HBCU STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS
OF THEIR READINESS FOR
COLLEGE COMPOSITION

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine freshman composition students’ perceptions of their secondary school English classes and the extent to which the English classes prepared them for college composition. The study also examined how academic tracks (remedial, standard, advanced/accelerated) the students enrolled in during secondary school influenced their learning. Research focusing on the voices of the students is scarce. Also, studies about African American students at HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) are limited to discussions about the causes of the graduation rates, retention, etc. This study was designed to examine the students’ experiences in grades 9 – 12 and their perceptions of their readiness for college composition. Learning about the students’ perceptions could help educators to create learning opportunities that would enhance students’ ability to master skills required to improve their communication skills in academia and in their chosen careers.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my aunt, the late Mrs. Lydia Farrior Wheeler, whose valuable advice, encouragement and moral support inspired me to take on this important task. Mrs. J. Hazel Taylor, my mother, reminded me throughout several trials and tribulations of my ability to finish what I started. Finally, I dedicate this doctorate to my deceased father Mr. James Taylor, Sr., and my brother, the late Mr. James Taylor, Jr., both of whom personified true fatherhood.
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CHAPTER I:
INTRODUCTION

I lost one of my most loyal cheerleaders on Saturday, March 12, 2011. In efforts to comfort me, ministers and friends continue to remind me that my ninety-nine year old aunt had been blessed with longevity of life, that death is inevitable, and that she is at peace now. “Auntie” was an elementary school teacher for more than 35 years, and whenever I (at the elementary school level myself) would tell those she taught about my relationship to her, many of her students would respond, “Your aunt is so mean!” Approximately 38 years later, my aunt’s former students describe her quite differently. They now say, “Mrs. Wheeler is the reason I am what I am today, and I wish my children had more teachers like her.”

Nearly a year ago at a family gathering, my aunt reminisced about her teaching career. I always enjoyed videotaping her as she sometimes provided history lessons that books could never convey. At this gathering, one of my brothers – who passed away five months ago – said that “Auntie” was not as mean as students had said she was. Whenever I accompanied her anywhere she went, former students stopped her to remind her of the influence she had on their lives. Even when she was over 80 years old, she remembered most of the students – incredible! The students appreciated Lydia Farrior Wheeler for the academic learning she provided but mostly for the social and psychological support she provided because of her innate ability to “listen” to them. My dissertation introduction was complete (or so I thought) until my aunt passed away in March. I cannot help but to remember how her success in the teaching profession
and life led to the success of her students. Students could benefit from more listening and encouraging today, and that is why I am proud to have taken on this research topic.

For 16 years, I have worked as a freshman composition instructor at a historically Black university (HBCU) in the Southeast United States. With an enrollment of just 5,600 students, retention is a pressing issue, as it is at many historically Black universities where graduation rates are relatively low. Educators attribute various factors, from inadequate academic preparation to limited motivation, for the low matriculation rate. Before enrolling in a doctoral program, I too often blamed the problem on the students’ reluctance to take responsibility for their own learning and on the students’ inadequate academic preparation at the middle and secondary levels. However, my doctoral studies revealed that attributing poor academic performance to students’ attitudes and academic preparation was too simple; a more thorough examination was required. After completing course work in the program, I returned to the classroom as an instructor of composition with a reformed perception of students. Rather than attributing students’ deficiencies to a lack of motivation, I began to wonder if students actually knew how to demonstrate more responsibility for their learning. More thorough observations of students, earnest classroom discussions with students, and student questionnaires all contributed to my learning more about them. Britt (2002) made the following observation in regard to this: “As we aspire to find ways to improve teaching practices and learning outcomes for all students, we must understand the various ways that students are shaped by their experiences prior to and during the college years” (p. 55).

I discovered that, because many of the students had been enrolled in high school classes that did not require students to master proficiency in language arts skills, some of them failed to produce passing writing assignments with adequate support and a limited number of errors in
grammar and mechanics. Based on my professional experiences and my research, the students’ lack of exposure to learning activities that would help to prepare them for college, more than their inability or lack of motivation, was a main factor. Many students who had difficulty confidently assuming responsibility for their own learning had been enrolled in lower level courses in high school. Although being tracked into certain classes did not determine the students’ academic achievement, it greatly influenced their perceptions of themselves as learners. Subsequently, this lack of exposure to a curriculum that exposes students to activities and experiences that lead to proficient writing skills in high school greatly affects their academic performance in college.

Rationale and Need for the Study

Much recent scholarship points to the relationship between literacy and learner identities (e.g., Dillon & O’Brien, 2000; Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006; Lewis & del Valle, 2009; McCarthey & Moje, 2002). An emphasis on literacy teaching could help students “nurture their identities so that they would not limit themselves but would seek opportunities not readily available in their community” (Tatum, 2002, p. 52). Studying language along with identity is critical because students attempt to manage identities that connect the language practices they use at home and other social environments with the language practices promoted and valued in schools (i.e., language needed to succeed in academia). The paucity of research on ethnic minority members’ learner identities and the students’ perceptions of their learner identities make it necessary to examine their perceptions (Howard, 2003). The continued gap between the academic performance of African American and White students at the secondary and college levels indicates the urgency of examining students’ identities. Focusing on students’ perceptions, views, and voices is one method of addressing the needs of an underserved group of students.
Students’ perceptions of their own learning ability are crucial to their academic success. Unless teaching includes an examination of the thoughts and feelings of students whose perspectives are greatly influenced by school culture, efforts to improve learning are futile. All students, including minority students, are capable of providing educators an abundance of information designed to close the academic achievement gap among students. Students’ perspectives and self-perceptions influence their academic achievement, and learning about both could help educators to understand students better (Fowler-Finn, 2003; Thompson, 2002). Some information pertinent to students and their perceptions does not include the students’ own perceptions. Those who presume students’ disinterest in school would discover, upon examining what students really think, that many of them are concerned about making the most of schools (Scherff, 2005).

Freeman (1997) studied students’ perceptions of barriers to their participation in higher education, and the students cited the importance of the elementary and secondary school environments as factors. They believe that the provision of more information about the requirements, expectations, and other characteristics of college earlier in their academic lives would benefit them. My research examines the extent to which students in freshman composition classes felt their secondary schools prepared them for college. It also examines the role academic tracking plays in the preparation of students for postsecondary studies.

Many studies focus on the perceptions of educators and other decision makers, but educators often make assumptions about students’ perceptions of learning and of students’ learning abilities. Educators could benefit from “listening; hearing what students themselves have to say about who they are, how they see themselves in the school environment, and what they believe is expected of them as learners” (Sadowski, 2003, p. 163). Part of narrowing the
The academic achievement gap is to address the mismatch between students’ perceptions and their actual learning ability. There is little attention placed on the complexity of students’ lives (Stoughoton & Sivertson, 2005), and this results in the scarcity of theories looking to students themselves as sources of information about their educational experiences. In particular, scholars argue that identity formation as it relates to identities as learners has not been adequately studied among African American adolescents even though students’ perceptions about their learner identities are important in how they define and characterize themselves and others (Schultz, Jones-Walker, & Chikkatur, 2008; Stoughton & Sivertson, 2005).

For too long, education decision-makers have relied on every source to explain the problems facing literacy practices among college students except the individuals for whom these practices are designed. Increasingly, high-stakes tests have informed policy makers of strategies designed to enhance students’ learning. However, most reform efforts are shrouded in attempts to blame rather than to deal genuinely with the problem. Teachers blame students for not putting forth enough effort to master skills, and teachers blame students’ lack of prior exposure to adequate learning activities for students’ failure. Students and society in general blame problems in education on poor teacher preparation and teacher apathy. Students can provide much, if not more useful, information about their educational experiences in an overall effort to improve student achievement (Alvermann, 2006). Research pertinent to the academic achievement of African American students exists, but few research endeavors have allowed “African American students to speak on their own behalf and to offer suggestions, as the true experts on their own experiences” (Thompson, 2002, p. xx).

An understanding of students’ sense of identity and agency is important because teachers themselves enact identities, and their teachers’ identities, in turn, influence the students’
identities. A presumption of students’ possession of agency at the secondary level is important in developing curricular activities. If teachers actually believe this, then they would provide all of their students, regardless of the academic track in which the students are enrolled, with challenging and meaningful experiences (Alvermann, 2006).

Examining students’ perceptions, learning identities, and track placement is important because “substandard schooling has far reaching consequences that become most evident in the disproportionate number of African Americans who make up America’s poor and who are underprepared for university course work” (Thompson, 2002, p. xxi.). Among most ethnicities, a large number of those with college degrees earn more during their work lives than those who do not, and they are less likely to rely on public assistance programs as non-college educated persons (Richardson & Harris, 2004). Although the percentage of African American students graduating from high school is increasing, the inadequate instruction that some of them receive is cause for alarm. Only 40% of African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students go on to earn a bachelor’s degree within six years (Miners, 2010).

The quality of students’ secondary educational experiences influences their future opportunities for social, economic, and personal growth. Employing pedagogy that facilitates the advancement of all students - regardless of their race, class, or gender - is important to improving the learning of all students (Johnson, 2003; McLaren, 2003; Michie, 1999). The kind of education that students receive is evident in their performance at the college level. Despite calls to accommodate for the diversity among students in traditional public schools, students from marginalized groups still experience difficulty navigating mainstream classrooms because they are more likely to encounter exclusion and discrimination. African Americans are at a greater risk of falling through the cracks of the K-12 educational system. Knowing the research
pertinent to effectively teaching African American students is imperative to removing some of the barriers to their academic success, and a major part of understanding these barriers involves studying learner identity.

Research Questions

The main focus of this research study is how HBCU freshmen perceive their ability to do college work and how these perceptions differ from their actual performance. It also addresses the role of prior academic track placement on the students’ current perceptions and performance in freshman composition. One overarching question guided this study: How do HBCU students’ perceptions of their ability to do college level work differs from their actual performance in a freshman English class? Sub-questions related to this study include the following:

1. What are the students’ perceptions of their ability to do work in a freshman composition class;
2. What is the students’ actual performance in a freshman composition class; and
3. How has prior academic track placement in grades 9 through 12 influenced the students’ ability to do work in a freshman composition class?

Definition of Terms

Learner Identity: the way students see themselves as learners (Howard, 2003). Rather than simply a culmination of a series of events, identity formation is the way an individual interprets, connects, and internalizes successes, failures, routines, habits, frustration, etc. while in the process of understanding himself/herself; “it (identity) is the lived experience of an ongoing process...we are who we understand ourselves to be, as that understanding is shaped and lived out in everyday experience” (Nakkula, 2003, pp. 7 – 8).
Academic Tracking: the placement of students in classes based on their perceived ability; this perception is usually based on prior academic achievement and tests. Generally, tracks are divided into the following: remedial, standard, and advanced or accelerated.

HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities): The Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, defines an HBCU as the following:

any historically black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the Secretary [of Education] to be reliable authority as to the quality of training offered or is, according to such an agency or association, making reasonable progress toward accreditation.

Limitations

Several limitations may have influenced the results of the study: the sample population, the timeframe for the study, and problems with self-reports. First, the sample used in this study was purposive. Although I could have conducted the research at another HBCU, I chose to utilize participants on my campus. A second limitation is the timeframe for the study. I collected data during the summer session. Perhaps surveying and interviewing students during the fall or spring semester might have yielded different responses in addition to a greater number of participants. Finally, self-reporting of information can pose problems for researchers. First, other survey studies suggest that participants often report what they think others want to hear (Wittrock, 1986). Adding to this problem is participants’ lack of interest in a study. Because participants do not have a stake in a research project, they may not have answered honestly or to the best of their ability.

Summary

The experiences of African American students in high school play a major role in their academic performance in college. Too often, students from marginalized groups do not receive
adequate academic preparation, so they experience difficulty succeeding in college classes. A large percentage of these students attend HBCUs, which have experienced relatively low graduation rates caused partially by the students’ experiences in high school. Examining the students’ experiences and perceptions may lead to an improvement in their academic performance.

Chapter II focuses on the research pertinent to the learner identity, K-12 academic achievement, and the academic tracks of African American students who attend HBCUs. The literature focuses on the academic performance and graduation rates of students at the college level. Chapter III outlines this study’s methods and procedures for learning about the students’ high school experiences and about the students’ views of how these experiences have prepared them for freshman composition. Chapter III also examines the students’ actual performance in freshman composition and how the students’ perceptions differ from their actual performance. In Chapter IV, I discuss the two stages of the study in which I gathered data to answer the research questions. Finally, in Chapter V, I discuss the implications of my research and recommendations.
CHAPTER II:
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The way that students perceive themselves as learners affects their academic performance. Generally, when students have a low level of confidence in their academic ability, it is reflected in their performance in school. Although African American students are graduating from high school at a higher rate than in years past, the quality of their learning experiences in elementary and secondary schools is often mediocre. Students’ learning opportunities are determined in large part by the academic tracks in which they are placed. Lower academic tracks with fewer quality educational opportunities are composed of mostly minorities (Burris & Welner, 2005; Marks, Creswell, & Ainley 2006; Oakes & Lipton, 1992, 1995, 2005). When these same minorities attend college, some discover that they are not prepared to succeed in college classes; thus, the chances of their leaving college without a degree are increased. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), with relatively small endowments, are charged with providing postsecondary education to many students who have received inadequate educational opportunities in grades K-12 (A Statistical Portrait of Freshmen at Black Colleges, 2009). Despite these limitations, researchers, educators, and other stakeholders can create methods to improve the academic performance and the college graduation rate of African American students, and they can start by listening to what the students themselves have to say about their experiences.

This research study addressed the academic performance of African American students and their perceptions of their ability. My research was informed by the following perspectives:
learner identity (including African American Students’ Identity and self-perceptions), academic achievement of African American students, HBCUs, tracking, discourse/language patterns, college level writing, and teacher feedback.

Learner Identity

According to Centrie (2004), “identity theory states that a person’s behavior is directly connected to his or her conception of self, and that these conceptions are shaped in part by responses from others through interaction” (p. 234). That is, a person’s behavior is influenced by his or her perception of himself/herself and by individual and collective experiences with others. One’s identity and psychological growth are shaped by whom the individual interacts with in social settings (Centrie, 2004; Harlow, 2003; Watson & Protinsky, 1988). Students’ interactions with teachers, peers, and others

. . . impede or enhance their ability to blend their racial and intellectual selves. Faculty must understand the important role of racial identity development in the learning process and how it interfaces with other identity issues like intellectual development to cultivate a strong sense of self. (Fries-Britt, 2000, p. 56)

Researchers could gain valuable insight into the ways students learn and ways to create environments to improve their intellectual development by studying smaller and distinct student populations. Learning how experiences prior to and during the college years shape students is important to improving teaching and learning and for understanding more about the influences that shape students’ lives (Fries-Britt, 2000).

Adolescents and young adults are often concerned with questions about themselves, including what kind of student they want to be, what things are important to them, what others expect of them, where they want to go with their lives, and how other people perceive them. Psychologist Erik Erikson maintains that during this period it is imperative that students develop a positive sense of identity if they are to progress (Corey, 2005).
A major influence on students’ views of their learning ability is their sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the belief in one’s own capabilities, and these beliefs determine how students think, behave, and feel (Bandura, 1995). If students do not believe that they have the capability to change things they would like to change and achieve goals, tasks, and challenges, then they are less likely to approach these goals at all or to approach them with confidence. Subsequently, they lose confidence in their abilities and focus on negative outcomes (Bandura, 1995). Major sources of self-efficacy need to be present in order for students to take more control of their achievement: social modeling, mastery experiences, and social persuasion (Bandura, 1994). Students of similar abilities are in tracked classes, and if students do not see others similar to themselves succeeding, their likelihood of succeeding is slim. If students in certain academic tracks do not participate in adequate learning activities, they do not develop a strong sense of efficacy. If teachers do not persuade students that they have the capabilities to meet certain goals simply because they are in a lower track, the students’ sense of efficacy is weakened.

*African American Students’ Identity*

Learner identity development as it relates to a particular marginalized group - African American students - is a major focus of this study. Delpit (1995) pointed out the dangers of teachers underestimating students’ ability and the way students perceive themselves as learners. Delpit explains further how the mother of a 14-year-old African American girl was dismayed to discover that she brought home a report card filled with C’s and D’s after being assured by all of her child’s teachers that she was doing just fine. Upon asking the parent why she was so upset and that she should not push the child so hard, the teachers made the impression that even they (teachers) were not confident in the learner identity of the student. Too often, students internalize
this type of self-fulfilling prophecy and have less confidence in their learning than they should. Gay (1994) argued that in order to attain effective instructional practices for African American adolescents, there must be an understanding of how to help them develop a secure self-identity. Often, developmental characteristics of African American adolescents are overlooked, leading to students having a low sense of learner identity. An atmosphere that welcomes a range of student diversity and that matches the unique concerns, characteristics, and developmental needs of adolescents could lead to positive learner identities. Ladson–Billings (1995) argued for culturally relevant pedagogy and its importance in the academic success of African American and other children who have not been well-served by American public schools. Ladson–Billings asserted that few studies about speech and language interactions have considered the needs of African American students. Improving the self-esteem of the students has been researched often, but ultimately demonstrating academic competence has to be the goal. In one of Ladson – Billings’ studies, eight culturally relevant teachers demanded, reinforced, and produced academic excellence in their students.

Students also take responsibility and make recommendations concerning learning. Though many would describe adolescents as being disengaged from the learning process, in a study of small and large ethnically diverse high schools in Boston, Noguera (2007) found that students’ suggestions for improving schools should be analyzed and presented. Noguera (2003, 2007) found that students have some insight as to why certain practices are ineffective and why others should be considered. If students demonstrate a desire for educators to listen to them and to incorporate their views into decision making, then they indeed have an interest in improving their education, thereby increasing the role of students in their own learning. Students in the study described characteristics of a school in terms of the excitement of the learning, the
preparation of teachers, the patience of teachers, respect teachers show toward students, the way teachers expect to receive respect, and the firmness required by teachers to not allow students to get away with preventing other students from learning. Students with these views and recommendations indicate that students are concerned about a learner identity conducive to academic achievement. Such students also possess motivation and clear goals about how they will succeed in school.

Understanding identity is as important as understanding pedagogy, and “in order for educators to help adolescents succeed as students, we must develop a better understanding of the issues that affect them as people” (Sadowski, 2003, p. 2). Examining the influence of school in the learning identities and perceptions of African American students is important to their academic performance. Horace Mann thought that the school’s goal would be that of the greater equalizer and that school would be a place where all students would be given an equal chance at academic success. However, many schools prepare students for unequal statuses. Schools encourage division into classes that “reproduce inequality, racism, sexism, and homophobia (Fecho & Allen, 2003, p. 187). Instead of bringing about equality, schools stigmatize and devalue marginalized students while serving the interests of the wealthy and powerful (Fecho & Allen, 2003).

Also clouding the issue of the motivation and aspiration of minority students is that behaviors discouraged in school such as excessive use of body language, verbal wrangles, and wandering about the classroom (Davies, 1984) are common among some African Americans. Teachers may confuse such behavior as anti-intellectual if they do not take opportunities to learn about their students. It is time for all students, especially marginalized students, to voice their views in research studies (Davies, 1984).
Examining students’ voices in language arts classes is crucial because of the role that literacy plays in the learner identity of students. Many people believe that America’s teenagers and young adults do not read or write and that they are driven by the media. However, research paints a different picture. Students use their literacy practices to form their identities within and in opposition to school, work, and family. In fact, students’ reading and writing are linked to their interests and identities. Thus, a strong relationship between student identities and literacy practices exists. If schools are hindering students’ literacy practices, then they are hindering their identity formation.

**Self-Perceptions**

Self-esteem refers to the way one evaluates himself/herself. Personal self-esteem, according to Porter and Washington (1993), refers to the esteem for one’s individuality, regardless of racial or ethnic group; it is how one feels about the self in a comprehensive manner. A student’s self-perception as a learner would be influenced by his self-esteem in that self-esteem encompasses how the student feels about himself in a comprehensive manner. His perception of himself would have to complement and affect his self image (the way he sees himself). Academic self-efficacy refers to students’ confidence in their ability to carry out such academic tasks as preparing for exams and writing term papers, and it (academic self-efficacy) predicts grades and persistence in college (Zagacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005).

Classical social theory posits that there is a dynamic, interactive, and reciprocal relationship between self and society. Social psychologists believe that a person’s evaluation of his/her perceived efficacy is an important aspect of self-efficacy. Efficacy beliefs have been linked to a host of well-being outcomes. An individual’s beliefs in his competence, power, and control and his sense of virtue or moral worth contribute to his self-evaluation, and this self-
evaluation is derived from the person’s perception of himself. A student is more likely to feel comfortable participating in tasks that he/she believes he/she can accomplish than those in which he/she does not (Porter & Washington, 1993).

Academic Achievement of African American Students

Despite barriers, African Americans established schools for their children as early as the 1790s. In 1806, Prince Hall, a Revolutionary hero, established a school for African American children in his home (Hine, Hine, & Harrold, 2008). Centuries later, though, African Americans are still being underserved by public school systems. A disheartening fact is that even though the high school graduation rate among all Americans is at its highest, the level of achievement among African Americans has decreased. In No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning, Abigail and Stephan Thermstrom (2003) reported that African American students are four years behind White or Asian students by the twelfth grade. Their research asserts that an employer hiring a typical African American high school graduate is hiring one who is functioning at the eighth grade level. The Thermstrom and Thermstrom (2003) admitted that in every ethnic group, low-performing students exist, but the exceptionally high poverty rate among African Americans, along with the small number with incomes above the national average, is a cause for alarm in that educational achievement oftentimes influences economic success.

In 2000, more than half of African American children lived in families at or near the poverty level. The number has increased over the last few years. Many African American families face limited earning potential, inadequate public assistance, poor housing, and inferior schools (Hine, Hine, & Harrold, 2008). A 2009 survey revealed that more than a third of freshmen at HBCUs are from families with incomes below $25,000.00 (A Statistical Portrait of Freshmen at Black Colleges, 2009).
As is the case in most aspects of life, money matters, but it is not a major determinant of academic achievement. Students in Shaker Heights, Ohio, are a prime example. The affluent community of Shaker Heights consists of African Americans and Whites who live above the poverty line, possess a college education, and own their own homes. Despite the fact that the amount spent on each student is 50% above the national average and that low-achieving students are provided supplemental academic assistance, there is still a gap in the academic achievement of African American students. Regardless of endeavors to encourage African American students to enroll in more challenging courses, only 30% take any advanced placement or honors courses at all whereas 87% of White students enroll in those courses (Thernstrom & Thermstrom, 2003).

Similarly, Cedarbrook Middle School, located in a suburb in Philadelphia, is known for its effective schools, an established African American middle class, and extremely low poverty rate. Nevertheless, not one African American student sat in an eighth grade algebra class visited by a reporter in June 2001, and all of the students in the class in which the teacher was explaining what the $2 \text{ in } 21$ stands for were African American. Also, no Whites were in the English class where students were learning to identify verbs, and a small number of African American students were enrolled in an accelerated English class. Unfortunately, Cedarbrook Middle School is not an anomaly as conditions are even worse in the schools that most African American and Hispanic children attend (Thernstrom & Thermstrom, 2003).

Initiatives like No Child Left Behind (2001) were put in place to help all students achieve, but primarily poor students and students of color. Some data point to small changes; however, students of color still lag behind their White peers. Findings from the most recent NAEP show that although reading scores for Black students were higher than in the previous assessment, there is still a 26-point gap difference between Black and White students.
(Vanneman, Hamilton, Anderson, & Rahman, 2009). And, although the nation’s high school graduation rate increased from 1996 to 2006, there is still a 26 percentage-point difference between minority students (African American, Hispanic, and Native American) and their White peers (New Report Is ‘Cautiously Optimistic,’ 2009).

Various factors may contribute to the differences in the high school graduation rates of African American and White students. Too often, school districts place the least-experienced and poorest-performing teachers in schools where the students are in the greatest need of effective teaching. Many of these teachers do not possess an academic major or a certificate in the subject they teach. At the middle school level, 40% of core academic courses (English, math, social studies, and science) are taught by teachers out of their field, and over 17% of core academic courses in grades 7 to 12 are taught by teachers out of their field (Slaughter, 2009). In addition to their exposure to a relatively large number of unqualified teachers, minority students are served by many educators who are less likely to practice culturally relevant pedagogy. Without a consideration of the students’ needs and interests, African American and other minority students are left feeling insignificant, resentful, disengaged, and these feelings affect the students’ academic performance (VanDeWeghe & Scherff, 2005).

There are a few schools consisting of children from disadvantaged environments that encourage responsibility and, therefore, academic success. Schools like the KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) Academy in South Bronx, New York, strive to “alter” the culture of their students (Thermstrom & Thermstrom, 2003). The School Development Program (SDP) initiated by Yale University’s James Comer (2005) engages in extensive research and methods designed to improve the academic achievement of minority students, particularly those from families with low economic statuses.
Minority groups, particularly African Americans, have always struggled to acquire a quality education. Centuries following the extinction of legal sanctions against their attempts to gain literacy, African American students are four years behind mainstream students by the time they get to the twelfth grade (Thermstrom & Thermstrom, 2003). When they graduate from the twelfth grade and enter college, another type of gap persists, and that is the gap in the number of African Americans completing college programs within a specified amount of time at HBCUs (Thermstrom & Thermstrom, 2003).

As a response to the absence of opportunities for African Americans to obtain a higher education during segregation, HBCUs were formed. In 1854, the first chartered institution of higher education for African Americans, Lincoln University in Pennsylvania (originally called Ashmum), was established to prepare African American missionaries who would go to Africa (Hine, Hine, & Harrold, 2008). Two years later, in 1856, Wilberforce University was chartered by the Methodist Episcopal Church in Ohio (Richardson & Harris, 2004). In 1866, Lincoln University in Missouri was established by African American enlisted men and officers of the 62nd and 65th Colored Volunteers (Hine, Hine, & Harrold, 2008).

Currently, there are 53 private and 50 public HBCUs in the United States. While African American students’ enrollment in other universities has increased, 40% in the last decade, HBCU’s relative share of the total African American enrollment in higher educational institutions declined from 18.8% in 1980 to 13.7% in 1998. Black students’ enrollment in other institutions of higher education, as a percentage of the total Black enrollment in the U.S. rose from 80.82% in 1980 to 86.3% in 1998. (Sissoko & Shiau, 2005, p. 182)

Approximately 39% of all African Americans earn a degree at a four-year college within six years. Among the numbers of students who transfer or take more than six years to graduate, the rate is not that much higher. At HBCUs, the graduation rate is lower than the national average.
For example, at the university where this research study took place, the graduation rate was 23% in 1996, 2003, and 2005, (New Data on Graduation Rates, 2004). The 2009 graduation rate at Alabama State University improved to 29%; at many HBCUs, only 30 to 40% of all entering African American students go on to earn a college degree (Miners, 2010).

Not all HBCUs have low graduation rates, however. Spelman College has a graduation rate of 76%, a rate that is higher than the African American student graduation rate at 16 of the nation’s 54 high-ranking predominantly white colleges and universities with higher graduation rates, more resources, etc. (New Data on Graduation Rates, 2004). At Ivy League schools, the African American graduation rate is similar to the graduation rate of White students. Harvard, Princeton, and Brown are examples. New Hampshire has the largest African American graduation rate in the United States. A little more than 70% of African American students who enter New Hampshire go on to earn a degree within six years. “Four other New England states also have black student graduation rates that are above 50%. No other state in the union has a black student college graduation rate of 50% or more (African American College Graduation Rates, 2002, p. 96). In fact, all of the five states that have a graduation rate of 50% or more are in New England. The universities with the largest gap in black-white graduation rate are Trinity College, the University of Michigan, and Bates College. The state university with the highest black student graduation rate is the University of Virginia with a rate of 86%. In seven other states, the black graduation at flagship state universities is 60% or higher: Pennsylvania, North Carolina, California, Delaware, Michigan, New Hampshire, and Rutgers University in New Jersey. In southern states, South Carolina State University, compared to other southern states, have a relatively high black student graduation rate of 47%. The state of South Carolina has a black student graduation rate of 47.9% (African American College Graduation Rates, 2002).
An examination of the low graduation rate of African American students at HBCUs is needed to guide reform efforts that increase academic achievement. Low graduation rates can be attributed to several factors including the low-income of the families and the low endowments of HBCUs that are unable to provide sufficient financial aid packages for upperclassmen to remain in school. This circumstance appears to be a major cause of the low graduation rate at HBCUs (African American College Graduation Rates, 2002, p. 95). The percentage of freshmen at Black colleges with incomes below $25,000 is three times the number of students at colleges generally with low incomes. Thus, “the black colleges, which have far less in financial resources than predominantly White institutions, are increasingly accepting and educating those students who are less able to pay” (A Statistical Portrait of Freshmen at Black Colleges, 2009, p. 1).

One of the most important reasons for the low graduation rate is the academic preparation: “This is made worse by the fact that flagship universities in the southern states often tend to shuttle the lowest-performing black students into the state controlled black colleges in their state” (African American College Graduation Rates, 2002, p. 95). Many young blacks are entering college lacking qualifications, determination, and study skills (“African American Graduation Rates,” 2002). A high graduation rate may indicate institutional success, but a lower graduation rate may indicate a “university’s willingness to take a chance on academically dedicated young black students with substandard academic credentials” (African American College Graduation Rates, 2002,” p. 92).

Despite problems with retention and graduation rates, issues that most universities face to some extent, HBCUs serve major purposes. Graduates of HBCUs are more likely to pursue master’s and doctoral degrees than African American students attending Traditionally White Institutions (TWIs), so the presence of HBCUs is important. After feeling isolated in
predominantly White schools, “many Black students accepted by selective TWIs chose HBCUs” (Richardson & Harris, 2004, p. 374). HBCUs provide inclusive, culturally sensitive higher education.

Academic Tracking

In 1917, Thomas Jesse Jones, under the direction of the U.S Bureau of Education, gathered data concerning the education of African Americans. A social worker, Jones suggested a vocational and menial labor type of education for African Americans and criticized black educators who wanted pre-collegiate education for them. He argued for a different kind of education for African American children. Since most schools during this time were racially segregated and the education of minorities was neglected, Jones did not want to antagonize the white South or philanthropists, but he “accepted racial segregation and emphasized the need for more funding, better collaboration between the races, and a different kind of instruction and curriculum in black schools” (Ravitch, 2000/2001, p. 99). Today, instead of segregation of schools, there appears to be segregation within schools where the majority of African American students are educated in classrooms that value mechanical activities and memorization of meaningless, disconnected facts, characteristic of lower tracked classes. Tracking itself is not the main reason students encounter difficulty in college. Rather, it is the way tracking is practiced. Teachers of standard tracked classes can still provide students with challenging learning activities, but many do not because of their underestimation of the students’ ability and because of other assumptions teachers have of students in standard tracks.

Grouping practices lead to the reinforcement of powerful stereotypes. Such stereotypes are so powerful and pervasive that they paint incomplete and inaccurate pictures of ethnicity groups. For instance, the overestimation of the Asian students’ ability stems from their
overrepresentation in the honors courses and their high ranking in their class (Noguera, 2003). In many schools, a disproportionate number of minority students make up remedial classes. What is worse is that recent efforts to de-track classes have been stalled because of the students’ desire to remain in an environment which provides them comfort and familiarity. They have become so accustomed to being in certain tracks mainly because they develop particular perceptions about their learning based on the academic track in which they are placed. Minority students are not the only ones hindered by tracking. White students are adversely affected by tracking in that they will not seek academic assistance if they view such centers as places that serve mostly minority students (Noguera, 2003). Too often, educators assume that African American students’ selection of certain individuals with whom to socialize and certain classes to take is an indication that they are anti-intellectual. However, Noguera (2003) observed that “the vast majority of Black students I meet express a strong desire to do well in school. To the degree that such an orientation develops, it develops in school and from their seeing these patterns and racial hierarchies as permanent” (p. 27).

Some evidence shows that tracking has an adverse effect on self-esteem as students in low tracked classes doubt their ability to compete in high-tracked classes; spaces that students occupy in tracked classes influence their aspirations and identity formation (Yonezawa, Wells, & Serna, 2002). In addition, academic tracks and vocational tracks are organized around positions of status and influence. Luttrell and Parker noted that not all course work or school activities yield the same prestige and power to those who engage in them. Nor are students from different figured worlds (academic vs. vocational) expected to be a part of the same social group, to be treated by teachers the same way, or to be held in the same esteem by their classmates. (2001, p. 239).
Luttrell and Parker (2001) noted that “the English classroom is the focal centre of formal school literacy, and it is where students are exposed to literacy practices that are supposed to orient them to their place in society. In a regular English class, there was no room for student interpretation of literature. Rather, the teacher explained the key points they would need to know in order to answer the follow-up questions in the textbook” (p. 240). Noguera (2003) agreed, claiming the following:

The sorting practices that go on in schools also send important messages to students about the meaning of racial categories. For example, in many schools students in remedial classes are disproportionately Black and Brown, and students often draw conclusions about the relationship between race and academic ability based on these patterns….The racial separation we see in schools might also be considered an element of the ‘hidden curriculum,’ an unspoken (unwritten) set of rules teaches certain students what they can and cannot do because of who they are (p. 26).

Students’ placement in a particular track shapes their prestige, status, and power. Students in high tracks describe the school as a stimulating environment and they have easier access to and participation in school culture. When teachers equate students’ positions (low track) with students’ dispositions (unmotivated), they underestimate students’ abilities. When students take on others’ views of them, they take up dispositions that lead to a lack of confidence in their abilities.

Discourse/Language Patterns

Discourse refers to communication styles, behavioral styles, and learning styles – styles that vary and influence the students’ success in attaining literacy (Ford & Harris, 1996). Literacy encompasses much more than reading and writing. According to Gee (2005), literacy is the ability to engage in particular discourses. The language pattern that a person learns as he interacts with his family is a primary discourse while the pattern that is common in schools, businesses, etc. is known as a secondary discourse (Standard English). Acquiring the secondary
discourse leads to opportunities for social goods such as careers, education, and income; thus, this discourse is considered dominant (Delpit, 1995; Gee, 2005). Discourses are a combination of words, acts, beliefs, attitudes, social identities, gestures, body positions, and clothes. The language pattern of many middle-class homes reflects the pattern used in schools and business. The primary discourse of many African American students differs from the discourse prevalent in schools, making using Standard English proficiently more different for some African American students. One of the reasons marginalized groups experience difficulty performing well in traditional classroom settings is that their primary discourse is different from the secondary discourse. On the other hand, mainstream students have been immersed in the language patterns of the school and have practiced using the style longer. Thus, mainstream students appear to be quicker studies (Gee, 2005).

When members of marginalized groups succeed in navigating mainstream culture by gaining access to secondary discourses, they learn to code switch (alternate between one or more dialects) as they participate in activities in which their primary discourse is valued and in activities in which a secondary discourse is preferred (Delpit, 1995; Gee, 2005). The forms of expressions used depend on whom we are speaking to and where we are speaking to him or her. The difficulty arises when students cannot or will not alternate skillfully between dialects because they fear doing so negates their identity.

