation college students indicated gaps in the understanding of what an annotated bibliography is, or what it purports to do, even after completing the assignment for class. The

higher levels of knowledge for the memoir and commentary are unsurprising, considering these two genres would be common ones for first-generation college students to be exposed to because of commentary being a prevalent genre in online mediums, and the popularity of the memoir genre in popular culture. These are also genres that require a more personal writing type of approach, which is a style of writing many first-generation college students may likely be familiar with.

Another question in the post-survey asked first-generation college students about different first-year writing genres, and asked students which ones they had a more positive attitude toward (Appendix B). While I did not designate a definition for attitude in the survey itself, I did describe what I meant by attitude prior to distributing the surveys out to the students. Attitude, within this study, is simply defined as having a positive feeling or emotion toward a particular genre that is commonly taught in the first-year writing classroom. In this response, all the students gave the highest score of 5 for any genre that was reflective of personal writing, like the memoir. One student deviated from this response, in giving the personal narrative a score of 3, which shows a mid-range attitude, but responded in this fashion because he felt the personal narrative lacked a creativity he felt he could explore in a memoir assignment. In this sense, he felt the personal narrative was a more fixed genre, and one he couldn't express with any creativity. But even this response does show the preference first-generation college students have toward more personal genres that they feel can better show their creative abilities. First-generation college students also commented that they preferred writing genres with more of an "emotional range." This goes back to the theme I made earlier in my discourse analysis where I found first-generation college students would have more motivation, and therefore better attitudes, toward writing genres that they found to be less academic in terms of discourse. The

results from this survey prove that first-generation college students prefer genres that require some emotional response, or allow them to comment in some way on their own personal experiences. This finding further supports Nancy Mack's research that posits first-generation college students, and other so-called underprepared students, find personal narratives enjoyable, but creating assignments that also ask for citation and source use is necessary for them to begin to learn academic discourses (53-54). With this in mind, it is important to realize that building assignments into a first-year writing class that ask for personal experience and source use can help generate more student engagement in writing assignments.

The post-survey gave a similar response as the pre-survey in regards to which writing assignments first-generation college students found to be most motivating (Appendix B). Motivation here refers to having the energy and drive to do well on selected tasks. These responses were nearly exactly the same responses to Question 13 in the post-survey, with one key difference where a student gave a commentary a lower score for motivation than for attitudes (Appendix B). Overall, all other responses were the same, and again demonstrated the preference first-generation college students have toward writing assignments that allow emotional range and personal perspective, such as the memoir. These are also genres first-generation students likely feel more confident with, as they are not only more familiar, but also genres they may have explored on their own through their own writings on social media.

As I noted earlier in this section, the results from these surveys are not surprising, but do play into themes I noted in my analysis. For example, first-generation college students did place more emphasis and understanding into genres that were more personal in nature, such as the memoir and personal narrative. Even after being taught more academically rigorous genres, such as the annotated bibliography and commentary, first-generation college students still struggled

with the meanings and applications of these genres. This struggle can be seen in their responses toward the genres in the post-survey where the first-generation students indicate some increase in understanding, but still show they do not typically prefer these genres. For example, all the first-generation college students rated their attitudes and motivation toward the commentary genre in the post-survey as low on the Likert scale. This shows there is a definite gap in how first-generation college students are being taught these genres in the first-year writing classroom. When students responded to a follow up question regarding why they answered as they did to genre preference with motivation and attitudes, all the students described they preferred inserting some level of creativity and personal experience in their writing. In writing the commentary or annotated bibliography, they felt they had to follow strict guidelines that did not allow for discussing their own personal experiences or creativity. As instructors of writing, we know this not to be necessarily true, as we often encourage our students to use their experiences and interests in approaching academic writing assignments. This gap in motivation and attitudes, however, leaves a great opportunity for teachers to better develop pedagogies and classroom tasks that help first-generation college students engage with more academically rigorous genres. Some of these potential concepts and applications will be supplied in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

Motivation and Attitudes about Classroom Pedagogy

Because I performed a classroom study that focused on ways to implement a pedagogy that would benefit the needs of first-generation college students in the first-year writing classroom, I wanted to understand what types of classroom pedagogies students had positive attitudes about and found to be motivating. I wanted to analyze classroom tasks in terms of

motivation and attitudes because of the research from Wang that suggested first-generation college students often feel isolation and confusion once they enter the academy because these students have had neither parents nor siblings attend college (65). I questioned students on their motivation and attitudes toward the following in-class activities: small group work, individual time to work on projects in class, whole class discussions, peer review, and instructor writing conferences. In responding to the survey, multiple generation and first-generation college students did show some differences in regards to what classroom tasks they found more motivating and had better attitudes toward. I'll start by discussing the responses from the multiple-generation college students and then move onto the first-generation college students.

Multiple-generation college students listed the following pedagogical activities in the highest position: time to work alone on papers and other writing assignments in class, small group classroom activities, and having time to talk to the instructor one-on-one (Appendix A). These students indicated that they felt having time to work in class gave them more motivation to work on assignments outside of class. They highly valued the in-time class work because it gave them a head start on their various writing projects, and also allowed them time to work with their peers and get questions answered by the instructor or a classmate. Multiple-generation college students indicated that getting some work done for a project in class made them feel they were being productive and progressing along with the assignment. These positive feelings of motivation led them to continue working on the assignment outside of class. Students from this sample also related that they felt more positively towards working on projects alone in class because it meant they were not likely to be performing group projects, as group projects meant that they would always have to be working with the group on project tasks. This assumption about group work is, of course, not necessarily true as most group projects will require individual

work outside of the group construct, but no student took this into account in their responses. Two out of three students who commented on the group projects felt that group projects caused them to “lose concentration” and hindered their participation in negative ways since they often had to follow the schedules of others in the group. If they were working on a writing project alone, the students argued, they had a higher level of motivation because they could concentrate more effectively and set their own schedules for working on the assignment.

Small-group classroom activities were rated as the most motivating classroom activity for four students from the pre-survey sample of multiple generation college students. They described this activity as a motivating classroom activity for a number of reasons that they elaborated on in question 11 of the pre-survey (Appendix A). The main reason students from this sample preferred this activity was because of the ability to “share ideas” with their peers because it helped them to learn classroom concepts more effectively, and did not cause students to feel nervous about approaching an authority figure, such as the teacher, with an idea or question about the content of the course. Students also reported that small groups made generating ideas or content for teacher-led activities easier and more enjoyable for them because of the peer interactions. This finding demonstrated that the multiple generation college students felt far more motivated and held strong positive attitudes toward work that involved peer groups and peer in class discussions, despite the previous discussion about group projects. These students reported learning more from their peers, and feeling comfortable enough to ask them questions about assignments and other classroom writing tasks.

The final most motivating, or most highly rated activity to better instill motivation toward their writing assignments, included having time to talk to the instructor one-on-one, which was indicated by three students from the pre-survey sample (Appendix A). All the students from the

sample indicated they gave preference to this activity because it allowed them to gain insight from “the most knowledgeable person in the room” regarding whatever classroom activities were taking place. These students also indicated that they found the instructor feedback most valuable for obtaining good grades and instructive feedback on their writing assignments. The reason that instructor feedback rated highly for motivation goes back to the reasons why multiple-generation college students attend college: they wish to gain employment in a career of their choice, so gaining instructor feedback on assignments will help them potentially earn higher grades that may impress future employers.

The second highest rated classroom activity for instilling motivation in students from the sample of multiple-generation college students in the pre-survey included the following three: class discussion, time to work alone in class, and small group activities (Appendix A). Four students from this sample size stated that time spent in whole class discussion was their second highest activity because of the opportunity for discussing different ideas with their classmates. These students found the opportunity to discuss concepts covered in class with their peers as motivating because it helped them verify their own ideas about writing and the assignment in question. Five multiple generation college students responded by stating that having time to work alone on course assignments while in class was their second most motivating activity because it allowed them to get a head start on their assignments in the space of the classroom. One student listed small group activities, but gave no further feedback on the reasoning for their response.

