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RETROGRADE MOVEMENTS AND THE EDUCATIONAL ENCOUNTER:
WORKING-CLASS ADULTS IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

By

James Eric Romesburg
B.A., Clemson University, 1998
M.A., Clemson University, 2003

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
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Department of English
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Louisville, Kentucky

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A Dissertation Approved on

July 27, 2011

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my loving wife. Thank you, Christine, for being my most patient, dearest, and devoted friend.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without the support, sacrifice, and encouragement from my mother, Rae Ann Romesburg née Heater, I might be a high-school dropout painting houses instead of a high-school dropout with a Ph.D. Thank you, mom, for your faith in me. I know I made it difficult sometimes.

Bronwyn Williams is the most phenomenal teacher, mentor, colleague, and friend I've had in my academic career. His unwearying support and faith in this project when I was filled with doubts helped transform it from a scrapheap of ideas and half-thoughts into a serious and focused scholarly inquiry. Thank you, Bronwyn. I don't know of a higher compliment for a teacher than this: have faith that you've done more for your students than you will ever know.

I'm also deeply grateful to the other members of dissertation committee: Beth Daniell, Karen Kopelson, Susan Ryan, and Beth Boehm. Beth Daniell has been a mentor for over a decade now; she was the first person to introduce me to the powerful political implications of literacy education, and was also the first professor that encouraged me to question the idea of literacy as an incontestable force for social good. And Karen Kopelson has led me through some deep theoretical waters while always helping me forge connections between theoretical abstraction and the material realities of daily life. I am indebted to each of you for your thoughtful, patient responses to my writing.

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Finally, thanks to my colleagues who thoughtfully discussed with me their experiences teaching nontraditional students. Though I can't name you here, please know that I do appreciate your candid responses and good-natured patience.

ABSTRACT

RETROGRADE MOVEMENTS AND THE EDUCATIONAL ENCOUNTER: WORKING-CLASS ADULTS IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

James Eric Romesburg

July 27, 2011

This dissertation explores the role first-year composition (FYC) courses play in the academic lives of working-class adult students in the University of Louisville, an institution that, during portions of its long history, has been a valuable educational resource for working adults in the Louisville area. A confluence of political and administrative pressures from both within and outside the institution have been working to shift U of L's focus away from being an access-oriented metropolitan university and toward the standard research university model, which has meant raising minimum standardized test scores, increasing tuition on an annual basis, and reducing the number of evening classes available. All of these factors have dramatically decreased the percentage of nontraditional-age students at U of L—both across the curriculum and in FYC courses specifically. Those nontraditional students who do remain rely heavily on the literacy sponsorship of their families, employers, instructors, and (sometimes) their fellow students. While working-class adults are frequently among the diligent students in FYC classes, they are also likely to experience some feelings of isolation and alienation that stem from being the only older student in class, which in turn might reduce their contributions to classroom discussions. And yet working-class adults enrich our

classes immeasurably by being both exemplary students and a complicating and enriching presence, requiring instructors to interrogate composition pedagogies often designed by default for a classroom full of 18-year-old freshmen.

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CHAPTER I

RETROGRADE MOVEMENTS AND THE EDUCATIONAL ENCOUNTER: WORKING-CLASS ADULTS IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

I) Forward Through The Retrograde

Every two years the planet Mars appears to temporarily stall in its direct or “prograde” motion across the night sky and reverse course, making a “loop” against the more stable backdrop of distant stars before resuming its long, steady trajectory eastward through the heavens. As seen from Earth, this looping or *retrograde* motion occurs over the course of weeks and months, but has long been known to careful observers such as the ancients, who were troubled by the planet’s aberrant behavior. To Roman astrologers, Mars—the god of war—appeared to occasionally lose his mind and wander around in a rage. Ptolemy theorized an elaborate system of “epicycles” to explain Mars’ apparent motions within the ancient understanding of a geocentric universe, which positioned the earth at the center, surrounded by planets attached to fixed, concentric spheres. Not surprisingly, from a modern astronomical perspective, observations of Mars’s apparent motions consistently undermined theoretical explanations of its actual orbit for thousands of years.

Yet over the course of those many years, cumulative insights by thinkers such as Copernicus, Brahe, Kepler, Galileo, and Newton allowed astronomers to gradually work

out the intricacies of our heliocentric solar system, and to explain the complex *apparent* motion of Mars's orbit within that larger system. We now know that our own Earth's motion around the sun distorts how we see Mars's real trajectory, creating the optical illusion of backward motion when in fact both planets are moving along just fine in their orbits according to the gravitational laws that govern all celestial bodies. Thus, the system-bound perspective of our own orbiting planet distorts how we see a fellow traveler in that system, and as we gain insights into that other body's movements and existence, we gain knowledge of our own.