African Americans’ unique relationship with Standard English affects their language acquisition. Brown (2002) and Delpit (1995) asserted that when African Americans display characteristics that are different from those of mainstream culture, dominant groups label these qualities as inferior. At the same time, dominant groups erect barriers that exclude African Americans from the advantages of Western culture. In order to deal with this contradiction,
African Americans engage in African American English. African American English connects the orator to the experiences that he/she shares with the listeners, and it purposefully subverts standardized language and culture. The relatively low graduation rate of African American students at historically Black colleges may be linked to their tendency to use their primary discourse rather than Standard English in their writing. Middle-class African American adults realize the importance of learning a secondary discourse, but they also purposefully engage in African American English in order to convey messages and to identify with a particular culture. In other words, “there is a time and place for everything,” including particular language patterns. According to Delpit (1995), there is a difference between what one does with language and what one is capable of doing. Some minority students choose to identify with their community rather than the school. When educators are unaware of the students’ attempts to identify with their culture, they fail to appreciate linguistic diversity in the classroom. Not recognizing language variations in the classroom leads to an underestimation of the students’ academic abilities and poor academic performance.

In the 1979 Ann Arbor, Michigan, case, the courts ruled that teachers’ language attitudes were significant impediments to children’s learning. As noted before, those who speak African American English are often perceived as slow learners or uneducable. The language barriers that teachers erect as a result of their unconscious attitudes toward students who communicate using AAE (African American English) result in students’ reluctance to identify with school. The outcome of the case was that the school district was held responsible for failing to adequately prepare the teachers to teach AAE speakers.

The position of the adults who skillfully and purposely incorporate an African American dialect in their speech and writing is different from that of the students who cling to their primary
discourse. Thus, decision makers must develop ways to give students the kind of empowerment that adults possess when they skillfully and purposefully engage in Standard English and African American English.

If students and teachers do not understand each other, students may withdraw from classroom involvement and act as observers, thereby rejecting the identity of serious students. Delpit (1995) and Heath (1983) argued that as a result of the differences between the students’ language patterns and the patterns valued in the classroom, oftentimes teachers view the students as incapable and the students view the teachers as uncaring. When teachers do not understand the conflict that some students encounter while trying to maintain their own culture and succeed in another culture with which they have limited experience, misunderstandings between teachers and students occur. Instead of telling students what is wrong with their primary discourse, looking at what is right with students’ language pattern and using that knowledge to help students to acquire Standard English can facilitate teaching and learning. Examining how the students learn language at home and in the community is important, for identity is enacted through language (Delpit, 1995). Acknowledging the power dynamics of language helps teachers to recognize the language pattern their students bring to the classroom. Students’ writing and speech are a response to their identity, and dismissing the students’ writing could be viewed as an attack on their culture (Delpit, 1995; Heath, 1983).

The effects of the home and the community on language acquisition are important to learning. In her ethnographic study of students in the Piedmont Carolinas, Heath (1983) pointed out characteristics of language learning among African American children: storytelling among African American students is more creative and less formulaic to allow for cultural rituals such as playing the dozens; time and space for reading is not specified among African American
students; African American parents do not expect pre-scripted answers from their children; etc. In his study of the interviews of upper middle-class and working class students, Gee (2005) noticed that while upper middle-class teens often state viewpoints and make arguments in relatively impersonal ways, working class students narrate more and in a personal way. Middle and upper middle-class students learn about discourses in an environment that is closely patterned after the environment of the classroom. Instead of declaring the other students’ ways as inferior, educators must consider how the experiences of both groups of students influence their speaking and writing patterns. Then, writing skills at all educational levels would improve.

College-Level Writing

Literary composition theorist David Bartholomae (1985) asserted that the purpose of college English is to facilitate students’ learning of the academic discourse. Thus, a primary task of the writing instructor is to “‘pry loose’ the student from the discourse community to which he or she had belonged prior to entering the university” (p. 162). Bartholomae favors a memetic relationship between student and teacher.

According to Patricia Bizzell (1990), another composition theorist, when students enter college, it soon becomes obvious that some of them are already comfortable with academic discourse; on the other hand, other students seem quite unfamiliar with academic discourse and resistant to learning it. She focused on beliefs that Americans should share a national public discourse. Both Bartholomae and Bizzell were influenced by the late composition theorist Mina Shaughnessy, who advocated including marginalized and disenfranchised groups in the quest for navigating academic discourse. A review of the history of teaching composition as it relates to one of the leading figures in the field of basic writing is important here.
Mina Shaughnessy, at one time the leading figure in the field of basic writing and a devoted advocate of Open Admissions (Levels) College, argued that the students that we call remedial have the capability to become competent writers, and they do so. She argued that basing college admissions solely on high school grades and national tests was elitist and that all high school graduates should pursue postsecondary education. Shaughnessy used the term “Basic Writers” or “New Students” to refer to students who needed remediation and whose poor academic achievement could be attributed to their neglect and being betrayed by the educational system (Mcalexander, 2000). Writing was seen as a way of salvaging, especially in the case of underprepared students. English teachers are scholars in a democracy. Shaughnessy and her supporters pulled together anthologies of African American and White writers, recognizing the importance of such literature. She was not abandoning the traditional canon; rather, she attempted to bring the canon to her students while still respecting the dialect of the students. One of her poems (Maher, 1997) reflects this concern:

The blue books are passed out. Then the exam. questions. And the scribbling begins: the skin stretches white over the knuckles, eyes lookout occasionally from pathetic isolation. Could…there be writing about the pilgrims of Canterbury with such stern faces? Could King Lear ever arouse such dispassionate busyness? No – surely this has nothing to do with Lear.

Shaughnessy sought to encourage professors to make more than a graceless and begrudging accommodation to the students’ unpreparedness (Maher, 1997)

In the seminal text Errors and Expectations, Shaughnessy (1977) examined writing problems the underprepared college freshmen encounter. She analyzed 4,000 placement essays that incoming freshmen at City College in New York wrote in order to grasp an understanding of the logic of errors students make in composition. Shaughnessy posited that there is a pattern to
student error. The following are approaches examined in various chapters of her book: Chapter 2 discusses handwriting and the ways basic writers use and misuse punctuation. To get an understanding behind the errors (commas, periods, capitalization), Shaughnessy explored the concept of the sentence and the differences between spoken and written English. In Chapter 4, she presented examples in areas of verbs, nouns, pronouns, and subject-verb agreement before discussing the discouragement teachers and students encounter. Along with offering simple suggestions, she provides a thorough diagnostic test. Chapter 6 focuses on the vocabulary of entering college students. Shaughnessy compared the writing of basic, intermediate, and advanced writers to discuss their vocabulary skills and the depth of ideas investigated through vocabulary. In Chapter 7, Shaughnessy pointed out that teachers complain that basic writing students lack ideas. She argued that their ideas are hidden by their novice skills and attempts at elaboration. She suggested teaching students how to see and create structure in writing and how to recognize specific patterns that link together sentences and paragraphs. Shaughnessy’s critics argued that the focused too much on mechanical skills and correctness – surface features – rather than meaning of student writing (Barthomae, 1985).

Today, composition teachers vary in their beliefs in the approaches to facilitating the academic growth of college students. One particular organization, ACT, Inc. (American College Test) conducts a nationwide survey of secondary level teachers and instructors of typical first-year college courses every three to four years. ACT, Inc. pointed out the variations in the priorities of high school teachers and those of college instructors. Based on the surveys, Patterson & Duer (2006) found that there must be a greater understanding between high school teachers and college instructors in terms of what writing and reading skills each group considers important. The surveys also revealed that “a good starting point for discussion would be the
place of grammar and usage in high school instructor’s expectations for incoming students (p. 86).

Lavelle and Zuecher’s (2001) goal in their study of writing approaches of university students was to investigate students’ experiences of writing as reflected in personal interviews and as related to their writing approaches as measure by IPIC (Inventory of Processes in College Composition). Part of the study examined students’ views of writing through three surface scales approaches: Low Self-Efficacy, Procedural, and Spontaneous Impulsive. Based on comments during interviews, students with the Low Self-Efficacy approach revealed a dislike and general fear and avoidance of writing situations. These writers write when they have to. Writers scoring high on the Procedural approach reported their emphasis on organization and a concern for how much time writing tasks take. Students scoring high on the Spontaneous Impulsive Scale reported a “get it all out and be done strategy.” Some students admit that they have no writing preference, and if there is a process it is unorganized. Writing rolls off the top of their heads and they then reorder. Others comment that they just sit down with no planning and organize a bit after. None of the writers who made high scores reported emphasizing revision, understanding their own process or a need for self-expression.

Teaching strategies aimed at improving academics in composition also involves composition instructors’ moralistic stance. Fish (2008) posited that despite how laudable the goals of professors who take a moralistic and political stance as part of their duty, the one proper role for academe in society is to advance bodies of knowledge and to prepare students to do the same. Educators serving as agents of social change, political activists, and moralists neglect their duty. Although Fish’s view has been dismissed by the composition establishment, Fish (2009) maintained that unless writing courses focus solely on writing, they are a disservice to the
students. Fish added that out of 104 English sections of college English courses (lesson plans) only 4 emphasized teaching in the craft of writing. Rather than focusing instruction on instruction in composition, the students spent a large amount of time discussing novels, movies and essays on a number of controversial issues such as racism, sexism, immigration, etc. In order to classify as a composition course, the course must focus on grammar, style, clarity, and argument.

Teacher Feedback

Feedback is a major influence on learning and achievement, but the type of feedback can be effective in different ways. Hattie and Timperley (2007) define feedback as information provided by a teacher, peer, book, parent, self, and experience, and this information regards aspects of one’s performance or understanding. A teacher or parent can provide encouragement, and a learner can look up the answer to evaluate the correctness of a response. Feedback, thus, is a ‘consequence’ of performance. Rather than informing the student only about correctness, feedback should provide information specifically relating to the process of learning that fills a gap between what is understood and what is aimed to be understood. The gap may come in the form of indicating that more information is available or needed, pointing to directions students could pursue, and offering alternative strategies to understand particular information.

Increase in effort is more likely when the belief in eventual success is high. Subsequently, students may develop effective error detection skills, which lead to their own self-feedback aimed at reaching a goal. Additionally, students can seek better strategies to complete the task or be taught them. Teachers can help in reducing the gap between actual performance and desired goal attainment. Teachers can create a learning environment in which students develop self-regulation and error detection skills. Goals are more effective when students share a commitment
to attaining them, because they are more likely to seek and receive feedback. Developing a shared commitment to academic goals needs to be nurtured and built. Feedback is effective when it consists of information about progress and about how to proceed.

Four major levels of feedback exist. First, feedback can be about a task or product, such as whether a task/assignment is correct or incorrect. Second, feedback can be aimed at the process used to create a product or complete a task. For instance, a teacher or peer may say to a learner, “You need to edit this piece of writing by attending to the descriptors you have used so the reader is able to understand the nuances of your meaning” (Hattie & Timperly, 2007). Third, feedback to students can be focused at the self-regulation level, including greater skill in self-evaluation or confidence to engage further on a task. For example, “You already know the key features of the opening to an argument. Check to see whether you have incorporated them in your first paragraph.” Such feedback has major influences on self-efficacy, self-regulatory proficiencies, and self beliefs about students as learners (Hattie & Timperly, 2007).

Summary

Failing to consider the voices of students could have serious consequences. Examining their high school experiences in English classes could lead to improved performance in college classes. If tracking is practiced in a way that denies students meaningful and useful learning opportunities, then the graduation rate at HBCUs will remain low. An improvement in academic achievement could then lead to better retention and graduation rates.
CHAPTER III:

METHODS

Research is “a process of systematic inquiry that is designed to collect, analyze, interpret, and use data to understand, describe, predict, or control an educational or psychological phenomenon” (Mertens, 1998, p.2). In his or her quest to collect, analyze, interpret, and understand data, the researcher must make sense of a phenomenon, which depends on the researchers’ view of the world (Hatch, 2002; Mertens, 1988). These world views or belief systems (i.e., paradigms) guide researchers (Tashakkor & Teddlie, 1998) in their quest to collect data that will answer research questions. This study, informed by Jeannie Oakes’ research (1992, 1995, 2005) pertaining to educational inequality perpetuated by academic tracking and by Albert Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy (1995), sought to answer the following questions:

Main Question: How do HBCU students’ perceptions of their ability to do college level work differ from their actual performance in a freshman English class? The subquestions included the following:

1. What are the students’ perceptions of their ability to do work in a freshman composition class;
2. How has prior academic track placement in grades 9 through 12 influenced the students’ ability to do work in a freshman composition class; and
3. What are the students’ actual performances in a freshman composition class?

In the following sections, I begin presenting the methods I used to answer the research questions. I cover the rationale for using mixed methods and the steps and the specific procedures that I
took in order to collect and analyze data in order to answer the research questions. I follow this with a description of the participants and a statement regarding my subjectivity as a researcher.

**Mixed Methods**

Mixed method research involves using one method (e.g., quantitative) in one phase of research and another method (qualitative) in another phase (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Brewer and Hunter (1989) noted that “major areas of research in the social and behavioral sciences now use multiple methods as a matter of course” (p. 5). In many fields, “most researchers now use whatever method is appropriate for their studies, instead of relying on one method exclusively” (Tashakkur & Teddlie, 1998, p. 6). Datta (1994) cited convincing, practical reasons for the two methodologies: the longevity of both paradigms, the large number of researchers urging the usage of both paradigms, funding from agencies that support both paradigms, policy that both paradigms have influenced, and the lessons taught by both paradigms. The similarities in fundamental values of quantitative research and qualitative research are adequate for there to be a partnership between the two. Further, quantitative and qualitative methods are both interested in understanding and improving the human condition, in communicating results to influence decisions, and in the proposition that the world is complex and often difficult to understand.

If a researcher is willing to engage in mixed research, he/she takes a pragmatic rather than a dogmatic position toward his/her research, and he/she is open to collecting both quantitative and qualitative data to help answer research questions (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). The researcher must determine the rationale for using a mixed design. Upon deciding to use mixed methods, the researcher must consider triangulation, complementarity, development, initiation, and expansion. Triangulation is the corroboration of the results after using different
methods. Complementarity occurs when one method elaborates on or enhances the other method, and it increases the credibility of research findings. Development means that results from one method helps to inform the other method. Initiation refers to contradictions discovered through the usage of mixed methods. Expansion means that the researcher uses mixed methods to expand the breadth and range of the inquiry (e.g., one method might be used to show how something works while the other is used to study outcomes) (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

Mixed methodology involves using one method in one phase followed by another method in the second phase. In the present study, the quantitative method (questionnaire) took place in the first phase, and the qualitative method (interviews and artifacts) follows in the second phase. In this study of students’ perceptions of their preparation for college English, a questionnaire and follow-up interviews are complementary, and one helped to inform the other. The questionnaire provided information about the students’ perceptions of their ability to do work in a college composition class. Subsequently, interviews provided more in-depth information about the students’ perceptions. This step was taken in order to determine if there were any contradictions in data gathered within the methods and to determine if the questionnaire data said one thing about the students’ beliefs while the interviews and unobtrusive data revealed something else.

This study is similar to one conducted by Thompson (2002) to examine students’ perceptions of their elementary, middle, and high school experiences. In her study of 271 African American high school seniors in Southern California, Thompson (2002) noted the importance of listening to the stories of students. The first phase of data collection consisted of a questionnaire. Although Thompson collected questionnaires from 1,983 high school seniors in one school district during the 1999-2000 school year; her study focused solely on 271 African American students. The questionnaire consisted of 59 questions and a space for additional comments. The
second phase of data collection consisted of follow-up interviews. Sixteen females and 12 males from four schools participated in the interview phase. The first set of data in the present study was also based on a questionnaire; the second set of data was based on interviews and artifacts (students’ writing assignments). I hoped to collect questionnaires from approximately 100 students in freshman composition classes at an HBCU, and I wanted to interview ten students.

The following depicts the freshman composition (English 131) at the University:

**Course Description**

English 131 emphasizes clear, adequate, and logical expression of thought within the sentence, the paragraph, and the essay. This course will help develop techniques for understanding and interpreting essays, articles, short stories, novels, plays, poems, biographies, and/or autobiographies. It further focuses on the effective use of various patterns of organizing and developing written communication. English 131 will assist in refining and strengthening these skills and will provide instruction and practice in writing essays modeled on readings from the textbook and other sources. The emphasis on reading in conjunction with writing is designed to stimulate critical thinking and improve both reading and writing skills.

**Prerequisite**

Students enrolled in English 131 are expected to have mastered the fundamentals of writing well-structured, error-free Standard English sentences and the basics of constructing unified, coherent paragraphs. If students have not mastered these skills, they may be advised to enroll in English 129 and/or English 130.

**Phase One of the Study**

Quantitative research involves collecting numerical data to explain a particular phenomenon. The study includes quantitative data on students’ perceptions through a 37-item questionnaire. In developing a questionnaire, a consideration of my research questions was crucial. Before drafting the questionnaire, I considered the kinds of questionnaire items Thompson (2002) included in her study of high school seniors. Like Thompson, I was striving to examine students’ perceptions of their learning experiences. Research about the specific learning
experiences of students at HBCUs is scarce, so I used my professional experiences with the types of students making up the population of my study to construct questionnaire items.

The first section of the questionnaire asked students to provide information about how students felt about their 9–12 grade experiences in English classes and their preparation for college. Participants chose from the following responses on the questionnaire: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. These questions were designed to answer Sub Question 1: What are the students’ perceptions of their ability to do college work in a freshman composition class?

The second section of the questionnaire asked students to provide information about their experiences in certain academic tracks. These questions provided responses to Sub Question 2: How has prior academic track placement in grades 9 through 12 influenced the students’ ability to do work in a freshman composition class? The third section asked students to provide information about their experiences in college English. These questions were designed to answer Sub Question 3: What is the students’ actual performance in a freshman composition class? The final section of the questionnaire is contained a demographic section. I needed to know the gender of the students, their age (for informed consent/assent purposes), and the students’ willingness to participate in the interview stage of the study to make sure that the study includes a representative group of students.

The questionnaire was on a scantron form, and the questionnaire was in the form of a Likert Scale. Research participants were directed to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with statements by shading the choice most closely matched their feelings: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. In the reporting of the results, those students who marked strongly agree and those who marked agree were combined. Likewise, the
students who marked strongly disagree and those who marked disagree were combined. In analyzing participants’ survey responses I employed descriptive statistics in the form of numbers (means) and percentages. Because of the small sample size, which is not generalizable to the larger population, this type of statistical analysis is appropriate.

**Phase Two of the Study**

In my quest to obtain an understanding of the experiences of college students’ experiences in their high school English classes from their own views and in their own words, incorporating a qualitative approach was important. The main qualitative data sources of this study include notes from and transcripts of interviews with participants and artifacts.

This study utilized the standardized open-ended interview. In this approach, the researcher enters the interview with a standardized interview protocol that includes open-ended questions. The difference between the standardized open-ended interview and other approaches is that the researcher using the standardized open-ended interview does not vary from the interview protocol; the questions are all written out, and the interviewer reads the questions exactly as written and in the same order to all interviewees.

The goal was to obtain detailed information about the participants’ thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations, and feelings about their past and present experiences and beliefs (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). It was also important when examining students from different academic tracks to understand their experiences (preparation) and how comparable those experiences are. Asking all interviewees the same questions in the same order helped me to identify themes and make comparisons. The following is a list of some of the questions:

1. How would you describe the difficulty of the work you completed in your high school English class;
2. What would you say was your weakest area in English in high school;

3. Explain why you think that your high school English classes did or did not prepare you for college English;

4. What kinds of activities did the high school teachers use to teach you about providing support and details for essays and paragraphs;

5. What did your high school English teachers say or do to prepare you for college?

6. What was your weakest academic area in your college English class? What were you having more trouble with? Explain your answer;

7. Did your college instructor teach you how to provide support in essays and paragraphs? If so, what kinds of activities did you complete;

8. Was your college English class what you expected it to be? Explain how you thought it would be. Explain how it actually was;

9. Did your college English teacher mark your papers for errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain what he/she marked the most; and

10. Who chose the academic track that you were in during high school? How did the track that you were in help you to understand college English?

In order to gain further insight into the lives of the participants, a review of students’ written assignments (tests, paragraphs, essays, quizzes, etc.) was also necessary. Unfortunately, all of the instructors did not give the students a preliminary writing activity, and all instructors did not assign essays in the same order. I examined different types of essays written by different students. That is, I may have used data from some participants’ comparison/contrast essays and illustration and final exams from others. Still, I was able to examine the essays in order to get an
idea of the students’ writing ability. Other assignments that served as artifacts include several essays and homework assignments.

Validity

In measuring a concept such as students’ perceptions or attitudes, validity must be considered. Validity concerns whether the researcher is measuring what he/she sets out to measure. Some concepts such as perceptions, attitudes, and self-concept are not that simple to measure. These concepts are called latent variables because they cannot be directly measured; thus, the construction of a questionnaire that measures these concepts indirectly is required.

Three elements of validity are pertinent to this study: content validity, construct validity, and face validity. Content validity means that the items on the questionnaire measure the latent concept (e.g., perceptions, attitudes, etc.) that the researcher is attempting to measure. Construct validity refers to how well the instrument operationalizes the concept to be measured and then whether it actually measures what the researcher purports to measure. Face validity is also important, for it concerns whether respondents believe that the instrument looks valid to them. Experts in the field may provide information concerning the validity of the instrument.

Discovering students’ perceptions on the questionnaire required including items that elicited some idea of the students’ feelings. Number 1 on the questionnaire on the questionnaire is an example: *I believe that my high school English classes have prepared me to make a passing grade in college.* The response to this item gave me information about how the students felt about their high school’s preparation of them for college. In order to obtain information about how, in what ways, the students believed that they were prepared for college, I included certain items on the questionnaire: (item 2: *I understood most of the rules of grammar and mechanics as I learned them in high school,* item 4: *I understood how to write essays with good content*
I understood most of the corrections/suggestions that my English teachers made on my assignments).

The students’ responses to the previous items help to operationalize the students’ perceptions by helping to pinpoint how the students could demonstrate their ability to pass a freshman composition course. Without knowing how to provide details and examples, proofread for errors in grammar and mechanics, and improve upon papers after looking over those that had been marked and graded, the student is hardly ready for college English.

Just as it is important in quantitative research, validity is essential in qualitative research. Types of validity in qualitative research are descriptive validity, interpretive validity, and theoretical validity. Descriptive validity refers to making sure that what was reported as taking place actually happened and that the researcher accurately reported what he/she saw and heard. The researcher must be accurate in reporting information, for accuracy in reporting is a major objective in qualitative research. (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Interpretive validity refers to the accurate portrayal and understanding of participants’ viewpoints, thoughts, feelings, intentions, and experiences. In order for interpretive validity to take place, the researcher must “get inside the heads of the participants; look through the participants’ eyes, and see and feel what they see and feel” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 251). Theoretical validity means that the explanation derived from the study fits the data and is credible and defensible. Theoretical validity moves from facts to explanation of a phenomenon (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

Interviews were also used as data. The interviews used in the study helped to clarify the students’ responses to the questionnaire items. Some questionnaire items specifically helped to explain the students’ responses. For example, item 8 on the questionnaire is an example: My writing assignments were marked, graded, and returned to me. Out of 104 students who
completed the questionnaire, the large percentage (87.5%) of students who marked agree gave the impression that in high school, most students’ writing assignments were marked with specific errors on them rather than just circles or checks by the errors. Interviewees provided clarification of what they meant by marking and grading.

Triangulation

Triangulation involves providing alternative perspectives on the phenomenon being studied through the usage of various data collecting methods. Learning about the students’ perceptions about their placement in a particular track requires more than taking notes during direct observation. It involves a comparison of different types of data collection methods such as surveys, observations, interviewing, and unobtrusive data (e.g., documents, students’ papers, personal communications, etc.) in an effort to attain reliability (Hatch, 2002). The data used to answer the research questions in this study included a questionnaire, interviews, and artifacts.

For example, the students’ papers were used as data to help determine the students’ actual performance. The students’ essays provided evidence of the students’ understanding of grammar and mechanics, the students’ ability to provide adequate details and examples to support a thesis, etc. Even if a student reported that he/she understood grammar and mechanics, his/her actual writing activities provided proof.

Context and Participants

The participants in my study included students in several freshman composition classes at a Southeastern HBCU during the summer 2010 semester. Eight English 131 classes were offered during the semester, and 18 students were enrolled in each section for a total of 160 students. One of the English 131 sections was mine. Prior to the start of the summer semester, I obtained permission from the faculty of those classes and received their approval. My intent was to
complete Stage 1 of the research study during week six of the summer semester. Instead, I administered questionnaires during the last week of the summer.

Stage 1 involved the students’ completion of the questionnaire that would help to answer the research questions and to identify prospective interviewees. Completing the questionnaire first, students could provide information about their experiences in high school English classes, their experiences in a particular track, and their experiences in their college English class. The following is an item on the questionnaire: *I understood most of the corrections/suggestions that my English teachers made on my assignments.* The response to this question gave me an idea about the knowledge students were bringing to college. An interview with a student would provide more detailed information about the kinds of corrections/suggestions high school English teachers marked on his or her paper and whether the student’s performance on college English papers actually demonstrated his or her understanding of corrections/suggestions on assignments. Thus, the follow-up interview in Stage II would help to add to and further explain the questionnaire item, and in some cases, clear up misunderstandings. These three sets of data (the questionnaire, the interview, and the student’s writing) could be compared. Administering the questionnaires during the last week of the semester was an appropriate time for students to be able to respond to questionnaire items. Taking the questionnaire too early in the semester would not allow students to answer some of the questionnaire and interview items. The following interview item is an example of this rationale: *Was your grade on essays and paragraphs lowered because of errors in grammar and mechanics? Explain the kinds of error you made.*

While 138 students were listed on the English 131 rolls by the time I administered the questionnaire, 74% (n=104) completed the questionnaire. According to Babbie (1990) “a
response rate of at least 50% is considered adequate for analysis and reporting . . . and a response rate of 70% or more is very good” (p. 182).

A total of 10 students participated in the interviews. The students indicated their willingness to participate in the interview phase on the questionnaire. The participants were selected based on the track that they were enrolled in at the high school level, their perceptions of their ability to pass a college freshman composition class, gender, and their actual performance in their English 131 class. I sought students who would represent the students at the University; each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was audiotaped. All interviews were later transcribed verbatim as word documents.

Prior to the interviews, participants had the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. After I transcribed and checked the interview for accuracy, I made any necessary corrections to produce a clean, corrected copy of the transcript. I created a title page that identifies the interviewer, the interviewee, the name of the study, and the date and time of the interview. Then, I filed the interviews for safekeeping. I also labeled the audiotapes. I provided the interviewees with the opportunity to read their interviews for accuracy. The interviews were analyzed using two methods. One was a qualitative data analysis software program called Atlas.ti; the other was a hand-coding process. Below I provide a description of the interviewees.

Amber is an African American freshman who attended a public high school in the city in which the University is located. She was enrolled in advanced classes at the 9th and 10th grade levels, but she took standard English classes in grades 11 and 12. I believe that Amber would have been challenged more if she had remained in advanced courses in the 11th and 12th grades because she mentioned more than once her being upset that too often teachers softened rules and
changed due dates for students. Her preparation for college is indicated in her having an “A” average in English 131. Amber’s serious demeanor is that of a student who knows how to be an active learner and to make the most of what her classes have to offer.

Veronica is a freshman who attended a public high school in the Southeast. She chose the pseudonym Veronica Clayton, a pop singer/writer. Veronica was enrolled in AP Honors English courses in grades 9 through 12. Her confidence level does not reflect her enrollment in honors English classes; she explained that the college instructor introduced her to many terms that she had not even heard of before. For instance, she indicated that she had not heard of comma splices or run-on sentences before college. Veronica appears to be determined to pinpoint her weaknesses and work on improving her writing, unlike some high school Honors students who refuse to accept the fact they must work on certain skills in order to be successful in a college English class. Veronica is also an athlete.

Maranda is a freshman who graduated from a public high school in the Southeast. Her hometown is approximately an hour and a half from the University where the study took place. She was enrolled in a standard “tech track.” Students in the tech track, as opposed to the “college track,” are expected to attend vocational school, and teachers conduct tech track classes as though they are certain that the students will not seek a postsecondary education. According to Maranda, students are placed in a particular track based on grades in middle school. Even after Maranda discussed the possibility of taking classes in an advanced track, she was advised to remain in the tech track. Her lack of confidence in her ability more than likely prevented her from making extra efforts to be placed in a higher track, especially since her goal is to become a medical doctor.
Truth is a freshman who attended a public high school in the state in which the University is located. She is from a major city that is three hours from the city where the study took place. She was enrolled in a standard English track. Truth, as her name might imply, is one who questions and rejects notions and ideas that others easily accept. She listens to others’ opinions, but she is rarely moved by views that are different from hers. The deceased rapper, Tupac Shakur, is one of her heroes as evidenced in the music coming from the headphone she wears. When she asked me what takes place in an office that is not near my office, I encouraged her to explore the University in order to discover more details about the University. Later, she told me that she took my advice and found the administrators in the office that she inquired about quite helpful in answering her questions. She appears to be a future leader, maybe starting as an SGA (Student Government Association) officer.

DeShawn is a sophomore who attended a public high school in the North. He was in a standard track in grades 9 through 12. At the University, DeShawn was placed in developmental courses, English 129 and English 130, before taking English 131 because of his score on the ACT. Quiet and respectful, DeShawn explained how English 129 and 130 provided no challenge, and he made A’s in both courses without much effort. Unlike some students, he was not disappointed by being placed in courses that do not count toward graduation and that lead to a longer stay at the University. He is a work-study student who is described by his supervisor as one of the best workers with whom he has worked.

D. J. is a first-semester sophomore who attended a public high school in the city where the University is located. He was enrolled in a standard track in high school, and he is confident in his ability to pass English 131. He reported that his 12th grade English teacher was the main teacher who marked and explained errors in grammar and mechanics. He appears to be
extremely responsible and mature as he admitted that he worried about not arriving at the interview in my office on time. D. J. was the first student that I interviewed for the first and the second follow-up interviews, and I hoped that others would provide the kind of information about their experiences as he provided. He is adamant about the possibility of college professors visiting high school to offer students more practical advice about surviving college life. From the few moments of my visits with D. J., I view him as the kind of student that reminds teachers of the reason that they entered the field of teaching.

Amanda is a freshman who graduated from a public high school in the city where the University is located. She was enrolled in standard English courses in high school. Amanda is an outspoken, opinionated, sometimes loud student who reminds me of some of the subjects in Signithia Fordham’s article “Those Loud Black Girls: (Black) Women, Silence, and Gender ‘Passing’ in the Academy.” She is confident in her ability to perform well in an English 131 class. She can be overconfident in her writing ability as evident in her seeming to be surprised by some of the errors her instructor marked in her papers. During the second interview, she noted that she had difficulty with grammar/mechanics in her high school English courses. I was surprised when Amanda told me that she was joining the military and asked her if she made her decision to join the military before enrolling in college. She said “no,” but she told me that she and her twin sister (also a student at the university that Amanda attends) prefer to be in different places/colleges. Amanda does not seem to be sure of her goals or desires. I can see how some teachers could misunderstand her and underestimate her ability based of her demeanor.

Kevin is from the Southwest where he attended a public high school. He was enrolled in advanced English in the 10th grade and a standard track in grades 11 and 12. He is the second interviewee who chose to enroll in a standard track in grades 11 and 12 after having been in
advanced tracks in earlier grades. Overconfident, but not cocky, it is evident that he could have decreased the number of errors in his papers if he had proofread more carefully. Kevin is a basketball player.

Linda graduated from a private international Baccalaureate high school in Holland. She is the only interviewee who attended a high school outside of the United States; her father is in the military. Linda is in the University ROTC program, and at each interview she appeared hurried and busy, but focused. I made a couple of appointments with her in an effort to meet with her for the first interview, and she had to cancel or she simply forgot to show up. Once she arrived at the first interview, she appeared excited. I made several attempts to encourage her to make the appointment for the second set of interview questions. She apologized constantly and sincerely, and I discovered later that, along with being in ROTC, she was serving as a student tutor in the University Writing Center. Approximately a week after calling and leaving messages for her second interview, I met her as we were both walking across campus to class. She agreed to meet me at a certain time on a particular day, and, thus, we were able to complete the second interview.

Calvin is a transfer student from the North. He withdrew from English classes at a 2-year college because he knew that he was not passing the courses. Calvin maintains that in grades 11 through 12, the English courses required students to complete crossword puzzles most of the time during class. He often makes statements about getting the most out of the money that he is spending to acquire a college education. He is interested in traveling and working with campus organizations that reach out to residents, especially young children, in the community where the University is located.
My experiences in the classroom as a teacher facilitated my decision concerning a dissertation topic. While teaching at the secondary level, I realized that a major difference between students in an advanced track and those in a standard track was their perceptions of their own ability. Students in advanced classes were told in direct and indirect ways that they were the chosen group whose members belonged to an elite and privileged class. On the other hand, students in standard classes were instilled with the belief that they were inferior. Even the students who were capable of succeeding in advanced classes harbored the idea that they were inferior learners. These feelings of inferiority follow the students to the collegiate level and influence the students’ success at the college level.

I teach freshman composition courses at the HBCU where this study was conducted and find that many of the students were enrolled in standard classes throughout grade school. Too many of them believed that they were not academically prepared, and this view became more evident when one of my students so adamantly declared, “You know the students in this class have learning problems.” Not one student in a class of approximately 20 expressed disagreement with this student. It was as though they all had learning identities of inadequacy. They were resigned to the idea that they did not acquire minimum skills in grade school and did not think that they could actively pursue learning, even at the college level. Records and informal questioning reveal that many of my students were enrolled in low level courses in grade school. Realizing how common this view was among college students made me even more interested in studying college students’ perceptions of their secondary level experiences. Experience at the secondary and postsecondary levels has influenced my perception of the learning that takes
place. Thus, objectivity and subjectivity must be considered as they are important in any research project.

Objectivity means that the researcher “becomes in a sense a guardian and a defender of the true nature of the object. He or she wants to show it, describe it, and interpret it while remaining faithful to it – aware that one is easily misled, sidetracked, or enchanted by extraneous elements” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 20). Subjectivity is equally important:

Subjectivity means that one needs to be as perceptive, insightful, and discerning as one can be in order to show or disclose the object in its full richness and in its greatest depth. Subjectivity means that we are strong in our orientation to the object of study, in a unique and personal way – while avoiding the danger of becoming arbitrary, self-indulgent, or getting captivated and carried away by our un-reflected preconceptions. (Van Manen, 1990, p. 20)

Showing, describing, and interpreting African American students’ preconceptions could be difficult in that I believe that the students that I taught at the secondary level had become accustomed to lower expectations in Standard English classes; the low expectations shaped their learner identities while the learning opportunities of students in advanced English classes increased their confidence in their learning abilities because of the nature of the environment of advanced classes.