The third highest rated response from the pre-survey data was admittedly mixed with three students stating peer review, two students rating class discussion as the third most motivating activity, two stating the importance of small group activities, and three sharing that writing conferences with the instructor were the third most motivating activity. Because these

results are split, and equally divided between peer review and writing conferences, it is safe to assume that obtaining feedback on their writing, whether it was from peers or the instructor, was still a highly motivating activity for students when working on writing assignments for their first-year writing course. The emphasis on feedback may go back to the concern multiple generation college students gave regarding receiving high grades. The more feedback the students receive on their writing assignments, the higher probability for gaining a higher grade on the assignment and in the class as a whole.

The first-generation college student cohort shared differing responses between the two surveys, so I'll discuss each one, starting with the pre-survey. In the pre-survey, all three first-generation college students argued that the classroom activity that most motivated them was having time in class to work alone on papers and other writing assignments (Appendix A). One student described this preference because of his introvert tendencies, as he considered anything that was partner or group work to be uncomfortable for him on a personal level, and thus didn't find group or partner work to be motivating in the slightest. A second student commented on how she liked brainstorming on her own before working on an assignment with another student or with the teacher. By working on her own, she argued, she could take time to get everything she wants to say on paper and organized before having to share her results with others. She also described preferring to have time to write alone first as allowing her to have a "mini venting session" that she found enjoyable, as it allowed her to further organize and articulate her thoughts before having to share them with a classroom peer or a teacher. A third student liked to work alone first because he appreciated the time to think through his thoughts before having to share them, much like the second student articulated. The third response was also unique in that his second rated activity was time spent in whole class discussions, and he chose to comment

more on his second highest response than the first, as he stated he liked hearing other people's opinions before voicing his own, and that he also liked "getting [his] point across." A second student also listed whole class discussions as the second highest rated response, but didn't comment further on this answer.

A third student shared that one-on-one time with the instructor was her second most motivating activity because it allowed for more feedback on writing assignments. This concern plays into error-avoidance in papers, as discussed in the work of Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary* when he takes into account various student experiences in developmental writing courses (262-65). The student who responded with the concern toward error-avoidance wrote how she felt good writing was all about grammar and mechanics. As Rose shares in *Lives*, many underprepared and underprivileged students do view their writing courses as an exercise and grammar and mechanics, and not necessarily as the rhetorical exercise it is meant to be, which again shows a gap in the understanding of writing courses among first-generation college students (262-63). This particular student also elaborated in her follow up response that she preferred time alone to write because of being able to better organize her thoughts before she shares her writing with others. While this response could be because of introverted tendencies on the part of the student, especially since the student did not elaborate further on the topic, her response also speaks to the anxiety many first-generation college students face as they enter the college classroom. This anxiety stems from the lack of familiarity first-generation college students have with college-level academic discourse as well as the fact that they are the first in their families to attend college and are often unsure of expectations of college and university life that most multiple generation college students may be aware of because of older siblings and parents. Jenny Stuber in her study on college life for first-generation college students noted this

anxiety when she argued about the lack of cultural and social capital many first-generation college students face (34). This lack of social and cultural capital can be detrimental to the success, and retention, of students who come from underprivileged backgrounds, as much of the success in college requires a particular amount of social and cultural capital, such as knowing what types of academic and social support a university offers students. Stuber argues many first-generation college students arrive painfully unaware of the cultural and social expectations present in the university setting, and this ignorance can work against them when they find themselves struggling socially or academically.

The third highest rated activity was unanimously small group classroom activities, which plays into the responses that discussed how the students enjoyed hearing the thoughts of others before voicing their own responses. The fact that the first-generation college students preferred small group activities before moving on to large group class discussion is telling, because it allows them to have their thoughts and opinions validated by peers before moving onto sharing their ideas with the teacher, and the rest of the class. These responses from first-generation college students about sharing ideas with peers before whole class discussions and their concern toward issues of error avoidance serve as illustrators of the anxiety many first-generation college students face in entering our college writing classrooms. As one can see from the responses here, as well as above, all three first-generation students exhibited some level of anxiety toward group work, at least before the student in question was able to work alone to formulate their thoughts or organize their words on paper. For instance, one first-generation college student commented on the importance of having time to organize her thoughts before she presented them to a teacher or peer, which hints at feelings of attitudinal anxiety over her writing. A second student commented on his introversion, which he used to explain his aversion to group work. A third student

commented on how he liked voicing his own thoughts, but also wanted to hear the opinions of others before sharing his own, as if he had anxiety about if his own thoughts were correct for the context of the first-year writing classroom. Such shared subtle anxiety points toward an error-avoidance with social situations in the classroom experience as first-generation college students do not want to make themselves look “less than” in front of their multiple generation peers, nor do they always want to out themselves as not having parents with a college degree, as they do want to fit in with university culture, as Tiffany R. Wang notes in her essay on mentorship of first-generation college students, and be socially accepted by their multiple generation college peers (335). This stress creates an anxiety for the first-generation college student population that is more prominent within this surveyed population and was also well documented in their survey responses.

Despite the felt anxiety from first-generation college students regarding academic discourses at the beginning of the semester, their responses to the same question in the post-survey did alter. To discuss the results from the post-survey and how the responses changed, first-generation college students were asked the same questions from the pre-survey: which classroom methods were they most motivated by in their first-year writing course (Appendix B). The post-survey also asked a follow-up question allowing students to respond as to why they were most motivated by their higher rated activities (Appendix B). Because I have a smaller sample size with the first-generation college students, I am only going to discuss responses to the highest rated pedagogical activities performed in the classroom, which included three activities. One thing that needs to be taken from this response is the motivations first-generation college students held toward activities that involved their peers and/or the instructor, which is a change from the results in the pre-survey where they seemed more motivated by individual activities,

such as having time in class to work on an assignment. The end of semester results are similar to the responses from their multiple generation college student peers who gave higher rated scores to activities that involved small group work.

One student from the first-generation college student group selected peer review as a highly motivating pedagogical activity with a score of 5 meaning that student found the activity to be highly motivating, and this same student also gave a score of 5 to small group discussions. The rationale for rating these pedagogical activities as highly motivating was because the student reported she worked better with other people, but only if she was working with a group that was small, which she identified as around 2-3 other individuals, not counting herself. This left any other activity that involved larger groups of people, such as whole class discussions, as receiving mid-range scores of 3 in her survey results. However, one important takeaway from this response is that this particular first-generation college student gave nothing a score lower than 3 for motivation for classroom activities and assignments. This finding seems to suggest that first-generation college students show higher levels of motivation for pedagogical classroom activities. All the first-generation college students surveyed continually shared higher levels of motivation for classroom activities than their multiple generation college peers. This is an important finding for those of us who teach first-generation college students as it shows many of them come in ready to engage with our materials and concepts. We, as college instructors, just need to find opportunities and avenues to support these already engaged students as they work to learn their specific discourses of the academic communities in which they will enter and collaborate.

Two first-generation college students of three gave a score of 5 to instructor conferences, or any other time spent one-on-one with the instructor in pedagogical engagement. Their

rationale for this high response was because time with the instructor meant they would receive direct feedback on their writing regarding how they were doing as writers, what they could improve in their writing, and learning where they are succeeding as writers. This also shows a type of error-avoidance in these students as well, as they responded they were concerned with “correctness” in writing. Multiple generation college students did not demonstrate these same concerns, which backs up work by Mike Rose who suggests that first-generation college students become heavily concerned with mistakes related to grammar rather than mistakes related to argumentation in their writing style (263). The second student responded with a similar attitude, noting that she wanted to avoid any mistakes in her writing, so felt feedback from the instructor was a valuable tool for her to find mistakes she may not realize she is making. This response also demonstrates writing anxiety in first-generation college student, which the survey reports throughout with the focus on error-avoidance and receiving feedback from teachers and peers.