Educators could learn much from the concept of retrograde motion. As a metaphor, it might act as a corrective lens to the prevailing view of learning as the domain of the young, revealing to those invested in formalized education—or at to least those who care to look—that the perspectives shaping their own worldview will always distort how they see the directions other lives have taken. And while any teacher's focus is understandably on *schooling*, we are seriously limiting our perspective on *learning* by assuming that it most often takes place in an institutional setting. In fact, the educational encounters occurring in school might be among the most the most limited and limiting types of learning humans undertake.

Applying metaphors from the natural to the social sciences should always be done with caution, as Wilhelm Dilthey recognized more than a century ago, and it is easy to see why when one examines how haphazardly the positivist trope of “progress” has been applied to the social science of education (Makkreel, 1992, p. 61). In the ideology of the American educational system, students who move in any direction other than forward *through* the system have moved their educational lives “off track” and henceforward have

been consigned to a life determined by the consequences of this single act. In fact, a controlling metaphor of the American educational system is that it should function as a sorting mechanism for the emerging workforce, and the place where one is deposited by the system is where she should begin her ascendance (or stagnation) in the capitalist scheme of vocational rewards and punishment (DeGenaro 2001; Dowd 2007; Perruci and Wysong 2008; Shor 1987).

The literature on high school dropouts is one of the most disheartening manifestations of the sorting metaphor in action, as it is devoted almost entirely to dropout prevention and “early intervention strategies” for “at-risk” students. Other than an endless series of bleak quantitative data, i.e. statistics about dropouts and underachievers, surprisingly scant qualitative research on high school dropouts has focused on what happens in the learning lives of people who actually *do* leave school at any of the primary, secondary, and postsecondary levels. Gary Orfield’s *Dropouts in America: Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis* (2005), for example, is a compilation of scholarship focused almost entirely on the causes and prevention of high-school dropouts, yet “dropout-recovery programs” are mentioned on only four of its 300 pages (p. 297). From the perspective of educators such as Orfield who have successfully navigated the educational system and have that system to thank for their current socioeconomic status, students who deviate from the expected—i.e., “traditional”—patterns are often viewed as suspect.

Hence, we have the “non-traditional” student. The phrase itself seems a euphemism for a “recovering dropout,” and in the cold reality of the American economic system such an assessment is often the blunt and unpleasant truth. There is ample

evidence revealing the paltry earnings power of those with a high school diploma or less, as I will explore below, but when it comes to questions about *learning*—and that is what all questions of education must come down to—economic statistics are a poor measure of this fundamental drive of the human spirit.

Sorting has long functioned as a self-fulfilling prophecy in American education, with that system's blind faith in meritocracy reinforced with such a vengeance from the top to the bottom of our culture that few educators and fewer students can envision another way the educational encounter might happen in our lives. We believe it because we have lived it, and we continue to live it because we believe it. As Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis argued in their monumental *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1976), "By the time most students terminate schooling, they have been put down enough to convince them of their inability to succeed at the next highest level. Through competition, success, and defeat in the classroom, students are reconciled to their social positions" (p. 106). In other words, students internalize the systemic ideology that informs them of their worth to the dominant culture—and so informed, they act accordingly, entering the workforce at the "appropriate" level to begin their productive adult lives, their learning now behind them.

In this chapter I argue that working-class adults who wish to resume their formal educations face a daunting array of obstacles, shaped largely by the dominant capitalist ideology about who should (and who should not) be enrolled in our institutions of higher education and what those institutions should be teaching adult students. Historically, the options available to returning adult students have ebbed and flowed with the prevailing, youth-centered educational tides. Promises of opportunity through education for adults

have materialized in the form of vocational schools, two-year (“junior” and “community”) colleges, and urban colleges and universities, but each opportunity has, in its turn, proven highly vulnerable to the ideological forces that shape those schools to the will and needs of our capitalist culture. As I shall show, when policymakers and politicians could not shape the admissions and curricula to fit the needs of business (as they did in vocational and two-year schools), those same policymakers and politicians could always resort to the discipline of the dollar and budget cuts as the ultimate authority on who learns what in American schools.

But the field of composition, through its much-maligned first-year writing courses, might be in a unique position to undermine the capitalist disciplinarians, at least for a crucial sequence of courses working-class adults encounter early in their college careers. As long as such students are able to enroll in our courses—and that enrollment is far from a given, as we shall see—first-year composition instructors have a unique opportunity to: 1) listen to what the working adults in our classes tell us about their educational experiences and plans, 2) develop pedagogies to enhance those experiences and combat the truisms of our youth-obsessed educational system, and 3) fight like hell to make sure the politics and policies of the institutions we work for reflect the best, democratic possibilities of education and not the worst, oppressive bureaucratic nightmare of the American capitalist order.

