Transfer and Transitions: Exploring First Year Writing at Holy Cross

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Transfer and Transitions: Exploring First Year Writing at Holy Cross

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INTRODUCTION

The last three semesters at Holy Cross, and across universities across the world, has been like no other. The transition from in-person classes to an online environment has impacted students and faculty and staff in numerous unexpected ways. Holy Cross prides itself on being a school with small, intimate class settings that provide a space for students and faculty to cultivate meaningful relationships (implied to be in person). A global pandemic was neither expected nor well-fitted for this Holy Cross ideal.

Students who had been at the college for three years, like myself, found the transition to be particularly striking; my usual intimate class time was replaced with a Zoom call from my childhood bedroom in the middle of the spring 2020 semester. Many professors had never used anything remotely close to an online teaching platform, and thus found teaching online with a mere week to adjust frustrating. Students were asked to complete the same amount of work with the same rigor for an online setting that they also had not signed up for; the Holy Cross academic mission was not Zoom classes. This unavoidable situation that the school was put in caused many students to feel a shift in their relationship with classes. Holy Cross was not designed to be an online College; it adapted to become one due to circumstance. This adaptation was implemented quickly, not over the course of many years, the way that most colleges would typically plan a transition to full online learning over long periods of time.

Enter: the first year college student. Incoming first year students who had never experienced Holy Cross with in-person classes faced the additional pressure of the school as a whole adjusting to an online platform, plus the normal pressure that students feel adjusting and transitioning to college life and academics. This transition, between high school and college academics, was one of my first interests that sparked my project. I had also planned to be a staff member of the Passport Program offered at Holy Cross, which is a summer program
that offers writing and math support for students who come from underfunded schools before the academic year begins. This program was cancelled completely due to the pandemic, and this further made me interested in how students would adjust to college writing, especially without support and resources such as Passport being offered.

In my thesis, I will study first year writing at Holy Cross, with a specific focus on the English 110: Introduction to Academic Writing. My goal was to work with first-year writing students and focus on the ENGL 110 course with students who voluntarily signed up to take the course in their first semester of college to gain a strong foundation for writing. This means that these students are intrinsically motivated to pursue writing, unlike at other colleges where students have to take writing. I wanted to learn more about how first-year students understand writing, both coming from high school and as they continue to adapt to the Holy Cross community. I also wanted to focus on interdisciplinary writing and transfer, and how students in an introductory writing skills course develop the ability to write in different disciplines and how they then transfer, or adapt, those skills to other classes they are taking. This comes from a real interest in writing processes over products. That is, the way that students develop different writing habits and also rhetorical dispositions, how they're used, and why they matter.

My guiding research question at the beginning of my project was: how do students transition to college writing? That question, as the last year and a half progressed, became: how do students during a pandemic transition to college writing, college norms, and online classes? Student’s use of transfer was a big factor in this question: how does transfer assist students academically if they are able to use transfer at all?

The order of my thesis is as follows: first, you will see my literature review. I conducted research on first year student composition and writing courses across universities in the United States, with a focus on transfer and interdisciplinary writing. In this research,
both the effectiveness of the material taught and the ability to apply the skills taught to other disciplines and outside a school or classroom setting have been evaluated. There has been a lot of research done about other Universities’ first year writing programs, and it was imperative to my own research that I study what other researchers had discovered in their own work before I embarked on my own data collection. In this section I had three main findings. First, studies emphasized that writing cannot be taught independent of its context; it should include academic contexts and real-world applications. This ‘real-world’ connection seemed to come across as critical to facilitating transfer, which is students’ ability to take a general writing skill they learned and apply it to another context. Second, students in research-based classes saw first year writing courses as applicable to other classes, including ones like biology. And finally, studies found that when students studied non-literary data and information, synthesized pieces of arguments or studies, and did their own research, they were engaging in deep learning with regard to developing writing skills.

Next, you will see my methods section. This section outlines steps taken to design the study, including preparation and co-commitments. It explains how the study was run and how data was collected, sorted, and analyzed. I describe all the preliminary steps I had to take in order to start my data collection, including Institutional Review Board training, applying for a grant to buy incentives for my surveys and interviews, creating survey and interview questions and also having those questions approved. I also discuss my data collection with how I conducted my surveys and interviews. I had to transcribe my interview data in order to code it, and I also broke down my coding system in this section as well. I then describe how this coded data led me to analysis of the results I received from the students. Further information on what the study revealed will be addressed in the results section.

Next, in my results section, I describe what the data showed after coding and breaking down the information I had gathered. This was a summation of the survey and interview data
that I had gathered over the course of the last year. In this section, I explain 10 main findings that came from all my data collection. The survey results showed that students were able to talk about their writing using language that was specific to writing, and students also showed that their confidence levels increased over the course of the year. The interviews showed that students had a hard time talking about transfer, and students found that writing assignments in college were both much more varied in their assignments from course to course and from their high school experiences.

Lastly, you will see my analysis section. In this section, I analyzed what I broke down in the results section. I discuss my 10 findings in my own analysis of what the findings meant to me as a researcher and a student myself. This section I am able to tie together the bigger picture ideas, such as students using transfer but not being able to discuss it well. I also am able to tie in my own experience as a writing tutor and a fellow student of those I interviewed.
LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review frames the discussion around my inquiry into students’ views of first-year writing and how they develop writing processes over the course of their first years of college. It covers why first-year writing courses exist, and how they promote transfer. It also delves into the relatively new history of transfer and how teaching for transfer is required if professors expect students to be able to do transfer. Since this academic year was also entirely online, this literature review also covers the way that the resources offered through online courses can be beneficial to students but also overwhelming. Ultimately, considering first-year writing, transfer, and online learning together allow me to think about the relationship of these three concepts; that is, the way that first-year writing courses have a long history of being undervalued yet how research shows that they can be beneficial to students’ writing careers, especially when framed as skill-building so that students can transfer skills to new classes in the future.

The History and Context of First-Year Writing

In order to fully understand the development and debate around first-year writing courses, we must look at the foundation and history surrounding the class, as well as the politics that came with the course. First year writing courses were founded in the 1880’s when Harvard University developed a course to create academic harmony and baseline for their students coming into the university. While elite universities such as Harvard saw this view as a way to get all their male students to academically build on foundational writing skills, other universities pushed back on this idea. A study in 1923 done at the University of Minnesota found that there was no statistically significant improvement in students who took the first-year wiring course at the school. Early attacks on first-year writing classes argued
that college should not be a place to develop basic writing skills and essentially re-learn the skills that should have already been taught in high school. The initial plan of these courses was to have them be a temporary “stopgap” as colleges waited for high schools to learn how to properly instruct students on writing skills before they arrived at college; then colleges could resume their normal agenda of teaching advanced literature (Roemer, Schultz and Durst 379). Additionally, the 1930’s were filled with many controversies over education in general and there was a consensus that professors were being “destroyed” by being forced to teach first year students basic composition skills (Roemer, Schultz and Durst).

One of the biggest problems with this old-fashioned view of teaching is that schools and universities are merely transactional: a professor gives the students their knowledge on their subject. This view that there is only one way of transferring knowledge suggests that students are not meant to contribute their own thoughts, which further adds to the arrogance of professors and faculty that effectively run the university. However, if we are able to view education and specifically higher education as a “contestatory site” between professors and students, this would open up many more opportunities to set a mandatory first-year writing course as the foundation for the rest of the student’s critical-thinking-focused education (Roemer, Schultz and Durst 383). When students just listen to lectures and try to absorb what professors are teaching, students are not having their own opinions and thoughts on the topics they are being taught. The students eventually get into this habit of not sharing their own ideas and the mindset that their professor has all “correct” thoughts, diminishing the student’s sense of critical thinking.

This old-fashioned view began to change in the 1970’s as the post-World War II surge in college attendance settled and attending university became more widespread across different demographics as well. A surge of compositionists and writing experts, such as Peter Elbow, changed many academics’ views on how writing should be viewed: now students and
professors alike began to see writing as more inventive, editable and ever-changing. As this view adapted, so did the English Departments that were tied to these views. The goal now was not to have students come out of these writing courses as perfect cookie cutter students, rather, it was to address a variety of topics through a variety of different teaching methods, including critical thinking, addressing wider issues of social change as well as raising the possibility of service learning courses (such as “Community Based Learning” courses, which integrates the Worcester community with Holy Cross courses). Additionally, the change in understanding of how students and professors interact can be “called the reproductive theory of schooling: schools reproduce the values, social practices, and skills needed for the dominant social and economic order” and thus schools began to shift their view as well (Roemer, Schultz and Durst 383). Rhetorical training and understanding is critical for students’ abilities to gauge audience, context and purpose for any writing they may have to do, and FYC is usually students first interaction with rhetoric in a classroom (Cook 26). FYC stands for first year composition, and additionally, FYC classes are also traditionally small classes which can allow for more one-on-one time with students. The instructor is able to provide more support to students in getting to have a supportive relationship with them (Cook 26). The universities keeping up with the new shift in understanding writing began reflecting on their teaching strategies and focusing on what they needed to make their students successful.

Lil Brannon in “Reconceiving Writing, Rethinking Writing Instruction” discusses the history of first year composition writing classes in multiple types of universities. SUNY Albany had a required first year composition course that was changed into a course for students with “writing deficiencies” who tested poorly on a writing exam before starting their courses. This decision was reconsidered in 1986 after backlash and the university abolished a compulsory first year composition course. The requirement instead was adjusted to require
students to take two “writing intensive courses” that could be completed in any subject. This way of approaching composition challenged the traditional model of first year writing courses in order to be able to “see writing as the students’ way of ‘knowing’ the concepts and conversations of the field” rather than just repeating certain skills in the same context they had learned the skills (243). Another change that the university made was to not force students to visit the Writing Center, but strongly encourage them to seek professional writing help from places like the Writing Center. This view correlates with Downs and Wardle’s argument that just by having first year composition courses, academics within the university are agreeing, albeit sometimes unconsciously, that writing can be simplified down into a set of skills and trivial knowledge that can be applied anywhere. Downs and Wardle stress the difference between teaching “about writing” versus teaching “how to write in college” (553). Writing should be seen as a legitimate discipline with content in which instructors should be focusing on teaching students how to shift the skills and understanding of writing to apply to various contexts and disciplines.

SUNY Albany, like many other universities, gave students the option to test out of the first year composition courses; but this usually is not an accurate reflection of a student's writing abilities. These types of tests usually are “superficial in their assumptions about writing” and are not necessarily an accurate reflection of the success of a student’s writing abilities (Cook 24). Students and parents alike are enticed by the idea of skipping these introductory writing classes for a variety of reasons but mainly because students want to get ahead with their education. Often, they see FYC as a waste of time or an inconvenience and as a skill they’ve already mastered. College is so increasingly expensive, and families do not want to waste time or money on courses that they do not believe are worth paying for.

While students who are not humanities majors especially may not see why they would benefit from FYC courses initially, the skills learned and applicability to any area of life are
vital for any means of written communication. J. Paul Johnson and Ethan Krase evaluate two student’s experiences with their writing across their college experiences. One student, Kate, is a biology major with a concentration in allied health and ecology. At first glance, it might seem like Kate would not have any need to learn writing skills. However, this study examines how much the FYC course helped Kate with her writing skills for biology which are for mainly lab-oriented classes, and how skills like concise writing and specific word choice are necessary for all types of writing.

“I feel confident in my abilities,” Kate says. “With more knowledge and more experience, I’ve been able to make my writing better.” From FYC to her advanced science courses, Kate has developed significantly as a writer, exhibiting an unfailingly positive attitude towards her writing, enjoying her creative pursuits, and managing her readers’ expectations adroitly. (Johnson and Krase 4)

Kate may have been a student who was initially hesitant to take a FYC course because of her major. In the long term, Kate was happy she followed the path of taking writing courses in college because it ended up benefitting her in not just her major, but the rest of her life as well.

Another important note that has made a difference in the first year writing courses is the instructor. Typically at universities lower level TA’s or non-tenured professors tend to deal with “lower level courses,” while older, tenured professors deal with their specific specializations (Roemer, Schultz and Durst 386). However, it is a common misconception that these TA’s are underqualified; in fact, they often receive much more training in actual classroom instruction than most professors. While there are professors who have been more experienced and more years studying than them, “TA’s routinely take both a readings course and a practicum course; they visit other teachers’ classes; they are mentored by more experienced faculty…[they] are often among [the] best-trained teachers” (Roemer, Schultz
and Durst 385). While it may seem obvious, the most important factor in a writing instructor is their knowledge of writing and they need to be properly trained in order to do so, rather than teach the course as if it is a menial task (Downs and Wardle 575). Where the university’s goal is to help teach “students more about writing and become more successful writers in the university,” there needs to be a faculty unity behind backing this idea (Downs and Wardle 574). The instructors additionally provide guidance for the students with specific writing-based skills that are typically in the FYC curriculum such as research assignments, analyzing information and synthesizing pieces, all of which, according to the Stanford Study of Writing and the National Survey of Student Engagement, promotes the concept of “deep learning” (Cook 27).

While many universities have chosen to eliminate the requirement for a mandatory first-year composition course, schools such as the University of Tennessee at Martin have shifted what their requirements mean. The university eliminated “remedial” courses for students and instead implemented a two-course program of college-level writing for underprepared students, referred to as “core English” courses (Huse, Wright, Clark Hacker). The university shifted their perspective on what first-year writing courses were supposed to be helping students with and made some important change in the new courses: only faculty with graduate or terminal agrees were eligible to teach English 110 and 100, and both courses were all taught by experienced faculty who have the same assigned textbook and writing handbooks. Regardless, these professors were allowed lots of flexibility in terms of the actual assignments, but the resources allocated to the students were constant. The results of this experimental two-course program were promising: students showed the same work ethic as any other class and seemed highly committed to their college success. The course enabled students and faculty to have open conversations about writing and further promoted their critical-thinking skills (Huse, Wright, Clark Hacker). University of Tennessee at Martin
understood the importance of a FYC curriculum in their students and decided to put effort towards bettering their own program to help their students use language well. It is not a good idea to skip FYC because language and writing define how we understand everything: “even that which we perceive as cold, hard facts are ultimately faltered through the words and symbols we use to make sense of...well, everything” (Cook 25).

Additionally, while many universities have decided to have no writing requirement or first-year writing course requirements, such as Holy Cross, this does not eliminate the writing needs that many students struggle with in their first year of college. In changing their requirements for students, the Department of English at University of Tennessee at Martin stated that they “realize that eliminating developmental programs would not...necessarily mean eliminating the students needing additional assistance to become effective college-level scholars” (Huse, Wright, Clark Hacker 29). The University did not want to eliminate their programs altogether because they recognized that their students had needs in regards to their writing skills. Similarly, Roemer, Schultz and Durst believe that the traditional view of education and learning is “a fundamentally elitist view of the English department mission and its move toward full disciplinarity, a view which we find in many ways quite disagreeable and contrary to the purposes driving composition studies” (378). By believing and functioning with oblivion to the needs of students, the authors argue that the faculty are functioning not for the success of their students.