A unique component of the responses from first-generation college students were in their interest toward receiving unique perspectives from their peers and teacher. All the students surveyed, at one point or another, noted that they enjoyed hearing comments from others in the class, and that these different perspectives enriched their learning experience. Multiple-generation college students did demonstrate a sense of appreciation toward other perspectives and opinions, but first-generation college students demonstrated a unique passion toward hearing diverse perspectives, as seen from their comments. For example, one student noted that in regards to whole class discussion, she “liked hearing other people’s questions and ideas that [she] didn’t know or think about before,” and that these responses also made her “think more about larger social issues” that she had not encountered because of her “small town” experiences. Another student commented that these types of exchanges helped him to “talk about difficulties

in life” and better relate to others and empathize with others. It is also useful to note that in the responses that were shared, only the first-generation college students spoke of others directly with a sense toward developing empathy for others and their personal perspectives on larger social issues. In examining the responses from the multiple-generation college students, they did not share the same excitement about learning new ideas, as compared to the first-generation college student sample. However, a couple multiple generation college students did share that they enjoyed class discussions because ‘it made [them] think more about larger social issues.’” The types of responses from first-generation college students indicate an interest in gaining personal growth in the social environment of the first-year writing classroom.

Further along in the post-survey, first-generation college students were asked about which classroom activities they had the best attitude toward, and why (Appendix B). I asked about classroom pedagogical methods that I knew their instructor had incorporated throughout the course of the semester in order to gain the most comprehensive results from their experiences in the classroom. All three students commented on finding their best support, and therefore had the best attitude, in instructor-led writing conferences. Again, as in previous responses, students commented on gaining feedback on their writing from the instructor mainly because of error-avoidance, but they also found this time valuable because of the individual feedback they would receive on their writing. One student from the first-generation student group responded in a follow-up question that the instructor conference session best fit their learning style because of the one-on-one environment, but this student did not elaborate further on this response. From this response, however, it may be assumed that once again first-generation college student most benefit from that direct instructor contact in the classroom because it best allows them to freely

express and work through their anxieties as writers so that they can better learn the discourse of the academic community.

Overarching Theme: The Need to Feel Academically Supported

The main area of study both surveys focused on was gaining a perspective on where and how first-generation college students felt they encountered the most academic support from the variety of sources they had available in the classroom, such as conferences with the instructor and working with classroom peers. I chose to focus on issues of genre familiarity, motivation and attitudes toward classroom pedagogies and assignments, and types of peer and instructor feedback to better understand how first-generation college students felt the most support in these areas. Looking back on the comments shared above, it becomes clear that first-generation college students find the most support from their peers, despite demonstrating some introverted tendencies during the pre-survey, and support from the instructor. This is evidenced by student comments that focused on having concerns answered quickly by the instructor, and having the ability to ask for instructor feedback when desired. First-generation college students also felt that gaining feedback from their peers was valuable, even if they didn't always enjoy group work activities. Instead, they saw the opportunity to gain feedback from their peers as a valuable learning tool, and one that would help them as they furthered their college careers.

Conclusion

As discussed in this chapter, first-generation college students have strong attitudes and motivation toward personal writing genres that allow for personal experiences to be shared and demonstrate emotional range, such as the personal memoir. These students are also likely more

familiar with these genres as well. While many multiple generation college students also showed strong support for personal writing assignments, these students did not share the same writing anxieties of their first-generation college peers. First-generation college students focused heavily on error-avoidance in their writing. First-generation college students also showed a higher level of motivation toward pedagogical activities in the classroom, as compared to multiple-generation college students, at least according to this sampling. This finding is likely because of how first-generation college students do not see their time in the first-year writing classroom as a simple hurdle to jump, but as a stand-alone, unique learning experience; an experience they will learn from and an experience that will likely aid them as they continue in their college education.

Because of the pedagogical differences between multiple generation college students and first-generation college students, it is imperative to develop what I term as First-Generation Pedagogy. I will describe and share this pedagogy in Chapter 4 where I will outline three key elements of this pedagogy and describe how they may be enacted in the first-year writing classroom. Despite first-generation pedagogy being created for the benefit of first-generation college students, I want the reader to note that this pedagogy is a generative, inclusive style of teaching that can aid all students for its attention to individual writing in the form of direct instructor feedback, focus on creating opportunities for peer and instructor mentorship in the classroom, and opportunities for empathetic genres created through expressive writing techniques. All these criteria may create an opportunity to build a platform for first-generation college students to successfully enter academic discourse communities.

CHAPTER FOUR: CREATING A FIRST-GENERATION PEDAGOGY

This chapter focuses on creating instructional strategies to develop a first-generation pedagogy in the first-year writing classroom. What I will share in this chapter is overarching pedagogical themes that a writing instructor may develop in efforts to better engage first-generation college students. All of these pedagogical practices that I will emphasize in the following pages have been informed from the previous study, as well as instigated by previous research on first-generation college students and the pedagogical imperatives that may help them succeed academically and socially in an academic setting.

Prior to sharing the themes that make up first-generation pedagogy, I want to share a rationale for the importance of promoting pedagogies that help engage at-risk student populations, namely first-generation college students. As instructors of first-year college students, we see many students enter first-year writing classrooms each semester. Some of these students an instructor will get to know, as these select students will share little, intimate grains of knowledge with us simply because we are their teacher and they believe that we will listen, and care about what they have to share with us. Many of these students enter the classroom like a number, a name an instructor memorizes with assignments that may or may not be recalled later for their emotional range or emerging academic sophistication. The important takeaway from all these brief exchanges with our students is that many different types of individuals enter our first-year writing classrooms, and yet an instructor must teach to all of these students regardless of their educational range or previous backgrounds.

A unique population in the classroom is the first-generation college student, described in detail in chapter one and chapter two of this manuscript. As the surveys shared in the appendices and in chapter three help to illustrate, first-generation college students benefit from the following

pedagogical actions: peer group work, open class discussions where all participants in the class share their ideas and arguments, instructor conferences, and personal writing genres like the memoir and personal narrative assignments. In implementing these pedagogical interventions, many of which are quite common in writing classrooms, instructors may better engage the diverse needs of first-generation college students through a number of themes that will create a first-generation pedagogy aimed at better educating first-generation college students. To discuss how to perform this pedagogy in the first-year classroom, this chapter is divided up by sections and each section will give ways for implementing these activities with special attention and interest shown toward engaging the diverse needs of first-generation college students. To discuss these potential pedagogical interventions, I'll share a brief overview of their use in a first-year writing classroom, benefits of the pedagogical interventions in relation to the first-generation college student population, and discuss ways of implementing these teaching strategies in any first-year writing classroom. These pedagogical interventions serve as strategies for helping to enact a first-generation pedagogy in a writing classroom. Before I begin to share the three themes that may inhabit a first-generation pedagogy, I'll briefly share what my study found about motivation and attitudes, and how these two ideas are linked, or not, when it comes to students' opinions on motivation and attitudes toward writing.

Motivation and Attitudes toward Writing Tasks

In conducting my classroom surveys, I imagined that positive attitudes toward writing would be directly linked toward a high level of motivation toward writing activities in the students surveyed, both first-generation and multiple. This assumption mostly rang true, as all first-generation college students who were surveyed responded with a high level of motivation

and attitude toward personal writing assignments such as the memoir. First-generation college students showed high levels of motivation for these assignments because they asked the students to comment on their personal experiences, and also allowed for some level of creativity. The genres of memoir and personal narrative are also fairly familiar genres to first-generation college students, and also are examples of what might be called everyday writing, which can refer to diary entries or other expository pieces of writing. While first-generation college students did show high levels of motivation and positive attitudes about genres like the personal narrative and memoir, they also exhibited some divergences in terms of their motivation and attitudes toward these more personal genres that are important to briefly discuss.