II) Youth Bias in American Education

A November 2008 episode of *Saturday Night Live* featured a skit satirizing the popular *High School Musical* movies: *Night School Musical: Senior Year Equivalent*.

Middle-aged actors dance to a hip-hop beat, singing, “Screwed up once, but now we’re turning that tide / Push my status deep down inside / Still can’t read and I’m 49 / Gonna get our learn on!” The announcer’s voice-over exclaims, “All the disappointment and real-world problems of adult education—IN A MUSICAL!” The skit closes with the comment: “*Night School Musical: Senior Year Equivalent*. They’ve got their best years behind them!” (King 2008).

As a satire, of course, the skit is designed to elicit laughter by poking fun at our stereotypical biases against adult students just as much as it pokes fun at the students themselves, but seen from the perspective of an educator of older students, the skit can only be described as a cruel farce, one that certainly must have humiliated thousands of older students who watched it, while perpetuating those same stereotypes and biases among the American public at large—and even among American educators who very likely are charged with teaching older students. For example, the “coursework” students in the skit take includes “TV/VCR Repair,” “Certified Forklift Operator,” “Framing,” and “Intro to Excel Spreadsheets.” The *SNL* writers certainly know their white, affluent audience, and the not-so-subtle class bias here combines with the more overt ageism to devastating effect. The message to older, working-class students who might want to return to school is clear: forget it. You had your chance, you blew it, and now the most you can hope for from “education” is a slightly less crappy job than the one you have, complete with all the ridicule you currently endure—not only in your private life, but portrayed for all the world to see and enjoy on NBC.

Adult educators have been working against such bias for many years and have responded to it on a level that the depth of its error warrants. Far from being a superficial

notion of “acting one’s age,” the reasons why Americans (or Western culture, broadly speaking) focus most of their educational efforts on the young come from deep-seeded ideological values. Malcolm Knowles, whose groundbreaking 1973 work *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species* is considered one of the central, founding texts of adult education, sketched American attitudes toward the idea like this:

In the prevailing view of society, it is the major task of children to go to school, study and learn, the major task of the adult to get a job and work. In brief, childhood and youth are a time for learning and adulthood a time for working. This is beginning to change, but the dominant thrust of society’s expectation and equally of his self-expectation is that for an adult the learning role is not a major element in his repertoire of living. Thus both society and the adult view himself as a non-learner. (p. 157)

That Knowles would argue against such an attitude seems almost common sense to educators today, but at a time when few scholars had focused any attention on adult learners, Knowles was able to clearly see and define this bias as the prevailing “common sense”—i.e. dominant ideology—about adult education at the time. Though scholars in the field have since arrived at many different conclusions about the specifics of Knowles’s *andragogy*, the adult education equivalent of pedagogy, nearly all agree that we owe him an immeasurable debt.

A scholar whose ideas on the subject actually pre-date Knowles by nearly 20 years may seem an unlikely one: widely read psychologist and philosopher Erich Fromm. Unlike Knowles, Fromm is largely absent from adult education scholarship today, but as adult education theorist Stephen Brookfield (2005) argues, the field is poorer for Fromm’s absence, especially given his ability to speak theoretically in a language accessible to a broad audience—and for his skill in bringing the ideas of Karl Marx to Americans in a way that the works of theorists such as Gramsci, Althusser, Marcuse,

Horkheimer, and Adorno have largely failed (p. 148). The book that accomplished this task most admirably was Fromm's *The Sane Society* (1955), and coming as it did at the height of the Red Scare, is remarkable for many reasons. Fromm's opinions on adult education, however, deserve special attention in this discussion, so I will quote him at some length:

The fact that we aim primarily at the usefulness of our citizens for the purposes of the social machine, and not at their human development is apparent in the fact that we consider education necessary only up to the age of fourteen, eighteen, or at most, the early twenties. Why should society feel responsible only for the education of children, and not for the education of all adults of every age? Actually, as [American economist] Alvin Johnson has pointed out so convincingly, the age between six and eighteen is not by far as suitable for learning as is generally assumed. It is, of course, the best age to learn the three R's, and languages, but undoubtedly the understanding of history, philosophy, religion, literature, psychology, etcetera, is limited at this early age, and in fact, even around twenty, at which age these subjects are taught in college, is not ideal. In many instances to really understand the problems in these fields, a person must have had a great deal more experience in living than he has had at college age. For many people the age of thirty or forty is much more appropriate for learning—in the sense of understanding rather than of memorizing—than school or college age, and in many instances the general interest is also greater at the later age than at the stormy period of youth. It is around this age also at which a person should be free to change his occupation completely, and hence to have a chance to study again, the same chance which today we permit only our youngsters.