Some students in my college classes have similar perceptions. If students are unprepared academically for college and do not have more confidence in their learning ability because of their perceptions, their chances of remaining in college are slim. The graduation rate at HBCUs is remarkably lower than it is at other universities (Miners, 2010). This subjectivity, my preconceived ideas about tracking and its effects on students, could have affected my efforts to describe and interpret what I observed.
Summary

Combining a quantitative method with a qualitative one helped to meet the goals of my research study. The first phase, quantitative, was influential in gathering information about the students’ perceptions of their high school experiences in particular academic tracks in high school English; this phase also provided formation about how their high school experiences prepared them for college. The second phase, qualitative, added more clarification to the questionnaire in that the interviews allowed me to grasp information retrieved from the questionnaires the students completed. The interviews helped to clear up misunderstandings and surprises about the aforementioned information. My initial belief was no doubt influenced by my experiences with college students who are the products of low tracked and advanced classes. Thus, as I moved from description to interpretation, I tried to be aware of the role my experiences would play in subjectivity in a qualitative study.
CHAPTER IV:

FINDINGS

This mixed methods study was divided into two main stages. In Stage I, I administered a questionnaire to students in English 131. In Stage II, I conducted interviews with students and examined unobtrusive artifacts (i.e., students’ assignments). One overarching question guided this study: How do HBCU students’ perceptions of their ability to do college level work differs from their actual performance in a freshman English class? Sub-questions related to this study include the following:

1. What are the students’ perceptions of their ability to do work in a freshman composition class;

2. How has prior academic track placement in grades 9 through 12 influenced the students’ ability to do work in a freshman composition class; and

3. What is the students’ actual performance in a freshman composition class?

Simply collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data are not enough. The sets of data need to be mixed in some way so that together they form a more complete picture of the problem that they do when standing alone (Creswell & Clark, 2007). In this mixed method study “a researcher collects data using a quantitative survey instrument and follows up with interviews with a few individuals who participated in the survey to learn more detail about their survey responses” (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 4).
Aldridge et al. (1999) and Myers and Oetzel (2003) both utilized mixed methods by connecting two sequential phases in which the second phase built off the first phase. Aldridge et al. (1999) identified key results from their quantitative data and used them to direct their qualitative phase. My research study’s phase was similar and key results arose. For instance, 80% of the students who completed the questionnaire reported that their high school English teachers marked, graded, and returned their essays to them. Initially, I was surprised by this result until the completion of the interviews. During the interviews, students revealed how their teachers in high school marked papers with circles or check marks around errors and a grade with little or no specification of the kind of error the students made. Thus, the questionnaire (quantitative data) and the questionnaire (qualitative data) were sequential and connected. In the sections that follow, I discuss the context of this study, the students’ perceptions of their ability to pass a freshman composition class, their actual performance in a freshman composition class, and the track they were enrolled during high school.

Contextual Issues

As stated earlier in Chapter Three, 74% of the students in English 131 completed the questionnaire – 104 out of 138. At the start of the semester, the average enrollment in each section was 18 students. However, according to the professors, by midterm only 13 or 14 students were attending class. I asked each instructor if the students had dropped the course officially, and their response was that they may have started with 19 or 20 students in their English 131 classes, but they ended up with 13 or 14 coming to class on a regular basis. Some of the students who stopped attending class did not drop the class officially. A common reason for not dropping the class officially is that students who receive financial aid must take a certain number of semester hours, and dropping a class could mean dropping below the minimum
number of hours and losing financial aid. This is common during the fall and spring semester, too, except the number of students who continue to attend class is a little higher.

I had intended to use the same type of essay written by each student; for example, I wanted to use each student’s preliminary writing activity, comparison/contrast essay, and illustration. Doing so was difficult because some instructors did not assign a preliminary writing activity, and a few students could not find some of their essays. Instead, I examined a variety of essay types: process, comparison/contrast, etc.

An initial discovery was that only 40% of the students who completed the questionnaire were freshmen, according to the number of semester hours that they had accumulated. This means that even though the students were enrolled in English 131, the first in a two-course series, they had accumulated enough semester hours to be considered sophomores. A couple of factors contribute to this. First, some of the students in English 131 had taken English 129 and/or English 130, which means an accumulation of more semester hours by the time they take English 131. English 129 is a developmental course designed to prepare incoming students for core courses such as English 131. Students are placed in developmental courses based on their ACT/SAT scores (students with low ACT/SAT scores are placed in developmental courses) and their grade point averages. Occasionally, students who are placed in English 129 are placed in reading and math developmental courses also. Second, some of the students were taking English 131 for the second time. Despite the number of hours that some participants had accumulated, they were still enrolled in English 131, the targeted population of the study.

While only 29.8% of the students who took the questionnaire had taken English 129, 60% had taken English 130. Most (96%) of the students were African American, 1% reported Latino/a, and 3% reported “other.” Fifty-one percent were females, and 49% were male
students. Around 54% were between the ages of 17 – 19; 37% were between the ages of 20 – 23; 4% were between the ages of 24 – 26; and 5% were above the age of 27.

In terms of their parents’ educational backgrounds, 42% of the students reported that their parents completed high school, and 1% reported that their parents had completed junior high school. Close to 44% of the students indicated that their parents had attended college and 13% reported that their parents had completed graduate school.

Figures about freshmen at all HBCUs indicate that more than 30% of the freshmen at HBCUs are from families earning below $25,000.00 per year (*A Statistical Portrait of Freshmen*, 2009). In the present study, 22% of the students were from families of incomes of less than $10,000 and 27% were from families making incomes less than $25,000. Only 20% of the students in this study reported that their families made $50,000 or more.

**Students’ Perceptions of Their Ability to Do Work in a Freshman Composition Course**

Perceptions are important in that they help to influence how a person thinks of himself and how others think of him. The way an individual thinks of himself determines his behavior, and his behavior contributes to the student’s failure or success. Both the quantitative and qualitative data in this study revealed that the students have a high perception of their ability to perform well in a freshman composition class.

Nearly 64% of the students who completed the questionnaire believed that their high school English classes prepared them to pass college English, while 17% believed that their high school English classes had not prepared them to pass college English; 19% of the students were neutral. A large percentage (83%) reported that they understood how to provide adequate content in essays, 83% reported that they understood rules of grammar and mechanics. Slightly more than one-third of participants (38%) reported that they made a lot of errors in grammar and
mechanics in their writing assignments in high school. Half of the participants said that they passed their high school English classes without having to work hard, while 36% disagreed, and 14% were neutral.

Prior to administering the questionnaire, I held preconceived beliefs about some of the responses that students would provide. After years of teaching English 131 and 132, I have had to provide much instruction on grammar and mechanics, so when most of the students reported that they understood most of the rules of grammar and mechanics as they learned them in high school, I was surprised. At the beginning of my tenure at the university, I assumed that the average college student would be able to proofread for errors in grammar and mechanics. However, many of them admitted to not being introduced to certain skills such as comma splices and run on sentences; some said that they had forgotten the rules. The students’ responses to the questionnaire items about grammar and mechanics were not what I expected.

While 83% of the students reported that they understood rules of grammar and mechanics, the students’ essays indicate that they may not have understood many rules of grammar and mechanics. Much like the research of Stougohton and Sivertson (2005), my study revealed that there is a mismatch between students’ perceptions and their actual performance.

This was supported by interview data. When students were asked to explain the part of the essays in which they lost points a large percentage indicated that, in college, they said they lost more points for making errors in grammar and mechanics than in any other area of essay writing. Most of the students interviewed pointed out that they wished that their high school English classes had done more to teach them how to locate and correct errors in grammar and mechanics. On the questionnaire, only 38% marked a neutral response, and 29% responded that they did not make a lot of errors in grammar and mechanics in high school.
During the interviews, 88% of the students reported that their teachers in high school marked, graded, and returned their papers to them. I discovered a contradiction during the interviews when many students explained that they received their papers with grades and marks but the marks were not specific. In essence, the teachers placed a checkmark by or circled errors, but they did not indicate the kinds of errors that the students made. Thus, the students did not get much information about specific errors that they made in grammar and mechanics.

I realize that although 88% of the students indicated in the questionnaire that their papers had been graded, marked and returned, most of the time the students did not know the particular errors that they made in grammar and mechanics. Still, 70% of the students surveyed reported that they learned how to revise and edit papers in their high school English classes. But, most of the students interviewed indicated that the points that they lost in writing assignments were because of grammar and mechanics.

During her interview, Veronica, who took A/P Honors English in a high school in Georgia, revealed that she had not heard of the terms *comma splice* or *run-on sentences* until her freshman composition class. She added that in Grades 9 and 10, her English teachers provided the students with activities designed to improve their proofreading and editing skills, but they were not consistent in their provision of such activities. Still, Veronica was successful in passing freshman composition.

Calvin, a freshman who was enrolled in Standard English courses at a high school in the North, reported that he learned little to nothing in his 10th and 11th grade English classes; in fact, most of the class time was spent completing crossword puzzles. According to Calvin, teachers, especially those in 10th grade and 11th grade English classes, did not focus on grammar and
mechanics. Calvin depended on friends and relatives to teach him about such skills. Calvin earned a C in his freshman composition class.

I did not expect such a large number of students to report that their English teachers talked about college and encouraged them to go to college. However, 82% reported that their high school English teachers talked about college, and 83% said that their high school English teachers encouraged them to attend college. During the interviews, I discovered that most teachers briefly mentioned college, but few actually encouraged them to attend college or actually provided them with learning experiences that would specifically prepare the students for college.

Although most students who completed the questionnaire and who participated in the interviews believe that their high school experiences prepared them for college, 95% indicated important skills that their high school English classes should have included to prepare them better for college. Only one student, Linda, indicated that there was nothing that she would add to her high school experiences in English classes to prepare her for college. She is also the only student who attended a school (private) in a foreign country.

The students in this study explained that they needed more activities that would have provided them with a better understanding of grammar and mechanics. Even though the students may not have lost points in grammar and mechanics in the papers written in high school, all of them lost some points for errors in grammar and mechanics in their college English class. In English 131/132 faculty meetings, instructors talk incessantly about the kinds of errors that students make in grammar and mechanics. The instructors point out that most students in a class grasp the concept of providing adequate support for a thesis, but the errors in grammar and
mechanics detract from the students’ papers. The following are examples from interviewees’ papers:

1. Attending a college that best fits the person, knowing one’s financial status, and visiting all schools of interest will help a person pick the correct one for themselves; and

2. When discussing, the girls noticed how everything fell into place. Such as the guys getting to the house before us and Becky thinking she unlocked her gate, which was not really locked.

Amber explained frustratingly, “in high school, they gave us more papers when they should’ve been teaching us how to do grammar instead of giving us all these papers that I can’t write without grammar/mechanics.” (interview question: What is the biggest difference between your high school English courses and your college English courses?) Calvin reiterated that the only time that he learned about grammar and mechanics in Grades 11 and 12 was when he sought the help of family members and friends. Calvin earned a C in the course. He can be described as a student who, two years after graduating from high school, realized his weaknesses and his ability to still become a successful college student.

No matter how effective students’ teachers may be at preparing them for college, there is always room for improvement. I wanted even students who were satisfied with their high school experiences to think about what may have been missing. Thus, another one of the interview items was If you could have added anything to your learning experiences in your high school English classes to prepare you for college, what would it be? Explain your answer. Some of the interviewees’ answers follow:

D.J.: I would say maybe create a program where college teachers would actually come to the high school and like maybe give like assignments to show what would happen ---like
maybe getting like a kind of simulation of what college work is like because it’s so much different.

Kevin: I would say add more work because in college there’s a lot more work. In high school, they don’t give you a lot of work. So, just the amount of work.

Veronica: I would definitely say more focus on grammar and mechanics because, I mean they teach us and you hear with your ear and a lot of times, I’m like okay, that sounds good to my ear, but when I’m in class, I’m like ohh…that’s wrong and I’m thinking that sounds good.

Linda: Nothing. I think they prepared me. (Later, during the second interview, Linda admitted that she did not really learn how to write a thesis statement until her freshman college class.)

DeShawn: Probably given us a little bit more definition words, like tell us to sit down and read the dictionary every once in a while.

Amber: I would have shortened up the due date for the essay. (To Amber, a teacher who gives students due dates and then changes the date to give them more time is crippling students. Usually college instructors have written rules about the consequences of submitting work late.)

Maranda, who was realistic about the limitations of her preparation for college, pointed out that she could have used much more experience writing essays, reports, research papers, etc. while she was in high school. The “tech” track, though, would not have provided Maranda with the experiences she needed at the higher education level since the track is designed specifically for students who are not going to college. Maranda also expressed an interest in medicine, but getting into and succeeding in medical school would be difficult because of Maranda’s matriculation in a “tech” track rather than an advanced track in high school.

Student responses to the interview question regarding whether they thought that their high schools prepared them for college were similar. One interviewee, DeShawn, replied that his high school English classes prepared him for college English, but he was placed in two developmental college English courses, which meant that his test results revealed that he was deficient in language arts.
D.J., another student who was interviewed, suggested placing college instructors directly in the high school classroom. He added

the college classes are a little bit bigger and the teacher really don’t have time to go around to each individual student...You have to go to the teacher yourself because they probably have 100 or 200 hundred students; they don’t have time to go to each individual student and ask ‘Can I help with this?’ The teacher would respond, ‘You’re weak in this, do you need to get tutoring for this?’

Kevin said that his high school prepared him for college “because they went over the basic fundamentals and prepared me, but he also added that the school should add more work because in college there’s a lot more work. In high school, they don’t give you a lot of work.” If Amber could have added anything to her high school experiences, she would have “shortened the due date for the essay because with the essay they would give us like an entire month. I don’t believe it should take that long to write an essay. In college, you don’t have that amount of time.” Still, she believed that her high school teachers prepared her for college.

Another student, Linda, indicated that her high school English classes prepared her because they did a lot of writing, which she knew she would be doing in college. Linda pointed out that

the main thing is we wrote a lot of papers and we did a lot of interviews and stuff with different people. And stuff I do here in college, I already did in my other high school, but not the same exact thing. But the way to write and everything, that’s how I was taught in my old school.

Calvin indicated that only his 9th grade and 12th grade teachers prepared him for college English. He stated,

Well, my 10th and 11th grade year...I didn’t really learn nothing from it ‘cause we would do crossword puzzles or things of that nature where we weren’t really writing papers like we read a couple of books but you know, it wasn’t really nothing that major where I had to actually buckle down and do the work like 9th and 12th grade.
Kevin would have definitely requested more focus on grammar and mechanics because, “they teach us and you hear with your ear and a lot of times, I’m like okay, that sounds good to my ear, but when I’m in class, I’m like oh that’s wrong and I’m thinking that sounds good.” If DeShawn could have added anything to his high school English classes to prepare him for college, he indicated that it would be “teachers probably giving us a little more definition words like tell us to sit down and read the dictionary every once in a while.” He added that his high school English classes prepared him for college, but not nearly enough.

Faculty teaching assignments poses a problem at some schools, making it difficult to hire and/or retain teachers who are trained in the field of study in which they are teaching. Below are comments from D. J. about one such instance.

D. J.: 11th grade was kind of the same but my 12th grade was kind of bad because I had a teacher to die.

Taylor: That’s unfortunate.

D. J.: And then the teacher they got right after that kind of quit because she couldn’t really take it. I think she was teaching elementary and then she went to high school or something like that.

Taylor: Okay, so that was a transition, her teaching elementary school students and then teaching high school students.

D. J.: And we had another gap. We got another teacher that he never could quite catch up. We were so far behind at that point.

Taylor: If you could have added anything to your learning experiences in your high school English classes to prepare you for college, what would it be? Explain your answer.

D. J.: I would say maybe create a program where college teachers would actually come to the high school and like maybe give assignments to show what would happen — like maybe getting like a kind of a simulation of what college work is like because it’s so much different.

Overall, the participants in this study did believe in their high schools’ preparation of them for college English. Their responses on the questionnaire display their confidence in their
possession of skills in some key areas. More than half (63.5%) believe that their high schools have prepared them to make a passing grade in college English and 19% were neutral (item 1). Not only did the students report that they knew how to write paragraphs and essays with good content, 82.7% and 68.9% respectively, but a large number (70.6%) of students even reported that they learned how to revise and edit papers in their high school classes.

However, nearly all of the interviewees revealed that they lost points because of inadequate proofreading and editing skills. In fact, one of the interviewees admitted that she had not heard of some of the errors that her college instructor marked in her paper. She was enrolled in an advanced track in high school English, evidence that every advanced class may not really be “advanced,” and every standard class may not be “standard.” On her questionnaire, Veronica reported that she did not understand most of the rules of grammar and mechanics as she learned them in high school although she was enrolled in an advanced track in high school. Nevertheless, Veronica reported on the survey that the skills that she needs to pass college English were covered in her particular track. Like many other students, Veronica apparently did not realize the importance of understanding proofreading and editing skills in college, and that belief could account for her response that she has the skills needed to pass college English. Her writing samples indicate an ability to provide examples and details that support a thesis, but she made some errors in grammar/mechanics. On the other hand, another interviewee who was enrolled in a standard track believed strongly in her ability to pass college English, and her writing samples were evident of her mastery of most proofreading and editing skills. The above responses are indicative of the importance of students’ perceptions of their confidence and not just the academic track in which they were enrolled.
Prior Academic Track Placement and Students’ Ability

Thermstrom and Thermstrom (2003) reported that only 30% of African American students enroll in advanced classes in high school compared to more than 60% for Whites. In the current study my findings were slightly higher: 42% reported that they were in an advanced track. However, nearly 60% of students were enrolled in a standard track and 10% reported that they were enrolled in a remedial track. The students’ answers concerning academic track placement varied. Most (69%) of the students indicated that they chose their academic track; in 45% of the cases the students were placed in a track by the guidance counselor, and the student agreed to this placement. One student reported that he and his mother agreed to a particular track.

The majority of the students surveyed (62%) and interviewed indicated that the academic track they were enrolled in prepared them for college English. One student indicated that the track did not prepare him at all. Even though the other interviewees believed that the academic track helped to prepare them to pass English 131, they made suggestions for improvements: teaching more about grammar and mechanics and encouraging students to ask more questions while in high school. Few (9%) of the students reported that they should have been in a higher track.

Only two of the students interviewed were uncertain of my question concerning the academic track in which they were enrolled. That, more than likely, explains why one of the students’ marks on the questionnaire were contradictory: Nearly 70% of the students reported that they chose the academic track of their high school English classes; almost 60% of the students were enrolled in a standard (regular, general, etc.) track, 42% reported that they were enrolled in an advanced track, and 10% were enrolled in remedial English courses in high school. A contradiction in academic track placement was obvious in that 68% of the students
believed that the learning activities in the track that they were in have helped them to understand course material in their college English class; however, 62% of the students said that they do not think that the skills that they need to pass college English were covered in their particular track.

When asked about where they thought they should have been placed, only 34% of the students believed that they should have been in a higher track than the one that they were enrolled in at the high school level while 9% believed that they should have been in a lower track than the one they were in. Veronica explained that she chose the academic track that she was in during high school.

Taylor: Who chose the academic track that you were in during high school? How did the track that you were in help you to understand college English?

Veronica: I did. I chose advance and it prepared me a lot because we did a lot of analysis and we had to learn about literary and all that stuff. I think it helped me a lot because it wasn’t like I was learning about grammar/mechanics even though I know that I should. I mean that’s a little bit right now but I learned about the different types of writing and maybe not that much of detail but I did learn about it like in general.

Taylor: Do you believe that the skills you learned in your academic track helped you to understand college English?

Veronica: Yes, I don’t believe I would be doing as well if I had been in a standard track. I think that I was prepared well but like I said I’m kind of mad that I’m messing up on [small things like grammar/mechanics]…I’m losing more points now for grammar/mechanics than I did when in high school.

Veronica’s description of grammar/mechanics as small things is an indication of how little grammar/mechanics may mean to her. She may believe that if she provides exemplary support, the errors in grammar/mechanics should not weigh in on her grade. From my professional experience with college freshmen, I have heard incessantly from students that they do not think that they should have received a lower grade on a major writing assignment even if the writing assignment consists of gross errors in grammar/mechanics. Often, students think that proving the thesis of the paper is the main, and sometimes the only, area that an instructor should
be considered with. Add to that the interviewees’ explanations of how the high school teachers graded their papers (a circle or check with no explanation) and one can infer how the teachers’ grading practices may very well have contributed to the students’ perceptions of grammar/mechanics. Not having specific errors and marks on their writing assignments gives students the impression that it is not important to focus on such specific errors.

As noted before, most of the students in this study were enrolled in Standard English classes. DeShawn was enrolled in standard English courses in high school. One of the reasons proofreading for errors and mechanics was difficult for him was the lack of opportunities to do so in high school, as he explained to me:

Taylor: So for the most part, most of your English teachers in Grades 9–12 did mark, grade and return your papers to you. Maybe not the 9th Grade teacher; she kept them, but she did go over them with you.

DeShawn: No.

Taylor: She kept them?

DeShawn: He kept them.

Taylor: He (9th grade teacher) kept them. And he didn’t go over them?

DeShawn: No. He would like maybe like take a essay and go over the common mistakes we made.

Even though DeShawn was quite successful in his college composition course, going over the essay with his teacher to discuss and correct some of the errors could have been beneficial to him.

The majority of the study population believed that they would pass a freshman composition class. One of the students who was placed in a lower academic track in high school because of grades she made in grades K – 8 posited adamantly that the track that she was in did not prepare her for college. Her grade in English 131 during the summer session was an
incomplete. Most instructors would have assigned the student a failing grade. Her professor revealed that she should have assigned a failing grade because of the students’ overall performance. An incomplete grade means that the student has to go back to the professor who assigned the incomplete and complete missing assignments in order to receive a letter grade. Usually, students prefer the incomplete for the sake of their grade point averages and the cost of repeating the entire course, but the student in this study chose to re-take the English 131 class instead of removing the incomplete. The student revealed that her writing deficiencies were the reason she decided to take the course a second time. Despite this one difference, the other students revealed on the questionnaire and during the interviews that the academic tracks in which they were enrolled in high school prepared them to do work in a freshman composition course.

Other interview participants explained that their high school teachers merely referred to college and writing courses by making statement such as, “When you get to college, your professors won’t allow you to turn work in late.” Still, according to one research participant, the teacher who made this same comment continued to allow students to submit work late without a penalty. In fact, constantly extending due dates, which may have crippled some students, is what Amber did not appreciate about one of her high school experiences. Amber was enrolled in an advanced track in grades 9 and 10 and a standard track in grades 11 and 12. According to Amber, changing due dates was a waste of time and it prevented students from learning additional content. If she could add anything to her high school experiences in English classes, she said that it would be that teachers require more accountability among students and more vocabulary and reading.
Seemingly contradictory items concerning academic tracking were responses to item number 24 and item number 25. A few more than 61% of the students did not believe that the learning activities in the track they were in helped them to understand course material in their college English class; 68% of the students believed that the skills that they need to pass college English were covered in their particular track.

I considered a few reasons for this contradiction. First, the students may have thought that some of the learning activities in their academic track were not helpful because some of the activities were no more than “busy work;” they were too boring, etc. The students still may have thought that other skills the teachers provided them actually helped to prepare them for college. In other words, all of the learning activities may not have been “busy work,” boring, etc. Second, some students create ways to understand course content, and this tendency combined with the teachers’ instruction would help them to meet course objectives. Third, the students could have made a distinction between “learning activities” referred to in one questionnaire item and “skills” noted in the other survey item. Finally, the students’ responses to the two questionnaire items may be an indication that at least one of the items could have been worded clearer or could have been deleted.

Most of the students who completed the survey and who participated in the interviews were enrolled in a standard track in high school. While some revealed that they believed that what they learned in a standard track prepared them for college English, others disagreed. One student enrolled in a standard English track, Truth, explained that she experienced difficulty during her 9th grade year of high school mainly because it was her first time attending the school, but from the 10th grade onward she was confident in her academic ability because each prior grade was effective in preparing her for the subsequent grade level. Truth’s high school is
located in the Southeast, and she reported that “everything they did basically prepared us for college because I’m seeing a lot of things we do here (college), I did in high school, so I’m familiar with it, so I can breeze through it…” Truth further explained that the teachers at the high school pushed the students with the level of work that they gave them. Such motivation is likely to lead to success.

Some research participants, however, were not as pleased with their experiences in their academic tracks. Maranda, for instance, pointed out that her standard English class failed to prepare her for college work. She stated that the only time they wrote was to prepare for a state exam. Miranda believes that her teachers could have also provided more writing opportunities instead of focusing on reading British literature, American literature, and poems. She added, “I never failed an English class, but I think they failed me in a way ‘cause like, even though I never failed, it feels like they didn’t prepare me well enough for college level writing.” Maranda graduated from a high school that tested students in order to place them into a “tech track” or a “college track.” She explained how she was placed in the “tech track” because of her test scores. As early as the 9th grade, Maranda knew that she wanted to major in pre-med, so I asked her if she could have opted for the “college track” despite testing into the “tech track,” a track in which the teachers assumed that students would not attend college but would seek a trade. She explained that she requested a change in academic track, but a teacher told her that her grades and test scores were evidence that she would do better academically in the “tech track.”

Yonezawa, Wells, and Serna (2002) pointed out that it is difficult for some students to move from low tracks to high tracks because of counselors’ and teachers’ input, and Maranda’s request to move from a lower track to a higher one is typical of the role of counselors and teachers in selecting academic tracks.
Amanda also believed that the track that she was in did not adequately prepare her. I asked about this in our interview.

Taylor: How did the track that you were in help you to understand college English?

Amanda: The guidance counselor put me in standard track in English in high school. It didn’t really help me because when it got down to the graduation exam in the reading part, I needed more help with that and it took me forever to pass it. I took test the from the 10th–12th grades, about four tries.

Taylor: Do you believe that the skills you learned in your academic track helped you to understand college English?

Amanda: Sort of. High school could’ve focused more on grammar. I’m pretty good at providing support.

Learning how to edit for errors in grammar/mechanics is as important as learning how to support a thesis with adequate content/support. Amanda’s case is representative of students who can provide support but have trouble finding and correcting errors in grammar/mechanics, mainly because grammar/mechanics within the students’ papers is not emphasized enough. Still, data shows that the tracks, for the most part, played some part in helping students to pass a freshman composition class.

Students’ Actual Performance in Freshman Composition

Overall, the students’ actual performance in their English 131 classes matched their perceptions. While only 5% of the students completing the questionnaire reported that they were not confident that they would make a passing grade in their college English class, 87% said that they were confident that they would pass college English. In fact, 97% of the students said that they were passing their college English class. Even though most of the students said that they understood the rules of grammar and mechanics as they learned them in high school, most (75%) reported that they had lost points because of errors that they made in grammar and mechanics in their college English class. In truth, only 37% of the students said that they made a lot of errors
in grammar and mechanics in their high school writing assignments while 29% reported that they did not make a lot of errors in grammar and mechanics in high school writing assignments. Whereas 69% said that they understood how to write essays with good content, 41% had lost points because of the kinds of details and examples they provided in their writing assignments in college. Yet, 86% reported that they wrote enough content in their high school writing assignments to make a passing grade. The large percentage of students (86%) who wrote adequate content in high school does not correspond with the percentage (41%) who lost points on writing assignments in college.

Out of the ten interview participants, two earned a final grade of A, five earned a B, two earned a C, and one received an incomplete. The fact that all except one of the interviewees passed the course was interesting. D. J. and Amber earned the A’s, Truth, DeShawn, Veronica, Linda, and Kevin earned B’s, Amanda and Charles earned C’s, and Maranda earned an incomplete. So, a large percentage of the interviewees passed the course, and all of the interviewees returned to the University after the summer semester. The success rate among the interviewees is high considering the fact that the retention rate where the study took place is 54%, and the graduation rate is 21%.

**Grammar and Mechanics Problems**

Grammar and mechanics seem to be the most common skill to which participants referred. Most of the interviewees reported that one of their weakest areas in English 131 was grammar and mechanics. The most commonly reported errors include subject-verb agreement and punctuation. The remaining few students reported reading, the thesis statement, and analyzing literature as their weakest areas.
Most of the interviewees passed English 131, and eight out of the ten reported that their college English professors taught them proofreading/editing skills; one student indicated that he had already learned about proofreading/editing in high school and another responded “not really.” The students indicated that college professors used worksheets and textbooks during lessons about grammar/mechanics.

All of the students interviewed indicated that their college professors marked their essays for errors in grammar and mechanics, and they explained the errors or encouraged the students to used their own papers and the textbook as supplements. Since most English 131 college professors give students a pre-test on writing skills during the first week of the semester, they encourage and expect students to work on errors marked in their paper upon receiving the graded pre-tests. Most of the college professors used a great deal of time covering grammar/mechanics (after each graded essay was returned and during other class times). I was surprised that most students did not indicate being referred to the University Writing Center, especially since nearly all English 131 professors discuss the numerous kinds of errors that their students make. The most common marks were misuse of the comma, subject-verb agreement, pronoun agreement, wordiness, run-on sentences, and fragments.

All of the students in the interview reported that the points they lost in grammar and mechanics caused them to earn a lower grade; one student pointed out that he never lost enough points to fail an essay. My interview with Amanda addresses one way that grammar and mechanics was handled:

Amanda: In high school, they gave us more papers when they should’ve been teaching us how to do grammar instead of giving us all these papers that I can’t write without (errors in) grammar/mechanics.

Taylor: Did your college English teacher mark your papers for errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain what he/she marked the most.
Amanda: Yes, all (errors in grammar/mechanics). Subject-verb agreement was marked the most.

Taylor: Was your grade on essays and paragraphs lowered because of errors in grammar/mechanics?

Amanda: Yes.

Amanda revealed that she was still confident about passing her college English course despite making a few errors in grammar and mechanics, and Amanda was one of many students who revealed the difficulty they experienced in attempts to proofread their writing assignments for errors in grammar and mechanics.

The students’ low level of mastery of proofreading skills is evident in the following excerpts found in their writing assignments. The first example is from a final draft of an essay about the effects of one’s environment on him/her.

*Growing up in a single parent home is the third affect on ones environment. It may make the child have a negative view of the other parent. They may also feel as if people will always leave them. The child may also feel a hatred of sex of the parent that was not in there lives. They my never be able trust the sex of the parent that was not in there lives.*

Missing punctuation, word choice/wrong words, and spelling errors are common throughout this short excerpt and the entire paper. This excerpt is from the student who received an Incomplete as a grade. Providing specific support was another skill she found difficult.

The following passage is from another student’s final essay, and it demonstrates errors in grammar and mechanics also.

*There are no longer sexual innuendos they are delivered deliberately. Movies such as “Shrek,” even contain sexual humor which are perceived to be for G rated audiences.*

In this section of an essay, Veronica has made errors in subject-verb agreement, and she has placed two independent clauses (though short) together without proper punctuation (semicolon)
The errors are an indication of a need for more activities that help her to understand grammar and usage.

The following sentences, all taken from participants’ writing, are additional evidence of the students’ lack of mastery of grammar and mechanics:

Also it can have an affect on there self esteem.

If you weren’t adopted, you have the same parents, therefore, you have the same genes.

College classes where supposed to be very hard with not a lot of help from the teachers.

They are either fighting over who is dating their boyfriend or who is wearing some else clothes without asking.

Singling out three obvious qualities of a poverty stricken neighborhood are high crime rates, low literacy rates, and government assistance.

The previous sentences consist of the types of errors that the interviewees reported as the common errors that they made in their college English class: comma usage, wrong word, comma splices, apostrophe usage, and spelling. Proofreading for errors in grammar and mechanics was difficult for many of the students, but most of them passed English 131. (I provide some of the students’ full essays in Appendix D.) Errors in grammar and mechanics can affect an otherwise effective essay.

What the students failed to realize is that substantial errors in grammar and mechanics could diminish the overall positive effect of a “good” essay. The following excerpt from a narrative essay shows this.

I stopped dead in my tracks and punched Kennan in his chest to get his attention. Two guys dressed in all black were walking towards us; I felt my heart almost jump out of my chest. They were walking faster and my feet were frozen I couldn’t move. The next thing I know I blacked out. When I woke I looked down at my feet and my shoes were gone. I shivered at the cold breeze of the night, because my jacket was gone also. I had a massive headache. I called for Keenan, I looked to my side and he was lying beside me, with his forehead bleeding, unconscious.
The above excerpt consists of a couple of errors in grammar/mechanics, but it conveys the idea of the thesis, which is the students’ dismay of the kind of violence that can occur on a college campus. Also, the errors in grammar and usage could take away the effectiveness of the incident the student, Truth, is describing.

This data in the study was contradictory in that on the questionnaire, most students reported that they understood grammar and mechanics as they learned them in high school. One would assume, then, that the students would not make numerous errors in grammar and mechanics in their writing if they understood proofreading and editing. During the interviews, the students admitted that they did not understand as much about grammar and mechanics as they thought. Two data sources – the interviews and the students’ writing – indicated that the students did not possess grammar and mechanics skills to the degree that they had reported, and a third data source - the questionnaire revealed something else: the students’ perceptions of their knowledge of proofreading and editing skills did not match their actual performance.

*Larger Issues: Ideas, Content and Organization*

Proofreading and editing were not the only areas of writing where students experienced some difficulty. Three students indicated that the conclusion was the hardest part of the essay for them to write, one reported the introduction, one reported the literary analysis, and two reported the thesis statement. The following is an example of a student’s difficulty with the thesis statement: “In my essay I will discuss the similarities and give details to support my reasons.” Often, college freshmen find it difficult to express the point of their essay in a thesis without making an announcement (e.g., I will compare…). With further instruction and practice at the college level, the interviewees said that they mastered the skill.
Providing support was not a large problem for the participants. All of the students who were interviewed said that they already knew about providing support in their essays. Of the ten who said that they already knew about providing support, one actually responded, “in a way,” and another of the ten revealed that even though he knew about providing support, the college professor taught it, also. The lack of specific details was rarely marked in the participants’ writing assignments, and the students basically did not point this out. They did, however, point out that high school, as opposed to college, allowed them the chance to provide less support. The following is an excerpt with inadequate details. The example is also indicative of the gravity of both high school and college teachers focusing on grammar and usage; the last sentence is an example. (The complete example is in Appendix D):

Growing up in a single parent home is the third affect on ones environment. It may make the child have a negative view of the other parent. They may also feel as if people will always leave them. The child may also feel a hatred of sex of the parent that was not in there lives. They my never be able trust the sex of the parent that was not in there lives.

Where Students Did Well

Not all of the students produced writings with errors in grammar and usage, writings with inadequate support, etc. In fact, most of the interviewees wrote passing essays. The following are excerpts from assignments with few or no errors in grammar and mechanics or grades from students who made passing grades.

One reason I included the following excerpt is to demonstrate how the data in this research – the survey, the students’ writing, and the interviews with the students – produced similar results in some cases. Also, I placed this excerpt here to indicate that many students at HBCUs come to college prepared to master course objectives, despite the message that the graduation rates convey. I specifically positioned excerpts from a variety of types of essays throughout this section to demonstrate that in general, even when writing a particular type of
essay, even one that many find difficult (comparison/comparison) some students possess skills required to succeed in college. Though the following excerpt has details and examples, the student could have been even more successful with more specific details. The author of this excerpt, Kevin, understands what supporting a thesis is, but he stopped short of providing enough details, a point that does not match completely his beliefs about his ability. Not taking the time to double check his work, from my understanding, is another one of Kevin’s tendencies, indicating, perhaps, a perception of his ability that is too high.