The divergences of opinion occurred if a student felt that an assignment, while well understood, lacked an opportunity for the student to explore his or her creativity. An example of this divergence in motivations and attitudes occurred with the personal memoir assignment. A surveyed first-generation college student responded that even though he or she felt a high level of positivity toward the personal memoir assignment, the same student felt the personal narrative assignment lacked creativity, and so rated the assignment lower for motivation. While this instance is not the only example where a lack of disconnect between attitude and motivation existed, it is one where a student described a rationale for feeling a lack of motivation toward a particular writing task, despite the original high level of positive attitudes the same student felt toward that writing task. This shows that first-generation college students, and likely many students, value a certain amount of creativity in their writing tasks.

Because of the emphasis from students' feedback on allowing for creativity in assignments and instruction, there is a need to allow for openness of expression in writing assignments and their associated writing tasks. This can be achieved through developing

expressive writing techniques into the classroom environment, even in cases where an assignment may not allow much for personal writing, but instead be focused on more technical needs, such as in a resume. Even with assignments that call for more technical jargon, it can be easy to develop in class writing activities that are more expressive in nature, and yet still allow students to complete a more technically driven assignment. This freedom is important to keep in mind when creating a first-generation pedagogical curriculum in the classroom. Along with keeping open the opportunity for expressive writing techniques, my first-generation pedagogy focuses on three main interventions a first-year instructor can make in the first-year writing classroom. The three possible pedagogical interventions I will examine---structured peer review groups, empathetic writing genres, and creating a empathetic spaces in the cacophony of the classroom---all leave the potential for an instructor to allow for varying levels of openness and creativity. Please remember, however, that these areas of opportunity are created only as possible pedagogical interventions. In an educational setting, it is always imperative to take your student's diverse learning needs and the student learning outcomes for the course into consideration before applying any or all of these pedagogical interventions.

First-Generation Pedagogy: Three Possible Pedagogical Interventions

Structured Peer Groups in the First-Year Writing Classroom

To understand the value of peer review, one must go back to seeing writing not as a product, but as a process, and how composition instructors teach writing in this manner. Donald Murray's 1972 essay, "Teaching Writing as a Process and Not a Product" argued for the importance of teaching students how to find the writing process for themselves, as well as seeing the writing process of other students (Murray 4). Peer review is a teaching strategy allowing

students to gain feedback while still in the drafting stages of their writing process, and leave feedback on the writing of other students in the class. Peer review is seen as a popular strategy because it allows the teacher to turn the process of reviewing drafts over to the students themselves, making the students more accountable for the work they are doing in the classroom by being responsible not only to themselves, but also to their classmates. Peer review is also a useful strategy to use in the classroom because of the many benefits students and teachers alike receive from a structured peer review process. These, and other elements of the peer critique process, make peer review a useful strategy in the first-year writing classroom.

Peer review provides a useful strategy for engaging the diverse learning and collaborative needs of first-generation college students in the first-year writing classroom and also help these students improve their writing? This question can be answered by carefully examining the numerous and multifaceted benefits of structured peer review in a classroom setting. One such benefit is that peer review encourages critical thinking and fosters investment in students' development as writers (Cho, Schunn, and Charney 264). This increased encouragement of critical thinking and investment in writing occurs primarily because students are engaged with their peers during peer review. First-generation college students, while at first hesitant and perhaps distrustful of group work, do start to realize the importance of peer feedback as they continue on in their semester, as showing in the data located in Chapter 3 from my classroom study on the first-year writing class. Because some first-generation college students have difficulty in envisioning themselves as academic writers, peer review can provide a useful structure for these students to begin to see themselves as writers in the university setting.

The question regarding the benefits of peer review is how does peer review provide ways for first-generation college students to see themselves as writers, and invest time and energy in

their writing? First of all, peer review requires that first-generation college students to directly connect with other students in the class in a situation where all students are focused on their own writing, and sharing their writing with other students. This sharing of writing is an important action for first-generation college students because it allows them to build networks with their peers and begin to see themselves as practicing writers in an academic environment. For first-generation college students, the ability to begin to see themselves as practicing writers in an intellectually driven environment is paramount to their success in the later stages of their college career. For example, Nancy Mack's research has argued that first-generation college students and working-class students struggle in seeing themselves as writers capable of scholarly or academic discourse (*Ethical Representations* 53). A benefit of having students work in peer review groups on various writing tasks is that first-generation college students can start to see how all students struggle with various tasks associated in creating academic discourse. In seeing how their multiple generation college peers also struggle with various writing tasks, the first-generation college students can start to see how their own struggles in writing are also universal struggles in writing. First-generation college students can also use the support of writers who are more academically savvy to help them better their own writing skills. In these ways, peer review groups are beneficial to the first-generation college student writer.

It should be noted the data in my classroom surveys suggested that first-generation college students did not rate peer review groups highly in terms of preferred classroom activities. As seen from the survey data, two first-generation college students gave peer review a low Likert score of two whereas another first-generation college student gave peer review a four on the Likert scale (Appendix C, Table 4). Meanwhile, multiple generation college students also shared a wide spread in regards to preference toward peer review. Despite the differences of motivation

and attitude toward peer review, instructors of writing know peer review presents a unique opportunity to get first-generation college students talking about their writing and learning from their peers in an academic, classroom setting. The benefits of peer review are striking, and need to be noted before I discuss how peer review can be instituted in the first-year writing classroom in a way that will best benefit first-generation college students.

Kenneth Bruffee, in his often-heralded essay, “Collaborative Learning and the Conversation of Mankind” lauds the benefits of collaborative learning in the space of the classroom, and notes the benefits of collaborative activities, such as peer review, can bring to a student’s writing and learning. One thing that Bruffee points out is that in adapting to college life, a student must learn how to ask for help (637). Peer review presents students with a structured opportunity that allows students to ask for help on their writing assignments without having to actually ask for the help in a direct way. Instead, students are placed together in groups with the intent to give feedback on another student’s piece of writing. Having an opportunity like this in place for first-generation college students is key, as many of them are not yet ready, nor do they always know where to go, in asking for help on their assignments or asking for feedback on their writing. In addition, research on peer review has shown that it “helps students improve their own writing abilities by giving feedback to other student writers” and helps them to “critically evaluate their own writing through critically evaluating the writing of others” (Lundstrom and Baker, 38). Peer review, when implemented thoughtfully, can present first-generation college students with an opportunity to gain valuable feedback on their writing, and teach them the importance in knowing when and how to ask for help on academic tasks.

In forming peer review groups, there opens opportunities for mentoring practices or for friendships to form between the participants. Perhaps a key in making these positive experiences

happen is in how peer review groups are created and maintained. In forming peer groups, creating opportunities for mentoring relationships to open up may be key in first-generation college student retention and success. As stated in research by Tiffany R. Wang, first-generation college students are more successful in academic and university environments when the student has a mentor or mentors. This means that creating peer group structures that are stable and consistent may be key in forming these potential mentorship opportunities. These peer review groups I refer to as *structured peer review groups* because they are peer review groups that do not change throughout the length of the course. In structured peer review groups, students remain with the same group members throughout the course. To create a structured peer group setting, an instructor can spend some time during the first two or three weeks of class to identify the writers that may benefit more from a more experienced peer writer. To identify writers who may be more or less experienced, a teacher could ask all students to submit a brief writing narrative where the students share their personal and educational experiences with writing. A teacher could also identify these writers from doing a couple of smaller, low-stakes writing assignments to better assess student writers in the classroom.

Once these structured peer groups are set up, students can use them consistently throughout the course to gain feedback on their paper drafts and perhaps even work on a collaborative assignment together during the course. A strategy a teacher could use to make sure these groups are productive is to have students keep meeting journals that record how often the students meet together outside of class, what topics the students cover during meetings, as well as keep observe how the students are using their group time during class. To best know how students are performing in their structured groups during class time, an instructor can ask students to fill out a peer review worksheet that asks students to record the feedback they

received on their drafts and what they learned and did during their peer review group time. With the meeting journals, the students can record their meetings outside of class or meetings they have online through Google Drive or other online platforms. These meeting journals can be brief notes that indicate the day, time, place, and purpose of each group meeting to the instructor. Along with these meeting journals, an instructor could request end of semester feedback, in the form of participation narratives, where students can share how they used their group time and any mentoring relationships that were formed because of these meetings. It would be a relatively easy task for an instructor to include meeting journals and a brief participation report as part of the students' final grades.