New understandings of how to teach first-year writing courses are now more common as we learn more about effective ways of learning and teaching. Wardle and Downs continue to discuss the need to shift the model of first year composition classes from a reduced set of skills to “teaching realistic and useful conceptions of writing - perhaps the most significant of which would be that writing is neither basic nor universal but content-and-context-contingent and irreducibly complex” (558). This type of teaching would include many of the same
activities that are traditionally taught in first year composition classes, such as reading, researching and practicing writing arguments; however, the course would be asking more questions about how students use writing, such as how writing is effective, how writing is used, what problems are faced with different kinds of writing, how do we solve those problems, etc. Instruction should be varied in academic context and real-world context because writing cannot be taught independent of its content. Additionally the course should focus on conversation and reading scholarly texts to enforce that there is not a double standard between professional and student writers. Readings should be based on student experience and data-driven research articles so that research assignments can be completed as well to help students “shift their orientation to research from one of compiling facts to one of generating knowledge” (Wardle and Downs 562). Reflective assignments have also proved helpful for students in understanding their own work in comparison to those they have studied in class.

As more research has been done on first-year university students, studies have found why this course is particularly useful for students in their first year of college courses. Jonathan Monroe, a professor at Cornell University, discusses in “Writing and the Disciplines” how most colleges and universities do have some variation of a required first-year writing course. While these are not necessarily problematic in themselves, they should be used as embedded with and using the disciplines. The course should set the premise that all writing takes place in “particular contexts, for particular purposes and audiences” (page number). Students are also taking this course while enrolled in other classes, and the instructor should be aware they may be taught about argumentative writing in those classes as well. Monroe also mentions how Cornell University uses graduate students to teach first-year writing seminars because they are just as qualified as any other professor, and they may even have had more recent experience in college that would allow them to have
more common ground with these incoming students. These classes need to include just as much academically stimulating work than any other class or discipline to allow students to do their best writing, and first year “students who have become accustomed to discipline-specific approaches to writing are likely to begin their undergraduate careers with a significant advantage” to the rest of their undergraduate career.

*Developing Transfer Through Intentional Teaching*

Transfer is defined by educational psychologists Gavriel Salomon and David Perkins as “instances in which learning in one context or with one set of materials impacts on performance in another context or with other related materials” (Carillo 35). The earliest studies of transfer date back to 1901 where scientists stated that transfer was rare and would only be successful if there were identical contexts. These results were challenged and further research was conducted a few years later by Charles Judd that showed that “transfer was, in fact, possible in situations that were not characterized by identical elements and that the learner herself was an important component in the process” (Carillo 35). Charles Bazerman discusses how there has been a consistent problem across first-year writing courses with students bringing the skills taught to reality or to other courses. This viewpoint causes disinterest and disengagement from the students because they do not feel like they will use the information they are being taught in writing classes in other disciplines or outside of a school setting.

Transfer is a vital skill for students to learn in first-year writing classes, and some studies show that this shift in “teaching for transfer” has started. Charles Bazerman in *Reconceiving Writing. Rethinking Writing Instruction* discusses how to make a first-year writing course useful for students by including skills like transfer into the curriculum so they are able to apply their knowledge outside of the specific course. Bazerman discusses the
importance of the instructor in this class, and stresses the need for instructors to provide more real-life examples and encourage lively discussions with various topics for students to engage with. Bazerman says the goal of first-year writing courses should be to make writing skills visible over “a variety of discourses, so that the students can reorient and evaluate new discourses as they become visible and relevant” (257). Bazerman refers to this skill as “rhetorical flexibility” and calls to action the instructors of these courses to frame their courses with rhetorical flexibility in mind.

There appears to have been progress with this kind of changed mindset as Carra Leah Hood discusses how the use of traditional research papers and traditional assignments in first-year writing courses has significantly declined. There has been a 72% decrease in traditional research assignments for first-year writing courses in co-ed liberal arts colleges. More modern research has shown that this way of conducting research papers “reflects a past perspective on teaching and learning” (Hood 2). First-year curriculums for students have shifted towards more updated, cohesive research assignments that can be carried out across various disciplines. Research and learning research skills has increasingly been recognized as important to learn across all disciplines; all types of subjects and fields of study include researchers and a variety of studies underway to expand the field. These skills are just as important for writing as any type of literary skill or traditional curriculum for an introductory English course. The research assignments have been updated to be able to include many skills that will be transferable across the students’ college career. Kathleen Yancey and her colleagues have experimented with the effectiveness of teaching for transfer skills and found that students in the classes that were altered to teach for transfer did more frequently transfer their writing skills and knowledge more than those in other types of writing courses (Carillo 36). This type of assignment and updated teaching style is a critical first step in teaching
students the importance and value of transfer, as research skills are impertinent for any
discipline or academic context.

Umbrella terms and general understanding of concepts from composition instructors
can prove detrimental to their student’s application and understanding of skills like transfer.
Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle discuss the dangers of the umbrella term “academic
writing.” Additionally, they discuss how teaching first-year writing courses should push
students to ask more questions about why they are completing their tasks and specifically how
what they are doing would apply to other disciplines in order to develop student’s
understanding of these transferable skills. Writing is “content-and-context-contingent and
irreducibly complex” and should not only be taught as so, but also emphasized in many
contexts outside the course itself (558). While from an outside perspective, students should
understand that skills are able to be transferred from one topic to another, students often do
not make this connection that they can use what they’ve learned in different contexts. This is
why Downs and Wardle explain the need for explicit instructor explanations and examples of
how to apply the skills they have taught to a variety of contexts because of the complex and
abstract ideas behind transfer.

This idea of shifting from a broad academic term to focusing on the skills of transfer
is also seen in Chapter 13 of Reconceiving Writing, Rethinking Writing Instruction (pg 249).
The chapter discusses how because of broad definitions and concepts, there is no uniformity
in the professors teaching courses. This lack of uniformity sends different messages to
different students, and additionally, many of the professors themselves did not understand
what exactly they were trying to convey to their students about writing because they also had
such a broad definition of these academic concepts. While concepts like transfer are complex,
there needs to be more clear expectations for what first-year writing consists of, especially
when it comes to teaching transfer from a uniform professor’s perspective. Like Downs and
Wardle explain, transfer is complex and without explicit definitions from instructors, students may not fully grasp the concepts that they are learning, and they may not understand that they are transferable. If there is no uniformity from the professors and instructors teaching the courses, there is no way that their students can fully understand what their instructors expect from them. Additionally, Joanna Wolfe, Barrie Olson and Laura Wilder discuss and evaluate what students do with the skills they learned in first-year writing courses such as transfer. One of the first things the authors address is how this skill of transfer is often not taught at all: “composition instruction rarely encourages students to explicitly consider the connections between genres assigned in FYC and those of other disciplines” (42). The lack of explicit explanations and a cohesive understanding of how composition skills apply outside the specific context used in class is part of the problem with teaching transfer.

As an associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Cornell University, professor of comparative literature and director of the John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines, Monroe expresses his strong views that writing is integral for all disciplines in higher education. He also believes that students will not be able to be the best students they can be and do their best academic work until writing is fully integrated into all disciplines. “Writing and the Disciplines” discusses how terms such as “writing across the curriculum” (WAC) and “writing in the discipline” (WID) have been more prevalent in higher education studies, which suggests that universities have also been beginning to realize the importance of the transfer of skills and writing as a vital component in all academic fields. Monroe believes that the responsibility to teach writing in different disciplines falls to the faculty in that particular department to teach students what the expectations are for that particular department. Students cannot be expected to learn how to write in a new context effectively without being taught how to do so by a faculty member who has had much experience in the field doing so. “Students who have learned a one-size-fits all approach will soon discover it
does not fit the varied demands and diverse writing practices they need to be able to negotiate” and they can only do so with the help of the instructors of the courses who will guide them to be able to use the skills they have in a new academic field (PAGE #).

However, this proves to be more difficult than stated; many instructors have been used to viewing writing in their specific area for so long, it’s often hard for them to take an outsider’s perspective of writing skills, as discussed by Wolf et al. The instructors that are teaching students all come from a variety of backgrounds and understandings of what academic writing skills are and how these skills apply to the specific discipline they are used to teaching and working in. Because of this, one of the primary problems with teaching transfer is that the “instructors primarily teach and study within their disciplines, they come to mistake their specialized disciplinary ways of thinking and writing as universal skills” (Wolf, Olsen, Wilder 43). Instructors often are “native-speakers” of their discipline and have been using the “language in their discipline for so long that it is partially invisible to them” because it is such a second nature (McCarthy 262). For example, when asked to define what a thesis statement is, instructors' answers varied based on their academic background. In order for instructors to be successful in teaching their students how to navigate the language used in a discipline, they should provide them with introductory writing assignments and instructional support that will ease the language barrier that students often have to navigate independently (McCarthy 262).

This would also apply to their definition of transfer and their teachings of how they would use transfer, if they taught it at all. If students have an understanding that these transferable skills will be able to help them in multiple academic contexts, they also can learn how to use them beyond the classroom. “It is a myth that students will automatically [transfer]...what they learn in their lower-level writing courses to their upper-level ones. They simply won’t” (Carillo 34). Professors and academic settings just assume that students will
automatically transfer the things that they have learned from one course to another without being taught how to, which should not be presumed. For example, Lucille McCarthy completed a case study following a student, Dave, who initially stated that he “did not really like to write and he was not very good, but he knew that writing was a tool he needed” (McCarthy 238). He was taking two writing courses, and planned to be a biology major. Over the course of the semester, Dave had a variety of writing assignments for all three courses, Freshman Composition, Introduction to Poetry, and Cell Biology. All the courses he took that semester had overlaps and similarities for the writing tasks, but Dave interpreted all of the assignments as being “totally different from one another and totally different from anything he had ever done before” (McCarthy 245). Why? Dave’s focus on each course was different and he understood the class goals differently, which is why he understood the writing assignments to be so opposite from each other. Although the skills and necessary parts of the assignments were very similar, Dave did not understand the transfer of skills that would have made his assignments easier. In these courses, he was not taught how to transfer skills across disciplines and other areas of study and because of this lack of instruction, Dave did not see the connections between these different courses. As mentioned by Wolf, Olsen, and Wilder, the instructors for the course were likely teaching their students what they believed to be the most direct way of writing for their specific course, failing to consider the long-term benefits of teaching transferable skills to their students.

Monroe also goes on to describe how these writing skills will also be transferable beyond a strictly academic context and another goal for transfer in these classes will be to understand the use of writing skills in “the real world;” writing will likely continue to be a prevalent part of students’ future outside of undergraduate courses in a variety of situations and careers as well. Additionally, by looking at transfer from a larger lens and the way that it applies to not just an academic setting, we are able to learn how we learn in our everyday
Many commonly taught composition skills are vital for many disciplines, and many of these skills have also been practiced in writing centers across universities. Wolfe, Olson and Wilder explain how across academic disciplines, there are overlaps in the skills needed to write well in those areas. For example, links such as using the combination of “pattern + interpretation” usually work well together in all 6 disciplines examined. This type of information organization was typically used when looking at data or primary information and analyzing those results; however, this strategy would look different in the different disciplines. While both business and biology writing would be explaining and analyzing data, the ways in which they would use “pattern + interpretation” would look different when written out. Using a conceptual lens and using concepts to organize observations in the setting of different disciplines is also a commonality across subjects. Through this lens, the writer would present the concept they are exploring and then apply it to the primary material they are studying. This would look different based on what the primary material is, but a common way of looking at analysis nonetheless. Additionally, citation styles would also be used in multiple disciplines. Heather N. Hill suggests that not only first-year composition instructors should be encouraging and working with students on transfer. Hill recognizes the need to improve how transfer is taught, but also thinks that writing center tutors could also assist and be an important assistant in students understanding how to use transfer. Many of the topics previously discussed, such as data analysis, organizing observation using a conceptual lens and citation help are topics that writing tutors see on a daily basis. Hill also emphasizes the importance of teaching writing center tutors about transfer theory themselves and how they themselves can specifically help students with applying transfer theory to their writing. They are able to do this by asking questions and pushing students to see beyond their
actual piece of writing into a larger context, which is something that most writing tutors already learned and have a skill set for when working with students. While the responsibility of teaching transfer falls on the shoulders of composition instructors, writing tutors could play a vital role in students’ understanding and retention of transfer in a larger context.

Changing Contexts: The Shift to Online Learning

Another relevant part of today’s coursework is the possibility of courses going fully virtual with online instruction. “A Tutor’s Handbook: Online Tutoring” discusses some benefits to online instruction when it comes to composition studies, including the accessible use of media and visuals during teaching. Sound, video, chat feature and images all are able to easily enhance many students’ learning experiences. Additionally, the average student’s assignment grades were half a letter grade higher in their online courses than while taking in-person classes, while in-person courses continued to have a typical bell-shaped grading average, with most students getting average grades and few extremes on either end (Rendahl and Breuch 300). The online grading performance curve showed more of a line, with more students excelling than receiving average or failing grades for assignments (Rendahl and Breuch 300). Additionally, all students enrolled in the observed class reported back that they would take an online writing course again; they enjoyed the convenience, course structure, and individual attention from instructors that the online format allowed.

Merry Rendahl and Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch conducted a study looking at two online first-year writing courses; one of the main questions asked in the study was “what do students in an online first-year writing course perceive as good study habits and what helps them succeed?” (297). One of the difficulties between online first year writing (OFYW) courses and in person courses is the difficulty to tell levels of engagement for students in the class, and it was previously believed that students have to be “assertive with their online
learning experience” (299). Additionally, it was previously established from other research that with the courses’ shortcomings of face-to-face interaction, there was a level of difficulty in establishing collaboration between students online. However, the study found that performance is not necessarily correlated with participation: different kinds of students and learning styles perform differently in each class. (Rendahl and Breuch PAGE).

While some scholars believe that the lack of face-to-face interaction could be detrimental to the students’ performance, students shared surprising results as they finished their online semester. The students did not consider communications with peers as a productive study activity and did not value the time they spent discussing with classmates as much as other activities “despite a deliberate attempt by instructors to build peer interaction into the course” (Rendahl and Breuch 297). Contrastingly, “A Tutor’s Handbook: Online Tutoring” discusses how the relationships built between instructors and students are foundationally made in person with the face-to-face contact that are very difficult to replicate with online instruction, and the results of how this change could play into learning comprehension and writing abilities is still debated.

In the book *Reconceiving Writing, Rethinking Writing Instruction*, Fred Kemp discusses the importance of conversation, either written or dialogic conversations. Kemp talks about how conversations are able to keep going and they are individualized experiences that are open to infinite interpretations and thoughts; electronic conversations have even more possibilities to be open to more people. Technology is, in short, changing the way we communicate and learn. While some researchers such as Rendahl and Breuch mention that the lack of face-to-face interaction can have a negative effect on students, Kemp emphasizes how “the digitization of text in a word processor can transform an understanding of what words are and do” for students and professors alike (Kemp 182). Kemp also introduces the “complexity theory” in the context of general writing skills instruction (GWSI), stating that
writing and communication are “complex, in the sense that a great many independent agents are interacting with each other in a great many ways...[it] cannot be reduced to simple formulations,” which is often the route that many GWSI instructors take in simplify writing skills for their students (188). Writing gets complicated, and students should have the experience of being able to use technology and participate in a course that emphasizes the complexities of the writing process.