Will and Martin could both go from being serious to being goofy and silly. They could also play multiple characters in the same show. They could play an old man in one scene and then in the very next scene, a snotty, nosed kid who was always getting into trouble. The ability to show different aspects of their talent and emotions is what attracted me to these shows. It made them both interesting because I never knew what was going to happen. The randomness kept me attracted to the show because, I wanted to know what was going to happen next. I believe Martin’s and Will’s abilities to play multiple roles are key reasons for their success.

The next excerpt is taken from a process essay. From my teaching experience, students do not experience a large amount of difficulty writing the process essay although they tend to leave out specific details, as the excerpt demonstrates, because they make assumptions about what the audience already know. The students’ lack of details indicates that they may not know as much as they claim to know about certain skills:

Being classified as a senior in high school is only one of many accomplishments a person will come across. Senior days, senior pranks, senior get-togethers, and other senior activities gives the ability to remember those special moments. The biggest accomplishment of them all is graduating and knowing which university a student will soon attend. Making sure the university best accompanies the individual will help that person enjoy the college life.

As mentioned before, providing support was not a great problem for the participants even, and the essay may have been more effective with more proofreading and editing. All of the students who were interviewed said that they already knew about providing support in their
essays. Of the 10 who said that they already knew about providing support, one actually responded, “in a way,” and another interviewee of the 10 revealed that even though he knew about providing support, the college professor taught it, also. The lack of specific details was rarely marked in the participants’ writing assignments, and the students basically did not point this out. They did, however, point out that high school, as opposed to college, allowed them the chance to provide less support.

Students’ Perceptions

Most of the participants reported that they believed that they were passing college English, and they did, but they added that in order to help them to understand material better, college professors could have emphasized usage and punctuation, formulating sentences properly, and peer evaluation. Other suggestions included slowing down the pace of the class, giving students more time to complete assignments, using more visual, hands-on approaches, more writing on the board, and requiring students to write more papers.

Half of the students revealed that their college English class was what they thought it would be. At least three students reported that they did not expect as much guidance from the professors, which made college English easier than they thought it would be. Two students reported that they thought that college would be a lot harder. Another student described the difference as mediocre. Some material was difficult to understand while other material involved little to no difficulty. The following are responses to the interview question, Was your college English class what you expected it to be? Explain how you thought it would be. Explain how it actually was.

I thought it would be harder with longer papers and not so much guidance and just thrown at me. So, I think I expected the worse.

Yes. I was told basically I’d be writing essays and papers mostly every week.
I expected it to be a lot harder but I guess since I comprehended the material in high school, it’s really not as hard. I thought we’d have to write an essay at least twice a week.

I thought it was going to be like high school, just maybe a little bit harder. But it was completely different. Like in our school, we didn’t have to write certain essays; we just wrote essays, we didn’t have to write descriptive, narratives, all of that. And when I got to college, I didn’t know...I knew how to write a narrative because that’s just like writing a story, but I didn’t know how to write a compare/contrast and descriptive. I had to learn all that when I got to college because they didn’t teach you that in high school...

I expected it to be the way it was. I actually kind of expected it to be way harder too because you know how you get in your mind that some stuff is going to be way harder until you actually do it. I don’t think taking English 129 and English 130 was necessary at all.

I expected it to be hard, just all out difficult, but it’s pretty simple. The content that I’m learning is like a review of everything I’ve learned from middle school and high school.

Yes, it was what I expected it to be. For one, I didn’t think the teacher would do much individual work with us because she had so many students, but she really did do a lot of individual work. She would always come and ask us questions and we could always come to her before and after class, and I really wasn’t expecting that.

The students interviewed cited a few differences between high school English and college English. Students were required to provide more details and description in college; high school teachers should have focused more on grammar and mechanics. Another difference was that in college, once the students got essays back with grades on them, the professionals actually went over the mistakes and explained them to students. High school teachers did not do this.

Interviewees also pointed out that college required more reading.

Sixty percent of the students interviewed reported that they had not engaged in peer editing in their college English class. Since proofreading and editing for errors in grammar and mechanics are areas of weakness for most students, one could wonder if peer editing could have helped to improve the students’ understanding of errors that many times led to a loss of points that led to a lower letter grade on an essay.
Summary

On the questionnaire and during the interview, students in this study indicated a belief that they were prepared to pass their freshman composition course. Some of the students’ beliefs were stronger than others. In other words, a little over half of the students were “sure” that their high school experiences prepared them for college English; others said that they were “kind of sure” or “sort of sure.” Still, the vast majority of the students’ perceptions of their ability to do well in a freshman composition class are equal to their actual performance as most of them passed their composition class.

The students’ answers concerning academic track placement varied. Most of the students indicated that they chose their academic track, but in many cases the students were placed in a track by the guidance counselor, and the student agreed. One student reported that he and his mother agreed to a particular track. The majority of the students interviewed indicated that the academic track they were enrolled in prepared them for college English. One student indicated that the track did not prepare him at all. Even though the other interviewees believe that the academic track helped to prepare them to pass English 131, they made suggestions for improvements: teaching more about grammar and mechanics and encouraging students to ask more questions while in high school. The majority of the students interviewed made a passing grade in the University freshman English course, so the perceptions of most were equal to their actual performance in the course.
CHAPTER V:
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this study, I explored how HBCU students’ perceptions of their ability to do college level work differed from their actual performance in a freshman English class by investigating three particular questions:

1. What are the students’ perceptions of their ability to do work in a freshman composition class;
2. What is the students’ actual performance in a freshman composition class; and
3. How has prior academic track placement in grades 9 through 12 influenced the students’ ability to do work in a freshman composition class?

Overall, what I found were many contradictions both in participants’ survey and interview responses and their actual classroom performance. In the sections that follow I discuss my key findings in each area and follow up with implications for secondary and college English teachers. I close with implications for stakeholders.

HBCU Students’ Perceptions of Ability

In connection with the work of scholars who were previously mentioned, the main purpose of this chapter is to examine the scholarship that connects the students’ perception of their ability, the role of the academic tracks in their preparation for college English, and the students’ actual performance in a college composition course.

Constructivists attempt to grasp an understanding of the experiences of others in an attempt to co-construct the knowledge discovered through the study. In the case of college
students enrolled in a freshman composition course, the research participants were the co-constructors. In one of the findings of this research about students’ perceptions of their ability, I discovered that students believe that their high schools have prepared them for college, but some students are not aware fully of what is expected of them upon entering college, so there is a disconnect between high school and college.

Research has found that high school teachers and college instructors have varied priorities in composition (Patterson & Duer, 2006), and these differences may account for the students’ performance in college composition courses. In an ACT survey, high school teachers agreed that skills in evaluating and judging texts are important, but they did not approach these skills as priorities in the classroom. In college, reading and writing processes are combined. College teachers of first year university students lament the students’ inadequate skills in reading and evaluating texts (Patterson & Duer, 2006). Reading and evaluating texts could help students to provide adequate details and examples in their essays.

College instructors could help students to improve their writing, too. Kutney (2007) pointed out the inability of first year composition courses to instruct a transferrable, universal academic discourse. For example, despite programs such as Writing across the Curriculum, awareness programs in English service courses may activate civic responsibility, but few students demonstrate significant behavioral changes.

Students themselves influence their learning in writing courses, for students’ beliefs about their strategies affect learning outcomes. When the students’ aim is to comply with task demands, the learning activity involves a low level of cognitive engagement such as memorizing, repetition, listing, or organizing. Students with low self efficacy fear having their writing
evaluated in that self-esteem and self efficacy influence mastering skills. Such students also have a poor writing self concept involving sentence structure and grammar.

Also important is the collaboration between students and teachers (Leah, 2002). In Lavelle and Zuecher’s (2001) study of writing approaches of university students, they revealed that the self-efficacy of students influenced greatly the students’ approaches to writing. In this study, it was apparent during the interviews that even when students were in Standard as opposed to Advanced courses in high school, the method their particular teachers used helped to determine the students’ perceptions, efficacy, and performance in their college composition course. That is, most of the students who were interviewed passed their college composition course, but they were enrolled in Standard English courses in high school. The one student who failed college composition received training in a Standard track that most likely underestimated her ability and, consequently, affected her performance in college English.

One hundred and four (104) students in freshman composition took the questionnaire, and ten of those participated in the interview phase. Most of the participants believed that they had been prepared to pass their college composition course, and their perceptions equaled their actual performance as evidenced by the data—they did pass the class. However, there were contradictions between the questionnaire, the interviews, and the students’ papers.

For example, on the questionnaire, more than half of the students reported that they understood the rules of grammar/mechanics as they learned them in high school, but their answers during the interview and their writing samples indicated a need for further instruction in grammar/mechanics. Understanding grammar and usage is different from actually putting this understanding into action in writing assignments. It is much easier for students to locate errors in grammar and usage while detecting errors in isolated sentences on a worksheet than editing their
work for such errors. Oftentimes, teachers provide students with grammar and usage exercises (found in published workbooks) written by students whose writing styles vary from those in the actual classroom. Using students’ errors from their own papers could be more helpful in teaching grammar and usage. In some cases, high school teachers admit to not placing an emphasis on skills including writing strategy, organization of writing and grammar and usage (Patterson & Duer, 2007). Subsequently, students themselves do not prioritize skills such as grammar and usage.

Another issue is the conflation of marking papers and revision strategies. Students’ responses in this study echo the findings of Scherff and Piazza (2005) who found that process writing—a cyclical process of drafting, revising, editing—was absent from most high school English classes, with 20% of students never going beyond a first draft. Data on process-writing suggests that “without feedback and revision as a routine part of daily writing lessons, students missed an essential part of the writing process—revision, the stage in which studying the writer’s craft (strategies and skills) takes place (e.g., Applebee, 1981, 1986; Applebee & Langer, 1987; Atwell, 1987; Olson, 2003)” (Scherff & Piazza, 2005, p. 290). According to Leah (2002), “Revision might be considered the most important stage in the whole writing process…It is also the stage that many writers misunderstand or just don’t allow time for” (p. 51).

On the questionnaire, students said that their teachers marked, graded, and returned their papers to them. The follow-up interviews revealed that some teachers marked papers via a circle or check marks but did not specify the error in grammar and mechanics. Again, the interview helped to clarify students’ answers as some students considered a circle and a check mark without specification of the skill (error) as a teacher marking, grading, and returning the essay. The interview was more effective in grasping an understanding of the items on the questionnaire,
especially those items pertinent to understanding grammar and mechanics and the teachers’ markings on the essays.

According to a writing survey conducted by Patterson and Duer (2006) high school teachers and college teachers place different degrees of importance on grammar and usage. The skills under the headings “Writing Strategy,” Sentence Structure,” “Organization of Writing Style,” and “Grammar and Usage” were rated most important by college instructors of entry-level English courses. The fairly low percentage of the aforementioned skills taught as reported by high school teachers indicates the genuine difference between the priority of high school teachers and the priority of college teachers. If skills such as grammar and usage are not prioritized in the secondary high school English classroom, it is difficult for students to grasp the skills when they arrive at college. Most college teachers mark students’ papers, indicate the specific error made, and make suggestions about improving the students’ work.

The students’ essays also helped to answer the research questions pertinent to students’ perceptions of their ability to do work in a freshman composition course. The students made a variety of types and numbers of errors in grammar and mechanics, but most interviewees who reported that they believed that they could pass the course were successful in doing so.

On the questionnaire, only one of the interviewees, Maranda, reported that she had not lost points on assignments because of errors she made in grammar and mechanics. Maranda’s actual writing showed something different. Maranda had lost points as evidenced by the excerpts provided.

I believe that the other students realized quickly upon entering college English that they may not have understood errors in grammar and mechanics and other skills as they were discussed in their high school English classes. Their positive perceptions of their ability to do
college work helped them to address their shortcomings and then to work on making improvements. This study’s findings indicate that the students’ perceptions of their abilities are just as important as their academic ability. Most of the interviewees displayed traits of individuals who believed in their ability to succeed in a college composition class, and most of them passed the course.

Maranda’s instructor marked and specified several errors in grammar and usage, indicated areas that were not clear (particularly because of the grammar and usage errors), and pointed out the error in the structure (a need for the beginning of a new paragraph in the excerpt). Students experienced some difficulty in other areas, also.

Three students indicated that the conclusion was the hardest part of the essay for them to write, one reported the introduction, one reported the literary analysis, and two reported the thesis statement. The following is an example of a student’s difficulty with the thesis statement: “In my essay I will discuss the similarities and give details to support my reasons.” Often, college freshmen find it difficult to express the point of their essay in a thesis without making an announcement (e.g., I will compare…). With further instruction and practice at the college level, the interviewees said that they mastered the skill.

HBCU Students’ Actual Performance in College

This research study revealed that although students may pass a specific college English course, weaknesses in their writing still exist. The students must be cognizant of the skills that they did not master because not having a firm grasp of skills (e.g., grammar and usage) will affect the students’ performance in their careers upon graduation.

Of the students who engaged in the interview phase of the study, only one did not pass freshman composition. In that sense, the results coincide with the responses on the questionnaire
in which the students reported that they believed in their ability to pass a freshman composition class. Also, most of the interviewees’ writings revealed that they could pass a freshman composition class. Oddly, the one interviewee who did not pass the composition class reported on the questionnaire that she believed that her high school English classes prepared her to make a passing grade in college English, that she understood most of the rules of grammar and mechanics as she learned them in high school, and that she understood how to write essays with good content. Students completed the questionnaire near the end of the summer semester, so she may have thought that she would pass the course despite the marks on her essays in English 131.

College students in general believe that “effort” should play a large part in their final grade. In essence, even if their average grades equal a failing average, students believe that their effort should make a huge difference in the final grade that they receive in a course. During the interviews, the student who failed the freshman composition class admitted that she had not been prepared adequately for college English. She admitted that she needed to re-take English 131 because she did not grasp many concepts.

Most students reported on the questionnaire a belief in their ability to pass a freshman composition class, and all except one of the interviewees actually passed English 131. Most students reported that they understood most of the rules of grammar and mechanics as they learned them in high school, that they understood how to write paragraphs with good content, and they understood how to write essays with good content. During the interviews, however, most students revealed that they did not understand grammar and mechanics at a level that they originally believed they did, and weaknesses in some areas of grammar and mechanics caused them to lose points on their writing assignments. The students’ writing assignments revealed that most of the interviewees could provide enough details and examples to pass a writing
assignment. The students overestimated their understanding of grammar and mechanics as most of them lost points for not proofreading and editing adequately.

HBCU Students’ Prior Track Placement

One of the driving forces of this study is scholarly research on the effects of academic tracking on student performance. Too often, educators view students’ differences in language patterns as indications of inferiority (Delpit, 1995; Oakes & Goodlad, 1985). This research study revealed that the academic tracks in general did not influence students’ achievement in college as every standard track is not the same, every advanced track is not the same, etc. Students in standard tracks were exposed to more experiences that prepared them for college than did the students enrolled in an advanced track, unlike what some critics of tracking contend (Oakes, 2005). In essence, the teachers’ methodologies and expectations accounted for the students’ success or failure more so than the tracks themselves.

Most of the students (both those who completed the questionnaire and those who were interviewed) were enrolled in standard tracks; they believed that they were in the appropriate track during high school. One student who was in a tech track (designed specifically for students who were going to technical school and not college) made an *Incomplete* grade in college; she portrayed a lack of a positive perception; during the interviews she explained that the academic track in which she was enrolled (“tech”) was taught in a way that assumed the students would not need skills important to succeed in college. Three of the interviewees were in advanced tracks and they made final grades of *A* and *B*; the remaining interviewees were in a standard track, and they made *B*’s and *C*’s. In a couple of interviewees, the students did not perform academically as one would expect. That is, one would have expected all of the students in the advanced track to have done much better than the students in the standard track. In one case in
this study, there was a contradiction: the student in the standard track depicted a greater perception of her ability and more actual ability than the student enrolled in advanced high school English.

There does not seem to be a large difference among the students based on high school track placement. Regardless of the academic track students enroll in during high school, their perceptions of themselves and their capabilities are important. Among the interviewees, most displayed evidence of a high self esteem and ability, and their final grades matched their beliefs. The research findings indicate that enrollment in standard tracks does not, as a rule, mean that students are not challenged and encouraged to have confidence in their ability. What is more important is “how” academic tracking is practiced in the classroom. Students have informed me that though they may have sat in standard tracks, the teachers taught them as though they were in advanced tracks.

However, in some cases, tracking is used to stratify learners. Among students identified as average or slow, tracking stymies progress. Instead of helping students feel more comfortable about themselves, tracking can reduce self-esteem and aspirations. Often, teachers create learning activities and opportunities based on the track of the classes they teach, and students observe the teachers’ attitudes about the classes and the teachers’ perceptions of the students’ abilities. Some studies even report that tracking causes students to have negative attitudes toward school. Generally, teachers expose students in high-track English classes to topics and skills that are required for college. Teachers of low-track classes provide instruction in basic reading skills that were taught mostly through workbooks and kits. The students’ tasks were characterized by memorization or low-level comprehension (e.g., Oakes, 2005; Oakes & Goodlad, 1985; Scherff & Piazza, 2005).
Implications and Recommendations

One of the main reasons I chose to research students at HBCUs is that I have rarely read journal articles or books concerning details about these particular students’ learning, their attitudes, and their perceptions. The results of this research indicate the need for middle and high school teachers to take more time learning about their students. Test results tell only part of the story; students themselves tell the rest. Teachers need to do more to encourage more students to take a more active role in their learning by expressing their perceptions. Perceptions influence behavior and performance in the school environment, and oftentimes the roles that students take on in middle and high school predict the roles they will play in society later in life. Academics is definitely not less important than students’ perceptions, but academics could be improved when students’ feelings about their abilities are more positive.

The fact that many students in the study revealed that they were making errors in grammar/mechanics and were losing points as a result is an indication that some high school teachers may need to re-evaluate how they teach students how to proofread and edit their papers—in other words, incorporate more true process writing and revision. Most of the students who fail essays and other writing assignments in college do so because they need a stronger mastery of proofreading and editing skills, which could also be accomplished through ongoing peer revision activities. I think that 9th through 12th grade teachers should collaborate more with college instructors in order to help students to strengthen all skills in all areas. I also believe that high school teachers need the support, resources, and time to provide detailed comments about students’ essays so that they will have a greater understanding of proofreading and editing, increasing their chances and degree of success in college English classes.

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College teachers must not assume that earning a high school diploma means that the students know how to proofread and edit papers for errors in grammar/mechanics. Often, I hear college teachers complain about students’ inadequate proofreading and editing skills, and some do not think that it is their responsibility to teach these skills to students who have reached the college level. However, college instructors everywhere must work with what they have, and they must not “pass the buck” or “play the blame game.” Instead, as Leah (2002) reported, more collaboration between students and teachers is needed. As it is now, there are two cycles: in the first cycle, the students do all the work writing papers and in the second cycle, the teacher does all the work grading the papers. Of course, there is no way to get away from this pattern completely, but with more give and take at various stages of the process, faculty-student communication would improve. Instead of two cycles, there could be moments between student writing and teacher grading when students help to propose ideas relevant to grading criteria, submitting papers, etc.

Further, both middle and high school teachers and college instructors must open the lines of communication with each other in order to learn how both educational levels can complement each other. As mentioned earlier, high school teachers place little emphasis on concepts that college teachers value and consider requirements in students’ success in mastering course objectives (Leah, 2002; Patterson & Duer, 2006). Providing college instructors with more time to engage in the research of their student population is essential, also. An absence of such approaches leads to the failure of all of the stakeholders: students, teachers, administrators, future employers, and society in general.

A major part of facilitating writing at the university level is found in designing a high quality writing climate, emphasis on revision and meaning, scaffolding, modeling and integrating
writing across content areas (Lavelle & Zuercher, 2001). Writing is crucial to success in most fields. Report writing is increasingly found in many of the jobs that students with a higher education pursue. Therefore, activities that require students to write from expository sources facilitate both academic learning and eventually workplace competence (Perin, Keselman, & Monopoli, 2003).

Parents and students must work on ways to encourage an interest in learning in the first place and then to work on figuring out how the students learn best. What takes one student two hours and one teaching method to learn and complete may take another student four hours and various methods to do so. The length of time does not necessarily mean than one student is less academically inclined than the other. What it means is that students must learn more about themselves and their own learning styles so that they can have more control over their academic endeavors regardless of the academic track the students and/or their counselors choose. The academic track that the students enroll in does not dictate the students’ academic, social, or economic future. More of the students who participated in the interview portion of this study were placed in a standard track, but it was clear that their perceptions of their ability influenced their performance and final grades.

**Recommended Teaching Strategies**

The most effective English language arts classrooms practice interconnectedness; they make connections between school and home, between explorations of key concepts and questions over the course of the semester or year, connections between canonical texts and other alternative texts, and revisiting related ideas and experiences (Applebee, 2002). Without connectedness, teachers, too often, present information about key concepts in isolation of writing and reading. Such is the case with students completing worksheets on random sentences with
grammar errors in them without examining the whole essay (support, thesis, transitions, etc.). Knowledge about one aspect of writing (e.g., support) is futile without an understanding of the usage of grammar and usage to convey the message in the support. In my study, I discovered that some students provided adequate support, but the errors in grammar and usage detracted from the point the students were attempting to make in the paper.

Another strategy is cultural relevance in teaching. Ladson-Billings (1995) posited the importance of having students’ home/community culture and the school complement each other. According to Landt (2006), for example, the literature in school remains mostly Eurocentric and providing an array of perspectives is critical, but exposing students to these works is a challenge. Students are aware of the absence of their culture in school. Truth, one of the interviewees, in my study, expressed a desire for more readings about African American people. Educators should also consider the prevalence of multimodal tools that make it necessary to redefine notions about reading, composing, etc. That way, educators can incorporate digital literacies in their English language arts curriculum since students use them on a daily basis (Doerig, Beach, and O’Brien, 2007). A major part of cultural relevance and listening to students is taking the time to find out how they communicate inside and outside of the classroom.

It is important for young adults to see how others experience life because they are in the process of becoming independents in a world beyond school and the communication; exposing students to varied texts allows them to engage in understanding the self. Also important is for students to consider who is missing from their textbooks and how this may influence the self-esteem of those who are not featured in the texts. Readers need to see images of those like them in order for them to make connections between literature and their everyday lives. If adolescents
read about others similar to and different from them, they get to see that unfamiliar aspects of other cultures are less foreign when viewed through the lens of familiar issues.

A strategy referred to as the Linguistic Awareness Program (LAP) takes into account the learning of all students – nonminority and minority. Students who used the nonstandard language awareness approach showed a 59% reduction in their use of African American language in writing whereas the students being taught traditionally “increased” their use of AAL (African American Language) by 8.5%. Although most of the research participants in this study made errors that can be attributed to African American Language, there are nonminority (not a part of this study) students who have made a few of the errors made by students in this research project. In addition, a small number of errors in the study participants’ papers could have been caught by the students had they invested in more proofreading and editing, not just because of African American English. Schools in Tennessee, Illinois, Georgia, North Carolina, and California have practiced successfully the LAP. Those supporting LAP insist that all of the six focus areas of LAP used consistently and in a quality manner could lead to improvements:

1. Build teachers’ knowledge and understanding of positive attitude toward the language students use;

2. Integrate linguistic knowledge about nonstandard language into instruction.

3. Use second language acquisition methodologies;

4. Employ a balanced approach to literacy acquisition that incorporates phonics and language experience;

5. Design instruction around the learning styles and strengths of Standard English language learners; and
6. Infuse the history and culture of Standard English language learners into the curriculum. (Hollie, 2001)

Another key practice, providing feedback to students, could lead to self-regulation among students. Feedback can be focused at the self-regulation level, including greater skill in self-evaluation or confidence to engage further on a task. Whether the students in my study made errors in grammar and usage because they simply did not take the time to proofread, their high school teachers did not establish proofreading and editing as a priority, or they do not have an understanding of grammar and usage, feedback from teachers could help to ameliorate the problem. A similar approach should be taken while teaching students other elements such as support, transitions, the thesis, creativity, etc. An example of a feedback could be, “You already know the key features of the opening of an argument. Check to see whether you have incorporated them in your first paragraph” (Hattie & Timperly, p. 93, 2007). Such feedback has major influences on self-efficacy, self-regulatory proficiencies, and self beliefs about students as learners.

A final strategy could be more communication between high school teachers and college teachers and between students and teachers. A key element of successful schools is “shared responsibility which includes students, teachers, school administrators, parents, and policy makers” (Linn, 2003, p. 3). Collaborations lead to accountability, which empowers teachers to implement strategies that ensure academic achievement among all students. In one research study, many college students specifically identified their experiences and interactions in college as being essential in forming their felt identities (self concept) (Kaufman & Feldman, 2004). Communicating with their teachers facilitates students’ sense of confidence in the learning environment. The students in my study made few comments about their communication with
their high school teachers, thereby indicating a need for more information about the way students communicate with their teachers and the degree of said communication.

Research indicates that parents and teachers sometimes have different meanings of success of students. When a parent was dismayed because her son had made C’s and D’s on his report card, his teachers inquired about the parent’s dismay and encouraged her to stop pushing her son. The parent, who met with her son’s teachers to discuss his academic performance and was always told that he was doing fine, had a different view of what the teachers felt was acceptable for her son (Delpit, 1995). There are other cases in which there is a distinction between what parents want and expect of their children and what teachers expect of the students. Communication between parents and teachers could remove any stereotypes some teachers may have about certain groups of students and improve teaching and learning in the classroom.

Collaboration between high school teachers and college teachers could influence academic achievement. Currently high school teachers and college teachers have different priorities in terms of concepts and skills that they teach. Both groups of teachers need a greater understanding in terms of what writing and reading skills each group considers essential (Patterson & Duer, 2006). As one of the interviewees in my study explained, high school students could get a better understanding of what to expect in college if the college teachers visited the high schools and engaged in some of the activities high school students complete. According to a nationwide survey of secondary-level teachers and instructors of typical first-year college courses, “A good starting point for discussion would be the place of grammar and usage in high school instruction and in college instructors’ expectations for incoming students” (Patterson & Duer, 2006, p. 86).
Needed Research

Additional research on students at HBCUs is needed, not only to improve academic performance and to improve retention and graduation rates, but to compare freshmen across the many HBCUs. Discovering how universities with similar student populations, endowments, etc. are similar to and different from each other is bound to spark more research, thereby removing the gap in research on African American students at HBCUs. Research relevant to the types of communication between secondary and college instructors could help one group learn how the other group prioritizes its presentation of academic skills, and this understanding could help in facilitating students’ success at the university level. Also needed is research examining the perceptions and high school learning experiences of students placed in English 130 (equivalent to a remedial college course) at the university.

Educators could influence student learning more if they focused on the students’ perceptions of themselves, mainly because perceptions often influence behavior and performance. Students do not have to be in advanced English classes in high school to succeed in college. As a result of considering the students’ own perceptions, educators could discover students’ views of themselves and their own learning. One student’s suggestion that college instructors visit high schools in efforts to prepare the students for college may already, to some degree, be in place, but a program designed specifically to forge collaboration between university and high school English teachers could help to improve the academic achievement of all students. In the final analysis, this research study shows that more students would pass their classes after one attempt if they had more positive perceptions of their ability, regardless of the track in which they were enrolled in high school. Consequently, the students would gain the
skills needed in order to better succeed and the retention and graduation rates at HBCUs would increase.

Conclusion

Throughout my research endeavor, I scanned many scholarly articles that were not directly related to my research study, yet the content of such articles left me with a desire to return to them for further contemplation. This tendency is a part of research in general. I have known the importance of listening to students but never to the degree that this research study has demonstrated. Students deserve to have a more direct role in their educational lives because their perceptions speak volumes about improving their educational experiences. The students are experts, also. Particular academic tracks do not determine necessarily the students’ success. A student in a Standard English class may be just as capable of succeeding and – in some cases – more prepared to succeed in a college class than a student in an advanced track because of the experiences that teachers provide and the expectations they have of their students in classes, regardless of the track. So much information is left uncovered, and I am hopeful that all education stakeholders consider the potential of research to improve education for all groups of students so that no group is left behind.

Many reasons for examining students’ perceptions exist; developing a tendency to listen to students could help them to develop more interest in arguments about significant global and local issues because these issues affect all of us in one way or another. Educators have much to learn from listening to and hearing what students have to say (Sadowski, 2003). When decision-makers make sincere efforts to listen to students’ voices, the students could be encouraged to express their views more freely and more often. While addressing challenging but fascinating subjects, students could discover the connections between what is happening in their own
backyards and what is happening on other continents. Such readings and writings help to build critical thinking, analysis, and research skills. Few students in this research study indicated that they wrote about such issues. Learning about global and local issues could help students to at least consider becoming agents of change as they expand their understanding of various topics through a myriad of class assignments, for it is important for students to tackle issues that are relevant inside and outside of the classroom.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
Appendix A

Approval of Research

July 29, 2010

Felecia L. Taylor.
Department of Curriculum & Instruction
College of Education
The University of Alabama

Re: IRB # 10-OR-235 “HBCU Students’ Perceptions of Their Readiness for College”

Dear Ms. Taylor:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. You have also been granted the requested waiver of informed consent. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on July 26, 2011. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of Continuing Review and Closure Form. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of FORM: Continuing Review and Closure.

Please provide participants with a copy of the attached participant information sheet.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Caroline M. T. Myles, M.S.A., C.I.M.
Director & Research Compliance Officer
Office of Research Compliance
The University of Alabama
Appendix B
Consent Form

Dear Student:

You are being asked to participate in a study about how HBCU freshmen feel about their readiness for freshmen composition courses. The purpose of the study is to learn more about how the students perceive the role that their high school English classes played in preparing them for college English. The study will also examine how the academic tracks that students were in during grades 9-12 affected their learning. The study will help to determine if students’ perceptions of their level of college preparation are similar to their actual performance in the classes.

If you decide to be in the study, you will first fill out a questionnaire about your high school experiences in English classes and your college experiences in English classes. Completing the questionnaire may be your only role in the study. Or, you may be asked to participate in follow-up interviews about the same subject matter. If you agree to participate in the interviews, your name will be attached to your answers for contact purposes. However, your actual name will not be attached to any interview answers. A pseudonym (a name made up) will be used. You may be asked to participate in 2 one-on-one interviews in places agreed upon by you and the researcher and places which provide privacy. Should you participate in the interviews, you will receive University paraphernalia (pens, notebooks, etc.) for your time.

The interviews will be tape-recorded so that there is an accurate record of the discussion. Information recorded will be typed, but no names will be used. Your name will not be used in any way to identify your participation in this study. The tapes will be destroyed as soon as the typed record is made.

No one outside the study will know what you or any other particular person said. The researcher will write a report on the study that talks about what you said or did not say, but no one will be able to recognize you. Neither your parents nor your teachers will know what you said.

You are a volunteer. You are helping to provide information that will help to improve the education of high school and college students. You do not have to participate in the study unless you want to. This is your free choice. If you start the study and decide you don’t want to continue, just let me know. No one will be upset with you.

There are no risks or harm to you in this study. You may find the discussions helpful to you, or you may feel good about helping to improve teaching and learning.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant in this research study, please contact Ms. Tanta Myles, the University of Alabama Research Compliance Officer, at (1-877-820-3066).
If you have any other questions about this study, please ask the researcher now or contact her at 1-334- 229-5656.

If you agree to be in this study, please sign your name on this letter below.

Thank you very much for your interest.
Appendix C
Questionnaire

SURVEY OF HBCU STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR READINESS FOR COLLEGE

PART I (High School English - Grades 9 - 12)

Directions: Think about your overall experiences in English classes in high school (grades 9 through 12). Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements by shading in your choice that most closely matches your feelings. Please do not omit any items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I believe that my high school (9th through 12th grade) English classes have prepared me to make a passing grade in college English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I understood most of the rules of grammar and mechanics (e.g., subject-verb agreement, pronoun agreement, punctuation, etc.) as I learned them in high school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I understood how to write paragraphs with good content (details and examples).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I understood how to write essays with good content (details, examples, etc.).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I understood most of the corrections/suggestions that my English teachers made on my assignments.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I made a lot of errors in grammar and mechanics in my writing assignments.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I wrote enough content (details and examples) in my writing assignments to make a passing grade on them.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. My writing assignments were marked, graded, and returned to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I learned how to pre-write and draft papers in my high school English classes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I learned how to revise and edit papers in my high school English classes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I worked on my homework assignments for my high school English classes during my English classes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I worked on my homework assignments for my high school English classes outside of the classroom when I was in high school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I spent more than 3 hours per week on my English homework assignments.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. In my high school English classes, we did peer reviewing and editing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Overall, I passed my high school English classes without having to work hard.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. My high school English teachers talked about preparing for college.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. My high school English teachers encouraged me to go to college.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Designed by Alabama State University Office of Institutional Research
Comments: sir@alsu.edu
### PART II (Academic Tracks)

**Directions:** Think about your experiences in particular tracks (e.g., remedial, standard, advanced/accelerated) in English throughout grades 9 through 12. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements by shading in your choice from the scale below that most closely matches your feelings. Please do not omit any items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>STRONGLY DISAGREE</th>
<th>NEUTRAL</th>
<th>STRONGLY AGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>I chose the academic track (remedial, standard, advanced/accelerated) of my high school (9th through 12th grade) English classes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>The counselors or teachers placed me in a particular track in English during high school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>I was enrolled in a remedial track in English during high school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>I was enrolled in a standard track in English during high school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>I was enrolled in an advanced/accelerated track in English during high school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>My teachers talked about how to get prepared for college English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>I think that the learning activities in the track that I was in have helped me to understand course material in my college English class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>I think that the skills that I need to pass college English were covered in my particular track.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>I think that I should have been in a higher track (e.g., advanced English) than the one that I was enrolled in at the high school level.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>I think that I should have been in a lower track (e.g., standard English) than the one I was enrolled in at the high school level.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>I believe that the academic track that I was in during high school helped to prepare me for college English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>I was in the same type of academic track (remedial, standard, or advanced) in grades 9, 10, 11, and 12.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Part III (College English)

**Directions:** Now, think about your experiences in your college English class. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements by shading in your choice from the scale below that most closely matches your feelings. Please do not omit any items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>STRONGLY AGREE</th>
<th>NEUTRAL</th>
<th>STRONGLY DISAGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>I am confident that I will make a passing grade in my college English class.</td>
<td>![Shading]</td>
<td>![Shading]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>I expect to engage in a lot of out-of-class work in order to make a passing grade in my college English class.</td>
<td>![Shading]</td>
<td>![Shading]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>I expect to engage in a lot of out-of-class studying in order to make a passing grade in my college English class.</td>
<td>![Shading]</td>
<td>![Shading]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>I spend more than 3 hours per week studying/preparing for college English.</td>
<td>![Shading]</td>
<td>![Shading]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>I am passing my college English class.</td>
<td>![Shading]</td>
<td>![Shading]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>I am putting forth a lot of effort in my college English class.</td>
<td>![Shading]</td>
<td>![Shading]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>In my college English class, I have lost points because of errors I made in grammar and mechanics (e.g., subject-verb agreement, possession, etc.).</td>
<td>![Shading]</td>
<td>![Shading]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>In my college English class, I have lost points on assignments because of the kinds of details and examples I have provided in my writing assignments.</td>
<td>![Shading]</td>
<td>![Shading]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part IV: DEMOGRAPHICS

1. I am a freshman.
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

2. I took English 129.
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

3. I took English 130.
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

4. Ethnicity:
   ○ African American
   ○ European American
   ○ Latino
   ○ Asian
   ○ Other

5. Gender
   ○ Male
   ○ Female

6. Age
   ○ 17 - 19
   ○ 20 - 23
   ○ 24 - 26
   ○ 27 +

7. Parents' Educational Level:
   ○ Elementary
   ○ Junior High
   ○ High School
   ○ College
   ○ Graduate School

8. Family Income:
   ○ Less than $10,000
   ○ Less than $25,000
   ○ Less than $50,000
   ○ $50,000 +

I would be willing to participate in interviews concerning my high school English experiences. (Your responses are completely confidential, and your name will not be linked to any of your responses).
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

If you are willing to be interviewed, please write your name and contact numbers in the spaces provided. Remember that at no point will your name be linked to any of your responses. The information that you provide below is for contact purposes only.