From these structured peer review groups, instances of mentorship can begin to be formed because of the continuous contact in working with the same individuals on writing and research tasks. In fact, previous studies have pointed to the important role of social integration in regards to student retention for at-risk college students. In a case study conducted by Paula Wilcox, Sandra Winn, and Marilyn Fyvie-Gauld, "It Was Nothing to do with the University, It was Just the People: The Role of Social Support in the Experience of First-Year Education," the authors show how integral social support is for at-risk college students. Their findings show how developing friendships start to replace the supporting role of family during their first year of college, with family being one of the main support systems of many first-generation college students (Wilcox, et al. 713). Because of the need for social support, creating key opportunities is integral to building social support for first-generation college students to directly work alongside their multiple generation college peers in the writing classroom. These peers may not only help the first-generation college students academically, but may also provide them with social opportunities and connections outside of the classroom, especially with structured peer review

groups where students continue to work with one another, inside and outside of class, for the full semester.

Key challenges exist in structured peer groups as I have described above. For example, an assumption that could be made about the meeting journals, in particular, is that it is a form of micromanaging. Instead these meeting journals are intended to help the instructor see the ways in which students are reaching out to each other, and note any gaps that may be emerging within the student groups. If gaps arise, an instructor could talk with the group about how to better manage or structure their time. An instructor could also spend time encouraging students to better communicate with one another, or better illustrate how these meetings serve a greater purpose within the course structure. While these are not perfect answers for every potential pitfall this assignment may accrue, they do give some appropriate avenues for response when difficulties do arise.

A further challenge may be illustrated by the difficulty in ensuring mentoring opportunities are present within the structured peer groups. Even though the peer groups are structured through the instructor's input, there are few ways to ensure the structured peer groups will remain meaningful in terms of the exchanges between students or the work that the students will accomplish together. One way to help institute an opportunity for mentoring is to advocate for the practice, and help students understand characteristics of a peer mentor. It would also be important to note that any student can serve as a mentor to another, and for a variety of reasons, and that will help students see there is no pre-identified group leader, but instead a collaboration within the group to help instigate positive mentoring practices.

A more obvious challenge with structured peer groups exists with the simple fact that the groups never change, unless changing group members is needed for issues of student safety, a

student dropping a course, or other concerns that can arise when students work together. If a structured peer group changes, that could mean there is a break within that peer setting that could negatively affect one or more members of the group where one person or more people in the group lose a valued peer member. While this could be seen as a set back of the structured peer group concept, a break up of a group could also serve as an important learning opportunity, or teachable moment, for students who are just entering college classrooms for the first time. An instructor could use this set back as an opportunity to discuss personnel changes that often happen in business climates and discuss how, during college, you may often watch friends you made earlier in your college career move on to other opportunities. Group changes in a structured peer setting are never ideal, but do open gateways for conversations about change and academia to start early on.

Creating and Teaching Empathetic Writing Genres

I mentioned earlier in this chapter that expressive writing techniques are useful and can help engage first-generation college students, since expressive writing techniques function as stream of consciousness writing, and may aid in idea generation for writing assignments. Expressive writing techniques can be useful at all stages of the writing process, and can be utilized for assignments that are technical in nature, like in writing a resume or a cover letter. Ways to create expressive writing activities in class may include having students freewrite on past professional experiences that they can include in a cover letter, and have them write about important projects or events that took place during that time of employment or during that particular professional experience. An instructor can also help students analyze the rhetorical situation that is present in a professional writing situation by having students imagine what

audiences they may encounter, and how they may respond to those audiences in a professional, educated manner. Because of the high ratings that first-generation college students gave to more personal and experiential writing tasks, including expressive writing activities in the classroom-learning environment is important, and may also help an instructor create empathetic genres in the classroom.

To review, in Chapter two I defined empathetic genres as genres that function to create a space for a student to personally reflect on his or her experiences through writing while also learning valuable academic writing skills, such as secondary source use and the ability to successfully integrate outside knowledge and ideas. As seen in my survey data, first-generation college students demonstrated high levels of motivation and more positive attitudes toward writing genres that were more personal in nature, such as the memoir and the personal narrative. This finding likely comes not only from their familiarity with the genres, but also because these genres as students to reflect on their own personal experiences, which are modes of everyday writing that many first-generation college students find value in. While first-generation college students often preferred these genres do not use a great amount of academic jargon or need for citation, it is still necessary that instructors build in spaces for first-generation college students to engage critically in source use and start to learn what is needed in constructing academic language. An instructor wouldn't have to frame these assignments as academic in nature, and could emphasize how these genres are focused on personal experience, such as how cover letters for employment are often focused on personal, professional, and educational experiences. This kind of framing of the assignment could help first-generation college students see the value in the assignment, and also start to learn the importance of source use and integration.

To accompany these goals, there are a number of potential assignments a teacher could create that use both personal experience and help first-generation college students begin to understand academic and professional discourses. Perhaps one of the better assignments to be created from a need to engage first-generation college students has been Nancy Mack's personal memoir assignment that encourages students to write about their own life experiences, but also asks them to provide source material from their hometowns and communities, and cite that material. As shared in Chapter 2, Mack writes in "Ethical Representations of Working Class Lives," that first-generation and working-class students "frequently have trouble imagining themselves as scholars" (53). In creating assignments such as the meaningful memoir, an assignment detailed in her essay "Writing for Change: When Motive Matters," Mack is attempting to help first-generation college students locate an academic voice by joining their own experiences with researched history and folklore from their home areas (26). Mack also argues that writing teachers need to spend time "constructing the premise for writing and allowing students to help design some elements of the assigned tasks to promote student ownership" ("Writing for Change: When Motive Matters," 28). Mack's arguments for writing engagement provide direct ways to motivate and encourage positive attitudes surrounding writing tasks for first-generation college students. Mack's research is motivated by engaging the unique needs of working-class students; however, it is important to realize many first-generation college students come from different kinds working-class, or low-income, backgrounds, as noted in Pell Institute's white paper, "Moving Beyond Access: College Success for Low-Income, First-Generation College Students," which shows that 24% of incoming freshman are estimated to be low-income, first-generation college students (Engle and Tinto, 2). While not all first-generation college students come from working-class or low-income backgrounds, it is important to note

that many first-generation college students do originate from lower-income backgrounds and both populations, regardless of economic background, need the types of pedagogical engagement that allow them to work with familiar writing genres in order to begin to feel ownership of their writing. Mack argues that the pedagogical concepts she suggests for writing teachers will help first-generation college students feel as if they are scholars, or academically engaged in their writing tasks.

Seth Kahn's work in creating empathetic genres to directly engage at-risk students, like first-generation college students, has shown how ethnographic assignments help guide students toward socially reflective writing. Seth Kahn, in his unpublished dissertation *Grassroots Democracy in Process: Ethnographic Writing as a Site of Democratic Action*, describes how ethnography assignments create democratic space in the writing classroom (8). Kahn argues that assigning ethnographic writing assignments allows students to learn about other cultural identities, and the social barriers those identities experience. For instance, in interviewing people from other cultural backgrounds and social experiences, Kahn argues students develop an empathetic stance toward these populations leading to social reflective action (22). Kahn notes instances where students volunteer time and energies to organizations that focus on the populations they studied. Kahn also pointed out that sometimes students form bonds with their interview subjects that continue beyond the classroom exercise (25). As Kahn's dissertation research proves, ethnographies are useful assignments in helping students empathize with diverse identities outside of their own cultural spaces.