The introduction of online conversations allows for a new way to view writing and a new way to see one’s own writing. Printed text is an artifact, finalized and unchanging, while online work is a more interactive way of writing. For activities and practical needs such as revising, online work is easier to change and also easier to delete and create temporary work; students thus feel less pressure to make their work perfect since they have the option to always go back and simply hit the delete key or add more text if they feel it is more appropriate. Starting with the invention of the typewriter, writers were able to put words on a page without feeling pressure to stay with that sentence or phrase they included; it allowed for the flexibility to go back and change any spelling errors or mistakes that they may have made without having to completely redo the rest of the paper or assignment. Additionally with this available feature, the written conversation became more accessible to more writers. Kemp discusses how the written conversation “provides a reflective and compositional character that deepens the discourse at every stage and strengthens its self-structuring effect” which is a large part of what online writing is meant to do (Kemp 187). Online writing allows for the written conversation to be published on wider platforms and in more casual and less permanent ways.

The use of technology in writing courses can be helpful for students, but it is imperative that the instructor first understand what they want their students to learn and then reflect on the best way to express that, with or without advanced technology. Technology has
given instructors and students more platforms to learn material, but if the technology is not used well, it can actually be more distracting for students than helpful and have a negative impact on learning. The instructors “in the classroom should first ‘decide what we want students to do’ and then ‘find the best technology to encourage that behavior,’ explains University of Colorado Boulder professor Doug Duncan,” rather than just assuming that all technology is the best route to student comprehension (Carter and Matzke 321). Additionally, online courses allow students to have the freedom to also turn in their assignments from a variety of platforms (ie. podcasts, videos, websites, social media accounts etc), and this multimodal creativity furthers their understanding of digital literacy and how they themselves can use technology to their advantage to communicate their messages (Bourelle and Bourelle 353). Students also have the opportunity to think critically about the rhetorical situation of the assignment and what technology would best work for them.

This idea of digital literacy is also something that needs to be taught by professors and is not something that necessarily comes naturally to students. Phill Michael Alexander describes the concept of “digital natives” and “digital immigrants:” digital native refers to people born during the technology boom and who are familiar with technology since they grew up with it, while digital immigrants were introduced to digital technologies later in their lives (325). While technology has integrated into our everyday lives, it has also given educators (who are largely digital immigrants) a chance to look at the way people look at education and what tools we can use to enhance or add to our learning experiences. While educators may not have been brought up with the same technology as their students, they still need to “recognize that students are often missing foundational digital literacy skills desperately needed for their success beyond the classroom” (Carter and Matzke 321). For example, students need to be taught how to concentrate on a task; students who have been brought up with technology are better at scanning information to get information but are less
successful at focusing on one task at a time (Carter and Matzke 321). Additionally, a study done at the University Colorado Boulder found that in “education as a whole...the habits that are formed in the biology classroom will impact the habits exhibited in the writing classroom. All students—not just writing students—need to be taught how to be effective users of a range of composing technologies” (Carter and Matzke 322). This take on digital literacy emphasizes that instructors need to understand how their students learn in order to evaluate how to use the technology provided.

Writing classes should be focused on writing, and the class format can impact how students write and how frequently they write for the course; for online writing courses, the actual writing students do is the main form of communication. In terms of actual writing, students in online courses typically write a lot more than in an in-person class because of the format and way of communicating, “suggesting that students have the opportunity to practice writing more than if they were taking an [face-to-face] class” (Bourelle and Bourelle 353). Their online writing is the main source of interaction with peers or with the instructor, and statistically the students end up having a higher word count with their assignments combined than an in-person class (Bourelle and Bourelle 353). Additionally, students in online classes typically participate in online discussions as assignments, and through this platform students are able to spend time crafting their own thoughts in their posts, yet practicing more communication and writing skills, rather than being forced to think on the spot in a class discussion (Bourelle and Bourelle 353). Rendahl and Breuch point out that it may be worthwhile to have different expectations for online and offline learning. Students repeatedly report high levels of engagement and positive attitudes towards their online writing courses, and while there are clear differences in learning styles and styles of teaching, both appear to be effective ways of teaching (Rendahl and Breuch). Online learning is continuously asking students and instructors to challenge their previously held conceptions about learning.
Final Thoughts

Based on the history of first-year writing courses and the context in which they were taught this year, I felt like this year’s cohort of students was a particularly interesting one to study, given that everything was online. This online environment made me consider how students’ transition to college would be affected by online learning (when they had not necessarily signed up for it) and how transfer and first-year writing would function in such a setting. These unanswered questions led directly to my study design. Based on the mixed reception of first-year writing that I read about in the research, which typically cited administrators and faculty assessment of learning goals, I was curious to find out what students themselves thought about their first-year writing courses. My study relies on the concepts of teaching for transfer and the typical goals of a first-year writing course, which the research helped me define. I extend the work of the researchers I cited by asking students about their experiences in survey and interview questions, described in the next section.
METHODS

This section outlines steps taken to design the study to measure first-year students’
writing growth and writing processes, including preparation and co-commitments. It explains
how the study was run, using both surveys and interviews during and after the semester in
which students took first-year writing, and how data was collected, sorted, and analyzed.
Further information on the trends and lessons students learned writing across disciplinary
contexts will be addressed in the Results section.

Background

As the first step in the process, I completed my CITI training so that I could submit
study plans to the Holy Cross Institutional Review Board. My study was approved as exempt
from IRB oversight on November 2, 2020 (see Appendix A). Data was collected between
November 9, 2020 and April 13, 2021. My study includes human research subjects, studied
through surveys and interviews. The research subjects were all Holy Cross students enrolled
in ENGL 110: Introduction to Academic Writing in the fall 2020 semester. There were two
sections of the courses with a total enrollment of 25 students across both classes. Both
sections were taught by the same instructor (Professor Sarah Klotz), who gave me permission
to study her course. Participation in the study was voluntary, and no information was shared
with the professor of the course until late in the spring 2022 semester, well after she
submitted grades for her fall 2021 cohort.

To disclose additional connections to the professor and the course, I worked as a
Writing Fellow for Professor Sarah Klotz’s ENGL 110: Introduction to Academic Writing
course as an extension of my regular work as a writing consultant in the Writer’s Workshop.
This vantage point allowed me to additionally gain first-hand experience in an introdutory
writing course at Holy Cross, which I never experienced myself as a first year student. I
observed the class once every week (on Monday mornings), met with Professor Klotz to
discuss assignments so I could tutor effectively, and then I made myself available to meet
with students about their writing assignments for 30-60 minute collaborative sessions for the
duration of the semester. I served as a resource for the students in the class, especially as their
assignments became increasingly more complex and more questions arose, and all students in
the course were strongly encouraged to meet with me three times throughout the semester.

Surveys

I created two surveys that asked students about their experience with writing in high
school, ENGL 110 and any other courses they have taken. One survey was administered in
November 2020, when students were just over halfway through with their ENGL 110 course.
The follow-up survey was administered in April 2021, when students had been out of ENGL
110 for several months and had a chance to transfer or apply lessons learned in ENGL 110 to
their next semester’s roster of classes. The surveys included a variety of different questions
including multiple choice questions, open response questions, and Likert scale questions. I
wanted to have a balance of all of these types of questions in order to receive a variety of
responses and data.

The Likert scale questions allowed me to understand many of the beliefs that students
held as they entered college, as well as their then-current beliefs and understandings of
writing, in quantifiable form that moved beyond binaries (yes/no) and into degrees of
agreement/disagreement. They responded to statements about writing on a scale ranging from
“strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” An example of a question asked in the first survey
was the following:
Multiple choice questions allowed me to understand specifics with past courses students had taken, as well as any straightforward information, such as demographics and high school background. I also used multiple choice questions to gather specific information about writing processes where only one answer was possible. An example of a multiple choice question was the following:

**I feel like my high school prepared me well for college-level writing.**

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 Strongly Agree

The open-response questions were more open-ended and allowed students to elaborate on any previous thoughts or ideas that they wanted to express. I did not include too many open response questions in order to get more detailed responses to the few questions I did ask. Overall, I likewise limited the overall amount of questions being asked (and be specific and carefully worded instead) in order to avoid survey fatigue and increase the likelihood that students would drop out of the survey if it was too long for them to focus on. Open-response
questions were crafted to allow students to offer responses that might vary or not be easily anticipated through a set of multiple choice options. An example of an open-response question was the following:

![Image of open-response question]

The goal of the November 2020 survey was to understand students’ high school writing experiences and motivations for taking ENGL 110. It was a preliminary gathering of information, serving as a basepoint for comparison. The April 2021 survey was designed to see if students retained information learned in ENGL 110 and if they were able to use that information in classes they were taking in the spring 2021 semester. The April 2021 survey was, in essence, designed to assess transfer. See Appendices C and D for copies of both surveys in full. Students who participated in the surveys were given the option to be entered into a raffle to earn a $50 Amazon gift card. Gift cards were funded by a 2020-2021 Ignite Grant from Holy Cross (see Appendix F). One gift card was distributed at the close of each survey.

Survey data was analyzed in two main ways. The first--for multiple choice and Likert scale questions--involved simple tallying and calculating percentages. This data-driven information was gathered and analyzed using Google Forms and informed the larger context for the interview data, detailed below. The second--for multiple choice questions--was distinct. We developed a simple coding scheme for the open-response questions. More details on the larger theoretical basis for my coding schemes follows in the “Interview” section. However, a brief overview follows.
For survey one, in response to the question “Why did you decide to take ENGL 110? Please explain below,” the scheme included two basic categories: improve writing or transfer skills. An example of something coded as “improve writing” was: “It will help me when I take harder courses in later college years.” An example of something coded as “transfer skills” was: “I also hope to learn how to write according to changes in audience.” Also for survey one, in response to the question “What do you hope to learn in ENGL 110? Please explain below,” the scheme included two basic categories: improving product or improving process. An example of something coded as “improving product” was: “I hope to learn how to approach different types of papers.” An example of something coded as “improving process” was: “How to have good writing habits going forward and to be prepared for my classes going forward.”

For survey two, in response to the question “What do you believe is the most important writing skill or type of writing? Please explain below,” the scheme included three basic categories: clarity of argument, organization, and revision. An example of something coded as clarity of argument was: “I think the most important writing skill is being succinct with your ideas and stating your claim in a straightforward manner.” An example of something coded as organization was: “The most important writing skill is learning how to organize your ideas and determine the flow of them throughout the assignment or paper.” An example of something coded as revision was: “I believe that the ability to implement constructive criticisms in one’s writing is the most important skill in writing.” In response to the question “What did you learn in ENGL 110?,” the scheme included three basic categories: organization, research, process. An example of something coded as organization: “I learned how to organize my thoughts in a much more efficient way.” An example of something coded as research was: “I learned a bunch of great research skills as well as I learned about all of the resources [sic] our school has to offer.” An example of something coded as process was: “I
learned how to effectively organize/outline my ideas and content before starting the process of writing an actual paper.” In response to the third and final open-response question of survey two, “How can you apply what you learned in ENGL 110 to other classes you’re taking?,” did not include an advanced coding scheme, as all responses had to do with pre-writing or featured generalities about writing writ-large. An example of such a response included: “I have been able to utilize the pre-writing skills (brainstorming, making a solid outline, breaking down a prompt, etc.) before writing every writing assignment for all of my other classes that are primarily in the humanities/social sciences.”

Interviews

In January and February 2021, I interviewed students about their experiences and perceptions of ENGL 110, and specifically about how they understood core class concepts to transfer to other classes and/or disciplines. The interviews were conducted via Zoom using the approved interview questions (see Appendix E) to understand in more detail how and why students held the perceptions they articulate in their first semester of college about writing, and how those perceptions changed over the course of a semester-long writing course. I recorded the interviews in order to be able to transcribe them later so they could be segmented, coded, and analyzed to better understand the patterns that emerge. Interviews typically lasted 12-20 minutes. Participants were offered a $10 Amazon gift card for their time. The interviews allowed for deeper and conversational than the multiple choice questions and Likert scale questions mainly in the survey.

I used Dedoose software to code my data and came up with an a priori coding framework (meaning that I created the codes before I analyzed my data). I used this sample a priori code set on two transcripts and coded those transcripts accordingly. I then altered that code set by condensing, readjusting and editing those codes to account for where they seemed
to fit and did not seem to fit the first transcripts. Then I was able to create a cohesive codebook that was applicable to all of the data. All of the interview transcripts were coded according to this final codebook. After coding, I reviewed data with my advisor and edited and developed *a posteriori* codes that condensed codes that ended up having very few examples into other categories that were similar. Adjustments were made to the assigned codes so that the codebook, in its final form, reflected *a posteriori* code adjustments.

When I coded the data, I first segmented using topical chains. Topical chains are units—roughly explained, they are divisions in sentences, or spoken utterances, that reflect that comprise a continuous unit. That means that sometimes a single sentence was one topical chain, and sometimes a sentence contained two or more topical chains. Sometimes two or more sentences comprised a topical chain. The divisions of speech utterances were not made according to a grammar imposed on sentences but rather based on changes in the speaker’s focus. An example of one long response coded as a single topical chains included:

I learned a lot in that class, it’s kind of hard to pinpoint that. I think one thing that I always remember now is the opener. It's something weird that it's the intro but I didn't really realize how important it is to set it up well and not to make it super bland and you have to be straight to the point but at the end you can always be super creative with it. You can make it fun and engaging and also using quotes that in high school you might be taught to bring in the reader with a quote or just something that wasn’t very to the point or creative in a way. But I think doing that section on the openers just kind of emphasized how important it was just to set out and lay out the scene for your reader and actually make them engaged. I mean I had to do that for the third essay research paper and I didn’t know how I was going to do that. I eventually did and it worked out and kind of let my creative style out a bit but I liked learning about the opener quite a bit...the introduction paragraph section in writing in style. It was
basically the introduction paragraph but I didn’t think you could be creative at all with that.

Meanwhile, an example of a moderate response that was split in the middle, according to a shift in the speaker’s focus (topical chain) included the following, where the split is marked with an //:

I just had a very different perspective from high school to college for high school I didn't feel. I it sounds stupid now looking back at it, but I just didn't feel like it was as important as college was. // So I know now like this is like working towards a career, this is working towards like my life so like I feel like I have to put a lot more effort into it now, so I decided like when I did start writing. I would spend like a solid week and a half, like I’d spread it out over time and I would try to make sure that I would get...If it was a long paper try to get like a pair at least a paragraph a night just to make sure that I was progressing.