Name:

Contact Numbers:
Becoming a Successful Musician

It takes many years to become a successful musician. One must be a fan of music and a lover of the arts. They must also have a taste for all kinds of music. They must also have a basic understanding of musical concepts. The three ways to becoming a successful musician is by choosing the right instruments, practice and patience, and being able to handle criticism.

On the journey to becoming a successful musician one has to find the perfect instruments for them. Instruments come in all different shapes and sizes. Each person is different, so the best way to find what fits you as an individual is to try each of them out for style and size. They come in different sections such as percussion, woodwinds, and brass. Each of these sections willfell different and to each individual. When one comes across an instrument that feels “right” they will then be ready to start the first steps of learning how to play the instrument correctly. Latter on with time they will find easy side tricks to allow them to play it in a more personal way. It’s important to know how to play ones instrument correctly before become comfortable with it in a unprofessional manner.

The next biggest step in becoming a successful musician is practicing and has patience. One must understand that mastering there instrument will not be a easy task. They will have to become okay with sacrificing fun activities in order to have time for the things that are important. With out practice they wont grow a strong relationship with there instrument. This step alone will take a lot of patience. Patience is a crucial element in becoming a successful musician. This will be an
important tool to gain because it will take time to set your instrument up, prepared for practice. It will also take them time to prepare themselves for an practices or showers.

One must also become okay or at least comfortable with criticism. One must be able to control himself in a manner able way. One must have good composer. Instrumentalists always has to be on point and key and if not one maybe criticize horribly.

Musicians in order to be successful must be a fan of music, have the right instrument. One must have a ear for music and be a lover of the arts. Also have the patience to learn the types of instruments. The three ways to becoming a successful musician is by choosing the right instruments, practice and patience, and being able to handle criticism.
The type of environment one is accustomed to has a lot of effect on one as a person. A negative environment usually breeds negativity in a person. As well as a positive environment usually breeds positivity. The affects in the environment also have a major effect.

The three major negative affects on a person’s environment are physical abuse, mental abuse, and having a single parent home.

If one grows up in an environment with physical abuse they may also become an abuser. They may also grow up to be violent and unstable. They may never be able to have a healthy relationship. They may also have a warped reality of the opposite sex. They might also turn to drugs to cope with the abuse.

Mental abuse is another factor that may affect one in a negative way. Mental abuse may make one have a low self-worth. Also it can have an affect on their self esteem. Like physical abuse they may turn to drugs. They may also try to commit suicide.

Growing up in a single parent home is the third affect on one’s environment. It may make the child have a negative view of the other parent. They may also feel as if people will always leave them. The child may also feel a hatred of sex of the parent that was not in their lives. They may never be able to trust the sex of the parent that was not in their lives.

The environment that one grew up is a major factor in who they become. Negativity breeds negativity. As well as positivity breeds positivity. But the factors are of the environment are not
always bad. But in most cases the way one grows up is the person they become. The three major negative affects on a person are physical abuse, mental abuse and growing up in a single parent home.
I should have listened to all the people who told me Miguel was no good. They told me Sicily
his a bad boy from the streets of Brooklyn. Your a prissy little rich girl from one of the most upper
class black neighborhoods in New York what on earth would you want wit a thug like him.

My name is Sicily Williams Sanchez I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth is what my
parents always said. Basically I was spoiled rotten he being a only child and all everything I ever
needed I had handed to me. My dad a doctor and my mother a lawyer we had a Cosby like experience,
but I was just like most rich girls I had a thing for bad boys and always wanted to know how the other
half lived which is where I met Miguel.

My friends and I were at the mall and that’s where I saw him this tall Dominican thug with
black wavy hair pretty brown eyes and a magnetic smile which I would later find out is the same smile
he gives to all his victims. I had never had a boy friend before never even been kissed until I met
Miguel he was my first for everything and the first man I can say I really and truly hated. Wow!!!

I should have known something was wrong when he met my family for the first time he was not that
they didn’t like Miguel he had a certain charm or as my grandmother says a devil in disguise. He
charmed my parents and I giving us the story of his life he was abused as a child and was a run away
he went from one foster home to another till he finally ended up living with his grandmother till she
passed now he’s homeless living in a shelter.

My parents always had a thing for sad cases and after us dating for six months they let him
move in and after a year and a half we were married and on our own that’s where the problems started.
He changed soon after we were married in little ways at first he would hang out at night and not come
home till the next morning smelling like smoke and sex with his clothes disheveled looking a mess he
would sleep all day and yell when I didn’t cook what he wanted to eat and if the house wasn’t up to his
standards of being clean he would throw things like a child having a tantrum like a three year old,
Soon I learned my place I did everything a good wife should do, I cooked I cleaned and I put it on him on a regular basis but this still wasn’t enough for Miguel. Soon he started staying out later, being gone two or three days at a time with out so much as a phone call to me. This was also the time I found out about his affairs and that I was pregnant.

The word around town was that on those two or three days away from home he was with other women. Two other women as a matter of fact. Now I’m not the type of woman to anger easily but when I found all this out I figured it was time to confront Miguel on all his bull shit or as my friends tell me read him.

When he came home after one of his many outings with his many mistresses I had his things packed and waiting on him. This is the day that changed my life forever, I told him I was pregnant and he went crazy accusing me of cheating. He threw one of his tantrums and attacked me throwing me up against the door and punching me pulling my hair. Cussing trying to hurt me and our unborn child in anyway he could, telling me if I ever tried to throw him out of his house again he would kill me.

I did everything to hide the bruises and black eyes and make up big glasses but it wasn’t enough. After I tried to throw him out things were worse than before. When ever I mentioned the baby he would hit me. Everything I did good or bad he hit me and when I started to show the abuse intensified one day after getting smart with him he pushed me down the steps I fell and landed on my stomach hard. I felt a sharp pain and begged him to take me to the emergency room. When he refused I drove myself. After my examination they told me I lost our baby and that’s when I got the idea to kill Miguel.

I know by now your asking yourself why don’t you just leave him? I tried that and I went everywhere I could think of my parents, my friends it didn’t matter he would always find me and the cycle would begin again. But after the miscarriage I stopped the cycle once and for all. It took me a month to plan it out, with in this month things became worse, the abuse, the infidelity and my need to end it all intensified.

The day finally came he came home looking a mess as usual itching for a fight and I wouldn’t
do anything wrong all day but he would pick and pick and pick till I snapped and he fell right into my
trap he went crazy on me but I fought back I took a page from Angela Basset playing Tina Turner in
What's love got to do with it and fought him back just as hard as he fought me. Finally I led him to our
room where I had my pistol hidden under the pillow I let him pin me down and when he was going in
for a punch I reached under the pillow found the gun and shot him in the head.

I fired six shots in all three to his chest and two to his head I had never had a happier moment in
my life then standing over his lifeless body the magnetic smile I fell in love with wiped from his lips
those pretty brown eyes now glazed and glassy and that beautiful wavy hair I envisioned our son or
daughter having stained red from his blood and as I turned the gun on myself and pulled the trigger my
last though was I should have listened and I died that day with a smile on my face.
Throughout many individuals’ lives, many obstacles are present. The strength of every individual is different and will determine which persons will overcome his or her own test. Becoming a teacher can bring many different challenges on a daily basis. In “See How They Run” Mary Elizabeth Vroman keeps her readers yearning for more of this mysterious book. Vroman foreshadows events to show the love gained during the story, and symbolism to indicate importance of certain aspects of the characters.

Vroman foreshadows throughout the entire book. One event is the sudden illness of a character by the name of Tanya. Tanya began showing signs of her illness during recess. Ms. Richards looks into Tanya’s eyes and begins thinking, “You’ll make a lovely angel to grace the throne of God, Tanya!” (46) The next day, Ms. Richards pays a visit to Tanya’s family. Tanya’s mother stated, “She’s always been a puny child, but this time she’s took real bad, throat’s all raw, talk all about her head las’ night.” (47) The family isn’t financially able to send for a doctor; therefore, Ms. Richards takes control of the situation and has a doctor sent to help Tanya’s condition. Vroman telling her readers that Tanya’s condition is at its worst was a hint. Ms. Richards soon receives a letter stating Tanya’s well-being. In closing, the doctor stated, “P.S. She had diphtheria.” (49) Tanya’s health conditions were soon getting better, and Christmas was approaching. “But by Christmas Tanya was dead!” (49) Ms. Jane Richard’s health condition throughout the book begins to descend because of her being concerned about her students. Trying to gather money from the school was an emotional strain. “She’s really very sick, maybe you’d like to help?” Some of the teachers would constantly tell Jane to stop worrying herself because the stress would damage her own health. The pain in the back of her eyes grew more insistent, “I
can," she said. “I can understand how intense you are because I used to be like that; but, pet, Negro teachers have always had to work harder than any others and till recently have always got paid less, so for our own health’s sake we have to let up wherever possible. Believe me, honey, if you don’t learn to take it easy, you’re going to get sick.” (48) Jane did not believe the other teachers at all. She soon would, "Jane did. Measles!" (48)

Another aspect about this literary reading was the symbolism used in the book. Many of the students were given names after well-known historians such as “...Fredrick Douglass, Franklin Delano, Abraham Lincoln, Booker T., Joe Louis, George Washington.” (44) Vroman chose these names for some of the students to symbolize that each child would succeed. The parents want their children to become educated individuals, but aren’t equipped with the amount of knowledge to help their children get to a successful level. “What a great burden you bear, little people, heirs to all your parents’ stillborn dreams of greatness.” (57) Jane took upon herself not to let any of the parents down as a teacher to help all the children succeed. “I must not fail you.” (57) C.T. telling false tales about his father’s employment symbolized C.T. wanting to be successful in life. “He work at dat factory cross-town, he make plenty money, Miz, Richards.” Ms. Richard’s knew the about the lie C.T. was telling the entire time. “The record said, "Unemployed." “Oh, you poor darling. You poor proud lying darling.” (45) Vroman purposely referred to the students as mice throughout the reading selection. “Only this time it was forty-three mice.” The students being called “blind mice” symbolized that the students were labeled due to their financial statuses and educational levels. Many of the students were poor, and thought of as ignorant. “The small figure in the too-large trousers and the too-small shirt drew itself up to full height.” After one school term of being with the children, Jane finally realized that the children
Shrimp Fried Scary

College Campuses are supposed to be where you feel your safest. A home away from home some may say. Some of the things that go on at college campuses and around them will shock most; something as simple as buying a French fry from McDonald’s and getting robbed for it to stepping out of your dorm and getting into a fight with locals. Friday night was one of the most shocking and unexpected events that has ever happened to me.

“Friday, Thank GOD! It’s Friday.” I said and looked over at my friends as we were walking through the yard of ASU after our Lab Biology class that let out at 7:20 at night.

“Yo, let’s hit up Burger King y’all,” My friend Kennan said.

“Nah, I’m in the mood for some Chinese, let’s go there,” I said and looked at my friends Omar and Keisha. They nodded in approval and we were on our way.

It was the beginning of November and it always got extra cold at night. I had on my Alabama State University letterman’s jacket, and new pair of black and yellow Ones, looking fly as usual of course. Kennan was trippin’ off of some old Tupac song on his Apple IPod touch and poppin’ his collar like he was P-Diddy or somebody. Omar and Keisha were walking behind us “caking up” as we call it for flirting. I looked over at
Kennan again as he was doing the dougie and singing the lyrics to “I Get Around.” I shook my head in disgust.

“How you gone do the dougie to Tupac, don’t disrespect him like that stupid!” I pushed his big dread head and he stumbled a little bit almost falling. He looked over at me.

“Girl you crazy, always getting offended when it comes to your lil boo Tupac,” He said mocking me. “You know he dead right?” He said laughing.

“Yes, I know he’s dead but his music and legacy lives on!”

Kennan stared at me for a second then busted out in hysteric laughter.

I shook my head again and smiled a bit.

“Whatever.”

I stopped dead in my tracks and punched Kennan in his chest to get his attention. Two guys dressed in all black were walking towards us; I felt my heart almost jump out of my chest. They were walking faster and my feet were frozen I couldn’t move. The next thing I know I blacked out. When I woke I looked down at my feet and my shoes were gone. I shivered at the cold breeze of the night, because my jacket was gone also. I had a massive headache. I called for Kennan, I looked to my side and he was lying beside me, with his forehead bleeding, unconscious. Omar and Keisha were nowhere in sight. I tried to get up but fell as soon as I tried. I scooted back leaning against a light pole trying to recall what happened. I reached in my pocket for my cell phone and I couldn’t find it. I was robbed. I can’t explain the feeling I felt at that moment. My best friends were missing and one unconscious lying next to me. My breaths got harder and I started to cry, the tears flowed furiously as I tried to stand up once again. I pushed my weight onto the
ight pole and gathered myself enough strength to stand. I limped forward as I tried to move one foot in front of the other. Slowly I began to walk faster, until I began to run. I was so confused and scared and cold. My tears were clouding my eyesight. I wiped my face and ran faster. The only thing in my mind was the sight of Kennan’s body lying on the ground. I cried harder, and ran into the gas station across from the bookstore on campus. I ran into the back of the store to the bathroom, and cried there on the hard cold, floor holding my head in my hands in disbelief and anger.

...
Salvation

In the short story Salvation, Langston Hughes's narrative of how he grew up, she shows various points of literary elements. Some of these elements are symbolization and setting as well as a little dialogue. Langston Hughes is a great poet and novelist. He ventured out greatly during his time and accomplished many thing black people during his era were not given the chance to achieve.

Langston's story of Salvation tells how his Aunt took him to church on day and everyone was what is called “coming to Jesus” or getting saved. He sat in the pew in front of the church with the other kids and watched as they faked salvation so that they could go home and also be praised by the pastor. Langston did not fake, he sat in his pew because truthfully in his heart he believed and wanted Jesus to come into him. He witnessed the awe and praise the other kids had gotten for “coming to Jesus.” They ranted and raved and praised the Lord but Langston knew it was just a show because the kids were ready to go home, and they all knew the sooner the received Jesus, the sooner they would be able to go home.

The preacher and congregation of the church looked on at Langston as if he was refusing to let Jesus come onto him. He began to feel ashamed and eventually gave in to please his church family and his Auntie. When Langston got home he cried because Jesus did not come to him. His Aunt believed he was crying because he received the Holy
Ghost. Langston held on to his values as long as he could in church, he refused to be fake. I think he was showing how life can be, especially in religion. Having to be like others regardless if it is what you feel is right, so that you will not be looked as different or strange. In his dialogue with the other boy who was sitting in the pew with him, Langston showed how people are in life. This reveals how people are to please others for selfish reason. This short story is also a reflection of Langston Hughes’ view of religion.
“Salvation”

Many people can say they are saved but do not live by their faith. Many people go to church just to hear God’s word or for all the wrong reasons. Most people understand building a relationship with God is an important factor in life, but they are scared to change their sinful ways. In “Salvation” Langston Hughes skillfully uses characterization and setting to describe what it feels like to be saved but not really saved.

In “Salvation” Langston Hughes used characterization throughout the story. He stated that his aunty told him when he was saved his soul was cleaned from all sin, and he believed her. He also heard other church members say the same thing, so he felt it must be true, so he sat in church waiting for Jesus to come to him. While he was waiting on Jesus, he was wondering why everyone else was being saved except him. He continued waiting to see Jesus, but he had not come to save him yet. Then he noticed it was just him sitting alone by himself, holding service later than normal. He decided to lie and say that Jesus had come to him and saved him. After lying and service was over, he felt guilty because he knew he had lied about being saved. Since Jesus did not come to save him, he did not believe in him anymore.
Hughes also utilizes setting to develop the theme in “Salvation”. He describes the setting as a hot crowded church service. As service continued, all worshipers were up on their feet, giving God praise while he was waiting to see Jesus. The young sinners were asked to leave their seats and come to the altar to repent to God, and ask him for forgiveness. While most of them were at the altar, others were crying and shouting to Jesus. The service continue; people were singing and others kneeling around the young sinners’ feet, praying for them. When Langston finally decided to get up and join everyone else, the whole room shouted out to Jesus. After all the young ones were blessed in the name of God, the whole church was praising God.

Most people know the main point of being saved is allowing Jesus to save their souls from eternal death, so that they can live for God and be used by God to help others. By attending church on a regular basis could be a start for most people, but a lot of people feel since they have been sinning for so long there is no point of changing. Why should they go to church if they going to continue sinning after service is over? Most people forget that as long as they repent to god and ask for forgiveness they are saved from all sin. Langston Hughes gives specific details on what it seems like to be saved by God, but going to church when the time is right for sinners is the best time to devote themselves to Jesus Christ.
Life as an Adopted Child

Meeting her for the first time was an experience I will never forget. It took 20 years of my life to actually meet my biological mother. All this time I could only imagine what she looked like because I had never seen her before; I could only imagine what things would be like when I met her. Thoughts occur in my head like, does she look like me, would she love me, and would she notice me when she saw me? I never thought the day would come true. The day I met my mother was an overwhelming experience I would cherish for life.

Meeting her was a dream come true. The moment I stepped out of the car I began to sweat. There were four ladies standing on the porch, I did not know which one of them was my mother because I had never seen her, until a lady pointed her out to me:

“Here is your mother right here”

“Which one?”

“The lady behind me”

“Hi mother”

“Hey son”

We both stood there stunned for a moment because we finally met each other for the first time since she birthed me. After that I ran up to her and gave her an everlasting hug. That
moment was a relief for me because all my life I had this empty feeling inside my heart. I was feeling like who am I, is my mother alive, would she accept as her son, and could I forgive her for giving me away to the system? When I met her the answer to those questions were answered with “Yes”. I was too excited to see her, so at that moment I forgave her. I felt like, since she was the one who birthed me, I had to forgive her. Without her life on earth mine would have been impossible, and a part of me was missing until I met her. As we both sat down on the porch and wiped the tears from our eyes, we began to talk.

“Can you forgive me”?

“Yes, you are my mother and no women on this earth can take your place”

“Thank you son”

“No problem I love you”

“Love you too”

I forgave her for her past because I wanted a relationship with her. Holding a grudge against her was not going to stand in the way of our relationship. What she has done in the past does not concern me anymore, having her in my life does. It was more important to me to meet my mom, instead of holding a grudge against her for things I could not change. My mother was everything I thought she would be like; the love we shared for twenty minutes was the greatest moment of my life. If I had to do it all over again, I would want it to be the same exact way it is now because being an adopted child is who I am. The decision she made was best for me and
her because no one knows what could have happen. I love my mom and meeting her for the first time was, experience I would never forget.
Everyone enjoys going to the movies because it has become one of the norm America's pastimes. Going to the movies on the weekend as a family outing is considered a norm in this society. Each year, theatre has developed with better technology, eloquence of language, taste preference, and quality. All of these factors generate a huge impact on the "finishing product" of the theatrical film. Technology allows the producers to be more diverse in constructing the film. Language is the communicating factor.
that targets the audience, which will
ultimately create the preference and
quality. As the world continues to evolve, the
movies that are produced are becoming
more explicit each and every day. The evidence
of the overwhelming amount of reference to violence
and sex is becoming outrageous.

Violence is brewing in the society itself,
but over the years violent movies have plummeted
into the box offices due to high demand. Generally,
being involved in an unstable environment can
manifest in your life in the worst way. In a
hypothetical sense, a mother scolds her child
and tells him not to watch any action
movies because of the high volume
of violence. As the mother moves down-
stairs, he starts to watch "Dark Knight Rises,"

because curiosity killed the cat. With that the young adolescent sneaking to watch this intense movie could cause him to fight in school to solve minor misunderstandings [instead of handling], ultimately, leading him to the issue of dealing with being obedient. For example, in 1961, Albert Bandura performed an experiment called the Bobo Doll Experiment. Based essentially on observation, Bandura hypothesized that human behavior was a learned process, by imitating "society." Bandura chose children as the subject in this experiment. Children are generally less conditioned socially because of the lack of interaction,
Compared to adults, Bandura conducted a study of the behavior of two different variable groups of children; one group watched a violent movie and the other group watched a nonviolent movie. The children that watched the violent movie were more prone to hitting the bobo doll, proving that Bandura’s hypothesis was correct. Along with violence, sex is also a major concern with the creation of movies in the 21st century. There are no longer sexual innuendos; they are delivered deliberately. Movies such as Shrek even contain sexual humor which are perceived to be for E rated audiences. 

As a personal experience when as a young child, Isis was at her aunts house and her older cousin baby-sat her for awhile while
he baby-sat her, he watched BET music videos that contained a lot of women dancing provocative. At a wedding reception, Isis got up to dance leading her to dance like the music video, and soon after being rebuked for dancing in such a manner.

That is a prime example of the way that this young generation tries to imitate what they see in the environment, just as the Bobo Doll experiment.

In conclusion, the movies that are being produced are way too explicit because of the effects that the contents will have on individuals. The public is liable to react in any kind of way because some people may admire the actor/actress yearning
for "love," or lacks the proper communication skills to express the way they feel, leading to violence.
How a Student Becomes Burned Out From School

A student is a person formally engaged in learning being enrolled in a school or college. The task of a student is complex, requiring much attention. Along with being a student, there are many other things that a student can take a part in bringing their life into full circle. Generally, most students endure most of their trials and tribulations starting in the eleventh grade of high school. This assumption has been made because these are the years that you have to start to put your life into perspective, more to prepare for college or your career path. A student becoming burned out from school is an easy process by becoming too involved with too many extracurricular activities, not being able to comprehend courses, or trying to live up to other people’s expectations.

As an active participant in high school, I know how it feels to be exhausted from school. This is a simple task to accomplish. Being a part of extracurricular activities is a major component. As a high schooler I participated in a performing arts program, varsity track and field, student government, and two student organizations. With all of these tasks on my plate they present some conflict at times, because each area demands attention. With there always being a meeting to be apart of, at times I felt overwhelmed. Becoming overwhelmed is the start becoming tired of school, because there are so many things to take part of.

Comprehension skills are essential to learning in the classroom. If a student does not comprehend the course work assigned is evidently going to present an issue in the classroom. Most students probably do not realize they have an issue with comprehension until they are presented with a test. But at that point, it is too late. For instance, in Georgia every high school
junior must pass a competency test to be eligible for graduation their senior year. If this student does not pass this test it, it can be assumed that they could not grasp the material that has been taught to them over the years. This could cause them to become discouraged after all of the hard work that they have done throughout the years leading up to their eleventh grade year.

Living up to other people’s expectations, is not a good suggestion. Especially in regards of college. College is a choice that has to be made for a person’s own sake. The responsibilities of a college student are challenging. Going to school from pre-k to twelfth grade is natural, and is expected in a normal functioning society. But, college is an option. If, a student is already “burned out,” from grade school they have to encompass some type of desire to strive for a better life.

Becoming tired of school is a easy process, as stated earlier. But it is your responsibility to know what you can handle as a student. In society it is a norm to see students drop out of school, and that is generally a sign that they have become tired of the monotony of being a student. Therefore becoming tired of school is expected because no one likes to do activities that are not considered fun. With that being said you have to know what type of work load that you can handle because you are responsible for your well being.
The Best Way Out is to Finish

As humans it is a given that we will doubt ourselves at times when our confidence level is not at its peak. What are the steps that you take to correct this feeling of incompetency? Do you shrivel up like an introvert and proclaim that you can not step up to the plate or bite the bullet, step out on faith like an extrovert and finish our way through? These feelings never concerned me until I began running track in the third grade. The moment I met my high school track coach, she influenced my life in many ways by bringing the discipline I possessed on the track into my personal life.

As a young girl I have been involved with extracurricular activities. Therefore, I have always come into contact with many people because my parents have always kept me busy. When I was in the third grade I started running track for the Gazelle’s track team. Track has always been near and dear to my heart. This leads me to my first track meet my junior year, Morehouse Relays in Atlanta, Georgia when my coach, Deanna Lane, told me that the best way out is to finish strong. As I bent down at the start line to get my baton in the exchange zone my stomach jumped, my legs were loose, my mind was focused. I knew that it was my turn as third leg in the sprint medley. My team mate was coming down the 100 yard dash lane, bracing myself, I placed my left foot forward, right foot backwards, right hand to the back so that I could grasp
the baton, as I sprinted off into my 400 meters. In my head I was thinking “It’s now my turn.” As I came around the last curve I heard a voice yell that sounded like Coach Lane’s, “DIGG DIGG DIGG!” Those simple eight words have traveled with me ever since that day, I stepped out on my nervous energies and finished my race strong whether it is on the track or in my personal life.

Coach Lane is near and dear to my heart; she was my track coach for three years in high school, who I admired dearly. Lane ran for Pope high school in Georgia and continued her track career at Florida State University. Knowing that Lane came form the same area as I was raised was always an inspiration that I could be just as great as her. My junior year was my most influential year of track. Lane devoted a lot of her time with myself and three other runners. Through her dedication as a coach she trained me day in and day out. There were morning workouts, prepared nutritional lunches, night practice and study hall. My coach implemented every aspect of a student-athlete because she wanted us to be great at what we were perfecting.

Sitting in my coach’s office she asked:

“What do you plan to obtain in your track career?”

“I want to be great.”

“How are you going to be great?

“I’m going to work hard”

“Good because practice makes perfect, and the best way to finish any task in life is to finish. Do not back down from challenges because you are a child of God, and he will carry you through any trial that you feel you are not adequately equipped.”
This was the start to a great beginning. When my coach and I made this agreement that we would work hard to be great I knew that this was the start to a beautiful journey. The discipline of an athlete is outstanding. Typically, to be a great athlete you must be disciplined so that you are able to reach all of your goals. Time management is a necessary tool to obtain because of your hectic schedule. Lane made sure that I understood what a disciplined athlete was because she knew that I had it in me as an individual.
Being black in America during the first half of the 20th century was pretty hard. Yet, being black in the south during that era was one of the most difficult positions to be in period. This is the story of my grandmother Rosa Webster who was born August 13, 1922. She was the daughter of Charles and Claudia Hawthorne. I decided to do my essay on one of her experiences because she is the oldest member of my family and can recall memories from 80 years ago like she just happened yesterday.

Like Zora Hurston my grandmother didn’t always know that she was just a “black girl.” You see my grandmother was originally from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and came to Alabama when she was 8 after the death of her father. She describes coming to Alabama as “the worst thing that ever happened to me.” That’s because things were so much different. She can remember the dollar days which meant working from sun up to sun down and only making a dollar and even then that was considered a blessing. She says that never would happen in Pittsburgh.

One specific incident that she mentions when talking about the hardships that black faced was when she started working in the fields for a man named Mr. Malone. She recalled having to walk at least 3-5 miles to go work for a man that thought black people as less than a dog and thought that they should be happy to all day in the fields no matter the weather conditions. She goes on to say that one day after working all day and only wanting to receive her fair pay that Mr. Malone “told some bad news on her and the other workers.” He claimed that he wasn’t able to sell his items at the usual price this week because of competition which included tobacco, cotton, and various vegetables. Therefore, he couldn’t pay the regular wages that he usually did and handed everyone a sack full of sugar and meal and told them to be back tomorrow at the same time like he owned them.

Also like in the Autobiography of Ms. Jane Pitman my grandmother remembers the retaliation that whites had towards blacks during the civil rights movements. A lot of the black people were still working for the whites whether being in-house or field workers at that time. My grandmother tells the
story of when some of the white people that her friends worked for found out they were connected to. 
the civil rights movement they were immediately fired, beaten, and sometimes killed. My grandmother 
was in a position to help and made sure they all had food to eat during that time and says that if our 
people would learn to do that now we would be so much better and more united as a people.

These are only some of the stories that my grandmother likes to tell when she reminisces on her 
life. She always says she can't understand what happened to our people. She always smiles when she 
remembers the unity we used to have. Being black was hard during a large portion of her life but I 
believe it made her and people like her better people. Its nice to have a walking encyclopedia of African 
American History.

Wow

Excellent points

Good conclusion

I suggest you make sure the paragraphs are all double spaced with no space in between

Nevertheless
My Shows

The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air and Martin are my two favorite shows. When I'm down or in a bad mood, I just watch one of my favorite shows to make me laugh or cheer me up. Fresh Prince was my favorite show of all time and I began to watch Martin. It was just as funny. I didn't know which one I enjoyed more. The Fresh Prince and Martin are very similar and share a lot of the same characteristics.

In my essay I will discuss the similarities and give details to support my reasons. The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air and Martin were both comedy shows that showed the everyday lives of two young black males. Will Smith was......
Story of the Fresh Prince and he was in his early twenties, Martin Lawrence was also in his early twenties.

Also both sitcoms show the two stars and how they interact with their family and friends. The shows depict them going through everyday struggles that normal, everyday people go through, but they always include humor to lighten up the mood.

The shows let you watch both characters grow as men and mature through the progress of the shows. Life lessons could be learned on every episode. There was a moral to every story and each show had substance. The shows were both hilarious and informal because you could become weak from laughter, while you are learning something you can actually apply to your own life.
The Fresh Prince of Bel Air and Martin both had main characters who could play multiple characters and had many personality traits. Will and Martin could both go from being serious to being goofy and silly. They could also play multiple characters in the same show. They could play an old man in one scene and then in the very next scene, a shotty, nosed kid who was always getting into trouble. The ability to show different aspects of their talent and emotions is what attracted me to these shows. It made them both interesting because I never knew what was going to happen. The randomness kept me attracted to the show because I wanted to know what was going to happen next. I believe Martin's and Will's abilities to play multiple roles are key reasons for their success.
The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air and Martin

are my two favorite shows of all-time. I'm not sure

which show I like more because they both are funny

and contain many of the same aspects. Both shows portray the

life of a young black male and his interactions with his family.

Also, both television shows have main characters who

can play multiple roles. They made the show entertaining

and kept you on the edge of your seat. These two sitcoms

are basically the same; and that's why I like them equally.

I couldn't possibly pick one over the other.
My Shows

The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air and Martin are my two favorite shows. When I'm down or in a bad mood, I just watch one of my favorite shows to make me laugh or cheer me up. Fresh Prince was my favorite show of all time, and I began to watch Martin. It was just as funny. I didn't know which one I enjoyed more. The Fresh Prince and Martin are very similar, and they both show a lot of the same characteristics.

In my essay, I will discuss these similarities and give details to support my reasons. The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air and Martin were both comedy shows that showed the everyday lives of two young black males. Will Smith was...
Thump-thump; breathe thump-thump, breath. My heart beat as if it was pounding out through my brain; I tried to catch my breath. I heard footsteps coming up behind me like an elephant chasing at my heels. A scream pierced my ears and echoed many times in my mind. My thoughts raced from one thing to another. After locking the door, the four of us clinched in a corner for nearly an hour. My day had begun normal. I remember I woke up, went to school and found myself with my friends that afternoon. My company was five of my closest pals, Tyler, Shayla, Gayle, Lee, and my boyfriend Darryl. We all had hung out many times before and knew each other well. For most of the evening, we sat around telling horror stories and gossiping about classmates. Time passed quickly and soon, it was time to head home. The girls were all planning a slumber party at Shayla’s. Her parents had gone out of town for the weekend, and she was not willing to stay alone. We began our evening of leisure by getting into our P.J’s, and returning to our scary stories. Before realizing it, another hour had passed. All the stories must have gotten to us because before we went upstairs we made sure every light was on in the house. The hair on the back of my neck began to rise as we listened to the cold aching silence. In the distance, we listened to three loud car horns and a door slam. We, then, jumped away from the window and started down the stairs. Half way down the stairs, we stopped dead in our tracks. The roof began to rattle as if someone was climbing across it. Our pulses raced as we flew down the remainder of the stairs. Thump-thump, breath. We huddled together in the kitchen. For our safety, we gathered a sharp knife and a phone. We came up with explanations to relieve our minds deciding
that the horn was a neighbor and the thump on the roof was the cat. Calming our thoughts down, we relaxed into a group, sitting on the counter. We laughed at the fools we had been, and grew quiet as we heard several car doors slamming, again. Silently staring at one another our eyes grew wide as we hesitated to jump. Tyler tried to explain "It’s just the neighbors." We sighed in relief that someone had broken the silence. At last, we developed the strength to start back up the stairs. This time we made it past the bottom half of the stairs where we could see out the window. Shayla, who was leading the pack, screamed. The rest of us had not reached the section of the stairs to see out the window. I was next in line as I leaned to see what was happening. I looked out to see our cars in the driveway, headlights shining.

We turned and bolted to the bottom of the stairs. We climbed over one another to reach the security of the bathroom. All four of us flung our bodies against the door as we slammed and locked it tightly. Shayla began to cry, taking short sharp breaths that caused her to shake rapidly. Thump-thump, breath I sat thump-thump, breathe to catch my air. Tyler grabbed the phone from Shayla’s hand and swiftly dialed 9-1-1. When the operator began to speak, Tyler lunged the phone into Shayla’s shaking hands. Shayla took the phone, not realizing what was going on, and hung it up. Gayla and I stood blocking the door in disbelief of our situation. I felt anxious, listening to Becky weep, tears rolling down her face. The phone rang. In horror, we all jumped, as we looked at the phone, debating in our minds that would pick it up. I looked as Shayla picked up the phone and hesitantly answered "Hello?" We all waited for Shayla reaction to the caller. She let out a sigh of relief letting us know it was the 9-1-1 operator. Shayla stayed on the phone with the operator, who calmed her down for nearly a half an hour. We did not hear anything for a short time, but we could not leave the bathroom because we were still waiting for the cops to arrive. Suddenly, it began again and we heard loud bangs on the side of the house. As walls
began to rattle Shayla screeched and tears returned to her eyes. The doorbell began to ring and my heartbeat grew. I was so mad the thump-thump, breathe returned roaring out of my chest.