In his essay, "Putting Ethnographic Writing in Context," Seth Kahn gives a contextual framework for teaching ethnographic assignments to first-year writing students. Kahn's discussion of the rationale and context for teaching ethnographic writing assignments gives an

example of ethnography as an empathetic genre assignment that helps build a first-generation pedagogy in the first-year writing classroom for first-generation college students. Kahn argues that ethnographic writing introduces students to the varied tasks of writing, such as analysis and synthesis, but also “highlights and emphasizes human relationships between participants and researchers” making the genre an empathetic genre (176). When ethnographic writing is successful, Kahn notes, the assignment can help students navigate relationships between different populations and improve the understanding students have of the different lives of people (176). This learning objective would create a meaningful experience for first-generation college students where they can work with familiar concepts, such as reflection and relationships, and also learn more about different cultures and populations.

Along with a deeper understanding of different populations, first-generation college students would also learn more about the writing process with ethnographic writing assignments. Kahn notes that because ethnographies require students to complete a number of tasks related to writing-- such as interviews, field notes, pre-writing tasks, keeping a journal, among other tasks-- first generation college students would become familiar with the multifaceted processes involved in academic writing (176-77). Ethnographic writing assignments would also help teach first-generation college students how to organize research, compile data, synthesize information, and communicate effectively, along with numerous other tasks associated with the writing process. Most importantly, the process of ethnographic writing is recursive, meaning first-generation college students will learn the workings of the writing process, instead of thinking of academic writing merely as creating a finished product, which also helps highlight revision as a key writing skill.

The strength of Kahn's and Mack's assignments are in showing first-generation college students how the writing process is recursive, while also showing students the importance of source use and integration. An assignment an instructor could teach that asks students to locate a career goal and use their own personal or educational experiences to inform that career choice is having students write a career analysis research memo. This assignment would ask students to imagine entering a career field of their choice and describe what experiences, both personal and educational, will help them to enter a job position in that career. Students would also research potential job positions in that career and then discuss which two jobs (or more or less) they may best fulfill by the time they graduate with a degree. This assignment would require students to research a career, a few job positions that are available in that career choice, and perhaps have students also research potential job locations and discuss why and how they might fit into these job positions, companies, and locations.

A critique of the career analysis research assignment in a first-year writing classroom may be that many students are yet unsure of what they would like to do for their future career, or what their future career goals are, which was strongly apparent in the data I collected in my study on first-generation college students. I argue, however, that this assignment can help students identify a potential career choice, research employment opportunities in that career, and potential companies and locations that hire individuals seeking employment in those specialty areas. This assignment could also help students start to articulate how they see themselves as professionals, and begin to build an understanding of the requirements necessary to succeed in a chosen profession. Doing this may also help students better understand future employment opportunities and may even help students identify job opportunities they would rather not take once they graduate from college. A follow-up assignment could ask students to analyze genres in their

chosen field as well, such as analyze documents they may have to compose, and learn about various audiences they will need to communicate with to fulfill needs in that career. By viewing potential genres and understanding possible audiences, students can take this knowledge to their future college courses and feel better prepared for articulating how they fit into their professional discourse communities.

An overarching reason why I am advocating for a career analysis assignment in the first-year writing course is because of the answers all first-generation college students shared in my surveys regarding their motivations for attending college. As reported in my discussion in Chapter 3, none of the first-generation college students articulated defined career goals, like their multiple generation college student peers did in sharing specific career goals they had once they earned a college degree. Instead first-generation college students focused on a college degree as promising them a better life in terms of having more opportunities for employment and a higher pay. Their articulated social and economic concerns point to an obvious gap of knowledge in some of the purposes for earning a higher degree, such as entering a particular career field. By creating an assignment that asks first-year writing students to examine potential career goals, and research these careers, instructors may give an opportunity to first-generation college students to start to see themselves in particular professions, and use that career motivation to help them continue on in their college careers. Further, in knowing what career or field they would like to enter, the future data on first-generation college students may also show an improvement in retention rates. Perhaps the first-generation college students that I surveyed did have career goals in mind, but those goals were not shared within my survey data.

Many potential assignment opportunities exist for creating empathetic genres in the first-year classroom (or in any writing classroom) that can help engage the needs of first-generation

college students. The important take away from knowing how to create and teach empathetic genres is that students must be asked to work out from their personal experiences and also use outside sources and materials. Another useful assignment could simply be asking students to interview a chosen professional in a career field they would like to enter to learn more about that career opportunity, and then write a report on the interview, also asking students to cite not only the interviewee, but cite information about the job the interviewee holds. Not only does this allow for source use, but also it teaches first-generation college students valuable skills in an important professional genre, the interview.

Creating and Maintaining Empathetic Spaces for Effective Collaboration

The final theme in maintaining a first-generation pedagogy is ensuring the classroom is an empathetic space, or a space where instances of community can open up, that creates meaningful conversations between students and the instructor and maintains a conversation that welcomes and accommodates differences. As seen in Chapter 3, first-generation college students shared similar levels of anxiety toward group work and whole class discussions and debates, but did also still recognize the importance that these communal discourses had on their overall academic progress and intellectual engagement. As an instructor, one must create a space that opens a gateway for all students to critically engage with the course material and have meaningful conversations with one another. In this section, I'll share some ideas and strategies for creating these meaningful moments in the classroom.

The primary area for an instructor to take account of, aside from the students in the classroom, is the physical space of the classroom in which the students are developing their ideas and thoughts. I define empathetic spaces as spaces where instances of community open up, and

communication about similarities and differences is directly and enthusiastically encouraged. Before I go on to describe how an instructor can create these empathetic spaces, I want to share how they can function in a classroom, which many of us may view as a static space with walls that don't move, and occasionally desks or chairs that are screwed into the floor. To understand how empathetic spaces can function in the classroom, Jeff Gabrill's analysis of the classroom as a space not just filled by the technologies of table and chairs, but also a space filled by a multitude of attitudes, opinions, and experiences becomes important to understand and dissect (Gabrill 465). Gabrill refers to this as the classroom's inherent infrastructure, which Gabrill notes is something beyond just a static space, but instead is a space constantly in flux, in movement (465). Because part of a teacher's job exists to negotiate the multifarious movements of the classroom, creating empathetic spaces in the classroom can be a strategy to work to better engage first-generation college students. The question, of course, remains how instructors can accomplish this goal with classroom spaces that are sometimes difficult to even move around in.

One strategy to open up and facilitate communication is in allowing all students to see each other. Often in a classroom all desks and seats are facing the front of the room. As an instructor, encourage students to move their desks or chairs around so that they can see everyone in the room, and everyone else in the room can see one another. This will help facilitate communication in having students face each other, and also allows the teacher to join the group in a way that appears less authoritarian. Paolo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, a foundational text in critical pedagogy, advocates for a pedagogical style where student and teacher are on equal ground, helping the student become a co-creator in the creation and sharing of knowledge. Freire argues that the oppressed, in this case underprivileged students, have internalized the language of the oppressor, in this case the instructor or society in general, and

now find themselves fearful of freedom (47). I argue, however, that in creating a first-generation pedagogy, the power dichotomy between student and teacher needs to be subverted so that both parties can communicate on as equal of footing as possible. Like what Freire advocates for, all writing instructors need to create a learning environment that allows all students equal ground to participate, despite the social and educational backgrounds that remain unequal. By having everyone in the class be able to face each other, and all be seated (or standing, depending upon the activity) it eases the feeling of someone having authority over another, and also helps create an even playing field between all parties, as well as helps facilitate easier communication.