I then sorted topical chains into four main parent codes: Comparing ENGL 110, Process, Product and Transition. I used these four categories to organize all of my data into, and then I further broke down these segments into child codes, which became complex and specific. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of the topical codes into the second and third layers of detail. As defined by Cheryl Geisler, coding is “the analytic task of assigning codes to non-numeric data” (113) such as the verbal interview data I received from students. I was able to organize the information I had gathered because coding “creates and assigns a word or phrase to symbolize, summarize, or otherwise capture some attribute of ‘a portion of language-based or visual data,’ often in interaction with that data” (Geisler 113). I used mutually exclusive coding for my data, which meant that I only assigned a single code to each data segment: although my codes often had multiple layers, each segment only had a single code assigned to it.
What follows is a concise definition of each parent code, as well as an example of one segment that was coded as such. Under each parent code, the first and second level child codes are likewise defined with examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Codes</th>
<th>1st Level Child Codes</th>
<th>2nd Level Child Codes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comparing ENGL 110</td>
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<td>Transfer</td>
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<td>New Skills</td>
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<td>No Transfer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
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<td>Support</td>
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<td>Teacher/Professor Feedback</td>
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<td>Non-Professor Support</td>
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<td>Composing Practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depth</td>
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<td>Growth</td>
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<td>Transition</td>
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<td>Comparing College to HS</td>
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<td>Complexity</td>
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<td>Writing Beyond Literature</td>
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<td>Process</td>
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<td>Workload</td>
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<td>Preparation</td>
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<td>During/After 1st Semester</td>
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<td>Investment</td>
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<td>Workload</td>
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<td>Confidence</td>
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</table>
**PARENT CODE: PRODUCT**

We assigned the code ‘product’ when the student discussed an assignment they completed in one of their classes in the fall semester. An example of something we categorized under product would be “we did a couple paragraph essays like nothing too big and then we had like the longer six pages, and then we had an eight page essay and they were all based on questions that she chose. She would give us two options [to write about].” In the context of the interview, the student was discussing some of her assignments she completed in her Montserrat course. The secondary layers of coding allowed us to see whether that comment was about the depth of a finished product or if they saw personal growth with completing that assignment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Code</th>
<th>1st Level Child Code</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Process (36 lines)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Depth (16 lines)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Growth (9 lines)</td>
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**Child Code: Depth**

We assigned the codes ‘depth’ or ‘growth’ depending on what about the assignment the student was discussing. When a student discussed the complexity of an assignment or how the assignment was intensive, we assigned the “depth” code. An example of something we coded under “depth” was “having much longer assignments that are worth more of your grade. I guess you put more effort and time until making sure that the finished product is reflective of your writing.”

**Child Code: Growth**

We assigned the code “growth” for students who mentioned something they learned from a finished writing product. An example of this code is “for my Montserrat it was really eye
opening to see that, like how choppy my words were when it came to writing about stuff that I wasn't like really like comfortable with like, in my writing class I got to choose what I talked about, and it was like it was more easing it in, but then with my Montserrat...I just really hadn't been exposed to that religion to anything like in like the Muslim world.”

**PARENT CODE: PROCESS**

We assigned the code “process” to data that discussed students’ general procedure for composing a piece of writing. An example of this code is “when you break it down, step by step, writing is much easier than in my head like I feel like when I look at the paper, and I look at the assignment like it seems so intimidating, but if I break it down and I actually give myself the time and like put in the energy that I need it's not as scary as intimidating as I let myself believe it is.” We broke this code into three secondary layers of code: planning/preparing, support and composing practices. We organized the code like this in order to see what parts of their writing process students talked about most often and where their challenges came from in the process.

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<tr>
<th>Parent Code</th>
<th>1st Level Child Code</th>
<th>2nd Level Child Code</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Process (68 lines)</td>
<td>Planning (15 lines)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support (35 lines)</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Teacher/Professor Feedback (11 lines)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Professor Support (23 lines)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Composing Practices (15 lines)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Child Code: Planning/Preparing*
We coded something as “planning/preparing” when students were talking about their preliminary steps in their writing process before they actually started their composition. An example of this code is “I like talking out ideas verbally that helps me kind of structure it in my head and listening to other people's ideas and their thought processes also helped me, so i guess the verbal part of it and the discussion component of the Montserrat class helped me.”

*Child Code: Support*

We coded something as “support” when students discussed seeking other resources to assist them for their writing assignments. An example of this is “I ended up using the research librarian multiple times.”

*Second Level Child Code: Teacher/Professor Feedback*

Under the “support” code, we added another layer of code to specify what type of support the students were discussing. We assigned the code “teacher/professor feedback” when students discussed receiving assistance from a professor or responding to feedback the professor had given them. An example of this is “I went to office hours a lot, so that was really helpful for me and the professors have been really understanding about it.”

*Second Level Child Code: Non-Professor Support*

We coded something as “non-professor support” when the students talked about using resources other than professor assistance, such as using the Writer’s Workshop or library resources. An example of this code is “my English class made us meet with the writers workshop for one of our essays and so after that this helped me for ECON as well, but I met with a bunch of different people from the writers workshop like for every paper, and that was that was huge for me.”

*Child Code: Composing Practices*
We assigned the code “composing practices” when students discussed their actual writing practices when completing an assignment or something that had come up while they were in the process of composing. An example of this is “I found it really hard to come up with one particular thing that they had all. I had so much to say, I guess, and like not enough space to say it, and so I think that's one thing is like narrowing it down and being like very concise was challenging for me on that, like a particular project.”

**PARENT CODE: COMPARING ENGL 110**

We coded something as “Comparing ENGL 110” when the student was discussing specifically the course “ENGL 110: Introduction to Academic Writing” with Professor Sarah Klotz and how the course compared to their other writing experiences. An example of this is “So in Introduction to Academic Writing, we learned right away the formatting and how you’re supposed to do things and I had that book next to me and it was great that we started things early because when we were starting things for Montserrat, I could just look back at that book and say ‘oh yeah, pie paragraph,’ I’ll try that or brainstorm like this.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Code</th>
<th>Child Code</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comparing ENGL 110 (39 lines)</td>
<td>Transfer (17 lines)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Skills (16 lines)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Transfer (5 lines)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Child Code: Transfer**

We applied the code “transfer” when students discussed how skills they learned in ENGL 110 could apply to situations outside of the classroom, either in another course or outside an academic setting. An example of this would be “I’d say that Intro to Academic Writing was probably the most helpful because it was right away and that's what I was looking for. I wanted that class to help me with my other classes, which it definitely helped.”
Child Code: New Skills

We applied the code “new skills” when students discussed new skills or tactics they learned from ENGL 110: Introduction to Academic Writing. An example of this is “I think one thing that I always remember now is the opener. It's something weird that it's the intro but I didn't really realize how important it is to set it up well and not to make it super bland and you have to be straight to the point but at the end you can always be super creative with it. You can make it fun and engaging.”

Child Code: No Transfer

We applied the code “no transfer” to quotes when students were discussing how skills they had learned in ENGL 110 were not transferable to other contexts or if they did not feel like they could use what they learned in the course otherwise. An example of this code is “To be honest, it was kind of an opposite writing experience at least from what I felt from my academic writing class. Academic writing was like I said, a lot more structure based, and this is how to build different kinds of arguments and this is how you should be presenting your quotes, where Montserrat most of what I remember doing and learning was the short answers.” This student did not feel like what she learned in ENGL 110 would apply to her Montserrat class assignments.

Parent Code: Transition

We applied the code “transition” to any student talking about their transition to college and the writing transition as well. We broke this code into second and third layers of code because we wanted to specify what part of the transition they were referring to. An example of something we coded as “transition” is “My environmental science class I did it for some reason in my head I didn't think I was going to have like a big research paper and but I mean it's a science class, so I did, and that one probably was my biggest struggle in the end because
I didn't expect it. I kind of struggled in environmental studies, like my first semester, I think it was a struggle of both being home and not really having the support to go in and talk in person.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Code</th>
<th>1st Level Child Code</th>
<th>2nd Level Child Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transition (74 lines)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Comparing College to HS (44 lines)</td>
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<td>Complexity (21 lines)</td>
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<td>Writing Beyond Literature (2 lines)</td>
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<td>Process (7 lines)</td>
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<td>Workload (4 lines)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence (10 lines)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Child Code: Comparing College to High School

We applied the code “comparing college to high school” to data that specifically talked about high school writing experience and how that compared to college writing. An example of this “transition” code is “I say the volume, basically, the volume is definitely bigger in college or you're writing a lot more than you did in high school.”

Second Level Child Code: Complexity

We applied the code “complexity” to when students were talking about the level of complexity that they wrote in high school or in college. An example of this is “I think
a lot of the writing I did in my Montserrat class was research based, which was pretty similar to what I did in high school. The style and structure of paragraphs and essays kind of like was similar and, like the research process, I guess, as well.”

Second Level Child Code: Writing Beyond Literature (2)

We applied the code “writing beyond literature” to data that discussed how certain skills would be transferable outside the classroom context. An example of this is “I just had very different perspective from high school to college for high school I didn't feel - it sounds stupid now looking back at it, but I just didn't feel like it was as important as college was. So I know now like this is like working towards a career, this is working towards like my life so I feel like I have to put a lot more effort into it now.”

Second Level Child Code: Process

We applied this code to when students were comparing their writing process from high school to college and how this may or may not have shifted coming into college writing. An example of this is “in high school I skipped a lot of those [writing process] steps, I didn't go through such a big peer review session because I didn't have the freedom. To kind of go extravagant with it, it was always formulaic.”

Second Level Child Code: Workload

We applied this code to data discussing the amount of work that students had in high school versus the amount of work they have in college. An example of this code is “I really enjoyed in high school having that month period I could procrastinate all I wanted and I think like oh it's like not do for another month, but now like I have like three papers due next week so like it's just it's definitely my hardest experience is just the time like I feel like I don't have enough time for anything.”

Second Level Child Code: Preparation
We added a third layer to this section because we wanted to break down the students feelings of how they felt coming into college. We coded something as “prepared” when the student talked about how they felt ready to write in college based on their previous writing experience. An example of this is “I think, for me, personally, I came from a Jesuit high school and I felt like I was pretty well prepared for my writing as a writer and going to college.”

*Child Code: During/After First Semester*

We added a second layer of coding to organize when students were discussing their experience during their first semester of college or reflecting on their semester. An example of this code is “Like it was never the length that I had to do here, so that was something I had to adjust to and I had to figure out intro paragraphs and transition sentences to make that length work for me I guess.”

*Second Level Child Code: Confidence*

We added another code to this section to break down what students were saying about their experience during and after their first semester of college. We applied the code “confidence” to students who discussed a change in their confidence levels over the course of the fall semester. An example of this is “I just learned writing to learn the skills and the confidence that I’m not afraid of writing for the future courses. If they give me a paper I’m not afraid anymore.”

*Second Level Child Code: Investment*

We coded something as “investment” when students were discussing the effort they put into their writing assignments in their first college semester. “It was a completely new subject matter which I’m not particularly into, I’ve realized, so it was interesting but I wasn’t really into it. It was obviously applying real life issues happening in the education system and then talking about it and saying what we can do about it...being
really strategic, realistic and trying to look at what the issue is and trying to come up with a solution or at least analyzing what’s going wrong and picking apart what is contributing to that and what you can do to fix it.”

*Second Level Child Code: Workload*

We coded something as “workload” when students discussed the amount of work they received in college during their first semester experience. An example of this is “There was a lot of crunch time with that third essay, just a lot more stress in general I think because I was thinking about the other assignments as well. During the year it was definitely pretty manageable.”

*Final Thoughts*

By conducting two surveys and ten interviews with students from ENGL 110, I was able to gather data to create a code book. The codes I used enabled me to accurately break down and analyze my data results. Both my interviews and surveys contributed to my data collection and I used this information to move forward with my analysis. I conducted the surveys and interviews in order to collect data appropriate for my research on student’s first year writing growth and writing processes. I was able to break down this information using a code book we created that allowed me to further analyze what students had to say about their writing experiences in specific categories. This information will be discussed in the results section.
RESULTS

The following are the results I collected from the surveys and interviews for my thesis project. For the first survey, 13 students responded out of the total enrollment of 24 students in ENGL 110 in the fall 2020 semester, which represents a response rate of 54%. For the second survey, 12 students responded, a 50% response rate. I interviewed 10 students to collect additional data, which represented 42% of the total course enrollment (or 77% of the total number of respondents from the first survey, from which the interviews were drawn). All the students who participated in the surveys were first year students. The survey results showed that students were able to talk about their writing using language that was specific to writing, and students also showed that their confidence levels increased over the course of the year. The interviews showed that students had a hard time talking about transfer, and students found that writing assignments in college were both much more varied in their assignments from course to course and from their high school experiences.

Survey Results

In the first survey, the majority of respondents were female (62%) and the vast majority of students had not declared a major yet (85%). The majority of students also responded they primarily spoke English at home (85%), with 15% of students reporting they primarily speak Spanish.

Finding 1: Students showed that they saw writing as a less necessary skill to have mastered in science-based courses than in humanities or social science courses, and that belief became more entrenched as they progressed through their first year.

In the first block of questions in the survey in the fall, I asked students what their beliefs were regarding the use of writing in their classes. When asked about writing skills in different classes and disciplines, students exemplified varying beliefs about where they saw
writing as important. 100% of the students reported that they believed writing was an important and necessary skill for humanities classes such as English, history or philosophy courses. Similarly, 92% of students believed that writing was important in social science classes such as psychology, sociology and political science courses. About two-thirds of students believed that writing was an important skill to have in science-based courses such as biology, chemistry and environmental science courses (62%). The second survey administered halfway through students’ second semester in college, showed that students saw writing as nearly equally important still in the humanities (92%) and social sciences (83%), but it dropped significantly in the sciences. Only 33% of students saw writing as a necessary skill in science classes such as biology, chemistry etc. That represents a decrease of 50% when raw numbers are calculated (8 answered that writing was important in the sciences in the fall compared to just 4 in the spring).

**Finding 2: Students professed comfort in accessing writing support (such as getting professor or peer tutor feedback), but fewer actually sought out that support during their writing processes. As they progressed through their first year, their comfort levels seeking peer writing support grew.**

In the second block of survey questions in the fall, I asked students about their comfort levels with their own writing abilities, the resources they are given at Holy Cross, and their writing processes. Most students felt comfortable asking their professor for writing help (69%) and bringing their paper to the Writer’s Workshop to work with a peer consultant (62%). The remaining of the results were “neutral.” In the second survey in the spring, however, even more students felt comfortable asking for help at the Writer’s Workshop (83%) than the previous survey--a 25% increase (when calculated with raw numbers). Meanwhile, from fall to spring, comfort with reaching out to a professor stayed relatively the same (67%, where it was 69% first semester). Yet while students professed they were comfortable seeking
support, their actions did not always follow through: fewer students reported that they would ask their professor for feedback as they were working on their paper in the fall (46%) than felt comfortable (69%), the number who said they would reach out dropped in the spring to 33%.

Finding 3: Students professed that they frequently revised in substantial ways (ie: reorganizing, rewriting, etc), but that they only did so in small parts of their papers. Further, they revised less as they progressed through their freshman year.

When asked about their writing habits in the fall, less than half of the students reported that they check their writing with their professor (46%), but the majority of students said that they did look back at their professor’s old comments from other assignments before starting their new assignments (77%). The surveys asked about specific revision actions: reorganizing, deleting, adding, and rewriting. All students reported that they rearranged their sentences and paragraphs during their revision process, attending to issues of organization. The vast majority of students added more details and deleted sentences or paragraphs during their revision process as well (85% each). However, only a few students reported they always rewrote 50% or more of their paper during their revision process (38%).

By the spring, students’ revision process seemed to have changed. Only one student reported they revised more than half of their paper after a first draft was completed as part of their consistent writing process (7.7%), compared to that 38% from the fall. 67% of students reported they now added more details while revising, compared to that 85% from the fall. Only 75% of students reported that they typically delete paragraphs or sentences while they are revising, as opposed to the first survey’s 85% of students who said they typically deleted paragraphs and sentences while revising. Similarly, 75% of students reported that they reorganized their paragraphs and sentences while revising, while in the first survey, 100% of students reported they did this in their revision process. Less students also reported that they
Finding 4: Students found research important in the writing process for school-based writing and beyond.