The cops had not arrived and everything started to blur in my mind. The operator said the cops were outside but not to let them in until they did a "code knock." We waited, listening to everything that happened outside the door that concealed us so tightly. Banging started again, this time with voices. Voices that sounded panicked and demanding. For a moment we hesitated then recognized the voices. It was Darryl and Lee at the back door. Rage flowed through my body as we flung open the bathroom door and the four of us ran out, like a football team ready to play tough defense. The thump-thump, breathe began to settle as we opened the back door and let them in. They ran in and locked the door behind them. We yelled at them sternly as we noticed the cops sitting outside. Opening the door, we apologized to the cops many times. The cops asked the boys to step outside, asking Shayla if she wished to press charges. Without hesitation, Shayla said "no" and the cops drove away. They left us with a bit of advice; they said "Lay these boys down and kick them several times." We all laughed, but the guys knew this was a definite possibility! The guys came inside where we talked for many hours about a joke they thought was so funny. When discussing, the girls noticed how everything fell into place. Such as the guys getting to the house before us and Becky thinking she unlocked her gate, which wasn't really locked. When the guys left we made fun of each other's reaction to the incident. Talking about how we should have turned out some of the lights. The guys had informed us that they saw our every move the whole night. Even though we knew what the boys had done we still had problems sleeping through the night. We thought what if someone came after the guys had gone home. We would just assume it was the guys again and not take the proper precautions needed. I
cannot believe we had such a scary night. Now every time we are home alone we laugh about our naivety during the incident. Although we still lock all the doors and shut off all the lights!
What is a successful student? Well, certainly every college has their image of a successful student, or rather "the" successful student. It is the student that they want to attend their college, walk down their halls and call their name alma mater. At some point during a student's high school career they must define the successful student for themselves. We all know that education is important. However not everyone knows how to survive in college. There are many different steps a person can take to become an excellent college student.

The first step is to attend class. It is difficult at times to pull yourself out of bed to go to class in the morning. However it is for your own good. If you attend class regularly you will pick up on information that may be on tests and quizzes. Many teachers give special hints of certain things that will be on their tests and if you are not there you will miss out.

The second step is to get to know your professors. This is really important because they may want to help you more if they actually know who you are. Also by getting to know their personality, may give you insight into how they will structure quizzes and tests. For example if you talk to your professor and they tell very elaborate stories without leaving anything out, they may choose very detailed questions. In this case you would know to read your text very carefully and not skip the side paragraphs on the textbook pages.

The next step is to do your homework. This may seem like a given but many people fail classes because they don't do this. Doing homework is a very important part of your classes. Not only does it count as a percentage of your grade but it also helps you understand the class...
material. This way you can ask questions about things you don't understand. Without doing your homework you won't even know you should be asking these questions.

The next step is study for all tests ahead of time. Many students decide to put off studying for the last minute, such as the day before. If you study ahead of time you won't have to stress out the night before. Also you can get more sleep, which is vital in getting a good grade. By leaving your studying until the last minute you are really compromising your grade. Many times it is impossible to learn all the material in one day.

In conclusion: these are really some easy steps to becoming a successful college student. If they are followed I can guarantee that you will accomplish the degree you are trying to get. It may take some work to get used to doing some of these things, but believe me in the end it is worth it. A great education is one of the most important things in life.
Appendix E
Interviews

Set 1 Interview Questions/D.J.

Felicia Taylor: How would you define the term *writing assignment*?

Student #1: To me, a writing assignment is when the teacher gives you a specific topic to write on and she wants you to maybe research it or maybe just give your own opinion and put it in a written format.

Felicia Taylor: Can you give me an example of one of your writing assignments in high school?

Student #1: I know we had to do a writing assignment on like a ancient Greek book that we were reading. She wanted us to take a specific chapter and like give details on what was maybe - what was different between their society and our society.

Felicia Taylor: What about in college? Can you think of a particular topic you had to write about in college? English 131 essay?

Student #1: Ok, we had to write a descriptive paper maybe like interaction we had with our parents.

Felicia Taylor: Ok. Interesting.

Felicia Taylor: How many times a week did you complete English work, including homework, outside of the classroom in high school?

Student #1: Probably at least 2 to 3

Felicia Taylor: 2 to 3 per week?

Felicia Taylor: How would you describe the difficulty of the work you completed in your high school English class? Or would you say that the work was difficult at all?

Student #1: I wouldn’t say the work was difficult. It was challenging and it did like put a lot on me especially my senior year and they tried to get us ready for college. But it wasn’t difficult, it was just a lot of it.

Felicia Taylor: What would you say was your weakest area in English? (i.e., providing support, proofreading, etc.).

Student #1: Probably my punctuation, like when to use commas and things of that nature.

Felicia Taylor: That was the weakest area in high school also, right?
Student #1: Yes

Felicia Taylor: So you’re still experiencing that problem now?

Student #1: Yes

Felicia Taylor: Providing support was never one of your problems?

Student #1: No ma'am

Felicia Taylor: How many paragraphs did you write during each grade in your high school English classes? How many essays did you write during each grade?

Student #1: Talking about for each individual paper?

Felicia Taylor: Each individual English class. You know, how many essays did you write during 9th grade English would you say in a school year? How many?

Student #1: At least a hundred, couple of hundred.

Felicia Taylor: Paragraphs?

Student #1: In your 9th grade English class? What about your 10th grade English class?

Student #1: It was quite a bit more than that because we had to do at least one essay a week.

Felicia Taylor: Okay. So what about 11th and 12th grade?

Student #1: 11th grade was kind of the same but my 12th grade was kind of bad because I had a teacher to die….

Felicia Taylor: That’s unfortunate.

Student #1: And then the teacher they got right after that, kind of quit because she couldn’t really take it. I think she was teaching elementary and then she went to high school or something like that.

Felicia Taylor: Ok, so that was a transition, her teaching elementary school students and then teaching high school students.

Student #1: And we had another gap. We got another teacher that he never could quite catch up. We were so far behind at that point.

Felicia Taylor: If you could have added anything to your learning experiences in your high school English classes to prepare you for college, what would it be? Explain your answer.
Student #1: I would say maybe create a program where college teachers would actually come to the high school and like maybe give like assignments to show what would happen ---like maybe getting like a kind of like an simulation of what college work is like because it’s so much different.

Felicia Taylor: What would you say is the biggest difference between your high school English classes and your college English classes?

Student #1: Well, the college classes are a little bit bigger and the teacher really don’t have time to go around to each individual student and say “Are you having a problem with this?, Do you want to be in this class?” It’s kind of like you have to do it yourself. You have to go to the teacher yourself because they probably have 100 or 200 students; they don’t have time to go to each individual student and ask “Can I help you with this? You’re weak in this, do you need to get tutoring for this?”

Felicia Taylor: How many students were in your English 131 class?

Student #1: Talking about at the end or the beginning? Because we had a big dropout.

Felicia Taylor: Okay. Explain to that me.

Student #1: I think, in the beginning, we had about 35, then towards the end we probably had maybe I would say 15, no more than 18.

Felicia Taylor: Do you have any idea why these students would’ve dropped? Because I’m assuming that you talked to some of these students. Do you know why it started off with 35 students and ended with 15?

Student #1: I think they maybe really didn’t like how the teacher did; she wanted us to pass the class so she would like give us an assignment and if she felt like if she graded it were not going to pass, she would give it back to us and let us do it again. And a lot of them did not like that. I don’t see why they didn’t. Cause I think they wanted (inaudible)

Felicia Taylor: That’s impossible

Felicia Taylor: So you were explaining to me why some students even after being given an opportunity to take work back that they may not have done well on and to do better on it by adding some details to the work, you were saying (inaudible) So why do you think some of these students still refused to take the work and have the opportunity to do a better job?

Student #1: Well, because we only have 2 or 3 assignments before midterms. And you know a lot of students want to know where they are before making up so they can go
ahead and drop the class without the penalty of getting an “F.” So, if we only have 2 or 3 assignments, we only have one graded assignment and the other 2, she tried to give back to us (inaudible).

Felicia Taylor: You said that she was trying to give it back to you?

Student #1: Yes and she was explaining “If I grade this, you’re going to get a bad grade.” And they felt like that maybe she was grading a little bit unfairly---going into too much detail like 2 points off for a comma here, you didn’t put a period in the right place, you had a fragment sentence or too much in one sentence. So they felt like well I’ll just get out of this class while I can now because they didn’t want to be stuck after the midterm.

Felicia Taylor: Explain why you think that your high school English classes did or did not prepare you for college English.

Student #1: I felt like my 9th through 11th grade classes did but in my 12th with my teacher dying, I feel like I didn’t get the full effect of what I should’ve been able to get.

Felicia Taylor: Just the idea—the fact that you had different teachers in the 12th grade English class is what kept you from getting what you could’ve gotten.

Student #1: Because all teachers teach differently.

Felicia Taylor: Exactly.

Felicia Taylor: What kinds of activities did the teachers use to teach you about providing support and details for essays and paragraphs?

Student #1: A lot of them would give us sample essays or they would tell us to write an essay that would be graded and they would like show all of our weak points or they would go over like a power point of what a good essay looks like and what a bad essay looks like.

Felicia Taylor: Did you lose points in your paragraphs and essays because of support you provided?

Student #1: In college or high school?

Felicia Taylor: In high school.

Student #1: Some, I would say I lost some credit but not a substantial amount.

Felicia Taylor: Not enough to cause you the fail the essay or the paragraph?
Student #1: No

Felicia Taylor: Did you learn from the errors that the teacher logged in your paper?

Student #1: Yes, cause it showed me what I need to look out for…what my weaknesses were.

Felicia Taylor: You understood the teacher’s remarks?

Student #1: Yes

Felicia Taylor: What kinds of activities did the teacher use to teach you about proofreading for errors in grammar/mechanics?

Student #1: One thing I remember specifically, they would give us a paragraph or essay that had some errors and we need to go and find those errors.

Felicia Taylor: Did you understand why you lost points in your essays and paragraphs?

Student #1: Yes

Felicia Taylor: Did you lose enough points to fail an essay?

Student #1: Maybe 1 or 2 but not the majority

Felicia Taylor: Were most of your paragraphs and essays marked, graded, and returned to you in high school?

Student #1: Not my 9th grade year. She kept everything and would let us come to her computer and see what grade we got.

Felicia Taylor: So are you saying that your 10th grade teacher did mark them?

Student #1: Yes, my 10th grade teacher did.

Felicia Taylor: What about 11th grade?

Student #1: Yes, she did.

Felicia Taylor: And the 12th grade is the same problem with your having more than one teacher?

Student #1: Yes, my 1st teacher that I had, Ms. Kimble, she would give it back to us kind of promptly.

Felicia Taylor: So for the most part, most of your English teachers in grades 9th – 12th did mark, grade and return your papers to you. Maybe not the 9th grade teacher; she kept them, but she did go over them with you.
Student 1: No

Felicia Taylor: She kept them?

Student #1: He kept them.

Felicia Taylor: He kept them. And he didn’t go over them?

Student #1: No. He would like maybe like take a essay and go over the common mistakes we made.

Felicia Taylor: In general, not specifically. He didn’t go over specifics. But your 10\textsuperscript{th} grade teacher did go over a particular error you made in your paper?

Student #1: Yes

Felicia Taylor: And your 1\textsuperscript{st} 12\textsuperscript{th} grade teacher also did the same thing.

Student #1: Yes

Felicia Taylor: What is peer editing to you?

Student #1: Peer editing would be like for another student to give me his paper and me for to use my knowledge to go through the mistakes he made as if I was the teacher.

Felicia Taylor: How much peer editing did you participate in during high school, grades 9 through 12?

Student #1: I would say little to none.

Felicia Taylor: What did you have more difficulty with in your high school English courses?

Student #1: I would say the most difficult thing was like a research paper…they didn’t give us much detail on that. My 11\textsuperscript{th} grade, they just told us how to do the cards but they didn’t really tell us what would be the best sites to go to like you really should go to some of the (Inaudible) I don’t know if you can put anything on there. Your EDU is much more trustworthy than this one….

Felicia Taylor: Did your high school English teachers mark your papers for errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain what they marked the most?

Student #1: I would say they really didn’t. They would put an X but wouldn’t really explain what it was for.
Felicia Taylor: No explanation of why it’s an error? You pretty much answered the next question. Did the marks help you to write better papers?

Student #1: No.

Felicia Taylor: So how did you master grammar mechanics?

Student #1: It wasn’t really until I got to my college level.

Felicia Taylor: Oh, that’s interesting. So, college is when you really learned about grammar and mechanics?

Student #1: Yes. Because to me, in high school they were more interested in what you’re writing about rather than how you wrote it.

Felicia Taylor: The details / contents.

Felicia Taylor: What did your high school English teachers say or do to prepare you for college?

Student #1: They somewhat did their job but they were more interested in as long as you give me the meat of what I want, you can learn the other stuff later.

Felicia Taylor: If you could say something to your English teachers right now about what they could’ve done to help you, to better prepare you for college, what would you say?

Student #1: I would say that they maybe should’ve taught more about the grammars and mechanics instead of just as long as you give me what I ask for, I don’t really care. Teach about commas, semicolons, stuff like that. I know a lot of people who still don’t when to use it correctly.

Felicia Taylor: You’re right. Is there anything that you would like to add to this interview? I thank you so much for participating during this session.
Set 1 Interview Questions/Kevin

Felicia Taylor: How would you define the term writing assignment? What is a writing assignment to you?

Student #2: A writing assignment is basically when the teacher gives a topic and then she’ll discuss like how she wants you to write it, how long and basically how to write it—like if it’s an essay or journal or a couple of paragraphs.

Felicia Taylor: Can you give me an example of one of your writing assignments in high school and in college?

Student #2: In high school, a writing assignment was basically just to talk about our daily schedule and figure out how to prioritize things—just basically time management. So we had to do a writing assignment about that.

Felicia Taylor: Was it in an essay format or just a list?

Student #2: Just a list, basically.

Felicia Taylor: What about in college? Can you think of a particular topic you had to write about in college?

Student #2: Recently we had to write an autobiography about our life up until now.

Felicia Taylor: Can you remember when you took English 131? Can you remember from that class what type of assignments you had to write?

Student #2: In English 131, we had to write essays. Do you need a specific essay topic we had to write about?

Felicia Taylor: Yes, just any topic that you wrote about. It can be your personal essay that you wrote, like if you compared/contrasted anything.

Student #2: I did one essay about the cause and effect about being in gangs. What causes kids to join gangs and what’s the effect it has on their lives.

Felicia Taylor: How many times a week did you complete English work, including homework, outside of the classroom in high school?

Student #2: I would say on a daily basis. The teacher usually gave us a homework assignment and plenty of class work; so on a daily basis.

Felicia Taylor: So you would say 5?

Student #2: 5 days a week
Felicia Taylor: How would you describe the difficulty of the work you completed in your high school English class?

Student #2: It really wasn’t challenging; it was just paid attention and then you got the concepts.

Felicia Taylor: What would you say was your weakest area in English? (i.e., providing support, proofreading, etc.).

Student #2: Probably the weakest, I would probably have to say maybe just grammar and mechanics.

Felicia Taylor: So, proofreading for errors and grammar and mechanics?

Student #2: Yes

Felicia Taylor: How many paragraphs did you write during each grade in your high school English classes? Approximately in your 9th and 10th grade classes... let’s just go 9th grade because you took advance English in 10th grade. In 9th grade, how many essays or paragraphs did you say you wrote?

Student #2: How many essays and paragraphs? I would have to say…… How many paragraphs does each essay have?

Felicia Taylor: Well, no, just how many total because you can combine the essays and the paragraphs together. Don’t distinguish them. Really, I’m asking you how many writing assignments did you have?

Student #2: I probably would say about 12.

Felicia Taylor: For each level? 9th grade, 10th grade, 11th grade?

Student #2: Yes

Felicia Taylor: Was there a difference in the 10th grade advance course?

Student #2: It was basically accelerated; the teacher moved a lot faster.

Felicia Taylor: That was the biggest difference?

Student #2: Yes

Felicia Taylor: Do you remember what types of paragraphs and essays you wrote in high school?
Student #2: We wrote a lot of compare and contrast essays, we wrote a lot of persuasive essays as well.

Felicia Taylor: If you could have added anything to your learning experiences in your high school English classes to prepare you for college, what would it be? Explain your answer.

Student #2: I would say add more work because in college there’s a lot more work. In high school, they don’t give you a lot of work. So just the amount of work.

Felicia Taylor: The amount of work? Any particular area where you think that high school should’ve done more for them to support grammar mechanics? Because you did say your weakest area was grammar mechanics.

Student #2: I would definitely would have to say that grammar mechanics, a lot of proofreading, trying to find errors……

Felicia Taylor: Explain why you think that your high school English classes did or did not prepare you for college English.

Student #2: I think they prepared me for college pretty well because they went over the basic fundamentals and prepared me.

Felicia Taylor: What kinds of activities did the teachers use to teach you about providing support and details for essays and paragraphs?

Student #2: They would basically just put an emphasis on using support and detail or they’d give us a paragraph and point out the main topic and ask for supporting details.

Felicia Taylor: Was that helpful?

Student #2: Yes, it was helpful.

Felicia Taylor: Did you lose points in your paragraphs and essays because of support you provided?

Student #2: Yes, if you didn’t add enough support and details then you wouldn’t make a high grade.

Felicia Taylor: Out of all the points that you lost in your essays and paragraphs, would you say that you lost more points for grammar and mechanics or more points for not having enough support?

Student #2: Grammar and mechanics

Felicia Taylor: You didn’t fail a paper because of support, did you?
Student #2: No

Felicia Taylor: And when you did lose a lot of points, it was grammar and mechanics?

Student #2: Yes

Felicia Taylor: What kinds of activities did the teacher use to teach you about proofreading for errors in grammar/mechanics?

Student #2: The teacher would give us a paper and we’d basically have to pick out the errors. It would have different types of errors and we’d have to correct and say what would be wrong.

Felicia Taylor: Were they essays or writing assignments that you wrote or just essays that teachers got out of a book?

Student #2: Essays that the teacher got out of a book.

Felicia Taylor: Did you understand why you lost points on your essays and paragraphs when you actually did lose points?

Student #2: Yes, I went over and saw what errors I made.

Felicia Taylor: Did you learn more from the teacher’s comments or you just looked at your own essays and figured it out? Based on the teacher’s marks.

Student #2: It was both. The teacher went over it and then I saw why I made the mistakes.

Felicia Taylor: Were most of your paragraphs and essays marked, graded, and returned to you in high school? Explain your answer.

Student #2: Yes. Our teacher would give it back to us the next class period and we can see what we needed to correct and what our mistakes were.

Felicia Taylor: When you say she marked it, she marked subject–verb agreement errors, verb endings... she didn’t just put a check mark (inaudible)

Felicia Taylor: What did you have more difficulty with in your high school English courses?

Student #2: I would have to go back and say grammar/mechanics and proofreading.

Felicia Taylor: Did your high school English teachers mark your papers for errors in grammar/mechanics?

Student #2: Yes, they did.
Felicia Taylor: Explain what they marked the most.

Student #2: Using commas, when to use semi-colons and punctuation.

Felicia Taylor: Did the marks that the teachers made help you to write a better paper afterwards?

Student #2: Yes, it did. It was just simple mistakes, sometimes when you rush and go to class.

Felicia Taylor: What did your high school English teachers say or do to prepare you for college?

Student #2: Well, they definitely warned us that it was going to be a lot of work and a lot of reading. That’s basically it.

Felicia Taylor: Would you say that a teacher specifically gave you assignments because she knew the assignment would get you ready for college or just she pretty much gave you a list of warnings?

Student #2: I would say for the most part, just a list of warnings.

Felicia Taylor: But not necessarily detailed assignments

Student #2: Not really too much detailed assignments.

Felicia Taylor: But you would say that in grades 9 through 12 that most of your teachers encouraged you to go to college?

Student #2: Definitely.

Felicia Taylor: You said that you were in an advanced class in 10th grade? Would you say that teacher focused more on preparing you for college than the others did?

Student #2: I would say yes because they challenged us a little bit more like a college trying to prepare us. Basically it was accelerated. So they moved a lot quicker and they put more work in a less period of time.

Felicia Taylor: It was more accelerated and the quantity of work that you did.

Student #2: Yes

Felicia Taylor: Do you think learned more in that 10th grade advance course than you did in the 11th grade standard courses.

Student #2: I don’t think I learned more; I just think I learned at a faster rate.

Felicia Taylor: Thank you so much for participating in this interview.
Set 1 Interview Questions/Amanda

Felicia Taylor: How would you define the term *writing assignment*?

Student #3: Essays that we have to write talking about ourselves.

Felicia Taylor: So essays and paragraphs?

Student #3: Yeah

Felicia Taylor: Can you give me an example of one of your writing assignments in high school?

Student #3: No, not really. I forgot. I think I did a *(inaudible)* one. My last one in my 12th English class, I don’t really remember.

Felicia Taylor: You don’t remember what kind of essay it was? You don’t remember what the topic was?

Student #3: No

Felicia Taylor: What about in college? Can you think of a particular topic you had to write about in college? English 131 essay?

Student #3: Demonstration essay.

Felicia Taylor: How many times a week did you complete English work, including homework, outside of the classroom in high school?

Student #3: About 3 to 4 times a week

Felicia Taylor: How would you describe the difficulty of the work you completed in your high school English class?

Student #3: They basically were the same from my 10th through 12th grade.

Felicia Taylor: Explain the difficulty of the work.

Student #3: If we got a high grade, *(inaudible)* the teacher wanted more, talk about your essays…

Felicia Taylor: So, content was the biggest difficulty?

Student #3: Yes

Felicia Taylor: What would you say was your weakest area in English? (i.e., providing support,
proofreading, etc.).

Student #3: They’d give us work out of the textbook, commas, etc. were my biggest (inaudible)
Felicia Taylor: Punctuation marks?

Student #3: Yeah

Felicia Taylor: So, you would say grammar/mechanics…looking for and finding and correcting errors in grammar and mechanics like subject-verb agreement and capitalization.

Student #3: Yeah

Felicia Taylor: How many paragraphs did you write during each grade in your high school English classes?

Student #3: I don’t remember

Felicia Taylor: What about essays?

Student #3: 5

Felicia Taylor: Do you remember what types of paragraphs and essays you wrote?

Student #3: Narrative, persuasive, she made us do a thesis statement and descriptive

Felicia Taylor: Those are the ones you remember writing in grades 9 – 12?

Student #3: Mmm-huh

Felicia Taylor: If you could have added anything to your learning experiences in your high school English classes to prepare you for college, what would it be? Explain your answer.

Student #3: How our teacher (inaudible) prepared us for college our first year.

Felicia Taylor: Which teachers would you say? All of them, 9th – 12th?

Student #3: All of my 12th grade teachers prepared me for college more than 9th - 11th teachers.

Felicia Taylor: Explain that

Student #3: All of the other teachers didn’t really care about if you wanted to learn, they just threw work to you and didn’t explain it to you. But my 12th grade teacher actually explained and broke it down to us to help us prepare ourselves in the real life
because she said nobody was going to do it for you unless you had parents. And some parents don’t teach you like teachers.

Felicia Taylor: Explain why you think that your high school English classes did or did not prepare you for college English.

Felicia Taylor: So would you just say the same thing you said in your previous answer? Your 12th grade teacher provided explanations whereas 9th – 11th grade teachers didn’t provide explanations?

Student #3: Yes

Felicia Taylor: I’m going to back to Question #6: If you could have added anything to your learning experiences in your high school English classes to prepare you for college, what would it be? You said “Yes, my high school teachers, especially in the 12th grade, prepared me for college English.” But what was missing? If there was anything missing that you would’ve wanted those English teachers to do, what would you say it was?

Student #3: (inaudible) prepare me for my college life instead of just wasting my time (inaudible) nothing was explained (inaudible) She actually prepared me for my college life.

Felicia Taylor: What kinds of activities did the teachers use to teach you about providing support and details for essays and paragraphs?

Student #3: She used the overhead projector and printed things off the internet and helped us with our paragraphs (inaudible) essays that we wrote we put on transparency and show the students what we talked about in our essays (inaudible)

Felicia Taylor: Did you lose points in your paragraphs and essays because of support you provided? Explain your answer.

Student #3: Kind of. I was talking about something then moved to a different subject instead of staying on the same topic I was talking about.

Felicia Taylor: Did you lose enough points to cause you to fail essays and paragraphs?

Student #3: No

Felicia Taylor: What kinds of activities did the teacher use to teach you about proofreading for errors in grammar/mechanics?

Student #3: She used worksheets & textbooks.

Felicia Taylor: Did you understand why you lost points on your essays and paragraphs?
Student #3: Yes, grammar mistakes that I made.

Felicia Taylor: What did you do when you looked at them and read them?

Student #3: I looked at the mistakes I made.

Felicia Taylor: Were most of your paragraphs and essays marked, graded, and returned to you in high school? Explain your answer.

Student #3: Yes and school notes were put on the internet.

Felicia Taylor: So, these are notes about your particular essays and paragraphs?

Student #3: Mmm-huh

Felicia Taylor: What is peer editing to you?

Student #3: Proofreading?

Felicia Taylor: Peer editing.

Student #3: Correcting your mistakes

Felicia Taylor: Have you engaged in peer editing in your classes?

Student #3: No

Felicia Taylor: Peer editing is allowing classmates to look at your essays. It’s sharing your papers with others in your English class.

Felicia Taylor: What did you have more difficulty with in your high school English course?

Student #3: Grammar

Felicia Taylor: Did your high school English teachers mark your papers for errors in grammar/mechanics?

Student #3: Mm-huh, they would go back and fix our mistakes

Felicia Taylor: What did they mark most, in terms of grammar and mechanics?

Student #3: Commas, run-on sentences

Felicia Taylor: What did your high school English teachers say or do to prepare you for college?
Student #3: Not really much. She just prepared us how to do our essays because she said majority of college, we’ll be writing a lot of essays. That’s why we did from the beginning of school up until the end.

Felicia Taylor: Which teacher was this? Did the 9th – 11th grade teachers do anything?

Student #3: Yes. Yes, my 11th grade teacher did the same.

Felicia Taylor: So you wrote essays from the beginning of the semester to the end?

Student #3: Yes

Felicia Taylor: How many times did she relate the assignment to college?

Student #3: About 3 or 4 times a week

Felicia Taylor: So she not only mentioned college, she explained to you how you’ll be (inaudible).

Student #3: College life was different than high school life—that’s what she explained to us. She said once we get to college, it’s nothing like high school, how you can you slide by with everything—the professors aren’t going to tell you what to do…if you don’t do it, they’ll flunk you. She told us to go to class on time, do work and ask a lot of questions because that helps you.

Felicia Taylor: Are there any questions that you want to ask? Thank you for participating in this interview.
Set 1 Interview Questions/Truth

Felicia Taylor: How would you define the term writing assignment?

Student #4: Essays, long papers, MLA format, basically.

Felicia Taylor: Can you give me an example of one of your writing assignments in high school?

Student #4: In high school, we did research papers; we had to go through the work cited processes and putting references inside of the papers. My topic was Early Childhood Education.

Felicia Taylor: How many times a week did you complete English work, including homework, outside of the classroom in high school?

Student #4: Well, for me, English was kind of…is one of my strong points so either I would finish it in class or maybe a few minutes at home; So maybe, 3 days a week.

Felicia Taylor: How would you describe the difficulty of the work you completed in your high school English class?

Student #4: Being that it was new to me, a 7 … 7 out of 10, with 10 being the most difficult. In the 9th grade it was difficult because it was new. But by the time I got in 12th grade, it really just prepared me and so it was like a breeze in a way because I was familiar with the formats and everything that I needed to do.

Felicia Taylor: What would you say was your weakest area in English in high school?

Student #4: Maybe punctuation and spelling.

Felicia Taylor: How many paragraphs did you write during each grade in your high school English classes? How many essays did you write during each grade?

Student #4: In 9th grade, I would say 4 at the most; In 10th grade, I can’t really recall; In 11th grade, not that many. In 12th grade, there was like a process so there was a lot of writing to this one big writing assignment so it was maybe 7 – 10.

Felicia Taylor: If you could’ve added anything to your learning experience in your high school English class to help you to get ready for college, what would it be?

Student #4: More black literature, definitely. Like it seems even in 9th grade in history, it’s kind of off subject, it seemed to skip over the black influences, what we had to go through like we weren’t even a part of American History at all. And so, it’s like the only time we would read about even black writers was maybe in the Harlem Renaissance and it was in the month of February. So, if there was like more put into the curriculum for black writers and stuff like that that we can learn about,
that would be good. That would’ve prepared me for college because I am at an HBCU and just to be familiar with those writers…just to be familiar with my history.

Felicia Taylor: Explain why you think that your high school English classes did prepare you for college English.

Student #4: It did because the way they pushed us, the level of work they gave us. The kinds of activities that I participated in helped me do well in my college courses.

Felicia Taylor: What kinds of activities did the teachers use to teach you about providing support and details for essays and paragraphs?

Student #4: She gave us worksheets we could refer to from uh..., you know what you said about the thesis statement, to transition words to just anything.

Felicia Taylor: Did you lose points in your paragraphs and essays because of support you provided?

Student #4: Not about support. No, not that I can remember.

Felicia Taylor: What kinds of activities did the teacher use to teach you about proofreading for errors in grammar/mechanics? Do you remember?

Student #10: She may have put us in groups and we traded papers, something like that; Just proofreading through with each other. We didn’t necessarily have sheets that were about grammar/mechanics or exercises.

Felicia Taylor: Did you understand why you lost points on your essays and paragraphs?

Student #4: Yeah

Felicia Taylor: Were most of your paragraphs and essays marked, graded, and returned to you in high school?

Student #4: Yeah.

Felicia Taylor: What is peer editing to you?

Student #4: When you might get with a student and y’all trade papers and just mark off..like maybe you should say this here, maybe exclude a comma here…that kind of thing. I participated in peer editing 9th through 12th grade.

Felicia Taylor: What did you have more difficulty with in your high school English course?
Student #4: Honestly, I don’t like to write. ….. Proofreading and Editing because I like to see myself as right and know what I read, but then when you get the paper back, it’s like this and that is wrong.

Felicia Taylor: Did your high school English teachers mark your papers for errors in grammar/mechanics?

Student #4: Yes

Felicia Taylor: What did they mark the most? What errors did they mark the most that you can remember?

Student #4: Commas or maybe spelling; position- like maybe this paragraph should go here kind of thing. I have grammar and mechanics marked so far in my English 131 papers.

Felicia Taylor: Did the marks help you to write better papers?

Student #4: I would like to think so because my grades improved.

Felicia Taylor: What did your high school English teachers say or do to prepare you for college? Did they say or do anything to help you get ready for college?

Student #4: Everything they did basically prepared us for college because I’m seeing a lot of things that we do here that I did in high school so I’m familiar with it and I can kind of breeze through it. Addition: I think one point that really helped was because it was that kind of school and so just having that experience and being around those types of people gave me some kind of insight. The teacher provided me with challenging activities even though I was in a standard class.
Felicia Taylor: How would you define the term *writing assignment*?

Student #5: A writing assignment to me would be basically a page full of writing depends on what subject you’re talking about.

Felicia Taylor: Can you give me an example of one of your writing assignments in high school and in college?

Student #5: We had a writing assignment (inaudible) straight from one of the chapters out of the book. We had to basically summarize that chapter. (inaudible)

Felicia Taylor: What about in college? Can you think of a particular topic you had to write about in college? English 131 essay?

Student #5: Basically the same thing, just a lot more (inaudible) one page (inaudible) 3 pages

Felicia Taylor: You said that the English high school assignment was summarizing a chapter out of a book? Was it the same thing for college?

Student #5: College was more than one chapter so we had to basically take chapters 1 through 5

Felicia Taylor: How many times a week did you complete English work, including homework, outside of the classroom in high school?

Student #5: Not very often…Maybe 2 times a week.

Felicia Taylor: How would you describe the difficulty of the work you completed in your high school English class?

Student #5: Most of them were pretty difficult but after you read it over and over for a while, you can understand it better.

Felicia Taylor: So, reading it more than one time is what helped you to understand it better?

Student #5: Yes

Felicia Taylor: What would you say was your weakest area in English? (i.e., providing support, proofreading, etc.).

Student #5: Proofreading

Felicia Taylor: Proofreading and grammar and mechanics? What kind of errors did you make in
grammar and mechanics?

Student #5: Things like using the words “there” and “their”

Felicia Taylor: How many paragraphs did you write during each grade in your high school English classes? How many essays did you write during each grade? What types of paragraphs and essays did you write?

Student #5: Probably 4 essays

Felicia Taylor: What about 10th grade?

Student #5: (inaudible)

Felicia Taylor: 11th and 10th go together, you said?

Student #5: Yes

Felicia Taylor: About 6?

Felicia Taylor: What types of essays were those?

Student #5: Essays on books and newspapers…stuff that’s going on…current events

Felicia Taylor: Did you have to write patterns such as division/classification, definitions in high school? Argumentation/persuasion?

Student #5: Yes, we did some argumentation/persuasions.

Felicia Taylor: If you could have added anything to your learning experiences in your high school English classes to prepare you for college, what would it be?

Student #5: Probably giving us a little bit more definition words like tell us to sit down and read the dictionary every once in a while.

Felicia Taylor: So you would say that one problem you had when you came to college was your vocabulary wasn’t extended enough?

Student #5: Yes

Felicia Taylor: It was limited?

Student #5: At some point, (inaudible)

Felicia Taylor: Explain why you think that your high school English classes did or did not prepare you
for college English.

Student #5: I believe they prepared me but not til I would know more. (inaudible) a lot more. They prepared me enough.

Felicia Taylor: What do you think they should’ve prepared you to do better (inaudible)

Student #5: On actually how to use words correctly

Felicia Taylor: What kinds of activities did the teachers use to teach you about providing support and details for essays and paragraphs?

Student #5: Write outlines

Felicia Taylor: Did they give you any examples of what good writing looked like, like sample essays, sample paragraphs?

Student #5: Yes and it seems like once I got here, it changed a little bit because the outlines changed.

Felicia Taylor: Can you explain to me in what way it changed?

Student #5: Writing an outline in high school is writing short phrases (inaudible) but in college you’re basically writing it out, like everything that goes in that paragraph, every sentence.

Felicia Taylor: More details?

Student 5: Yes, More details.

Felicia Taylor: So, the outline is one thing that you think high school could’ve done a better job on?

Felicia Taylor: Did you lose points in your essays and paragraphs because of the kind of support that you provided?

Student #5: Yes, I did.

Felicia Taylor: Would you say you lost enough points to make the difference in a grade, like an A and B?

Student #5: Yes

Felicia Taylor: What kinds of activities did the teacher use to teach you about proofreading for errors in grammar/mechanics?
Student #5: They gave us quizzes which made it a lot better (inaudible) like a vocabulary sheet with all the words that sound the same (inaudible). So that was kind of helpful (inaudible).

Felicia Taylor: What about errors like subject-verb agreement, verb ending, and punctuation? Did you have any particular problems like that?

Student #5: (inaudible)

Felicia Taylor: Did you understand why you lost points in your essays and paragraphs?

Student #5: Yes, I understood enough that I wouldn’t make the same mistakes.

Felicia Taylor: What was your method of using your own essays and paragraphs you wrote in order to help you understand your errors more?

Student #5: I would look back on the work that I did previously so I wouldn’t make the same mistakes and (inaudible)

Felicia Taylor: So, you kept all of your papers?

Student #5: Yes

Felicia Taylor: Do you have all of your essays from English 131 or at least most?

Student #5: I have most.

Felicia Taylor: Would you keep those for me and bring them the next time you come?