Another strategy to consider is in changing the physical space of the classroom. For example, an instructor can move all tables aside, and just allow space for students to sit and face one another. An instructor can also choose not to utilize objects, such as desks or podiums, to hide behind, but instead join in with the flow of the classroom by sitting with the students, which also will allow for greater interaction with the students in the classroom. Educational practitioners of critical pedagogy have advocated for instructors to find ways to create the classroom as an empathetic space that benefits both students and the instructor. One way to create a better empathetic space is by sitting amongst the students in the desks or chairs that are provided. Ira Shor, for example, has noted in his work, *When Students Have Power: Negotiating Authority in a Critical Pedagogy* how he strives to use a “risk-taking praxis” in each class that works to disrupt the authority the teacher imposes in a classroom (3). A strategy to counteract, or create risk-taking praxis, could occur as soon as the first day of class. Instead of entering the classroom, as the instructor, and talking from the front of the room, an instructor could simply sit in one of the desks the students typically inhabit and wait for everyone to enter the classroom. After everyone enters, and is seated, one could ask a question to the class, like “what are your

expectations here?” and start to have some discussion with the students. In the midst of discussion, the teacher could introduce himself or herself, and begin to give students an idea of the structure of the class. Instructors such as Shor would argue that this method, while surprising, may help students relate to the instructor on a more profound level, and help them begin meaningful discourses with an instructor inside and outside of the classroom walls. In other words, though the students will identify the person as the instructor of the course, they will also see the instructor as a humanized individual who does not conform to the typical authoritarian classroom presence they may be used to or expecting. Not only does this allow for easier communication, but also allows for better access for students to the instructor and also can serve to help build classroom relationships between the student and instructor.

As many instructors recognize, students in a classroom will often sit in the same, or almost always the same seats each class period, regardless of assigned seating. Because sitting in the same spot inhibits communication with others in the classroom, and can further serve to isolate students from one another, an instructor can create activities that force students to move around the room. Asking students to move around can also increase on-task behaviors. For instance, research that focused on how physical activity promoted on-task behavior done by Mahar, et al in their article, “Effects of a Classroom Based Program on Physical Activity and On Task Behavior” argued that in instituting alternative seating arrangements, and promoting some mild physical activity in the classroom, does help increase engagement by increasing on-task behaviors (2089). One way to do this is by counting off students into different groups for classroom activities. This allows students to get to know other students in the classroom and can help first-generation college students interact with other peers. Furthermore, an instructor can ask students to change up seating arrangements on a weekly or biweekly basis, to help get students

get to know others in the class. Having students move around regularly can also help promote engagement with the course materials, especially if a student is seen to not be engaging well with the activities of the classroom. To help promote this concept, an instructor could create a syllabus policy that states the instructor reserves the right to move students around if the instructor notices a lack of engagement or distracting behaviors. Added to this course policy could be an addendum that states students will be asked to sit in different areas of the classroom throughout the semester, despite the proclivity many feel to sit in the same place in the classroom each class period. Having students move around to sit in other areas of the room may aid in student engagement because it forces the students who often try to hide in the back of the room to occasionally move to the front of the room, help ensuring a better engagement with the course materials and class discussion.

Despite the numerous opportunities for opening student engagement using critical pedagogical methods, some critiques may be made. One critique of critical pedagogical methods is that they may be uncomfortable for an instructor, or work to somehow undermine the authority of the instructor in the classroom. For example, in an instructor working to meet his or her students on their level, one could argue the method delineates the authority of the instructor's position in the classroom and work to negate their authority. For example, Elizabeth Ellsworth argued that critical pedagogy is often offered through a Utopian view that works to undermine the aims of what the pedagogy wishes to do, which is to help students, and that different power dynamics must always exist in the classroom (230-31) While I find this critique well-articulated, I want to assure the reader that in working with first-generation college students it is important to work in some critical pedagogical imperatives. I argue for this not only because of my own experiences with critical pedagogical methods that have helped me create meaningful teacher-

student relationships, but also because of my data that suggests first-generation college students and multiple generation college students respond positively to one-on-one interactions with the instructor (Appendix C). These one-on-one interactions may help to create a more meaningful engagement between student and instructor that helps first-generation college students identify with a mentor that can help them succeed in an academic learning environment.

In creating empathetic spaces, the opportunity for mentorship practices should exist, and mentorships are often performed through empathetic and open communication. Previous research conducted on first-generation college students shows strong suggestions toward the need for mentoring by peers and instructors, and other forms of academic and social support that are extended through university and academic programs, like TRIO (Wang 336, Davis 42, Rose 36). For instance, Tiffany R. Wang analyzed the “memorable messages” first-generation college students received from mentors and found that many of these messages that occurred during class and outside of class were integral to the first-generation college students retention and academic success (338-39). First-generation college students may create long-lasting, meaningful relationships in their college career through interacting with their peers and instructor inside and outside of the classroom. A key component in building these relationships is having students work together on class activities and class projects to help support the potential for social support systems. In doing this, the instructor also needs to be engaged with the students’ work and move about the room to facilitate learning and engagement. Again, the instructor’s presence is integral in creating an empathetic space in the classroom. Furthermore, having time to interact one-on-one with the instructor to gain feedback on not only their writing, but also their ideas as they form concepts into writing, placing yourself as the instructor with the students

to help create an empathetic classroom space may be integral to the intellectual development of first-generation college students.

Conclusion

The survey study and the first-generation pedagogy I advocate for continues to support much of the research that exists on first-generation college students. First of all, my classroom study has demonstrated the importance of social networks to the success of first-generation college students by showing how they effect academic engagement and success in terms of classroom activities with small groups, instructor conferences, and peer review practices. I have also shown how first-generation college students view their college educations and see them not as avenues toward a particular career, but instead as a gateway toward a better way of life. Despite supporting extant research, my classroom surveys did uncover some new perspectives, such as motivations and attitudes first-generation college students have toward particular writing assignments and in-class pedagogical practices, many of which I shared in regards to the three themes I shared in creating what can be called a First-Generation Pedagogy, which was articulated in this chapter. While it is difficult to create an entire pedagogy based on the responses of a few students, I want to emphasize that what I have developed in this chapter serves as pedagogical interventions that can be employed to further support the needs of first-generation college students in the writing classroom.

As stated above, more work on first-generation college students needs to be done to help this student population be successful as they pursue degrees of higher learning and social and economic achievement. Some of this work includes the work of parents, universities, and the students themselves in aiding them not only as they gain entrance into college classrooms, but

also as they learn to move within these academic spaces, and learn the discourses of the academy. Other areas of future work focus on the engagement and scholarship of the teacher who encounters these students in his or her classroom. One important takeaway is to remember that all of us who teach college-level courses, whether they are writing-intensive or not, are teachers to students who may be first-generation and/or from underprivileged backgrounds. As my data as shown, it is important to instruct these individuals empathetically and thoughtfully, with a sense of openness, allowing for the achievement of student learning outcomes, but never forgetting the importance of the individual student in the classroom.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to uncover and articulate opportunities for future research in understanding the needs of first-generation college students in the university classroom, and teaching toward these needs. As presented, first-generation college students represent a population that is typically seen as at-risk in a university academic setting. My survey data, along with the research of others in investigating the needs of first-generation college students, presents a foundation for building stronger, better pedagogical practices to help retain and engage our first-generation college student populations in United States universities, respectively. In reality, those who study and teach students who are underprepared or first-generation college students still have a lot of work to do to help this at-risk student population. My classroom research does help instructors understand ways to help these students succeed, but it needs to be noted that no amount of peer review, instructor conferences, or empathy can guarantee that every student succeeds. As instructors, we are not responsible for our students' successes or failures, but can only serve as guides and mentors. Ultimately, it is also up to the students themselves to use the tools and resources provided to them by their instructor, peers, and academic setting to better enable them to succeed.

To give an overview for this chapter, I'll discuss avenues for future research that can be done in investigating the diverse needs of the first-generation college student population. These avenues for future research will be concepts I will consider in the future to allow me to continue my inquiry into the diverse needs of first-generation college students in the college writing classroom and potentially beyond.

Possibilities for Future Research

This chapter section will examine the avenues for future research in examining the diverse needs of first-generation college students in the first-year writing classroom. Future research studies could be done to further support and aid in the academic success of first-generation college students, and other underprivileged student populations. One final note to take into consideration is the concept that many of these future research pursuits may not only benefit first-generation college students, but also benefit the learning of all students in the college classroom. The reason I emphasize how this further research can help all students is because of the fact all pedagogical interventions can be beneficial to all students in the ways they approach student learning and accessibility of course content to all students in the classroom structure.