The third section of my survey questions regarded students’ general beliefs about writing practices and skills, both inside and outside the classroom. In the fall, 92% said they agreed research was important in all academic disciplines. Students were also consistent with their beliefs that research skills are important for all academic writing throughout their first year. By spring, 83% still reported that research was important in all academic disciplines. Students were also consistent with believing sources should be cited if referenced and that writing should be clear, concise and contain a direct claim. In both semesters, 100% of students agreed that if they are referencing another author’s work, they should cite the source, and all students also agreed that it is important to use reliable sources for their research. Nearly the same number of students in both semesters also reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that succinct and clear ideas in writing are important (100% in the fall and 92% in the spring). 100% of students also agreed that writing skills are necessary outside a school setting in the fall, while that number dropped to 67% by the spring.

Finding 5: Students generally voluntarily enrolled in first-year writing to improve their writing skills, which they viewed as insufficiently developed coming out of high school.

For the short answer questions, I asked students two questions. The first question asked why the student decided to take ENGL 110. The main two reasons students reported they enrolled in ENGL 110 was to improve writing or gain transfer skills. Many students responded that they wanted to improve their writing skills “early in [their] college career” and be more prepared with their writing abilities for the future of their college careers. Over
two-thirds of students reported that they took the course to improve their writing (70%). Additionally students reported that they “felt unprepared with the writing [they] had done in high school” and wanted to take the course to improve those writing skills. Students also expressed that they wanted to take the course to apply the skills they learned to other courses they may take at Holy Cross. Students also mentioned that they thought “writing skills are important past college” and that ENGL 110 would help them learn how to apply these skills outside of the classroom, and 31% of students reported they wanted to gain these transfer skills from taking ENGL 110.

The second question I asked was what students hoped to learn in the course. Students mainly responded in two main categories: improving product or improving process. Some students wanted to “have good writing habits going forward” and learn good writing habits to implement during their writing process, while others emphasized that they wanted to “learn how to construct solid pieces of writing” and focused more on improving their final product. Over half of the students wanted to learn about improving their writing process (62%) and about a third of students wanted to improve their writing products (38%).

Finding 6: Students saw the skills they learned in first year writing as transferrable to other classes, and they especially valued lessons on developing clear arguments and developing a multi-step writing process, with an emphasis on pre-writing.

I asked three additional open response questions in Survey 2. The first asked what students thought the most important writing skill was. The results roughly fit into one of three categories: clarity of argument (50%), organization (25%), and revision (25%). Open response question 2 asks students what they learned from ENGL 110. The results fit into one of three general categories: organizational skills (25%), research skills (33%), and the ability to engage in a multi-step writing process (42%). Meanwhile, open response question 3 asked
how lessons from ENGL 110 could be applied to other classes. All responses (100%) from the participating students had to do with pre-writing or general writing skills. All students had something positive to say about how they would apply pre-writing skills they honed in ENGL 110 to any and all other courses they may take at Holy Cross. This question was an important one, as it discussed transfer and what the students’ big takeaways were for the course. All students responded that they believed the course content also applied to other classes, and the general knowledge they gained could be used in other parts of their college career.

**Conclusions: Students’ writing confidence grew over time.**

Overall, students revealed an ability to talk about writing using writing terminology, referring directly to writing process language in open response questions and illustrating an ability to respond to questions crafted with writing terminology and language. Further, student confidence in writing increased over the course of their first year. In Survey 1, only 31% of students saw themselves as a strong academic writer, where in Survey 2, 58% of students believed themselves to be strong writers.

**Interview Results**

The following are the results from the interviews I conducted with students who were enrolled in ENGL 110 in the fall of 2020. I interviewed 10 students, which is approximately 42% of the students who took the course. The transcriptions of the student interviews resulted in 83 pages of verbal data (single spaced, using Times New Roman size 12 font on a standard Microsoft Word document page). I then collaboratively coded these transcripts with my advisor by topical chain (of which there were 217 total) as described in the Methods section of this thesis. Among the major findings was that 80% of those interviewed explicitly reported they were able to transfer skills from ENGL 110 to new contexts in other specific classes in the spring of 2021. The remaining 20% spoke in terms that were too...
vague to classify with regard to their spring classes, though they cited the usefulness of certain writing skills they learned in ENGL 110 (like writing introductions). However, and interestingly, only 8% of the total conversation I had with students included their reflections on transfer, even though I cued it because I specifically asked about it. What follows below is a breakdown of the findings specific to each parent code described in the Methods section.

“Transition” Data

Over one third of the interview data was from discussing transition data (34%). The responses clustered around the transition from high school to college and also the transition from first to second semester. In those categories, students talked about: complexity, writing about something other than literature, their writing processes, the college workload, their preparation for college, their investment in writing assignments, and their confidence. [See Figure 1].

Finding 7. Students perceived writing assignments to be very different in college than in high school, and they cited complexity of the tasks as a significant hurdle.

Many students emphasized that the complexity level of college writing is elevated and the assignments in college generally are different from the assignments that students received in high school. Part of this complexity involved adapting to new college genre expectations that differed by discipline. Students also mentioned how their high schools often trained them for standardized tests such as the SAT or ACT and the writing assignments they completed were often geared to make students ready for those assessments. Students additionally expressed in this section that they felt different Holy Cross professors had different expectations for their writing assignments and how they struggled with that transition from a what felt like a more standardized high school approach to writing to a more diverse range of writing styles required in college.
Figure 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Code</th>
<th>Child Code Level 1</th>
<th>Child Code Level 2</th>
<th>Note</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transition (74 out of 217 lines)</td>
<td></td>
<td>34% of total dataset</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparing College to HS (44 out of 74 lines)</td>
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<td>59% of the transition dataset (parent code)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complexity (21 out of 44 lines)</td>
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<td>48% of child code 1 dataset</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Beyond Literature (2 out of 44 lines)</td>
<td></td>
<td>5% of child code 1 dataset</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process (7 out of 44 lines)</td>
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<td>16% of child code 1 dataset</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload (7 out of 44 lines)</td>
<td></td>
<td>16% of child code 1 dataset</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation (5 out of 44 lines)</td>
<td></td>
<td>11% of child code 1 dataset</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During/After 1st Semester (26 out of 74 lines)</td>
<td></td>
<td>34% of the transition dataset (parent code)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment (12 out of 26 lines)</td>
<td></td>
<td>46% of the child code 1 dataset</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Another pattern that emerged was that students’ confidence in their writing abilities went up after their first semester of college as they adjusted to college writing norms. Some students mentioned that they now felt capable of tackling papers in different contexts with different assignments after having completed a full semester of college, while others mentioned that their Montserrat class forced them to try new things and really participate and take risks that they may not have taken otherwise.

“Comparing ENGL 110” Section

The section I coded “Comparing ENGL 110,” accounts for 18% of the total dataset for the interviews. The responses mainly clustered around students discussing using transfer or not using transfer, as well as the new skills that they acquired in ENGL 110. [See Figure 2].

Finding 8. Though 80% of participants identified specific examples of transfer from ENGL 110 to other courses, the data also revealed that students had a hard time describing how they transferred those skills.

Of all the data that discussed transfer, none of the students referenced the word “transfer” in their discussions. The students all referred to the actions of using skills from one class into another or using information from one context to another, but none of the students actually defined what they were saying as “transfer.” Students used phrases such as “cross
over” or “helped me with my other classes” but the word “transfer” was never spoken by the students.

Almost everyone talked about transfer (perhaps because I cued it), but out of the Comparing ENGL 110 dataset, only 44% of conversation data referred to transfer, even though I did cue it. (In other words, nearly 100% discussed it, but they did not discuss it for very long and/or were not able to elaborate).

Figure 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Code</th>
<th>Child Code Level 1</th>
<th>18% of total dataset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comparing ENGL 110 (39 out of 217 lines)</td>
<td>Transfer (17 out of 39 lines)</td>
<td>44% of the Comparing ENGL 110 dataset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Skills (16 out of 39 lines)</td>
<td>41% of the Comparing ENGL 110 dataset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Transfer (5 out of 39 lines)</td>
<td>13% of the Comparing ENGL 110 dataset</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, the students could describe the new skills they learned in the course. Six students discussed the new ways they learned to write in a new style or format that they hadn’t previously used. Students also mentioned specific skills they learned in ENGL 110 such as topic sentences, new citation styles, and quote integration. 41% of the data in the “Comparing ENGL 110” child code category referred to students describing these new skills.
Process Section

Almost a third of all of the conversations I had with students discussed what we coded as “process.” The responses clustered around the planning, support and composing practices of students’ writing processes. For the support responses, students mainly discussed their resources from their professors, and their resources outside of their professor, such as the Writer’s Workshop or library resources. [See Figure 3].

Finding 9: Students developed writing processes that involved seeking feedback from outside sources, and they cited this as particularly helpful.

Students discussing outside support (such as using resources like the Writer’s Workshop or research librarians) all positively reflected on those experiences. Students also expressed that they found these two resources specifically more helpful than they initially would have thought.

Figure 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Code</th>
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<th>Child Code Level 2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Process (68 out of 217 lines)</td>
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<td>31% of total dataset</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning (15 out of 68 lines)</td>
<td>22% of the process dataset (parent code)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support (35 out of 68 lines)</td>
<td>51% of the process dataset (parent code)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher/Professor Support (11 out of 35 lines)</td>
<td>31% of child code 1 dataset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Professor Support</td>
<td>66%</td>
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</table>
One student mentioned how using the Writer’s Workshop and that “it was so much easier than I thought and I will continue to do that during the course of my college career and those things I feel like definitely helped me improve.” Students either did not have or did not find Montserrat cluster groups helpful, but they did enjoy the peer review and class discussions they had both in their Montserrat and ENGL 110.

**Product Section**

Lines coded as ‘Product’ account for 17% of the total dataset. The responses in this category mainly discussed the depth and growth that came with the assignments and their writing products. [See Figure 4].

**Finding 10:** Students learned that there were a variety of assignments in college that differed by discipline and that there was no standard formula they could learn for college writing.

One of the main comments that students had regarding the product was that they felt that there was a really wide variety of writing assignments at Holy Cross. Students mentioned that professors often want very different things from their assignments, and they also learned in their first semester of college what a variety of assignments there were.
Most students felt that their college assignments explored more in-depth topics than they had previously experienced, and these assignments also often incorporated the student's own opinion. Many of these new types of assignments pushed them out of their comfort zones, causing the students to grow as writers. Meanwhile, 31% of students talked about product in a vague way that could not be cogently categorized.

**Final Thoughts**

In sum, what we found was that students enrolled in first-year writing to improve their writing skills that they hoped would be (and appeared to be) transferable to their other college courses, though students had a hard time describing how they transferred these skills using specific details. Students saw the research skills and outside resources as helpful and valuable, and they found research an important part of the writing process for school-based writing and beyond. Students tended to revise less as their year progressed, and they also
progressively saw writing as more important in the humanities than in science courses. Lastly, students became increasingly aware of the range of the variety of assignments in college that vary by discipline, and their writing processes for varying courses often involved seeking feedback from outside sources. English 110 overall appeared to provide students with skills and resources that transcended the course itself and their first semester of college.
ANALYSIS

The perception that students have of writing and college assignments changed as they progressed through their first year and shifted based on the courses they were enrolled in. Yet students found the skills they learned were transferable to different contexts and classes. In this section, I will explore possible interpretations for students’ reported experiences and how and why they matter. As I do so, it is important to note that students took the class because they didn’t feel prepared for college writing. They understood college assignments to be more complex than high school writing assignments, but they curiously reported revising less as they worked through their first years. However, they valued the resources available to them that were first presented in ENGL 110 because they felt they still needed writing support throughout their college careers, which felt affirming to hear as a fellow student and writing center consultant.

Writing Beyond the First-Year Writing Classroom

One of the interesting results related to students’ perceptions of writing in disciplines other than first year writing came in their view of the lack of importance of writing to science based classes (as compared to humanities and social science based classes). Finding 1 from the Results section notes that students saw writing as less and less necessary in science-based classes as they progressed through their first year of college. This finding could have to do with the common area requirements that first-year students are often encouraged to take in their first-year courses. Often, first-year students are encouraged to try courses that are outside of their perceived major or possible interests and urged to take classes that are maybe in a subject or discipline that they are not familiar with. For many students, calculus is a required course for their possible majors, and students also need to complete one math course during their time at Holy Cross (or replace this class with another science course). Since
many majors require calculus, and there is a common area requirement that will be fulfilled by taking this course, many first year students experience this type of STEM class in their first two semesters of classes.

This would have exposed them to a non-humanities based course in college. The first two calculus courses at Holy Cross often have no writing assignments or very little writing-based assignments, so it is possible that students’ changed their mind after their completion or partial completion of these types of STEM courses. For example, Biology 161 and 162 are typically the first courses students take if they are planning on majoring in one of the sciences, but they typically only have one or two major writing assignments which are often assigned at the end of the semester. This does not mean that they are not important writing assignments, but it does mean that the students are not working on writing for them for the whole semester. This may change if they declare majors in the STEM fields, as writing requirements increase in classes that are typically after the first year of college. As students took some of their first STEM courses, they could have seen how minimal writing they completed for the classes they enrolled in, and thus believed that they did not deem writing necessary for their non-humanities or social science courses. This also could have to do with the fact that only four students surveyed listed aspirations for becoming a STEM major (2 math, 1 biology and 1 environmental studies).

Students recognized the resources available to them, including their professor’s accessibility and office hours, the Writer’s Workshop and the library resources, such as research librarians. The students felt comfortable accessing these writing resources, as it corresponds with Finding 2, but fewer students actually sought out these supports during their writing processes, and their comfort levels with peer support grew as the year progressed. However, students may not have been as motivated to access these resources because of the online format. Students tended to be less likely to meet with a professor over
an appointment on Zoom, and similarly with an appointment with a student consultant or research librarian. For example, overall Writer’s Workshop usage was down 45% from fall 2019 to fall 2020 in that transition from an in-person to an online setting, Additionally, their increase in peer comfort levels may have been due to their own individual confidence levels. Students in their first semester may have been self-conscious of their writing abilities, especially where they did not know any of their peers and especially in the first semester, students did not know what to expect from their writing assignments or their peers. The students also may have been cautious to trust their new peers with their work: just as they could have been self-conscious about their own work, they also may not have trusted their peer’s feedback at the beginning of the year. Students also would have had more interaction with their peers in the spring semester when they arrived on campus. Peer relationships may have been strengthened due to the in-person environment which could have led to higher levels of comfort all around for first year students.

Developing Writing Processes

As student’s writing processes changed in their first year of writing assignments, they found that outside sources were particularly helpful as part of their writing process. This corresponds to Finding 9, where students stated they appreciated their introduction to these resources such as research librarians and the Writer’s Workshop. As a writing fellow, I know that students were required to meet with fellows over the course of their semester to earn an A in ENGL 110. Although required visits to a fellow or to the general writing center may seem like a burden to the students, the feedback provided from this cohort of students shows why professors may require this: their Writer’s Workshop experience is often not what students think it will be, and usually students find themselves going back after their requirements are met because they found it helpful. As a freshman, I did not know that the
Writer’s Workshop existed until the spring semester, at which point I wasn’t sure how to access it. I wish that I had been required in one of my classes to visit the Workshop because I would have seen how beneficial it was to have someone else give an outside perspective on my writing. The finding here shows how students valued the peer review process even outside the classroom and how important this wider engagement with campus was for them as they navigated their writing processes.