Felicia Taylor: Were most of your paragraphs and essays marked, graded, and returned to you in high school?

Student #5: For the most part, they put copies of letters with our grades, if our papers were (inaudible)

Felicia Taylor: For most of the paragraphs and essays, you had to give them back? So, how did you work on those errors? Did you have to remember what the errors were?

Student #5: I usually wrote them down.

Felicia Taylor: What is peer tutoring to you?

Student #5: Peer tutoring is someone who helps you every day on your (inaudible).

Felicia Taylor: What about peer editing? Is that the same thing to you?
Student #5: Yeah, pretty much.

Felicia Taylor: How much peer editing did you participate in high school? On average?
Student #5: We did that a lot.

Felicia Taylor: In your high school English classes?
Student #5: Uh-huh

Felicia Taylor: Okay, you did that a lot.

Felicia Taylor: What did you have more difficulty with in your high school English course?
Student #5: Expanded vocabulary

Felicia Taylor: Did your high school English teachers mark your papers for errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain what they marked the most?
Student #5: Actually they marked basically run-ons.

Felicia Taylor: Did the marks that the teacher made on your paper help you to write better paragraphs?
Student #5: Yes

Felicia Taylor: What did your high school English teachers say or do to prepare you for college?
Student #5: (inaudible)

Felicia Taylor: So they didn’t say “Ok class, this is something in particular you’re going to have to use when you get to college?”
Student #5: They said that but they didn’t mention it every day (inaudible)

Felicia Taylor: During a school year, it would be mentioned once or twice? But never “this is an activity that you’re going to participate in because it’s typical of the one you’re going to have to work on when you get to freshman college?”
Student #5: Yes

Felicia Taylor: Is there anything you want to ask me? I appreciate you participating in this interview. I got some interesting and helpful answers from you. Thank you for participating in this interview.
Set 1 Interview Questions/Veronica

Felicia Taylor: How would you define the term *writing assignment*?

Student #6: I think that’s the process of brainstorming, coming up with an outline and then putting it all together.

Felicia Taylor: Can you give me an example of one of your writing assignments in high school?

Student #6: Yes, I talked about a historical thing and…. I talked about Africa and the standards of women compared to American women.

Felicia Taylor: So, this was a research paper, an essay or a paragraph?

Student #6: It was like a research paper in my Lit class but it was based off of a movie that we watched and we were able to pick anything that we wanted to write about that was historical or that was going on and at that time and I thought about how women held a different standard in like different parts of the country. But I focused on Africa.

Felicia Taylor: How many times a week did you complete English work, including homework, outside of the classroom in high school?

Student #6: Probably twice because my teachers didn’t assign that much homework or if they did assign homework, I had time in class to get that taken care of.

Felicia Taylor: How would you describe the difficulty of the work you completed in your high school English class?

Student #6: I didn’t think it was difficult. I like writing and it’s always been one of my strengths because my mom always read to me when I was a child. But starting college, I’m hearing some things I’ve never heard of before.

Felicia Taylor: What would you say was your weakest area in English in high school?

Student #6: I would say grammar, grammar and mechanics. Making sure that everything (inaudible)

Felicia Taylor: How many paragraphs did you write during each grade in your high school English classes? How many essays did you write during each grade?

Student #6: Probably about 4

Felicia Taylor: What about paragraphs?

Student #6: Ranging between 5 to 6 paragraphs
Felicia Taylor: Do you remember what types of paragraphs and essays you wrote?
Student #6: Descriptive, analysis essays and ..I don’t know if it’s a word for it but we did a lot of annotating. Well, I guess that will be considered analysis because I was taking my annotations and then…

Felicia Taylor: So you were researching?
Student #6: Right.

Felicia Taylor: If you could’ve added anything to your learning experience in your high school English class to help you to get ready for college, what would it be?
Student #6: I would definitely say more focus on grammar and mechanics because, I mean they teach us and you hear with your ear and a lot of times, I’m like okay, that sounds good to my ear, but when I’m in class, I’m like oh that’s wrong and I’m thinking that sounds good.

Felicia Taylor: So more focus on grammar and mechanics?
Student #6: Right

Felicia Taylor: Explain why you think that your high school English classes did or did not prepare you for college English. Do you think that your high school English classes prepared you for college?
Student #6: I think that they did because I don’t really find myself struggling right now but I guess (inaudible)

Felicia Taylor: What kinds of activities did the teachers use to teach you about providing support and details for essays and paragraphs?
Student #6: She gave us a lot of handouts and the handouts were just highlighting how to do certain things and then she would always assign an essay to see if we understood that process.

Felicia Taylor: Would you say all of your teachers, grades 9 – 12, because you said “She”…are you referring to your 12th grade teacher?
Student #6: I was just thinking about 12th grade but generally, I was always given handouts or in a textbook taking notes, or a PowerPoint most times. It was PowerPoints, taking notes and handouts.

Felicia Taylor: Did you lose points in your paragraphs and essays because of support you provided?
Student #6: No, I never get points off for that but I have received points off for summarizing too much. Like my 9th and 10th grade years, I would summarize too much when they kind of wanted analysis.

Felicia Taylor: What kinds of activities did the teacher use to teach you about proofreading for errors in grammar/mechanics?

Student #6: 9th and 10th grades, I remember warm-ups but they were like..okay, we’re not doing warm-ups and they’ll fall off. They weren’t like consistent.

Felicia Taylor: Can you describe a typical warm-up?

Student #6: We’d come in, PowerPoint is up and like (inaudible) where do the commas need to be placed or what needs to be capitalized…you know general things like that.

Felicia Taylor: From papers that you all wrote as students in that class or just from books? From essays and books?

Student #6: I guess they were samples that teacher came up with because it was like a warm-up to get everything started.

Felicia Taylor: Did you understand why you lost points on your essays and paragraphs?

Student #6: Yes…they always told me or I always asked.

Felicia Taylor: Did you find that you had to ask more or just the fact that the teacher went over the lesson meant that she covered everything?

Student #6: No, I always asked questions

Felicia Taylor: Were most of your paragraphs and essays marked, graded, and returned to you in high school?

Student #6: Yes, always

Felicia Taylor: Always?

Student #6: Always graded and marked and always had notes on what I could’ve done better or what I didn’t do.

Felicia Taylor: So, your teachers didn’t just circle, let’s say, a subject-verb agreement error, they labeled it “subject-verb agreement?”

Student #6: Oh no, because they probably did just circle it, and kept it moving.

Felicia Taylor: So, they didn’t specify what the error was?
Student #6: Right

Felicia Taylor: No specifications what type of error but they did mark the error?

Student #6: Right

Felicia Taylor: And you did say that you always went to the teacher to find out. Would you say that you were able to figure out what at least half the circles meant on your paper?

Student #6: Most of the time, yes.

Felicia Taylor: But when you didn’t, you felt comfortable going to the teacher and asking?

Felicia Taylor: What is peer editing to you?

Student #6: I think looking for incorrect words, (inaudible) and like I said, going off of how it sounds versus the rules …..and saying oh, well this needs a comma and, this that and the other.

Felicia Taylor: Is that all you think about when you think of peer editing?

Student #6: Yes

Felicia Taylor: So, you’ve never had an opportunity in your high school classes to exchange papers with your classmates?

Student #6: We have

Felicia Taylor: So you have done that.

Student #6: But you know, apparently that’s biased.

Felicia Taylor: Well, yes and it depends on how strong the person is looking at your paper is.

Felicia Taylor: I’m detecting that you didn’t like engaging in peer editing.

Student #6: No

Felicia Taylor: It wasn’t that helpful to you?

Student #6: No

Felicia Taylor: So did you do much peer editing in your classes?
Student #6: I can say I’ve done it once in every class every year but it wasn’t something that was like that I just loved because I prefer my teacher’s ideas versus my peers.

Felicia Taylor: What did you have more difficulty with in your high school English course?

Student #6: Probably, just constructing the essays to make everything flow properly.

Felicia Taylor: Organization of it?

Student #6: Right

Felicia Taylor: No problems with the thesis and coming up with, (inaudible)

Student #6: Oh thesis, yes, all the time.

Felicia Taylor: Did your high school English teachers mark your papers for errors in grammar/mechanics?

Student #6: They did but they didn’t really carve on it so much.

Felicia Taylor: Did they explain what the remarks meant?

Student #6: No

Felicia Taylor: Did the marks help you to write better papers?

Student #6: When they left notes, it did..like little notes, that would help me out.

Felicia Taylor: You were going to say something and I cut you off. Do you remember what it was?

Student #6: It was what you were saying.

Felicia Taylor: What did your high school English teachers say or do to prepare you for college?

Student #6: They said it’s going to be you and not always going to be the teacher. You might not have the luxury of saying well oh I was late so can I turn it in this time. Basically that it’s a job and you have to treat it as if it’s a responsibility and not just a luxury. Because everybody can’t go to college.

Felicia Taylor: So they tell that, for example, you’re turning in a paper late, it’s just too bad. That colleges won’t accept it. Did that actually do that? Do you understand what I’m saying? Did they just say that these are things that college teachers expect of you? Did the high school teachers actually act as though they were the college instructors and say okay just like if you go to college a teacher won’t except late
papers except under extreme circumstances, so as a high school teacher, I’m not going to accept it either.

Student #6: I never experienced that.

Felicia Taylor: So they just mostly talked to you. No practice in the (inaudible)

Student #6: Not at all

Felicia Taylor: What about subject matter? Do you think they did anything in particular to get you ready?

Student #6: I would say annotations but a part of AP Lit that’s just a part of AP Lit itself because you have annotate everything and I know that being able to annotate and come in here when I read the textbooks and I’m able to annotate and make notes and put little reminders but I don’t really think that they prepared us for the mindset per se.

Felicia Taylor: Is there anything else you want to add to this interview or ask about this interview dealing with the questions that I just asked you?

Student #6: No, I just take it that you’re studying to get your PhD and it’s part of your dissertation. That’s cool.

Felicia Taylor: Right. Do you have any more questions?

Student #6: No, that’s it.

Felicia Taylor: Thank you for participating in this interview.
Set 1 Interview Questions/Amber

Felicia Taylor: How would you define the term writing assignment?

Student #7: Sit down and you brainstorm and you come up with different concepts of writing on a particular topic.

Felicia Taylor: Can you give me an example of one of your writing assignments in high school?

Student #7: Well, we had a research paper which we had to come up with a topic and I chose the Democratic party and we had to write about the pros and cons.

Felicia Taylor: How many times a week did you complete English work, including homework, outside of the classroom in high school?

Student #7: Every day

Felicia Taylor: Would that be weekends too?

Student #7: Yes

Felicia Taylor: How would you describe the difficulty of the work you completed in your high school English class?

Student #7: Well, my 9th and 10th grade year, it really wasn’t that challenging even though it was an honors course. My 11th grade year, it was a little bit challenging and my 12th grade, it was extremely easy.

Felicia Taylor: Really?

Student #7: Yes

Felicia Taylor: Do you think it was because you were in that standard track?

Student #7: I believe so and then the teacher...he would give assignments but then he would switch them up.

Felicia Taylor: What would you say was your weakest area in English in high school?

Student #7: Let me think about that one.

Felicia Taylor: Do you want me to come back to that one?

Student #7: Yeah
Felicia Taylor: How many paragraphs did you write during each grade in your high school English classes? How many essays did you write during each grade? What types of paragraphs and essays did you write?

Student #7: 9th grade: 5 – 7, 10th grade: 5, 11th grade: 5, 12th grade: inaudible

Felicia Taylor: How many essays did you write?

Student #7: My 9th grade year, we wrote 3. 10th grade, 4

Felicia Taylor: Do you remember what types of paragraphs and essays you wrote?

Student #7: Literary analysis, documented essays, narratives and expository

Felicia Taylor: If you could’ve added anything to your learning experience in your high school English class to help you to get ready for college, what would it be?

Student #7: I would have shortened up the due date for the essay

Felicia Taylor: Why would you have shortened the due date?

Student #7: Because with the essay they would give us like an entire month. I don’t believe it should take that long to write an essay.

Felicia Taylor: In college, you don’t have nearly that amount of time?

Student #7: Exactly

Felicia Taylor: Explain why you think that your high school English classes did or did not prepare you for college English. Do you think that your high school English classes prepared you for college?

Student #7: I believe they did prepare me in a way because we did a lot of writing which I know I’m going to do in college. And the way they did not prepare me is by the length of each project.

Felicia Taylor: Explain that.

Student #7: As I said before, instead of giving us an entire month to write an essay, give us a week.

Felicia Taylor: What kinds of activities did the teachers use to teach you about providing support and details for essays and paragraphs?

Student #7: A lot of worksheets and PowerPoints.
Felicia Taylor: Did you lose points in your paragraphs and essays because of support you provided?

Student #7: No

Felicia Taylor: What kinds of activities did the teacher use to teach you about proofreading for errors in grammar/mechanics?

Student #7: We would swap our papers with someone in the classroom to better our skills and proofread their paper. And then the teacher would also proofread it.

Felicia Taylor: Did you understand why you lost points on your essays and paragraphs?

Student #7: Yes

Felicia Taylor: Were most of your paragraphs and essays marked, graded, and returned to you in high school?

Student #7: Yes

Felicia Taylor: So the teacher marked them, not just a check mark, but circled them, put a check mark by them and wrote the kind of error that it was?

Felicia Taylor: What is peer editing to you?

Student #7: That’s when a classmate edits your paper for you.

Felicia Taylor: How much peer editing did you participate in during high school?

Student #7: We didn’t do it that often but we did do it sometimes.

Felicia Taylor: During each year, let’s say 9th grade, how many times do you think that you engaged in peer editing?

Student #7: Twice

Felicia Taylor: 10th?

Student #7: Once

Felicia Taylor: 11th?

Student #7: Twice

Felicia Taylor: And 12th?
Student #7: None

Felicia Taylor: What did you have more difficulty with in your high school English course?

Student #7: **Inaudible**

Felicia Taylor: Did your high school English teachers mark your papers for errors in grammar/mechanics?

Student #7: Yes.

Felicia Taylor: Explain what they marked the most? Do you remember what they marked the most on your paper?

Student #7: No ma’am

Felicia Taylor: You don’t remember what errors in grammar and mechanics that they marked?

Felicia Taylor: They marked your paper for errors in grammar and mechanics; you just don’t remember which errors they marked for grammar and mechanics?

Felicia Taylor: What did your high school English teachers say or do to prepare you for college?

Student #7: They would say like little speeches and stuff. And when you get to college, you’re not going to be able to do this and that.

Felicia Taylor: But you wouldn’t say they gave you activities or assignments with college in mind?

Student #7: No…well, they did have us writing in MLA format. That’s it.

Felicia Taylor: There were two that you wanted me to come back to and they’re really related. One is “what would you say your weakest area in English was, was it providing support?” And you may not think of yourself as having any weaknesses in English but you know, you may be weaker in one area than the other. So would you say providing support, proofreading, you know, when you did lose points in paragraphs…was it for providing support or was it for proofreading..when you did lose points

Student #7: It was more support. They would tell me that I wasn’t explaining or giving as much as I needed to.
Felicia Taylor: And then the other one that you skipped is “what did you have more difficulty with in your high school English courses? Would you say that you had any difficulty in your high school English classes?

Student 7: No

Felicia Taylor: Not really. Everything probably wasn’t equally easy. Which one was not as easy as the other one?

Student #7: Actually writing the essay

Felicia Taylor: Is it the details or just getting the grammar and mechanics together?.

Student #7: The details and getting started.

Felicia Taylor: So getting started with the essay, generating ideas, outlining, brainstorming and then the details, providing those specific examples?

Felicia Taylor: Is there anything else you’d like to add about your 9th-12th grade learning experiences in high school English classes?

Student #7: I feel that it could’ve been more work done.

Felicia Taylor: You think that the teachers should’ve given you more work? And that makes sense based on what you said earlier that the teachers instead of giving you so many days and weeks to write an assignment, the teacher could’ve squeezed more probably 3 times, 2 times as many assignments that would’ve given you more practice. So that’s what you’re saying?

Student #7: And then, also teachers switching dates of certain things like I know once before I have an essay due in 2 weeks and then they’ll be like well oh it’s going to due next week. Once you have a date, stick to that date.

Felicia Taylor: How does that affect you in particular?

Student #7: It kind of felt like it was a waste of time because after that I was ready to go and learn something new instead of going over the same thing over and over, which was already said.

Felicia Taylor: So a lot of what you went through was repetitive? You probably could’ve benefited from some more challenging work?

Student #7: Yes
Felicia Taylor: Yes, because you’re saying you did 7 days out of the week, so, of course, you were keeping up with what was going on so you wouldn’t have trouble adhering to the first original due date.

Student #7: Also, the teachers in English could’ve done more vocabulary.

Felicia Taylor: Vocabulary?

Student #7: My 11th grade teacher she did more so vocabulary.

Felicia Taylor: Why do you say that?

Student #7: To broaden your vocabulary.

Felicia Taylor: You think you could be writing some better essays now if you had a more extended vocabulary?

Student #7: Yes

Felicia Taylor: Is there anything else you want to add?

Student #7: They could’ve made us read more books.

Felicia Taylor: How could that have helped you?

Student #7: The more you read, the better you comprehend.

Felicia Taylor: And what kind of sources do you think they should’ve made you read? Should it have been more literature or just everyday reading like magazines, newspapers?

Student #7: Literature, well both.

Felicia Taylor: Newspapers, magazines, plus your literary work like your poems. Anything else? Thank you very much. This information is very helpful.
Felicia Taylor: How would you define the term *writing assignment*?

Student #8: Basically thinking outside the box…putting your thoughts on paper.

Felicia Taylor: Putting it on paper in an essay format, paragraph format?

Student #8: Essay format

Felicia Taylor: Can you give me an example of one of your writing assignments in high school?

Student #8: Persuasive essay

Felicia Taylor: How many times a week did you complete English work, including homework, outside of the classroom in high school?

Student #8: Every week

Felicia Taylor: Once a week?

Student #8: Yes, we’d have an assignment like [inaudible] once a week but you know we had initial assignments in class.

Felicia Taylor: So you’re saying that you actually did work in English once a week?

Student #8: Yes

Felicia Taylor: How would you describe the difficulty of the work you completed in your high school English class?

Student #8: It wasn’t that bad…not that hard, nothing I couldn’t meet the standards of.

Felicia Taylor: Not very difficult?

Felicia Taylor: What would say was your weakest area in English in high school?

Student #8: My grammar

Felicia Taylor: Particularly what type of error in grammar?

Student #8: Like fragments and run-on sentences

Felicia Taylor: How many paragraphs did you write during each grade in your high school English classes? How many essays did you write during each grade?
Student #8: I say a good 5

Felicia Taylor: And what about the 10th grade?

Student #8: None, really

Felicia Taylor: Really? 11th grade?

Student #8: 2

Felicia Taylor: And 12th grade?

Student #8: 6

Felicia Taylor: If you could’ve added anything to your learning experience in your high school English class to help you to get ready for college, what would it be?

Student #8: Give me a better take on how I could complete a college paper or basically understanding the format.

Felicia Taylor: More explanation on format and what else?

Student #8: Style of writing

Felicia Taylor: Style of writing, grammar and mechanics?

Student #8: Yes

Felicia Taylor: Explain why you think that your high school English classes did or did not prepare you for college English. Do you think that your high school English classes prepared you for college?

Student #8: Only 9th & 12th grade

Felicia Taylor: 9th and 12th, Can you explain that?

Student #8: Well, my 10th and 11th grade year, my English teachers basically inaudible like the curriculum that they gave us was really ... I didn’t really learn nothing from it cause we would do crossword puzzles or things of that nature where weren’t really writing papers like we read a couple of books but you know, it wasn’t really nothing that major where I had to actually to buckle down and do the work like 9th and 12th grade.

Felicia Taylor: What kinds of activities did the teachers use to teach you about providing support and details for essays and paragraphs? Did your teachers give you any exercises?
Student #8: Yes

Felicia Taylor: What kind were they?

Student #8: Exercises on how to write a persuasive essay or process paper, just giving us an example on what to expect out of each paper we had to turn in.

Felicia Taylor: So, they gave you worksheets and asked you to write examples, or did they give you, let’s say, sheets with essays on them and then they told you this is an example of what I want you to do.

Student #8: The example

Felicia Taylor: Okay, so they gave you sample essays?

Student #8: Yes

Felicia Taylor: Did you lose points in your paragraphs and essays because of support you provided?

Student #8: No

Felicia Taylor: So, you provided adequate support?

Student #8: inaudible

Felicia Taylor: What kinds of activities did the teacher use to teach you about proofreading for errors in grammar/mechanics?

Student #8: Basically reading over your paper and have someone else read over it

Felicia Taylor: Did you understand why you lost points on your essays and paragraphs?

Student #8: Yes

Felicia Taylor: Were most of your paragraphs and essays marked, graded, and returned to you in high school?

Student #8: Yes

Felicia Taylor: Is it all the grades or just the 9th and …

Student #8: Just 9th and 12th grades

Felicia Taylor: They were marked?

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Felicia Taylor: What is peer editing to you? Do you know what that is?

Student #8: No

Felicia Taylor: Actually you were engaged in it when you said that different classmates take papers written by others and looked through them. Whenever anybody else in your class takes your paper and you take somebody else’s paper and you look at it and you say I think you need to look at this for subject-verb agreement or verb ending or support, that’s peer editing. Think about the word peer, your peers, others sitting in the classroom, you’re editing each other’s papers. Ok, so did you do any of that when you were in high school?

Student #8: No

Felicia Taylor: Now when I asked you what kinds of activities the teachers used, you said that others…Let me make sure I got that one correct. When I asked you what kinds of activities did the teacher use to teach you about proofreading for errors, did other students look at your paper or ….?

Student #8: Probably just like my friends

Felicia Taylor: Oh, not in the classroom?

Student #8: Relatives..

Felicia Taylor: Friends and relatives..now I understand.

Felicia Taylor: Ok so, back to this question about peer editing, you didn’t engage in peer editing in your classrooms?

Student #8: No

Felicia Taylor: What did you have more difficulty with in your high school English course?

Student #8: Proofreading

Felicia Taylor: Proofreading. And that would be for those errors in grammar and mechanics like you said before?

Felicia Taylor: Did your high school English teachers mark your papers for errors in grammar/mechanics?

Student #8: Yes

Felicia Taylor: What did they mark the most? What errors did they mark the most that you can remember?
Student #8: Grammar and mechanics

Felicia Taylor: Which ones...like subject-verb agreement, verb-ending?

Student #8: Subject-verb agreement, run-on sentences

Felicia Taylor: Did the marks help you to write better papers?

Student #7: Yes

Felicia Taylor: What did your high school English teachers say or do to prepare you for college? If they said or did anything. Did they say or do anything to help you get ready for college?

Student #8: Yes, my 12th grade teacher did. She helped me by showing me how to write papers in college and preparing, showing us the college format like APA, MLA and all the different formats that all the college professors ask for. So that helped me benefit...that benefited me a lot. Because you know, when I first went off to college, basically knowing that information gave me...I was prepared for it.

Felicia Taylor: So, the other ones, 9th – 11th grade teachers, really didn’t say or do much to prepare you for college?

Student #8: 10th and 11th grade teachers didn’t really prepare me very much.

Felicia Taylor: They didn’t say anything about getting ready for college and they didn’t do anything?

Student #8: No

Felicia Taylor: But your 12th grade teacher said something about it. Because sometimes teachers can say, Okay you know you need to do this because you need to get ready for college and then others take a step further and they say you need to get ready for college and this is what you need to know, this is what I’m going to show you how to do. But your 12th grade teacher did, so she talked about it and then she actually did something to help you.

Student #8: Yes

Felicia Taylor: Is there anything else that you want to say about your experiences in English 9th – 12th grades?

Student #8: No, not really. I mean I wish I could go back to 10th and 11th grade years and have the English teachers which taught me the format earlier; then I would be more familiar with it now cause like you know I’m struggling a little bit now with
the grammar and mechanics the teachers are putting fear in my heart and everything about me inaudible failure

Felicia Taylor: Okay. Thank you so much. That’s really interesting. Thank you for participating in this interview.
Set 1 Interview Questions/Linda

Felicia Taylor: How would you define the term *writing assignment*?

Student #9: The teacher gives you a topic and you have to write an essay about it or a research paper sometimes you have that when *inaudible* a writing assignment

Felicia Taylor: Can you give me an example of one of your writing assignments in high school?

Student #9: High School? I had to write a paper about the difference between people and *inaudible* different regions they speak in like well people in *inaudible* what type of language they speak you know the different what’s it called…

Felicia Taylor: Dialect?

Student #9: Dialects and like southern, northern.

Felicia Taylor: How many times a week did you complete English work, including homework, outside of the classroom in high school?

Student #9: In high school? How many hours?

Felicia Taylor: Approximately, how many times a week?

Student #9: How many times? About 9 times a week

Felicia Taylor: How would you describe the difficulty of the work you completed in your high school English class?

Student #9: It was difficult. I think a lot of your time, in school and out of school, you know it wasn’t time for me to hang out with my friends. I was always doing homework.

Felicia Taylor: So, you said that you would study 9 times a week? Would you say you studied every day of the week?

Student #9: Every day of the week, pretty much every day.

Felicia Taylor: What would you say was your weakest area in English in high school?

Student #9: My writing.

Felicia Taylor: So, is it the part that requires you to come up with the content or support or grammar and mechanics?

Student #9: Grammar and mechanics

Felicia Taylor: So, you had no problem coming up with …
Student #9: There was no problem. I had to like look who through my work, very in depth

Felicia Taylor: How many paragraphs did you write during each grade in your high school English classes? How many essays did you write during each grade?

Student #9: Like I came to Fairmount High School like 10th grade so like range is like 6 was like the least amount

Felicia Taylor: Was it the same for the 11th and 12th grade

Student #9: Yes ma’am, but more, we had to do like research like 20 pages

Felicia Taylor: If you could’ve added anything to your learning experience in your high school English class to help you to get ready for college, what would it be?

Student #9: Nothing, I think they prepared

Felicia Taylor: They prepared you for everything that you could’ve seen in any English class?

Student #9: Yes

Felicia Taylor: Explain why you think that your high school English classes did prepare you for college English.

Student #9: The main thing is we wrote a lot of papers and we did a lot of interviews and stuff with different people and stuff I do here in college, I already did in my other high school but not the same exact thing but the way write and everything that’s how I was taught in my old school

Felicia Taylor: You had some experience?

Student #9: It made it easier for me to come up with things.

Felicia Taylor: What kinds of activities did the teachers use to teach you about providing support and details for essays and paragraphs?

Student #9: Worksheets and books

Felicia Taylor: Worksheets and textbooks?

Felicia Taylor: Did you lose points in your paragraphs and essays because of support you provided?

Student #9: No
Felicia Taylor: No, because you said earlier that you were always good at providing details.

Felicia Taylor: What kinds of activities did the teacher use to teach you about proofreading for errors in grammar/mechanics? Do you remember?

Student #9: To be honest, we were never taught that. Like inaudible cause 10th grade was the time when you should automatically know things.

Felicia Taylor: Okay, so the teacher assumed that you knew everything about grammar and mechanics

Student #9: Yeah, cause we start early inaudible teach you

Felicia Taylor: Where did you go to school in grades 1 through 9? Was it in Europe also?

Student #9: No, it was like in different places

Felicia Taylor: But you’re saying in all those different places you can say that the school systems did a good job at teaching you about grammar and mechanics?

Student #9: Yeah

Felicia Taylor: Did you understand why you lost points on your essays and paragraphs?

Student #9: Yeah, cause back then, I really didn’t pay attention to like the grammar and mechanics, you know? And I inaudible

Felicia Taylor: Were most of your paragraphs and essays marked, graded, and returned to you in high school?

Student #9: Yes

Felicia Taylor: So you would say that all of the essays and paragraphs that you wrote were marked, graded and returned?

Student #9: Yeah

Felicia Taylor: And you found that helpful?

Student #9: Yes, very helpful

Felicia Taylor: What is peer editing to you?

Felicia Taylor: Is that it? Is that all you think about it?

Student #9: inaudible
Felicia Taylor: Because peer editing is also letting others, let’s say your classmates, look at your work and analyze and respond to it, evaluate it perhaps, look over it for grammar and mechanics. That means that you didn’t engage any of that during high school?

Student #9: No inaudible

Felicia Taylor: What did you have more difficulty with in your high school English course?

Student #9: Grammar

Felicia Taylor: Did your high school English teachers mark your papers for errors in grammar/mechanics?

Student #9: Yes

Felicia Taylor: What did they mark the most? What errors did they mark the most that you can remember?

Student #9: inaudible

Felicia Taylor: So, no subject verb agreement, pronoun agreement?

Student #9: Yeah, those types of things

Felicia Taylor: Did the marks help you to write better papers?

Student #9: Yes, they did

Felicia Taylor: What did your high school English teachers say or do to prepare you for college? Did they say or do anything to help you get ready for college?

Student #9: Practice..like go home and just write think about a topic to write about and then bring it back to her.

Felicia Taylor: And these would be the types of practices that your teachers said that you would have to engage in in college? Did your teachers say anything about college when you were in 10th through 12th grade?

Student #9: Yeah

Felicia Taylor: What did they say?

Student #9: It was addressing like I was going to go to an American university so it was different preparing for that over in Europe. You had to get like extra credit; you got to get a certain amount of points. But they also told us, we had to take
inaudible exam so we had to go home and she’d give us like topics to write about in Paris or university…after she said that when we go there they’re going to start throwing papers at you, topics to write on and research papers.

Felicia Taylor: So you can say that she diversified it? Even though she knew you were going to an American university because I’m assuming that the rest of the students were not; they were going to a European university. But she did a good job…your teachers did a good job of getting you ready for American university and they focused more on getting the students ready for it. Oh, so the teachers didn’t focus a lot on getting ready for American universities? Is there anything else that you want to say about your experiences in English 9th – 12th grades?

Student #9: No

Felicia Taylor: Thank you for participating in this interview.
Set 1 Questions/ Maranda

Taylor: How would you define the term writing assignment? Can you give me an example of one of your writing assignments in high school and in college?

Student #10: It’s a paper that is assigned by your teacher on a given topic or a topic that you have to make up yourself. We really didn’t do much writing unless it was State, it came down from the State. But we had a writing test to graduate and my topic was…do students have the responsibilities of their own actions.

Taylor: How many times a week did you complete English work, including homework, outside of the classroom in high school?

Student #10: Little to none.

Taylor: How would you describe the difficulty of the work you completed in your high school English class?

Student #10: It was pretty simple.

Taylor: What would you say was your weakest area in English? (i.e., providing support, proofreading, etc.).

Student #10: Grammar.

Taylor: How many paragraphs did you write during each grade in your high school English classes? How many essays did you write during each grade? What types of paragraphs and essays did you write?

Student #10: 9th – maybe 5, 10th - I don’t even remember writing that often; 11th – We took our writing test then, so a good 8 to 10; 12th – none.

Taylor: If you could have added anything to your learning experiences in your high school English classes to prepare you for college, what would it be? Explain your answer.

Student #10: More writing to prepare us for college level writing, instead of reading; We had British literature and American Literature and we read poems.

Taylor: Explain why you think that your high school English classes did or did not prepare you for college English.

Student #10: I don’t think they prepared me for college English because of the track that I’m on; other than that, we really didn’t write all that often.
Taylor: What kinds of activities did the teacher use to teach you about providing support and details for essays and paragraphs?

Student #10: No- but we did have to do DGP; which was like the subject of the sentences and graphing and things like that.

Taylor: Did you lose points in your paragraphs and essays because of support you provided? Explain your answer.

Student #10: I…don’t…think so; I don’t think they graded it like that per se; I think they just read over them (papers) and just gave us a grade.

Taylor: What kinds of activities did the teacher use to teach you about proofreading for errors in grammar/mechanics?

Student #10: DGP- Daily Grammar Practices – Ex.: It would be like Bob and Sally went to the movies… Find the subject.

Taylor: Did you understand why you lost points in your essays and paragraphs?

Student #10: Yes and No. Yes, because I looked at my grade and was like what happened? No, because usually there were no marks.

Taylor: Were most of your paragraphs and essays marked, graded, and returned to you in high school? Explain your answer.

Student #10: Yes…they were not really marked (a circle were with the kind of error that it I saw, but they had a grade on them, and they were returned.

Taylor: What is peer editing to you? How much peer editing did you participate in during high school?

Student #10: When you let one of your classmates look over your paper and find corrections; (little to none participation in peer editing; more peer editing in 11th grade).

Taylor: What did you have more difficulty with in your high school English courses?

Student #10: Grammar; spelling and commas and things like that and run-ons; teachers did not mark for particular errors.

Taylor: Did your high school English teachers mark your papers for errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain what they marked the most? Did the marks help you to write better papers?
Student #10:  Periods, commas...somewhat helped me...We didn’t write like specific essays; We wrote whatever the State handed down; like if the State said that this is the writing prompt.

Taylor:  What did your high school English teachers say or do to prepare you for college?
Student #10:  They did not really go into details; References were made “only about football.” With the track that I was in, we were all going to go to Technical School. Addition: “I never failed an English class, but I think they failed me in a way; cause like, even though I never failed, it feels like they didn’t prepare me well enough for college level writing and English, because in high school a paragraph was 5 or 7 sentences, and now it’s like 9 to 18 and I didn’t know that until I got here; nor did I know that they were going to (I’m not going to say butcher) but butcher my papers in such a way to be like you don’t know how to write; they didn’t teach me.
Set 2 Interview Questions/D.J.

Taylor: What was your weakest academic area in your college English class? What were you having more trouble with? Explain your answer.

Student #1: Probably punctuation…I was having more trouble with the use of commas.

Taylor: Did your college instructor teach you how to proofread essays and paragraphs for errors in grammar and mechanics? What kinds of activities did he or she provide?

Student #1: Yes, she did. In fact she made us get a book specifically for that which had a whole 2 or 3 chapters about that. We tested on that frequently. There were activities in the book to be completed. There would be a paragraph with no punctuation in it and we had to put the punctuation in the paragraph; that helped me a lot.

Taylor: Did your college instructor teach you how to provide support in essays and paragraphs? What kinds of activities did you complete?

Student #1: In English 131, she wasn’t really concerned about that. She didn’t want the main idea what she wanted us to talk about in the paragraph. She was interested in the content of the paragraph and the essay. I had to use the knowledge that I had from high school about content. Activities: She wanted us to like, if we were talking about specific scene, she wanted to about what it looked like outside, if we were in a car, what color was the car, the model, the make….she wanted specific details not just about the random paper...she wanted to know specifically about what we were talking about…she could see it in her own mind. Well, I remember one essay we had to do, we had to write about our first car and she wanted to know the make of the car, the model, any specific problems the car had, how much gas did it use….

Taylor: What do you think your college English teacher could have done to help you to understand course material better?

Student #1: She did a pretty good job in general but she probably could have emphasized more like the punctuation usage.

Taylor: How many hours a week did you spend on your English work outside of the classroom? How many times a week were you assigned homework?

Student #1: Probably 8 hours; we were assigned homework about 3 days out of the week.
Taylor: Was your college English class what you expected it to be? Explain how you thought it would be. Explain how it actually was.