As noted in the discussion of the limitations of my research found earlier in this chapter, one of the limitations I discussed included not gaining much, if any, personal information on the first-generation college students surveyed. Gaining relevant background information from first-generation college students could help instructors better meet their needs in the classroom, and better understand the potential reasons for these needs. One way to procure this information is through structured interviews with first-generation college students. These students could be identified either through a self-disclosure through a survey. Another option would be to email students at a selected university and invite any student who identifies as a first-generation college student to participate. From this group, a researcher could begin narrative research to study the participants. Narrative research may be useful because “narratives [may function] as modes of resistance to existing structures of power,” as many humanists and poststructuralist traditions have treated narratives (Andrews, et al 4). In order to obtain these narratives, a researcher could ask participants for a narrative or oral history describing their experiences and reactions to

education, and how their family life or histories have affected, or reacted to, their education. From this, a researcher could better understand how their family and family history operates within their educational experiences to better locate in which ways these students feel supported, or not supported, by their family as they pursue their education. In doing this, a researcher could better understand what types of academic or social support services the students would benefit from during their college coursework.

Another research option would be to interview first-generation college students. For a future study, I do plan to interview a select group of first-generation college students as they progress through their first-year writing coursework. What I would like to uncover is to better understand their motivations for working to earn a higher-level degree, especially since not one of the first-generation college students I surveyed shared specific career goals. I would also like to better understand what benefits and complications they find in the peer review process, especially in regards to implementing structured peer review groups. I would want to learn more about what is working in these groups, complications of this type of learning environment, and what an instructor could do to better improve the peer review process for first-generation college students. Finally, I know each first-generation college student is unique in that each has his or her own backgrounds and personal experiences that both inhibit and help them in academic environments. Learning more about these students as individuals would also be beneficial in better meeting their needs as they continue in their college careers.

Another potential research opportunity is to note differences, if any, between first-generation college students who come from low-income or working-class backgrounds, and first-generation college students who identify more as middle-class. I believe the best way to accommodate such research goals is through narrative research, where I would be able to directly

interview the participants and obtain more concrete data about their economic backgrounds and family lives. According to the research done by the Pell Institute, most first-generation college students are from low-income households (2). A note remains, however, that only most of this student population is from low-income households. The question remains as to what, if any, differences exist for a first-generation college student who originates from a middle-class perspective. Do these first-generation, middle class students have more opportunities, social capital, and educational experiences than their low-income peers? If so, what is the effect? Do these middle-class, first-generation college students have higher rates of graduation than their lower-class peers? Do they find themselves to be more successful in college, and if so why? In answering these questions, we can also better understand the burdens felt by low-income and working-class students, and better equip our classrooms to help accommodate these needs.

Conclusion

As articulated throughout this dissertation, it is important to know that the work in understanding the motivations and attitudes first-generation college students have toward their academic work is not over. My classroom study presented just a small piece of a much larger puzzle that needs to be solved in improving the retention rates of first-generation college students. Ultimately, however, what I advocate for is empathetic understanding when instructing these diverse groups of students. As instructors, we need to remember that our college classrooms are exercises in diversity where all students need to be listened to, taught, and mentored in various ways throughout the semester. Some of these students we will form bonds with, as any teacher does with certain students. Other students who enter our classrooms will leave weaker impressions. Despite the differences, we must make note of every student in the

room and work hard to make sure we give each student every possibility to succeed. Doing this will not only fulfill our lives as teachers, but also help us fulfill missions of diversity for the universities in which we work.

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APPENDIX A: PRE-SURVEY

1. Please circle which class you are enrolled in: English 110 or English 120
2. Do either of your parents have a Bachelor's degree? Y or N
3. If yes, one or both of your parents? Mother, Father, or both
4. What or who is your best motivation for attaining a college education? Why?
5. Do you feel you have arrived at NDSU with adequate preparation for college? Y or N. Describe why or why not you feel adequately prepared for college?
6. Do you feel you have arrived at NDSU with strong study skills? Y or N. Why or why not?
7. If you answered no to either of the above questions, do you feel you are motivated to learn better study skills? Y or N. Why or why not?
8. What is your interest level for taking an English class? Please specify five as having a high level of interest and one as having no level of interest:
1 2 3 4 5
9. Listed below are genres of writing that are often used in first-year writing courses at NDSU. Please specify your level of familiarity with each with five being very familiar:
 - a. Memoir: 1 2 3 4 5
 - b. Ethnography: 1 2 3 4 5
 - c. Annotated Bibliography: 1 2 3 4 5
 - d. Commentary: 1 2 3 4 5
10. Which classroom activities do you have the most positive motivation toward? Please list in order with the first classroom activity being your favorite and the last activity being your least favorite classroom activity.
 - a. Small group classroom activities
 - b. Time to work alone on papers and other writing assignments in class
 - c. Time spent in whole class discussions
 - d. Having time to talk with the instructor one-on-one
 - e. Having your writing reviewed by your peers
11. Why do you have positive motivation toward the activities you listed?

APPENDIX B: POST-SURVEY

1. Please circle which class you are enrolled in: English 110 or English 120
2. Do either of your parents have a Bachelor's degree?
3. If yes, one or both of your parents? Mother, Father, or both
4. What or who is your best motivation for attaining a college education? Why?
5. Do you feel better prepared for future writing assignments in other classes after taking this course? Y or N. Describe why you feel better prepared or why you do not feel better prepared.
6. Do you feel your study skills have improved? Y or N. Describe why or why not?
7. What is your interest level for taking an English class? Please use 5 to designate highly interested and 1 as having no level of interest: 1 2 3 4 5
8. Listed below are genres of writing. Please specify your level of familiarity with each with 5 being very familiar:
 - a. Memoir: 1 2 3 4 5
 - b. Ethnography: 1 2 3 4 5
 - c. Annotated Bibliography: 1 2 3 4 5
 - d. Commentary: 1 2 3 4 5
9. What classroom methods did your teacher use? Circle all that apply
 - a. Small group discussions
 - b. Whole class discussions
 - c. Instructor conferences
 - d. Instructor email communication at least twice a week.
 - e. Peer Review groups
 - f. Small group assignments
10. What classroom methods were you most motivated by? Please specify your level of motivation with five as being the highly motivating and one meaning that your writing habits were not motivated by that activity:
 - a. Small group discussions 1 2 3 4 5
 - b. Whole class discussions 1 2 3 4 5
 - c. One on one time spent with instructor 1 2 3 4 5
 - d. Time spent in the English 110 writing lab 1 2 3 4 5
 - e. Peer Review 1 2 3 4 5
11. Describe why you were most motivated by the higher rated activities.

12. Which classroom activities do you have the best attitudes toward? Please put the methods in order with method number one as the classroom activity you most prefer and the last classroom activity listed the one you least prefer to engage in.

- a. Small Group Discussion
- b. Whole class discussion
- c. Instructor conferences
- d. Time spent in the English 110 writing lab
- e. Peer Review

13. Briefly describe why you made preference toward the activities you rated a 1 and 2.

14. Which writing assignments do you have positive attitudes about writing? Please note how positive your attitude was about the assignment with five meaning you felt highly positive toward the assignment and one meaning you had a no positive feelings about the assignment

- a. Memoir 1 2 3 4 5
- b. Profile 1 2 3 4 5
- c. Ethnography 1 2 3 4 5
- d. Commentary 1 2 3 4 5
- e. Personal narrative 1 2 3 4 5

15. Which writing assignments did you find most motivating? Please note your level of motivation or each assignment with five meaning that you were highly motivated to complete that assignment and one meaning you had no motivation to complete that assignment. If you did not write a specific assignment, please leave it unanswered.

- a. Memoir 1 2 3 4 5
- b. Profile (like an ethnography) 1 2 3 4 5
- c. Ethnography 1 2 3 4 5
- d. Commentary 1 2 3 4 5
- e. Personal Narrative 1 2 3 4 5

16. Why did you find those writing assignments more motivating than other writing assignments?