Students said that they frequently revised in substantial ways but they only did so in small parts of their papers. This corresponds to Finding 3, and students showed that they revised less as they progressed through their freshman year. Students expressed how they had a tendency to fix smaller aspects of their work, such as their thesis or topic sentences; they do one thing at a time, rather than rewriting the whole paper. These results of less revision could be from a variety of factors. First, students might be organically incorporating revision practices into their drafting and using recursive revision rather than drafting first and then revising. They may be doing revising, but it might not have been a linear pattern of revision that they were coached through in ENGL 110 or would be coached through in a Writer’s Workshop session. Thus, students might not have recognized this as revision, although they were still doing it. They could have gained more experience in writing over the course of their two semesters and progressed with their writing abilities enough to not have to revise as much. Students may have a deeper understanding of organization, and they may be doing larger revisions instinctually as they go. They could still be developing skills to rewrite a whole paper. Additionally, rewriting an entire paper may not be completely necessary if the class is not producing an end-of-semester portfolio; the majority of classes students write the paper, get graded, and move on to another assignment or section of the curricula.

Second, students also could have developed more robust pre-writing practices, using the knowledge that they used in their ENGL 110 course and applied it to their other courses
to make them more efficient planners and thus require less revision (students mentioned outlining, pre-writing skills, quote use etc). Students could have been doing more pre-writing planning, which they learned to do in ENGL 110, which was more than just doing an outline and could have included a variety of practices that develop ideas more fully before a draft is assembled.

Third, their confidence levels could have also improved, as the interviews also showed, and this could have contributed to more efficient writing. Students showed that their confidence in their writing skills increased after taking ENGL 110, and many students enrolled in the class in the first semester of college in order to try to improve their writing skills for their foreseeable college career.

Fourth, they could be revising less because they were no longer in ENGL 110, where they were being constantly cued and reminded that they should be revising all the time. Finally, the online semester and the pandemic should be acknowledged; the interviews showed that students often felt like they didn’t have enough time to complete their assignments and felt rushed to get their work done. Students could have remained around the same level of writing skills, but they may just not have had the time factored into their planning for revision, as it was in ENGL 110. ENGL 110 also emphasized focus areas (ie: argument, topic sentences, introduction, etc) and students may perceive these as smaller units they could revise, which in turn would result in higher impact revision. This online environment could have resulted in students spending less time revising their writing pieces before they submitted them.

Disciplinary Approaches to Writing

Students likely are taking a variety of disciplines in their first year of college as they try to navigate their academic interests and possible career paths. Students seemed to believe
that learning research skills would benefit them in a variety of ways both academically and outside of the classroom. This corresponds to Finding 4, which had to do with students’ views on the usefulness of learning and transferring research skills. Research may not have been introduced to students in their high school experiences, as I know I was only exposed to research in science classes in my own experience. It is also not explicitly taught in 100-level literature courses at Holy Cross, and is sometimes taught and sometimes not taught in Montserrat, both of which are the space where most students satisfy their literature requirements and learn writing (in the absence of a college-wide writing requirement).

Students noted in their interviews that they believed that their college academic path would be more directly related to their careers than their high school courses. Research can be conducted and executed well in all disciplines, as they saw in their ENGL 110 course with their research projects (which will be discussed in more detail below).

Some students expressed that they were nervous about coming from a public school education, and other students noted that they rarely had writing assignments in courses other than English. This corresponds to Finding 5, in which students often stated that they did not feel that they were prepared for college writing. Indeed, a majority of students were enrolled in ENGL 110 in order to improve their writing skills. Holy Cross prides itself on being a writing intensive school, and I know through my own experience looking at colleges that often Holy Cross stresses its academics to a point of intimidation. I was nervous that my own skills would not be up to par for Holy Cross’ expectations, and other students likely felt the same way. Students generally have a lot of anxieties about their transition to college, and students likely understood that by continuing to develop their writing skills they would be able to put themselves ahead in many of their courses in their Holy Cross courses. Academics in college can be seen as an overwhelming hurdle, especially at a school that can feel academically intimidating like Holy Cross, and it is understandable that the students who
enrolled in ENGL 110 wanted to take every opportunity they could to try to further their academic skills, especially at the beginning of their academic careers.

Similarly, students also understood writing assignments in college to be more complex than assignments in high school, which is noted in Finding 7. This perception could be due to the fact that the majority of students expressed in interviews that they did not have significant or substantial writing assignments in their high school courses outside of English classes. The surveys reflected the fact that the majority of students did not have writing assignments more than a few pages in their non-English courses. In their first semesters of college, students came into contact with courses or professors that required writing assignments in disciplines that they had never written in before, such as environmental science or economics. Additionally, students at Holy Cross expressed that they experienced a heavier reading load and perceived there to be more intensive, rigorous curricula (and related learning goals), leading them to struggle with time management as they fit increasingly complex tasks and information into their study schedules. In the college environment, college professors certainly present more, and deeper opportunities, for student learning, allowing them to develop more complex assignments as the semester progresses (because they can expect that students will have more resources and knowledge on that particular topic or subject). High school students typically will read one book or article and base their paper off of one or two sources, but college writing often asks for a more complex, multifaceted view of the topic from multiple sources. In part, students were talking about the typical first-year transition from high school to college, though focusing on the writing piece of it.

Students experiencing writing in new disciplines for the first time during their first semester in college were quickly able to understand that there is no one cookie cutter formula for writing, and writing is dependent on the context and class they are writing in. This corresponds to Finding 10, where students learned that there were a variety of assignments in
college that differed by discipline. This directly relates to the sources I consulted for my literature review, where I learned that writing is completely dependent on its context. Holy Cross professors also do not have one standard for their writing. This is possibly because of a lack of a first-year writing course, but it also just reflects the reality of the fact that they all teach for different disciplines or subdisciplines. It may not be possible to come up with a single, standard approach for writing that covers each department. It makes sense that the writing assignment and product is also dependent on individual professor’s preferences or expectations, which come from their deeply specific training, and which are not uniform to other professors’ expectations.

Moreover, the online environment may have impacted students’ learning experiences and perceptions of disciplinary writing conventions. In my own experience, professors tended to assign more small writing assignments that were easier for students to complete with an online format during a pandemic, rather than administering exams or group assignments that make more sense to complete in an in-person setting. This could include assignments such as discussion posts, Canvas responses, short response papers, responding to other student’s posts, or scaffolded, pre-writing assignments. These assignments may have been easier for professors to grade in an online format for feedback than tests, quizzes, group work, or any range of non-writing tasks that would have been assessed, may have been. It seemed that first year students were exposed to more writing assignments (targeted, smaller assignments or papers) in lieu of other forms of assessment in their first two semesters of college than other students might have in a normal semester. Thus, students during the 2020-2021 academic year may have had a unique experience in working through a range of many small, diverse assignments.

Though some of these assignments may have been unique to the online, pandemic environment, students still noted that they were able to gain first year writing skills that they
viewed as transferable to other courses they might take in the future. Corresponding to **Finding 6**, students especially valued the skills and lessons learned on developing clear arguments and a multi-step writing process, with an emphasis on pre-writing skills and tactics. Students saw these skills as useful for their other classes’ writing assignments and they predicted they would continue to use them in their college career. This could be in part because of the way that the ENGL 110 course was set up. One of the main goals of the course was to show students how the skills they learned could be applied to other disciplines. For their final assignment, students had to write a research paper in the style of a discipline outside of English. For example, students who were focusing on an environmental issue in their community had to style the paper to an environmental science course (using APA citation style and formatting, complete research in the science fields etc). I believe this project was extremely beneficial to the students in their understanding of applying their knowledge to other areas of academic writing.

Interestingly, although students recognized that they would use the skills they learned in ENGL 110, they had a difficult time talking about *how* they were able to transfer those skills to different contexts. This corresponds to **Finding 8**, which described students’ perception of transfer. Although 80% of students explicitly identified specific examples of transfer from what they learned in ENGL 110, the students still had a hard time explaining how they were able to use them in great detail or explicit terms. This could partially have to do with the fact that they did not recognize when they were using transfer until I asked about it. They also described writing processes that were clearly influenced by ENGL 110 (or which I’d seen taught in ENGL 110) but didn’t explicitly tie them back to ENGL 110 in conversation because these lessons had become so embedded in students’ writing processes. This allowed me to conclude in some instances that transfer had occurred even though the student didn’t explicitly state that it did; my presence as a writing fellow, observing classes
and seeing students learn concepts they later talked about as part and parcel of their processes, allowed my analysis of the students’ responses to become deeper. Although they had been explicitly coached to use transfer in ENGL 110, as studies in my literature view show, students still often struggle with using language of transfer. So it is unsurprising that the Holy Cross students also did. Perhaps this skill of being able to talk about transfer in more detail comes later in one’s college career, or only after more coaching in additional writing classes.

Final Thoughts

After my analysis of the data that I gathered, I was able to see the similarities in the ways that students’ thoughts on writing worked and overlapped. Before coding, there was a lot of verbal data to sort through, and students used different words and languages (possibly because they came from different schools and were still learning how to use writing language in college), so it was difficult to see patterns in students’ responses. After coding, I could clearly see the positive impact that ENGL 110 had on students and the growth that they showed over the course of their first year at Holy Cross.
CONCLUSION

After spending time analyzing my results, I can discern that ENGL 110 was a very meaningful and helpful course for first year students to take. Students were able to learn (and transfer) very useful writing skills that they would not have unless they were in that course. I was able to see firsthand as a fellow for the course how much students grew in their writing over the course of the fall semester, and then as they continue to learn and grow in the spring semester results as well. While students often have a difficult time using language to describe their transfer, they still described themselves actually doing transfer with the skills they had learned in the course. Students felt unprepared for college writing assignments coming into Holy Cross, and ENGL 110 appeared to have alleviated some of those fears, as the course was geared towards preparing students for all types of writing, not just writing for literature. Student’s writing processes appear to have changed as well after taking the course, both with the resources they access outside of the classroom and the ways in which they revise their writing. The online environment for classes may have had an impact on the student’s overall year long experience at Holy Cross, but the student’s positive reflection on the concepts they learned and their overall experience in ENGL 110.

After analyzing all of the data I have collected, I am confident in my ability to make some recommendations for the future of first year students at Holy Cross. First, it is important that students have the opportunity to have space to work through their transition from high school to college writing. This space would allow students to navigate different contexts of writing and learn that different disciplines exist. By explicitly teaching students about different disciplines, they are then able to learn that disciplinary conventions differ which opens the door to allow the students to learn how to meet those conventions. ENGL 110 provides students this space to learn about these important topics as a necessary foundation for college writing and their college careers.
Second, at some point in their first year of college, students should visit the Writer’s Workshop. Students described their positive experiences with the writing consultants and their intent to return to the Workshop with other classes and assignments. The Workshop also helps with revision skills, something that students expressed they did less of as their freshman year went on. Revision skills and tactics are a large part of consultant’s training, and consultants are well-equipped to assist students with revisions or pre-writing steps they may be struggling with.

Third, the skills that consultants help students with also could be even more effectively coached with a full composition course. As a student who didn't take first year writing but has worked in the Writer’s Workshop for 3 years and observed ENGL 110 and studied its cohort, some sort of writing class would be beneficial for all students. This type of class would focus on transfer and writing skills beyond what Montserrat teaches students. While usually students gain knowledge of transfer or the existence of disciplines and disciplinary writing at some point in their college career, I believe it would be most useful to have this course during their freshman year. Students complete a lot of writing assignments over the course of their Holy Cross career, and this information can set them up for success if they are aware of it at the beginning of their college writing journey rather than the middle or end of it.

Lastly, professors in each department should make clear what the disciplinary conventions of their writing is. Too often, professors assume that students will pick it up through reading or exposure in their class. As my research shows, students often do not intuitively know how to use transfer or write in different courses without explicit guidance that often is not provided by professors. Professors should encourage a discussion in their classes about transfer and what the expectations are for their specific discipline. Professors should ask students the following questions in order to facilitate this conversation: what did
you learn in writing? How does it apply here, and how do we need to adapt to new audiences? Who are our new audiences? These answers will all vary depending on the discipline, but they are necessary questions to ask in the student’s understanding of interdisciplinary writing and facilitating transfer.

As the student’s college experience continues, it will be interesting to see how their writing evolves with different learning formats. Classes may be in person in the fall, and I will be interested to see if the smaller writing assignments that students had so much of the last two semesters will persist or if they change. Either way, the students will experience a new type of writing format and context that will change their experience with college writing as they know it now.

In conclusion, as both a student and researcher, I was able to learn a lot about what first year students are concerned about in their transition into Holy Cross. This study showed that students enrolled in the course because they felt underprepared for college-level writing assignments and wanted to learn how to use skills in a FYC course for other courses. The results showed that students did succeed in transferring material from ENGL 110, though talking about transfer is difficult for students to discuss explicitly. Students found the outside resources provided by Holy Cross to be particularly helpful, though students tended to revise less as the year progressed. Students also became increasingly aware that different disciplines required different types of writing, and writing assignments often differed by professor and course, even within a discipline. Writing was viewed as increasingly more important in humanities courses by first year students as well.

As a writing fellow, I was able to see firsthand what a first year writing course actually entails and the way it is instructed, which I never had the opportunity to experience myself as a first year student. It allowed me to reflect on my own experiences as a student writer, as well as the values that Holy Cross holds as an institution. English 110 offered
students the opportunity to see writing beyond a literature standpoint, and the course emphasized revision, transfer, and interdisciplinary writing. These skills are critical for students to learn for collegiate writing.

Moving forward from this study, there are a few suggestions I can make based on my data. Students should have the opportunity to learn and grow during their transition from high school to college, and Holy Cross can provide that space academically with a first year composition course. This program would allow students to understand some of the fundamental concepts that would serve them for the entirety of their college experience and beyond. This would include teaching for transfer, learning revision skills, learning how to write in different disciplines and learning about some of the variety of contexts that would be necessary to write in. Additionally, students should visit the Writer’s Workshop at some point in their first year of college. Students repeatedly reported that they found the peer consultants at the Workshop particularly helpful, and this was also something that I did not experience as a first year student. Finally, in addition to a FYC course, professors in each discipline should have clear expectations of what the disciplinary conventions of their writing is. There is a lot of miscommunication or lack of communication when it comes to interdisciplinary writing that professors often assume students will come to learn on their own; however, I think a simpler way to ease students' minds for this hurdle would be to have each discipline have explicit expectations for their writing assignments.

While my research was able to show data from first year students about their writing experience, I also acknowledge the limitations of my study. First, Holy Cross is a small school with small class sizes, so my participants were limited to the two courses being offered in the fall semester. They are not representative of all first year students. This sample size is also not necessarily representative of all students and courses at Holy Cross; for example, there are only a few courses offered at Holy Cross that are exclusive to first year
students. Second, the students in the class and thus the students who responded to my surveys and interviews are likely dedicated students who take their academic work seriously. These students voluntarily enrolled in the course although there was no common area, major or minor possible incentive for them to complete; these students, as my data showed, largely took this course to improve their writing skills. Students also had only taken a small portion of their overall courses at Holy Cross. They were also likely taking mostly 100 level courses, so the writing assignments that they would complete would change over the course of their Holy Cross academic career.