Student #1: Yes, it was what I expected it to be. For one, I didn’t think the teacher would do much individual work with us because she had so many students but she really did do a lot of individual work. She would always come and ask us questions and we could always come to her before and after class and I wasn’t really expecting that.

Taylor: What is the biggest difference between your high school English courses and your college English courses?

Student #1: I would say the college English course would want to know about details and description of your paragraphs. In high school, they just wanted you to have the main ideas and you could read instructions and deliver what they wanted, but college they want much more…they demand much more of the students.

Taylor: Did your college English teacher mark your papers for errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain what he/she marked most.

Student #1: Yes, I had a lot of that on my…….She would mark commas or if we were missing a word, she would like put off to the side maybe what she thought the word would be and she would want us to come up and explain it to her later so she could understand what we were thinking at the time.

Taylor: Was your grade on essays and paragraphs lowered because of errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain the kinds of errors you made.

Student #1: Yes, probably another letter grade. I would probably not have a comma or rush through it and not look over it so I might miss a word and she would take off big points for that. She would take off a lot of points for the smaller things that we ought to know what we should do. Like she can tell if you didn’t proofread it or look over it, she would take off big points or just make us do it again.

Taylor: What part of the essay was the hardest for you to write?

Student #1: I would say the conclusion because you already state in the introduction and the body what you want to talk about but you want to do it over again but not sound repetitive and redundant and bore the reader so that was always a little bit hard.

Taylor: How much peer editing did your class participate in during your college English class? Was it helpful to you? Explain your answer.

Student #1: I know we did that on at least 5 different essays because we all had like individual groups of 2 or 3 people and we would trade essays and grade them or she would actually grade them herself. It was helpful because it showed me some things I’ve never seen myself. Example: Sometimes I might’ve said something that
didn’t come across clearly and they would underline it and I would go back and look at it…and maybe I was thinking one thing but I was drifting off and I just wrote something else and that would help me out.

Taylor: What was your final grade in your English 131 class?

Student #1: A

Taylor: Who chose the academic track that you were in during high school? How did the track that you were in help you to understand college English?

Student #1: My mother and I agreed with her. I can’t really say what it did because I don’t know what the advance classes were like because I took the standard classes. The classes prepared me for college because I had the basic intuition of what I need to do.

Taylor: Do you believe that the skills you learned in your academic track helped you to understand college English?

Student #1: I would say it did because the teacher we had for English 1 taught college and I think they got inaudible so they kind of taught at the college level.
Set 2 Interview Questions/Veronica

Taylor: What was your weakest academic area in your college English class? What were you having more trouble with? Explain your answer.

Student #2: It would have to be grammar mechanics because that’s what kicks my butt in these essays. I had more trouble with subject verb agreement and pronouns.

Taylor: Did your college instructor teach you how to proofread essays and paragraphs for errors in grammar and mechanics? What kinds of activities did he or she provide?

Student #2: Yes. Well, I read the back of the book like you told me the last time and I’ve been to the writing center.

Taylor: Did your college instructor teach you how to provide support in essays and paragraphs? What kinds of activities did you complete?

Student #2: I already knew before I got here.

Taylor: What do you think your college English teacher could have done to help you to understand course material better?

Student #2: I think formulating sentences properly because I know sometimes that I get long winded and I might abbreviate, not abbreviate but, what’s the word…….? Correct word choice.

Taylor: How many hours a week did you spend on your English work outside of the classroom? How many times a week were you assigned homework?

Student #2: Not much but it’s changing since last week. I would say about 30 minutes a day, at a minimum… At least 4 days out of the week.

Taylor: Was your college English class what you expected it to be? Explain how you thought it would be. Explain how it actually was.

Student #2: I thought it would be harder with longer papers and not so much guidance and just thrown at me. So, I think I expected the worse.

Taylor: What is the biggest difference between your high school English courses and your college English courses?
Student #2: You’re definitely more inaudible to the high school teachers and a lot of the stuff I’ve been doing, I’ve been doing for 4 years and now this year, I’m starting to get corrections.

Taylor: Did your college English teacher mark your papers for errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain what he/she marked most.

Student #2: I don’t believe so because I’ve been writing like that for so long so if anything was wrong it was a surprise. The teacher has marked grammar/mechanics the most: mostly subject verb agreement, pronoun agreement and verb choice.

Taylor: Was your grade on essays and paragraphs lowered because of errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain the kinds of errors you made.

Student #2: Yes

Taylor: What part of the essay was the hardest for you to write?

Student #2: Conclusions are always hard because you don’t want to be redundant and it’s kind of hard not to…you don’t know how to construct a good conclusion.

Taylor: How much peer editing did your class participate in during your college English class? Was it helpful to you? Explain your answer.

Student #2: None at all.

Taylor: What was your final grade in your English 131 class?

Student #2: I’m pushing for an 85 but I think my average is 78. I really want an A but I’ll take a B.

Taylor: Who chose the academic track that you were in during high school? How did the track that you were in help you to understand college English?

Student #2: I did. I chose advance and it prepared me a lot because we did a lot of analysis and we had to learn about literary and all that stuff. I think it helped me a lot because it wasn’t like I was just learning about grammar/mechanics even though I know that I should. I mean that’s a little bit right now but I learned about different types of writing and maybe not that much of detail but I did learn about it like in general.

Taylor: Do you believe that the skills you learned in your academic track helped you to understand college English?

Student #2: Yes. I don’t believe I would be doing as well if I had been in a standard track. Addition: I think that I was prepared well but like I said I’m kind of mad that I’m
messing up on small things like grammar/mechanics but I think I was prepared well in regards to being responsible because it is a big responsibility and you don’t have to do it because there’s no one here making me do it all. I’m losing more points now for grammar/mechanics than I did when in high school.
Set 2 Interview Questions/Amanda

Taylor: What was your weakest academic area in your college English class? What were you having more trouble with? Explain your answer.

Student #3: Grammar/mechanics; pronoun agreements, subject-verb agreement, I know how to do comma slice and run-ons, and fragments.

Taylor: Did your college instructor teach you how to proofread essays and paragraphs for errors in grammar and mechanics? What kinds of activities did he or she provide?

Student #3: The college teacher taught me. My 12th grade teacher also taught me. Hands-on, such as worksheets.

Taylor: Did your college instructor teach you how to provide support in essays and paragraphs? What kinds of activities did you complete?

Student #3: I knew that and then I got a little more prepping.

Taylor: What do you think your college English teacher could have done to help you to understand course material better?

Student #3: Improve us on the grammar and less on the papers (content).

Taylor: How many hours a week did you spend on your English work outside of the classroom? How many times a week were you assigned homework?

Student #3: 3 to 4 hours; probably 2 days out of the week.

Taylor: Was your college English class what you expected it to be? Explain how you thought it would be. Explain how it actually was.

Student #3: Yes, kind of. I thought it would be easier….more papers.

Taylor: What is the biggest difference between your high school English courses and your college English courses?

Student #3: In high school, they gave us more papers when they should’ve been teaching us how to do grammar instead of giving us all these papers that I can’t write without grammar/mechanics.

Taylor: Did your college English teacher mark your papers for errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain what he/she marked most.

Student #3: Yes, all. Subject-verb agreement was marked the most.
Taylor: Was your grade on essays and paragraphs lowered because of errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain the kinds of errors you made.

Student #3: Yes

Taylor: What part of the essay was the hardest for you to write?

Student #3: The introduction because I have to think of a thesis statement right off the bat.

Taylor: How much peer editing did your class participate in during your college English class? Was it helpful to you? Explain your answer.

Student #3: None

Taylor: What was your final grade in your English 131 class?

Student #3: 70.

Taylor: Who chose the academic track that you were in during high school? How did the track that you were in help you to understand college English?

Student #3: I did, I think. The guidance counselor put me in standard track in English in high school. It didn’t really help me because when it got down to the graduation exam in the reading part, I needed more help with that and it took me forever to pass it. I took the test from the 10th - 12th grades, about 4 tries.

Taylor: Do you believe that the skills you learned in your academic track helped you to understand college English?

Student #3: Sort of. High school could’ve focused more on grammar. I’m pretty good at providing support.
Set 2 Interview Questions/Calvin

Taylor: What was your weakest academic area in your college English class? What were you having more trouble with? Explain your answer.

Student #4: Subject verb agreement.

Taylor: Did your college instructor teach you how to proofread essays and paragraphs for errors in grammar and mechanics? What kinds of activities did he or she provide?

Student #4: Yes and I learned some in high school. Exercises and reviewing things in our books

Taylor: Did your college instructor teach you how to provide support in essays and paragraphs? What kinds of activities did you complete?

Student #4: She taught us….language, summaries & short essays.

Taylor: What do you think your college English teacher could have done to help you to understand course material better?

Student #4: Nothing really inaudible

Taylor: How many hours a week did you spend on your English work outside of the classroom? How many times a week were you assigned homework?

Student #4: About 2 – 4 hours; 3 days a week

Taylor: Was your college English class what you expected it to be? Explain how you thought it would be. Explain how it actually was.

Student #4: Yes. I was told basically I’d be writing essays and papers mostly every week.

Taylor: What is the biggest difference between your high school English courses and your college English courses?

Student #4: Pretty much the same

Taylor: Did your college English teacher mark your papers for errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain what he/she marked most.

Student #4: Yes, grammar/ mechanics were marked the most.

Taylor: Was your grade on essays and paragraphs lowered because of errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain the kinds of errors you made.
Student #4: Yes, mostly subject-verb agreement.

Taylor: What part of the essay was the hardest for you to write?

Student #4: None really…Thesis statement

Taylor: How much peer editing did your class participate in during your college English class? Was it helpful to you? Explain your answer.

Student #4: None., but I let people outside of the classroom look at my papers and they’ve been helpful. Students and instructors in the writing lab

Taylor: What was your final grade in your English 131 class?

Student #4: C

Taylor: Who chose the academic track that you were in during high school? How did the track that you were in help you to understand college English?

Student #4: Myself. My counselor pretty much put me in there. It helped me because it prepared me for college.

Taylor: Do you believe that the skills you learned in your academic track helped you to understand college English?

Student #4: Yes, basically gave me a format of what basic college writing is all about, different points of views, what type of essays to expect when you get to college. I’m referring to my 12th grade teacher. Addition: Make sure they get the teacher that’s going to teach them the right format in writing and grammar and mechanics.
Set 2 Interview Questions/Amber

Taylor: What was your weakest academic area in your college English class? What were you having more trouble with? Explain your answer.

Student #5: So far, writing the literary analysis paper. I lost points for misspelling simple words – proofreading.

Taylor: Did your college instructor teach you how to proofread essays and paragraphs for errors in grammar and mechanics? What kinds of activities did he or she provide?

Student #5: Yes. We’ve had many quizzes where she inaudible activities. Where you, in about 10 sentences, get the mistakes and correct the mistakes.

Taylor: Did your college instructor teach you how to provide support in essays and paragraphs? What kinds of activities did you complete?

Student #5: Yes, I learned in high school. Coming up with all the information we can use, then putting in the correct position to support all of your ideas and making sure you have at least 2 examples.

Taylor: What do you think your college English teacher could have done to help you to understand course material better?

Student #5: Peer evaluations

Taylor: How many hours a week did you spend on your English work outside of the classroom? How many times a week were you assigned homework?

Student #5: Maybe 3 – 4 hours; twice a week.

Taylor: Was your college English class what you expected it to be? Explain how you thought it would be. Explain how it actually was.

Student #5: I expected it to be a lot harder but, I guess since I comprehended the material in high school, it’s really not as hard. I thought we’d have to write an essay at least twice a week.

Taylor: What is the biggest difference between your high school English courses and your college English courses?

Student #5: The only difference is that once we get our essays back in college, the instructor, she actually goes over and gives inaudible to understand what we did wrong and how to correct the mistakes.
Taylor: Did your college English teacher mark your papers for errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain what he/she marked most.

Student #5: Yes. She marked unnecessary wording the most.

Taylor: Was your grade on essays and paragraphs lowered because of errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain the kinds of errors you made.

Student #5: Yes.

Taylor: What part of the essay was the hardest for you to write?

Student #5: Literary analysis; the comparison/contrast.

Taylor: How much peer editing did your class participate in during your college English class? Was it helpful to you? Explain your answer.

Student #5: We haven’t done any

Taylor: What was your final grade in your English 131 class?

Student #5: A

Taylor: Who chose the academic track that you were in during high school? How did the track that you were in help you to understand college English?

Student #5: I did.

Taylor: Do you believe that the skills you learned in your academic track helped you to understand college English?

Student #5: Yes.
Set 2 Interview Questions/Maranda

Taylor: What was your weakest academic area in your college English class? What were you having more trouble with? Explain your answer.

Student #6: Grammar and how long the paragraphs had to be…coming up with ideas to make my paragraphs longer. I was having most trouble with grammar. I didn’t think they were run-on sentences but then my teacher told me they were run-ons inaudible fragments even though I didn’t think I was writing a fragment or a run-on. Yes, I went to her and asked her to explain.

Taylor: Did your college instructor teach you how to proofread essays and paragraphs for errors in grammar and mechanics? What kinds of activities did he or she provide?

Student #6: Not really. No exercises on grammar and mechanics.

Taylor: Did your college instructor teach you how to provide support in essays and paragraphs? What kinds of activities did you complete?

Student #6: I already knew.

Taylor: What do you think your college English teacher could have done to help you to understand course material better?

Student #6: I pretty much understand it but uh…..Maybe slow things down some… Not enough details.

Taylor: How many hours a week did you spend on your English work outside of the classroom? How many times a week were you assigned homework?

Student #6: If I had to write an essay, maybe 2 – 4, if not, then 1. Maybe 2 – 3 days a week with an essay being due, but none without an essay.

Taylor: Was your college English class what you expected it to be? Explain how you thought it would be. Explain how it actually was.

Student #6: I thought it was going to be like high school, just maybe a little bit harder. But it was completely different like in our school, we didn’t have to write certain essays; we just wrote essays. We didn’t have to write descriptive, narratives, all of that. And when I got to college, I didn’t know…I knew how to write a narrative because that’s just like writing a story, but I didn’t know how to write a compare/contrast and descriptive. I had to learn all that when I got to college because they didn’t teach you that in high school. We had for to write for the writing test in high school. We had topics like How Do We Feel About inaudible, explanations…no particular patterns and they wanted us to write paragraphs and essays. We never had to do outlines or they’ll ask you something like, Do you
feel that if the students’ fault that they failed the class or is it because of the environment that they were raised in

Taylor: What is the biggest difference between your high school English courses and your college English courses?

Student #6: inaudible

Taylor: Did your college English teacher mark your papers for errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain what he/she marked most.

Student #6: Yes ma’am

Taylor: Was your grade on essays and paragraphs lowered because of errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain the kinds of errors you made.

Student #6: Yes. I failed some papers because of errors in grammar/mechanics…where to put commas.

Taylor: What part of the essay was the hardest for you to write?

Student #6: Maybe the conclusion and 3rd body paragraph because you start to run out of ideas.

Taylor: How much peer editing did your class participate in during your college English class? Was it helpful to you? Explain your answer.

Student #6: Little or none... I guess the little that I done was helpful but you know how people are about their work. Yes, I think it helped me to improve a grade on a paper because they can catch things that you can’t.

Taylor: What was your final grade in your English 131 class?

Student #6: I got an Incomplete because I kept a draft of a paper by mistake.

Taylor: Who chose the academic track that you were in during high school? How did the track that you were in help you to understand college English?

Student #6: The school chose it for me based on my grades. If you have A’s and B’s, you end up in advance, if not you end up in college prep and if you had lower than that, you had to take tech inaudible. I think we had to have all A’s and maybe 1 or 2 B’s to get in advance placement or 2 – 3 A’s to get in college prep, 2 A’s B’s and a C for tech and below that inaudible.

Taylor: Do you believe that the skills you learned in your academic track helped you to understand college English?
Student #6: Not at all mainly because I wasn’t prepared for these types of essays and writing. I wasn’t ready for the advanced level of writing essays, sentences, and paragraphs. They basically…we didn’t write unless we were getting prepared for the writing test. Basically my high school was preparing for the big test that got you out the door. Anything else is was just like you don’t really have to write, you don’t really have to this or that. Addition: In high school, don’t just pass the students by thinking that when they get to college, they’ll be able to learn all the things that they needed to learn in high school because it just makes it tougher. I know it made it tougher for me because when I got here, I was like..I know how to write, I think I know how to do this. But when I actually had to write an essay and I saw how butchered my essay was I was like Wow, that’s a slap in face because I thought I knew how to write and my teachers taught me how to but when I got to college it was a completely different thing. Addition: Don’t just pass students by, not only in English but in every other subject too.
Set 2 Interview Questions/DeShaun

Taylor: What was your weakest academic area in your college English class? What were you having more trouble with? Explain your answer.

Student #7: Probably reading a lot of books. Basically staying focused on what the books were about and getting the main topics. I didn’t have any problems writing essays. Like sometimes I would probably get off track of what I was talking about.

Taylor: Did your college instructor teach you how to proofread essays and paragraphs for errors in grammar and mechanics? What kinds of activities did he or she provide?

Student #7: Yes. They gave us activities like worksheets. The worksheets helped because they pointed some of the main topics or some of the best ways to remember the main topics of the book. They didn’t necessarily give us worksheets for writing activities; they just had us write a lot.

Taylor: Did your college instructor teach you how to provide support in essays and paragraphs? What kinds of activities did you complete?

Student #7: College instructors taught me but I already knew it. Basically like I said, they gave us worksheets. Like sometimes, they would take the time out and sit with us one by one.

Taylor: What do you think your college English teacher could have done to help you to understand course material better?

Student #7: I actually think they did a good job. One thing I would say they could’ve done better….Give us more time on assignments.

Taylor: How many hours a week did you spend on your English work outside of the classroom? How many times a week were you assigned homework?

Student #7: Maybe about 3 – 4 hours; every day out of the week.

Taylor: Was your college English class what you expected it to be? Explain how you thought it would be. Explain how it actually was.

Student #7: I expected it to be the way it was. I actually kind of expected it to be way harder too because you know how you get in your mind that some stuff is going to way harder until you actually do it. I don’t thinking taking English 129 & English 130 was necessary at all.

Taylor: What is the biggest difference between your high school English courses and your college English courses?
Student #7: College, we have to read a lot more. I think high school prepared me for college.

Taylor: Did your college English teacher mark your papers for errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain what he/she marked most.

Student #7: Yes, run-on sentences.

Taylor: Was your grade on essays and paragraphs lowered because of errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain the kinds of errors you made.

Student #7: Yes, they were but not enough for me to fail.

Taylor: What part of the essay was the hardest for you to write?

Student #7: Proofreading it myself.

Taylor: How much peer editing did your class participate in during your college English class? Was it helpful to you? Explain your answer.

Student #7: Every other assignment. It was helpful to me.

Taylor: What was your final grade in your English 131 class?

Student #7: It was a B.

Taylor: Who chose the academic track that you were in during high school? How did the track that you were in help you to understand college English?

Student #7: A counselor. I didn’t necessarily agree to it, but I didn’t disagree to it because I took AP classes before in 10th grade. In 9th grade, I took standard and then they moved me up to AP and after AP, it was like she chose the rest of my classes. If I would’ve told her I could take AP classes, she would’ve inaudible but she just automatically put me back in standard in 11th grade. I had a B in 10th grade AP English. Yes, the track helped me to understand college English.

Taylor: Do you believe that the skills you learned in your academic track helped you to understand college English?

Student #7: Yes, it did. Basically like I said, giving us a lot of papers to write and stuff like that. Addition: Well, I would say for getting started at a young age, as soon as they start school actually, that way they can get better and better every grade they go up to.
Set 2 Interview Questions/Truth

Taylor: What was your weakest academic area in your college English class? What were you having more trouble with? Explain your answer.

Student #8: Grammar/mechanics…..antecedents – pronoun agreement, maybe comma splices

Taylor: Did your college instructor teach you how to proofread essays and paragraphs for errors in grammar and mechanics? What kinds of activities did he or she provide?

Student #8: I knew in high school but…..the college instructor went over it. We have enabling activities and we have readings for homework and she gives us the pages and worksheets to go over.

Taylor: Did your college instructor teach you how to provide support in essays and paragraphs? What kinds of activities did you complete?

Student #8: Yes, we have outlines and worksheets for that.

Taylor: What do you think your college English teacher could have done to help you to understand course material better?

Student #8: More visual, hands-on…more writing on the board.. When you can see stuff…

Taylor: How many hours a week did you spend on your English work outside of the classroom? How many times a week were you assigned homework?

Student #8: Maybe 8 hours….It’s every so often, like after every chapter.

Taylor: Was your college English class what you expected it to be? Explain how you thought it would be. Explain how it actually was.

Student #8: I expected it be hard, just all out difficult but it’s pretty simple. The content that I’m learning is like a review of everything I’ve learned from middle school and high school.

Taylor: What is the biggest difference between your high school English courses and your college English courses?

Student #8: I guess in high school, they were more hands on.

Taylor: Did your college English teacher mark your papers for errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain what he/she marked most.

Student #8: Yes. She marked antecedents and pronouns the most.
Taylor: Was your grade on essays and paragraphs lowered because of errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain the kinds of errors you made.

Student #8: Yes, for me that’s failing, uhh but no.

Taylor: What part of the essay was the hardest for you to write?

Student #8: The body

Taylor: How much peer editing did your class participate in during your college English class? Was it helpful to you? Explain your answer.

Student #8: None but I think peer editing could help me…..writing centers, the help that we can get but I don’t… I guess.. use.

Taylor: What was your final grade in your English 131 class?

Student #8: 91, A-

Taylor: Who chose the academic track that you were in during high school? How did the track that you were in help you to understand college English?

Student #8: I just got a schedule. I knew nothing about the track I would be in. Well, it was the English class that I had; they just challenged us so when we got to college, we already knew some stuff and we were kind of prepared. I knew I could change my track after my counselor assigned it. I didn’t change it because I thought it would be harder.

Taylor: Do you believe that the skills you learned in your academic track helped you to understand college English?

Student #8: Yes. Addition: Take advantage of every opportunity to get more help; don’t be ashamed to ask questions; ask questions most of all in both high school and college.
Set 2 Interview Questions/Linda

Taylor: What was your weakest academic area in your college English class? What were you having more trouble with? Explain your answer.

Student #9: How to write the thesis statement. Thinking about how to start it off. As I try to start it off and it gives the impression that I really didn’t really think about it. It took me awhile…I really shouldn’t have took that long. The body and conclusion came easy.

Taylor: Did your college instructor teach you how to proofread essays and paragraphs for errors in grammar and mechanics? What kinds of activities did he or she provide?

Student #9: Yes. We did worksheets, and our English workbook. We had a lot of tests on it, we had to read over it and like we had a quiz the next day. And that really helped me on my grammar.

Taylor: Did your college instructor teach you how to provide support in essays and paragraphs? What kinds of activities did you complete?

Student #9: Not…yeah…in a way.

Taylor: What do you think your college English teacher could have done to help you to understand course material better?

Student #9: I would say we wrote more papers.

Taylor: How many hours a week did you spend on your English work outside of the classroom? How many times a week were you assigned homework?

Student #9: Honestly like, 3 or 4 hours; that’s when I had to study for a test. Pretty much every time we had class.

Taylor: Was your college English class what you expected it to be? Explain how you thought it would be. Explain how it actually was.

Student #9: Mediocre. It was like. It was easy and hard. You know you had your difficulties and weaknesses. I had to work; I had to work for my grade.

Taylor: What is the biggest difference between your high school English courses and your college English courses?

Student #9: How we had teachers to or coming here, how to read over your paper and fix your grammar mistakes. At my old school they made you go home and do it yourself. It (college) helps you to learn. When someone showed me how to fix my paper, it helped me not to repeat it the next time. College explained how to fix the error.
Taylor: Did your college English teacher mark your papers for errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain what he/she marked most.

Student #9: Yes. Fragments and run-ons.

Taylor: Was your grade on essays and paragraphs lowered because of errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain the kinds of errors you made.

Student #9: Yes. Fragments, run-ons, commas.

Taylor: What part of the essay was the hardest for you to write?

Student #9: It was my thesis statement. I learned how to do it this summer. I was on point with it.

Taylor: How much peer editing did your class participate in during your college English class? Was it helpful to you? Explain your answer.

Student #9: No, it was my fault I didn’t do that. Eventually when I started looking over my paper I would go ‘oh, I need that comma or period.

Taylor: What was your final grade in your English 131 class?

Student #9: B

Taylor: Who chose the academic track that you were in during high school? How did the track that you were in help you to understand college English?

Student #9: I did. Some of the things I learned in 131 was like a refresher. I learned it in my school, I forgot. I was out of school for about four months ‘cause we graduated early.

Taylor: Do you believe that the skills you learned in your academic track helped you to understand college English?

Student #9: Yes.

Taylor: Would you like to add anything to this interview?

Student #9: No.

Taylor: Well, thank you for participating.

Student #9: You’re welcome.
Set 2 Interview/ Kevin

Taylor: What was your weakest academic area in your college English class? What were you having more trouble with? Explain your answer.

Student #10: Grammar and mechanics. I was having trouble with the symbols.

Taylor: Did your college instructor teach you how to proofread essays and paragraphs for errors in grammar and mechanics? What kinds of activities did he or she provide?

Student #10: Yes, we used papers with hidden errors and had to find them.

Taylor: Did your college instructor teach you how to provide support in essays and paragraphs? What kinds of activities did you complete?

Student #10: Yes. We had to find supporting details in sample essays.

Taylor: What do you think your college English teacher could have done to help you to understand course material better?

Student 10: My instructor could have gave more essays for practice.

Taylor: How many hours a week did you spend on your English work outside of the classroom? How many times a week were you assigned homework?

Student 10: I spent about 3 hours. Two times a week.

Taylor: Was your college English class what you expected it to be? Explain how you thought it would be. Explain how it actually was.

Student #10: It was easier than I thought.

Taylor: What is the biggest difference between your high school English courses and your college English courses?

Student #10: High school was easier and the papers were shorter. College English courses move quicker.

Taylor: Did your college English teacher mark your papers for errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain what he/she marked most.

Student #10: She did. She marked punctuation and spelling.
Taylor: Was your grade on essays and paragraphs lowered because of errors in grammar/mechanics? Explain the kinds of errors you made.

Student #10: Yes. Grades were lowered.

Taylor: What part of the essay was the hardest for you to write?

Student 10: The intro was the hardest for me.

Taylor: How much peer editing did your class participate in during your college English class? Was it helpful to you? Explain your answer.

Student#10: My class participated in a little peer editing. It helped some, but not a lot. Teachers’ editing was more effective.

Taylor: What was your final grade in your English 131 class?

Student#10: My final grade was a B.

Taylor: Who chose the academic track that you were in during high school? How did the track that you were in help you to understand college English?

Student#10: I chose the track.

Taylor: Do you believe that the skills you learned in your academic track helped you to understand college English?

Student #10: I believed my skills helped me in college a great deal.
Appendix F
Analyses of Interviews

Analyses of Interviews/ Set I Questions

1. Definition of writing assignment

   A teacher gives a topic and she’ll discuss how she wants you to write it-if it’s an essay or journal or couple of paragraphs
   The teacher gives you a specific topic to write on and she wants you to maybe research it or maybe just give your own opinion and put it in a written format
   A page full of writing depends on what subject you’re talking about
   Essays that we have to write; talking about ourselves
   The process of brainstorming; coming up with an outline, and then putting it all together
   Sit down and you brainstorm and you come up with different concepts of writing on a particular topic
   Basically thinking outside the box…putting your thoughts on paper
   The teacher gives you a topic and you write an essay about it or a research paper sometimes
   A long paper, MLA
   Teacher assigns a topic or you make up the topic yourself; writing done only when you prepare to take a state test

   Students’ most common response (theme): Students defined writing assignment as writing from topics given by teachers
   Exception: 2 students said MLA, research paper

2. Number times a week you completed English work outside of the classroom

   2
   2
   9
   1
   3-4
   Daily
   2-3
   Daily
   3
   Little to none

   Students’ most common response (theme): 2 – 5 times daily
   Exception: One little to none

3. Difficulty of the work in high school
Not difficult; enjoy writing
not difficult; but challenging
Really wasn’t challenging
Most were pretty difficult
Basically the same as grades 10-12
Not difficult
9 through 10 through Honors, not challenging
Not that hard
Difficult
Easier with each grade
Pretty simple

Students’ most common response (theme): 7 said that the work in high school was not difficult; 3 said it was difficult.

4. Weakest area in high school English

Punctuation (commas)
Grammar and mechanics
a. Proofreading
b. Content
c. Grammar
d. Grammar
e. The writing process
f. Punctuation and spelling
g. Grammar

Students’ most common response (theme): Grammar and usage

5. Number of essays written in high school
a. 12
b. 4-6
c. 5
d. 4
e. 9th grade 5-7; 10th grade - 5; 11th grade – 5; 12th grade – 5
6
4
9th grade – maybe 5; 10th I don’t remember writing that often

Students’ most common response (theme): Most students reported 1-5 each week.

6. What you would have added to your learning experiences in you high school classes
a. Create a program where college teachers would actually come to the high school and like maybe give like assignments to show what would happen.
b. Add more work because college requires more work
c. Add more vocabulary
d. Focus more on grammar and usage
e. Require less time on assignments
f. Give a better take on completing a paper
g. Nothing
h. Black Literature
i. More Writing

**Students’ most common response (theme):** Most students wanted more activities to help with writing skills; one student requested a program for college teachers to come to the high school and work with the students; only one student responded “nothing” needed to be added to high school.

7. How high schools did nor did not prepare you for college
   a. 9 – 11 grades did
   b. They prepared me for college well
c. I believed they prepared me
d. 12th grade did
e. I think they did
f. I believe they prepared me
g. Only 9th and 12th grades prepared me
h. I don’t think they prepared me because of the track that I’m in.

**Common students’ response (theme):** More than 90% believed high schools prepared them. Only one said that it didn’t.

8. Marking, grading, and returning of essays in high school
   Not my 9th grade year; she kept everything
   Yes; given back; could see what I needed to correct
   They put copies of letters with our grades
   Yes; and school notes were put on the Internet
   Yes; always
   Yes
   Yes
   Really marked (circle) and with a grade on them and returned

**Students’ common response (theme):** Most said “yes”; the marking did not include specific skills though.

9. What high school teachers said or did to prepare you for college
   They somewhat did their job; give me the meat and learn the other stuff later
   A list of warnings
   Mentioned it, but no activities
   Teachers gave speeches
Practice...like go home and just write what I think about a topic to write about and Then go back to her 12th grade the teacher provided explanations whereas 9th-11th grade teachers didn’t provide explanations I think they did because I don’t find myself struggling right now… Only 9th and 12th / 10th and 11th grade year...I really learn nothing from it ’cause we would do crosswords, puzzles, or things of that nature. No. We really didn’t write all that often It did. Because of the way they pushed us

Students’ common responses (theme): Most said that high school teachers merely mentioned college with few specific details; one (1) student said that teachers said and did something in particular.

Analyses of Interviews/Set 2 Questions

1. Weakest area in college English
   Punctuation
   Grammar/Mechanics
   Grammar/Mechanics
   Subject-Verb Agreement
   Literary Analysis
   Grammar/Mechanics
   Reading
   Mechanics
   Thesis Statement
   Grammar/Mechanics

   Students’ Common Response (theme): 70% said grammar/mechanics; one said literary Analysis; one said reading, and one said the thesis statement.

2. Did college professor teach about proofreading exercises?
   Yes
   Yes
   Yes
   Yes
   Not Really
   Yes
   Yes
   Worksheets Used
   Learned about it in high school
Students’ Common Response (theme): 80% said yes; one (1) student said “not really”; one student learned about it in high school (Most were exposed to proofreading in high school).

3. Did college professor teach about providing support?
   Already knew
   In a Way
   Already knew, but college professor taught it
   Writing
   Yes
   Taught via outline
   Yes/one-on-one
   Yes
   Yes
   Students’ most common response (theme): The college professors taught them about providing support, but most students had been exposed to it in high school.

4. What could college teachers have done to help you to better understand content?
   Slower pace
   More examples
   Practice
   More visual aids
   More time
   Peer evaluation
   More emphasis on content
   Help in formulating sentences
   More practice
   Students’ most common response (theme): 60% of the students reported more examples of essays/time to write the papers; one reported help in constructing sentences; one reported peer tutoring.

5. Hours a week spent on English work/times a week assigned homework
   2-4 hours/none unless writing an essay
   2-4 hours/3 times assigned homework
   3 hours/2 times
   3-4 hours/ every day
   3-4 hours/ 2 times
   8 hours/ 3 times
   30 minutes/ 4 times (This is one of the honors students).
   Students’ most common response (theme): 6 students worked 2-4 hours a week on English work. They report that they were assigned homework 2-4 times a week.
6. Expectations of College class

   Like high school, but harder
   Yes, more essays
   Actually it’s easier
   Harder
   Much Harder
   A lot harder
   No individual work
   Harder
   Harder

   Students’ common response (theme): At least 75% reported that they thought college work would be harder.

7. Biggest difference between high school English and college English
   It’s the same
   More hands-on in college
   Lot more reading
   More time to understand
   More details
   More details required
   Similar

   Students’ common response (theme): More students reported that there was a difference than not. Those who said there was a difference cited more hands-on in college, a lot more reading; more time to understand, more details required.

8. Did college teachers mark papers for grammar and mechanics? What did they mark most?
   Yes; pronoun agreement and run-on sentences
   Yes; pronoun agreement
   Yes; wording
   Yes; comma usage
   Yes; grammar and usage
   Yes; all
   Yes; grammar and mechanics
   Yes; run-ons and fragments
Students’ common response (main): Students reported that their college teachers marked and specified errors in their papers.

9. Was your grade on essays and other assignments lowered because of errors in grammar and mechanics?
   Yes
   Yes
   Yes
   Yes
   Yes
   Yes
   Yes
   Yes; but not enough to fail

   Students’ common response (theme): Most of the students received lower grades on papers as a result of a loss of points in grammar and mechanics.

10. What was the hardest part of the essay for you to write?
    Ideas, construction, and conclusion
    Conclusion
    Conclusion
    Literary analysis
    Content
    Proofreading
    Introduction
    Thesis, until college
    Proofreading

   Students’ common response (theme): The hardest part of writing the essay in college was creating ideas, writing the conclusion. A really small number reported the thesis and the introduction.

11. How much peer editing was done in college?
    At least for 5 essays
    Helped to locate errors
    None at all
    None; except I let people outside of class (e.g., the Writing Center) look at the writing
    Little to none
    None
    None
    None
    Every other essay
    None
Students’ common response (theme): Most interviewees did not participate in peer editing.

12. Choosing your academic track in high school
   My mother and I agreed
   I did.
   I did. Guidance counselor put me in a standard track.
   I did/Guidance counselor
   The school chose it because of my grades
   Guidance Counselor
   I just got a schedule
   I knew nothing about the track I was in. I knew that I could change after the counselor assigned me; I didn’t want to because it would have been harder.
   I did.
   I did.

Students’ common response (theme): 60% of the interviewees reported that their guidance counselors played a role in selecting their academic track. 40% said that they chose their own academic tracks.