For similar future studies or replications of this study, I have a few recommendations to make. First, I would be interested to see how seniors view their entire writing experience at Holy Cross. Upon reflection of my own experience in this whole project, I would have liked to be able to either make these students a case study and see how their thoughts on writing change throughout their four years at Holy Cross, or interviewed current seniors and compared their answers to the first year students this year. It would be fascinating to see how student’s ideas about writing would change as they experience more courses and writing assignments, as well as real-world writing experiences for positions such as internships or full time positions.

Additionally, it would be interesting to see how this study would conclude on a different campus with different populations of students. I enjoyed studying students at my own university, but I would be interested to learn more about students at other universities as well without a first year writing course requirement. The anxiety that comes from the transition from high school to college is not unique to Holy Cross students, and more studies like my own would enhance my findings, thus making it more applicable to general college students.
Although students struggle through their first year of college, especially in an online format during a global pandemic, there is still a light at the end of the tunnel: students still found courses like ENGL 110 to be engaging and useful for collegiate work and beyond. My research is just the first step in advocating for students to have the space they need to grow as writers transitioning into more rigorous expectations at Holy Cross. I hope that my findings can encourage other researchers to investigate their own universities as well.
Bibliography


Appendix A: IRB Application

The Protocol

a. **Title of study** - Examining First-Year Writing at College of the Holy Cross

b. **Purpose of study** - This study aims to understand the mindset that first-year Holy Cross students have coming into college with regard to writing and to assess the writing skills that they develop over the course of their first year in college.

c. **Sponsor of study & COI** - The student researcher has applied for funding for the gift cards to incentivize student participation in surveys and interviews through the Holy Cross Ignite Fund. There are no foreseeable conflicts of interest with the College of the Holy Cross.

d. **Personnel involved and their qualifications** - The Principal Investigator is Dr. Kristina Reardon. She teaches Rhetoric and Composition and other writing courses at Holy Cross and serves as the associate director of the Center for Writing and director of the Writer’s Workshop. She will be fully supervising Elizabeth Casavant, a senior at College of the Holy Cross, who will be executing the administration of the surveys and interviews for her senior honors thesis in the English Department. Elizabeth has taken an advanced course in Rhetoric and Composition that included instruction in research methods and has worked as a tutor at the Writer’s Workshop since fall 2018, and she is also a writing fellow in a first-year writing class this semester.

e. **Results of previous related research** - “Naming What We Know” by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle has been a reliable source of information with a collection of essays from writing scholars.

f. **Study design** - Elizabeth will administer two surveys and one interview with first-year writing students who choose to participate. Both surveys will consist of a variety of types of questions on writing beliefs and practices, including multiple choice, open response, and Likert scale questions. The first survey will be able to reveal concrete data to code and analyze regarding the preliminary beliefs about writing that students bring with them into college. The second survey will be administered after the start of the spring semester and will seek to understand the long-term knowledge gained from their introductory writing course. The interviews will take place over the month of January and will be administered in order to have a deeper conversation with the first-year students about their writing experience across disciplines during their first semester. The interviews will take place over Zoom calls and will be one-on-one interviews with one student and myself as the interviewer. Calls will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. They will be stored on a password protected server.

g. **Subject characteristics** - The students involved in the research will be first year students at College of the Holy Cross who are enrolled in the course ENGL 110: Introduction to Academic Writing in the fall 2020 semester. Any students from the two sections of the course taught are encouraged and invited to participate in both surveys and the interviews.

h. **Justification for use of any special/vulnerable subject populations** - We will not be using any special/vulnerable subject populations.

i. **Recruitment procedures** - Elizabeth will be recruiting my research subjects from ENGL 110 by visiting their classes when my survey and interview questions are approved and ready to be administered. She also will send them all an email explaining the process with the links to the survey or meeting times for the interviews.

j. **Procedures to be performed** - After the project is approved by IRB, in the November or early December 2020, Elizabeth will email the professor of the two ENGL 110 classes running this semester, Sarah Klotz, to ask if she can visit the classes on Zoom to introduce the
project and ask for student participation. She will concurrently send the email inviting participation to the students in the class (attached) to better understand student perceptions of college writing and their writing processes during their first semester of college. After the first survey is completed, Elizabeth will review the responses in mid-December, and if any students opted to submit their name to be included for the interview process, she will directly follow up with them. In addition, she will send another group email in early January to the students to ask for interview volunteers. She will conduct the interviews via Zoom during the second and third weeks of January using the interview questions (attached) to understand in more detail how and why students held the perceptions they articulate in their first semester of college about writing, and how those perceptions changed over the course of a semester-long writing course. She will record the interviews so that she can transcribe them later so that they can be segmented, coded, and analyzed to better understand the patterns that emerge. At the beginning of March, she will send out the second (final) survey to the students via email to understand how their perceptions of writing have changed since their first semester as they have embarked on writing projects in classes that are not billed as writing classes. She will compile and analyze all data in the months of March and April so that she can submit her senior thesis during the second week of May.

k. **Anticipated risks and benefits to subjects** - There is no significant risk for the subjects to participate in the study. It is completely voluntary, and students are free to start and stop their surveys and interviews without any repercussions. It will remain completely confidential, and no raw data collected from the surveys or interviews will be shared with anyone except when reported publicly in aggregate form in the spring 2021 semester, long after grades have been assigned for the fall ENGL 110 classes. Further, this study may be beneficial to the students who participate, as it gives them an opportunity to reflect on their writing habits and growth at Holy Cross.

l. **Provisions for managing risk** - Since all of the surveys and interviews will be conducted fully online, all of the results and recorded data will be password protected through a shared, password protected Google Drive folder that only Kristina and Elizabeth have access to.

m. **Cost and compensation to subjects** - The surveys are each expected to take about 10 minutes of the participants’ time, and the interviews will take around 10-15 minutes as well. The students who participate in the surveys will be entered into a raffle to win a $50 Amazon gift card (one $50 gift card per survey). Additionally, each participant who volunteers to be interviewed will receive a $10 Amazon gift card.

n. **Plans for obtaining and documenting informed consent** - The survey will have the consent information on the first page; students will affirm their consent by clicking continue and taking the survey. The interviews will have a printed consent form that is distributed via email. The form will be read to the participant at the start of the interview, and the student will affirm their participation by stating that they consent to the interview on the recording before the interview begins.

o. **Plans for data storage** - Raw data, including survey results, interview transcriptions, and all notes on coding, will be stored in a password-protected Google Drive folder that only Kristina and Elizabeth have access to. The original recordings of the Zoom interviews will be kept on Elizabeth’s private Zoom account, which is password protected. All data will be kept for one year after Elizabeth completes her project. After that period of time, the data will be deleted, on or around May 10, 2022.

p. **Bibliography/Citations**


Appendix B: Student Recruitment Emails

Survey Recruitment Email 1:
Dear ENGL 110 students,

My name is Lizzy Casavant and I am a senior who is working on a yearlong English thesis about first year writing. As some of you know, I have been working as Professor Klotz’ 10:30 writing fellow as part of my job with the Writer’s Workshop and helping students improve their writing for assignments.

My project is mainly data driven and analytical, which means that I need to receive feedback and information about writing from students like you! In order to gain more insight on first year writing, I have created a short, 10 minute survey, and I am hoping for your participation.

Your answers will be completely confidential, and all participants are eligible to enter into a raffle to win a $50 Amazon gift card once you complete the survey. I really appreciate the feedback and insight you can provide for my thesis project.

Please let me know if you have any questions at all, and I look forward to hearing from you!

Best,
Lizzy Casavant

Student Interview Recruitment Email

Dear students,

Hello again! I hope you are all well and survived your first semester of finals! Thank you for everyone who was able to participate in the first survey: your feedback is critical for my upcoming project and I really appreciate the time and effort you gave for your answers.

The next step in my project is to conduct interviews with students to verbally discuss your first semester at Holy Cross and talk about your thoughts about writing. I am emailing you all because you had noted you would be interested in being interviewed. These interviews would only be about 10-15 minutes of just a discussion between you and I, and I would record our conversation for my data via Zoom. Additionally, all students who are willing to participate will receive a $10 Amazon gift card for your participation.

I have noted below times that I will be available to schedule an interview, and please let me know what time you would prefer for an interview. I am also flexible with meeting times as well, and would be happy to meet at your convenience.

January 19: 1pm EST - 6pm EST
January 20: 3pm EST - 7pm EST
January 24: 10am EST - 2pm EST
January 25: 10am EST - 2pm EST

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns, and I look forward to hearing from you!

Best,
Lizzy Casavant

Student Survey Recruitment Email 2:

Dear previous ENGL 110 students,

Hello again! I hope you are all having a good start to your spring semester. Thank you all so much for your participation both in Survey 1 and the interview process conducted over the past few months. Your data is extremely important to my research and I appreciate your cooperation!

As the final part of my data collection, I have created a final survey in order to show any progress over the last semester and any changed perceptions on writing at Holy Cross. Based on the feedback I received from you all a few months ago, I would love to have the chance to collect this data through this final survey. Like last time, all participants are eligible to be entered into a raffle to win a $50 Amazon gift card.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns, and I look forward to hearing from you!

Best,
Lizzy Casavant
Appendix C: Survey 1

Consent Page

This study seeks to understand the way that students understand and shift their thinking about writing during their first year of college. Participating is voluntary, and you may quit at any time. This survey should take around 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

There are no foreseeable risks to you as a participant, and all responses will remain anonymous. If you choose to enter your name into the raffle for a $50 Amazon gift card at the end of the survey, your name will not be linked to your responses and full confidentiality will be maintained.

Survey responses will be collected during Fall 2020 and Spring 2022, and around 24 students will be recruited to participate in the survey.

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact Elizabeth Casavant at eacasa21@g.holycross.edu or 617-678-9887 or Kristina Reardon, Associate Director of the Center for Writing at kreardon@holycross.edu or 508-793-2287.

By filling out this survey, you are signaling that you understand the risks and benefits of the survey and that you

Question Block 1 (of 3)

In high school, I completed writing assignments that were 4-5 pages long (or longer) in these classes (check all that apply):

☐ English
☐ History/Social Studies
☐ Math
☐ Science (like biology, chemistry, physics, etc.)
☐ Foreign Language
☐ Other: ___________________________
Look at the 5 class options below. Please number, in order of importance, the classes where strong writing skills are most necessary (1 as most important, 5 as least important)

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I think writing is an important and necessary skill in my humanities classes. (Humanities classes include classes like English, history, Classics, philosophy, and religious studies).

Strongly Disagree 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 Strongly Agree

I think writing is an important and necessary skill in my science classes. (Science classes included classes like biology, chemistry, physics, environmental sciences, and others).

Strongly Disagree 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 Strongly Agree

I think writing is an important and necessary skill in my social science classes. (Social classes include classes like political science, sociology, anthropology, psychology, and economics).

Strongly Disagree 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 Strongly Agree
Question Block 2 (of 3)

I believe I am a strong academic writer.

1  2  3  4  5
Strongly Disagree  ○  ○  ○  ○  ○  Strongly Agree

I feel like my high school prepared me well for college-level writing.

1  2  3  4  5
Strongly Disagree  ○  ○  ○  ○  ○  Strongly Agree

In high school, I typically got good grades (B or higher) on writing assignments.

1  2  3  4  5
Strongly Disagree  ○  ○  ○  ○  ○  Strongly Agree
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<th>Statement</th>
<th>Scale</th>
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I feel comfortable giving constructive feedback to my peers or helping them edit their written work.

1  2  3  4  5
Strongly Disagree  ○  ○  ○  ○  ○  Strongly Agree

I typically plan out my writing with an outline or some form of brainstorming before I start writing (planning/pre-writing).

1  2  3  4  5
Strongly Disagree  ○  ○  ○  ○  ○  Strongly Agree

I typically ask for feedback from my professor or other students as I am writing my paper (mid-draft).

1  2  3  4  5
Strongly Disagree  ○  ○  ○  ○  ○  Strongly Agree
After I finish my first rough draft, I typically rewrite 50% or more of my academic writing before I turn in my final draft.

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 Strongly Agree

I typically add more details as I edit my academic writing.

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 Strongly Agree

I typically delete sentences or paragraphs during my revising.

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 Strongly Agree
I typically rearrange or reorganize sentences or paragraphs during my writing process.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 Strongly Agree

I typically start my writing assignment:

〇 The day it's due
〇 The night before it's due
〇 Two days before it's due
〇 Three days before it's due
〇 A week or more before it's due

I look back at my professor’s feedback on my last assignment before starting my new one.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 Strongly Agree
### Question Block 3 (of 3)

Research skills are important for all types of academic writing, including writing in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences.

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Strongly Agree

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A good argument paper has a clear, direct claim.

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Strongly Agree

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If I reference another author or their thoughts in the paper I am writing, I should cite that source in my paper.

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Strongly Agree
I think it is important to use reliable websites and/or articles (collected from academic databases at the library) as sources in my research papers.

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Agree

When editing, I think it is important to make sure that my sentences are succinct and clearly state my ideas.

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Agree

I believe you need good writing skills outside of a school setting.

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Agree

Why did you decide to take ENGL 110? Please explain below.

Your answer

What do you hope to learn in ENGL 110? Please explain below.

Your answer
Demographic Information

Please select your class year

Choose

Please select your gender

- Male
- Female
- Transgender Male
- Transgender Female
- Gender Variant/ Nonconforming
- Other
- Prefer not to say
Please provide your major or write "undecided" if you have not yet chosen a major.

Your answer

Are you the first member of your family to attend a 4-year college?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

What language(s) do you primarily speak at home?

Your answer

In what country did you complete high school?

Your answer
Appendix D: Survey 2

Consent Page

This study seeks to understand the way that students understand and shift their thinking about writing during their first year of college. Participating is voluntary, and you may quit at any time. This survey should take around 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

There are no foreseeable risks to you as a participant, and all responses will remain anonymous. If you choose to enter your name into the raffle for a $50 Amazon gift card at the end of the survey, your name will not be linked to your responses and full confidentiality will be maintained.

Survey responses will be collected during Fall 2020 and Spring 2022, and around 24 students will be recruited to participate in the survey.

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact Elizabeth Casavant at eacasa21@q.holycross.edu or 617-678-9887 or Kristina Reardon, Associate Director of the Center for Writing at kreardon@holycross.edu or 508-793-2287.

By filling out this survey, you are signaling that you understand the risks and benefits of the survey and that you consent to participate.
Look at the 5 class options below. Please number, in order of importance, the classes where strong writing skills are most necessary (1 as most important, 5 as least important)

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<td>Econ110 Principles of Economics</td>
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<td>Bio 117 Environmental Science</td>
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<td>English130 Poetry and Poetics</td>
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<td>Political Science101 Intro to Political Philosophy</td>
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Strongly Disagree | Strongly Agree

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I think writing is an important and necessary skill in my science classes. (Science classes included classes like biology, chemistry, physics, environmental sciences, and others).

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Strongly Disagree | Strongly Agree

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1  2  3  4  5

Strongly Disagree  ○  ○  ○  ○  ○  Strongly Agree

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Question Block 3 (of 3)

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Strongly Disagree      Strongly Agree

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1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree      Strongly Agree

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1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree      Strongly Agree
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Strongly Disagree  ○  ○  ○  ○  ○  Strongly Agree

When editing, I think it is important to make sure that my sentences are succinct and clearly state my ideas.

1  2  3  4  5

Strongly Disagree  ○  ○  ○  ○  ○  Strongly Agree

I believe you need good writing skills outside of a school setting.

1  2  3  4  5

Strongly Disagree  ○  ○  ○  ○  ○  Strongly Agree
What do you believe is the most important writing skill or type of writing? Please explain below.

Your answer

What did you learn in ENGL 110?

Your answer

How can you apply what you learned in ENGL 110 to other classes you’re taking?

Your answer
Please select your class year

Choose

Please select your gender

- Male
- Female
- Transgender Male
- Transgender Female
- Gender Variant/ Nonconforming
- Other
- Prefer not to say
Please provide your major or write "undecided" if you have not yet chosen a major.

Your answer

Are you the first member of your family to attend a 4-year college?

- Yes
- No

What language(s) do you primarily speak at home?

Your answer

In what country did you complete high school?

Your answer
Appendix E: Interview Questions & Consent Forms

1) How is what you learned about writing in high school different from what you learned in ENGL 110?
   a) Follow up: How is what you learned about writing in high school different from what you learned in other classes where you did writing this semester? How is it similar?

2) How do you feel your understanding of writing has shifted after your first semester at Holy Cross?

3) What do you feel was the most useful skill you learned from ENGL 110 and why?

4) How did your Montserrat course impact your understanding of college writing?
   a) Follow up: what subject was your Montserrat class in?
   b) Follow up: what types of writing did you do?
   c) Follow up: Did the skills you learned in ENGL 110 overlap with your writing in your Montserrat class?
   d) Follow up: what supports or class activities helped you move forward with your Montserrat writing?

5) What do you feel was the most useful skill you learned from Montserrat and why?

6) Can you explain a time when you experienced writing in a context or class you didn’t expect last semester?
   a) Follow up: how was that experience different from previous writing experiences?

7) Can you walk me through your normal writing process?
   a) Follow up: has this changed since you’ve been a student at Holy Cross?

8) What has been your biggest challenge in your writing experience at Holy Cross?

9) What has your biggest success with writing been at Holy Cross so far?

10) What has been your biggest surprise regarding writing this past fall semester?

Consent for Participation in Thesis Research

I volunteer to participate in a research study conducted by Elizabeth Casavant and Dr. Kristina Reardon from College of the Holy Cross. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about first-year writing at Holy Cross for a senior thesis project. I will be one of approximately 24 people being interviewed for this research.

I understand that my participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, no one will be notified.

I understand that if I feel uncomfortable in any way during the study, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview/survey at any time.
I understand that participation in the interview requires answering a variety of questions about writing practices and habits and about my own writing beliefs. I understand that this information will be recorded and used by the researchers for the larger purpose of the overall study.

I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any of the reports using the information from this study, and my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.

Faculty and administrators from my campus will neither be present at the interview nor will they have access to the recordings from the interviews and raw data from the surveys. The information given to the study will be kept confidential and will prevent comments from having any negative consequences.

I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Studies Involving Human Subjects. For research problems or questions regarding subjects, the Institutional Review Board may be contacted through at hsc-irb@g.holycross.edu.

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

_________________________  ______________________
My signature                  Date

_________________________  ______________________
My printed name                Signature of the Investigator
Appendix F: Ignite Fund Grant

Part 1

Personal statement: Explain how the fellowship or grant for which you are applying connects to your academic and/or vocational trajectory to date, and how it will advance your academic and/or vocational interests in the future (~1,250 words).

Most colleges provide students with a first-year introductory writing course to allow students to take the time to learn how college writing may be different from any type of writing they may have learned in high school. Even though Holy Cross has a very selective admissions process, students come to college with very different ideas of what writing should look like and what it means for them to be good writers. Holy Cross does not provide the first-year writing course that other schools have because of its competitive nature and expectations set upon arrival at the school. I have experienced this firsthand as a writing consultant, especially in one particular case. I had a student this fall come in to talk to me about feedback that a professor had given her on a 4 page paper. She was very distraught and had received a very low grade on the paper, and told me she felt paralyzed with the overwhelming amount of work she needed to do to fix her paper. As we were working on the comments, I realized that the student did not even understand the language that the professor was using. Terms like “thesis statement,” “concrete evidence,” “figurative language,” “rhetorical,” and “synthesis” were all terms used in the feedback given by the professor, but the student didn’t know what those words meant. She had heard of some of them before, but there was no way for her to complete the rewrite without having this writing and composition jargon explained to her. She also explained to me that this was the longest paper she had written, and she had been asked to do so in about a week, which she explained was a much faster turnaround than she was used to. The professor had an understanding that all students
were at a certain level of understanding college writing; however, that is not the case for all incoming Holy Cross students.

As I have worked with more students over my career at the Writer’s Workshop, I have become more aware of the range of student’s understandings of what writing is. I am a student participating in the English Honors Program and will be completing a year-long thesis that will be advised by Professor Kristina Reardon. My project will be largely research based (data driven), and will be exploring first-year writing at Holy Cross. I am a writing consultant at the Writer’s Workshop and have been since my sophomore year. I also am currently a writing fellow for ENGL 110 - Introduction to Academic Writing, and I was a writing fellow for a summer course as well this past summer. I was also nominated to be a writing fellow for the Passport program this summer and had applied and been accepted into the program. I had been looking forward to working for Passport this summer, which due to COVID-19 concerns was cancelled. Although I was disappointed not to be able to work on the Passport team, I have now pivoted my thesis in order to make more contact with first-year writing students and focus on the ENGL 110 course to learn more about how Holy Cross teaches writing and how first-year students understand writing both coming from high school and as they adapt to the Holy Cross community. I am hoping to be able to gain clarity from first-year students, just as I was able to clear up any misconceptions and misunderstandings from the student I worked with this fall.

As a consultant at the Writer’s Workshop since my sophomore year at Holy Cross, I have had the opportunity to work with all different kinds of students. I have been able to work with students from all class years, all majors and all different backgrounds. Having the opportunity to work with this variety of students in an academic setting has shown me the importance of first year writing and how foundational it is to a student’s success at Holy
Cross. I have also learned through my own experience that students at Holy Cross need writing for every single subject they take. Even with the common area requirements, students have to learn to adapt their writing type and adapt their writing to the particular discipline they are working with, which they may not have previously learned how to do.

This example of a first-year writing student is representative of the many college students who come to Holy Cross at a more basic writing level than is often noticed. As a writing consultant, this has been something that I have noticed from first year students and is a constant struggle for students who find themselves at Holy Cross, writing much more than they had imagined and across more disciplines than they thought possible. I have helped a lot of students who need help with Montserrat assignments who have had similar experiences as well: their professors are asking for things that they don’t understand. Students who come in without an extensive knowledge of writing already find themselves at a disadvantage, and they may not even understand that they are at that disadvantage until well into their Holy Cross career because there is no first-year writing program.

In my own experience as a first-year student, I had a hard time learning how to write in my philosophy Montserrat course. I had never taken a philosophy course before, and although my professor was very helpful in instructing us on how to write a philosophical paper, I had a specific way of writing that I was used to from high school. Writing a different way was scary: I had been trained to write an argument and that writing in a specific essay style would allow me to be successful. I had not really considered the difference between English essay writing and writing for other disciplines, and it definitely took a lot of practice to get used to. Additionally, my sophomore year, I was enrolled in ENGL 387 Rhetoric and Composition which taught me a lot about writing practices, individual writer’s voices, evaluating different pieces of writing, and how writing is ultimately all about the process. All
of the work we did in that course prepared me for being a writing consultant and has ultimately led me to this thesis project. I want to continue exploring how students view writing at Holy Cross and use this data to share with the larger Holy Cross community.

Part 2

Description: Provide a description of the project you are completing, including a clear indication of the problem or issue you will be addressing, and the specific outcome the project aims to produce (~1,000 words)

Throughout my project journey over the course of the whole academic year, I am aiming to answer a few major questions. The project will aim to answer the following questions: What do pre-college students believe about writing, and how does that shift over the course of their first semester in college? Do students understand writing as specific to particular disciplines, revealing an understanding of discourse community norms and standards, or do they understand writing as a more general undertaking? Does participation in a first-year writing course impact their understanding of disciplinary literacies? Another important factor for me to consider in our current climate is how this academic semester (and year, dependent on the spring semester) will be different with digital instruction. I also have to take the different form of instruction that is being used this year into account as I gather my data and information from my research. How, if at all, does digital instruction affect first year students perception of writing?

As my first steps in the project, I have completed my IRB training in order to send out a survey to first-year students currently enrolled in Introduction to Academic Writing. I needed to complete the IRB training because I will be using human subjects in my interviews and surveys. I am finalizing my questions for that survey currently. This survey will include a variety of different questions including multiple choice questions, open response questions,
and Likert scale questions. I wanted to have a balance of all of these types of questions in order to receive a variety of responses and data. The Likert scale questions will allow me to understand many of the beliefs that students hold regarding their current beliefs and understandings of writing by asking them to respond to statements about writing on a scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” Multiple choice questions will be able to get into specifics with past courses they have taken and any straightforward information that I can gather, such as demographics and high school background. The open response questions will be more open-ended and will allow the students to elaborate on any previous thoughts or ideas that they wanted to express. I will not include too many open response questions in order to get more detailed responses to the few questions I do ask. Additionally, I am going to limit the overall amount of questions being asked (and be specific and carefully worded instead) in order to avoid survey fatigue and increase the likelihood that students drop out of the survey if it is too long for them to focus on. I also think by making the survey more short and succinct I will be able to get more participants who are willing to complete the information and questions asked.

I am currently working as a Writing Fellow for Professor Sarah Klotz’s ENGL 110: Introduction to Academic Writing course in order to get first-hand experience in an introductory writing course at Holy Cross, which I never experienced myself as a first-year student. She has consented to participate in my study, and her students from this course will be the ones that I will be asking to fill out the survey and to be interviewed. However, the survey and participation in my project will be optional, of course, and any student can opt not to participate. My goal of the survey is to gain knowledge about the students that are currently taking the course and their understanding of collegiate writing as it is used in interdisciplinary settings. I am planning on administering two surveys: one in the beginning of the fall semester and one at the end of the fall semester with the goal of being able to
compare students from the beginning and end of the semester of learning about college writing and experiencing a full semester of Holy Cross courses. I also will be conducting interviews (via Zoom) with students that volunteer to be interviewed to ask more open-ended questions and converse about more than the specific survey questions. The interviews will be more in depth and conversational than the multiple choice questions and likert scale questions mainly in the survey. I am planning to transcribe these interviews in order to synthesize and organize the data collected.

With the surveys and interviews, my advisor and I agreed that a monetary incentive would be the best way to get more participation in both the survey and the interviews. With the incentives and being present in one class of ENGL 110 every day, I am hoping to be able to get the majority of the students enrolled in the course to participate in the survey and hopefully interviews as well. We would like to give one $50 Amazon gift card for each of the two surveys for all the participants who are taking the survey to be entered in a raffle for the gift card. Additionally, we would like to give fifteen $10 Amazon gift cards for interview participants for the extra time they give. My advisor and I think this would be an effective way to ensure we get some participation in both the two surveys and the interviews for my research.

I hope that this project will not only teach me about student’s thoughts of writing at Holy Cross, but that it will also propel me forward in my career after graduation. Writing is a tool that can be used in any profession, and it is a skill that can always be transferred into any post-graduate position, even with preliminary tasks such as a resume or a cover letter. I have been researching graduate school programs, and as I have been looking at the requirements and recommendations for the applications, I have noticed that most composition programs are very impressed by research initiatives and projects that students have completed. I am
looking forward to completing this project and the forward trajectory that it will put me on as I am considering my post-graduate options.

**Explanation of learning outcomes (~500 words)**

My learning outcomes will be varied over the course of the year-long project. My main objective is being able to identify and explain ethical norms for research on student writing. In order to get to this point, I need to conduct some successful research through interviews and multiple surveys. I am currently in the process of drafting a survey that includes unbiased questions and leads to the collection of meaningful information in the service of answering a scholarly question or line of inquiry. The survey will allow me to bring in a lot of preliminary data from the students, and then the second survey will allow me to compare and contrast the students' progress over the course of their first semester writing at Holy Cross and finishing their ENGL 110 course. I am hoping for the majority of ENGL 110 students to participate in the surveys, as I will already have a preliminary relationship with half of the students as their Writing Fellow, so I hope to get to know them on both a personal and academic level. After the surveys, I will draft interview questions and conduct ethical interviews with human subjects according to IRB protocols.

With all this data coming in from the surveys and interviews, I also need to be able to organize and understand the data I have collected in order to use it meaningfully in my thesis. Thus, another one of my goals is to be able to segment and inductively code streams of language according to qualitative data sets to find patterns of meaning. This skill will take a lot of time to develop, and it is an extremely important factor in being able to understand and organize the data I receive from the students. After I am able to successfully organize the data I have received, I aim to be able to describe my research protocols, report my coding methods, explain her data, and analyze the complexity of the patterns observed in her data.
Finally, by the end of my yearlong project, I am hoping to be able to research and explain the history of previous investigations, in both qualitative and quantitative research, into her question and will be able to summarize and synthesize the sources that inform my own questions and analysis. I will be doing lots of research about past studies that have explored similar topics of writing and first-year students, and I hope that my research and findings from my yearlong project will be able to contribute to the larger narrative of writing studies. (428 words)

Use of funds (~500 words)

The funds given will be used in a few different ways. I hope to use the funds provided to 1) ensure participation from the ENGL 110 students and 2) thank the participants for their time and assistance with my thesis project. Studies show that participation increases with incentives, especially cash or gift cards, and I would really like to encourage as many students as possible to participate in my study by offering Amazon gift cards. We would like to give one $50 Amazon gift card for each of the two surveys for all the participants who are taking the survey to be entered in a raffle for the gift card. Additionally, we would like to give fifteen $10 Amazon gift cards for interview participants for the extra time they give. I think that as a fellow student, I also would be more likely to participate in a survey or interview if I was provided the incentive to also possibly receive a gift card.

Student participation is very important to my project. In fact, without any student participation, I have no thesis project. The premise of my project is to work with and talk to the first-year writing students to gather information about them in particular, and I need the participation from the students, so the funds will be a guaranteed way to make sure there is at least some student participation. Additionally, these students are the exact group that I am interested in working with as first-year students in Introduction to Academic Writing.
Additionally, I need to be able to stand out to the students through their constant flow of emails. In today’s digital environment especially, there is a dramatic increase in the amount of emails we get in a day, especially without getting any face-to-face contact that I normally would have been able to provide in person. While I will get the opportunity to talk to half of the students in class, I still want the incentives to be able to show that I really value their input and information that they give me, even completely digitally. I hope that the monetary incentive will be sufficient to stand out in their email and catch their attention to participate in my surveys and interviews. (374 words)

Part 3

➔ Proposed budget

- Travel expenses - $0
- Access fees, memberships etc for research - $0
- Equipment - $0
- Expenses shared by team members - $0
- Other expenses - $250