A sane society must provide possibilities for adult education, much as it provides today for the schooling of children. This principle finds expression today in the increasing number of adult-education courses, but all these private arrangements encompass only a small segment of the population, and the principle needs to be applied to the population as a whole. (p. 347-48)

It is difficult to imagine why adult educators have not seized on Fromm more firmly, but he is never mentioned in graduate-level introductory texts on adult education such as Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner's (2007) *Learning in Adulthood*, Peters and Jarvis's (1991) *Adult Education: Evolution and Achievements in a Developing Field of*

Study, and Taylor, Marienau, and Fiddler's (2000) *Developing Adult Learners: Strategies for Teachers and Trainers*. Perhaps Fromm has simply become passé for scholars who believe they are on the cutting edge of creating knowledge, but the clarity of vision in this passage is breathtaking. Fromm is calling for a radical revision of what it means to be educated, to learn, to understand the world and one's movement through it. And yet many of the formal educational opportunities for adults today—though vastly expanded since 1955—are the progeny of those “private arrangements” to which Fromm gives a reluctant nod (or shrug) near the end of this passage.

Adults who return to formal education at the postsecondary level are thus moving against the ideological norms about where they are in their lives and what they *should* be doing. Timothy Quinnan's *Adult Students “At Risk”: Culture Bias in Higher Education* (1997) offers a scathing indictment of the prevailing American educational ideology, which views adult students—especially those who want something more than a “skills update” for their resume—as shirkers of their responsibilities to home, hearth, and nation:

In the American myth...the concept of adult student is an oxymoron. Adults are providers, heads of households, units of production. If they are in school, they cannot be working. In the unforgiving light of Capital's day, adult students are eschewing their obligation to the free enterprise system. The college, as a preeminent institution dedicated to maintaining social and economic stability, implicitly views them as reprobates. The worst sort, this myth tells us, are adults who had jobs, voluntarily gave them up, and have now discovered college as a safe haven in which to rest before returning to productive labor. The inference here being that, to be back in school, adult students must have failed to pass muster in a competitive job market (p. 54).

Though the connection is not explicitly spelled out, Quinnan's critique is clearly rooted in Marxist theory on economic reproduction in capitalist countries. Louis Althusser's “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (1970) outlines Marx's argument that

survival of Capitalist societies requires not only a “reproduction of the material conditions of production” (i.e. the reproduction of the raw materials and infrastructure of production) but also a “reproduction of the relations of production” required for production to continue across generations—that is, a labor force dependent on wages for day-to-day subsistence who in turn produce children who will one day assume the working roles of their parents (pp. 129-131).

For this intergenerational cycle of wage subsistence to be broken, working-class individuals of all ages must have the opportunity to gain the educational capital their parents and grandparents (and children, for that matter) have been denied. At first glance—at least compared with many European countries—the United States’ system of higher education has a built-in educational institution for such a disruption: the community college, with its relatively low tuition costs, course scheduling convenient for working adults, and ease of access due to the sheer numbers of campuses and open admission policies. Yet the historical track record two-year schools have for breaking the cycle described above casts a dubious light on their ability to do so.

III) Working-Class Adults and the Community College “Movement”

Fromm wrote *The Sane Society* during the years of the well-documented post-World War II adult education boom that, despite its shortcomings, has had a real and lasting effect on how American colleges view older students. Postsecondary educational institutions had little choice but to make room (at the very least physical *space*) for surging populations of nontraditionals, and thus the American community college movement was born (Brandt 2004; DeGenaro 2001; Dowd 2007; Goldhaber and Peri

2007; Shor 1987). Community colleges sprang up everywhere, first in converted high school facilities, later in austere campuses befitting future workers in the military industrial complex (Shor, p. 12). This post-1950s explosion of adult education—Shor estimates that a new campus opened every ten days in the 1960s—allowed unprecedented access to higher education and social mobility for the “Greatest Generation” and their children. But the now-ubiquitous community college in America has less democratic roots than most educators would like to acknowledge.

William DeGenaro (2001) traces the origins of the modern community college back through the “junior college movement” of the early 20th century, a movement led by educators from the most elite schools in the country with the purpose of “sorting and sifting,” according to one of its leaders (Walter Crosby Eells), through those who did not begin university study immediately after high school. The president of Stanford, Ray Lyman Wilber, was even more boldly elitist:

Let the junior colleges try their hand at the double job of preparing better the ones who enter the upper division, and discouraging others from going to the university at all. The junior college forms a logical stopping point for many who should not go farther. It is a try-out institution. The superior students are selected and recommended for further university specialization. (as cited in DeGenaro, p. 500)

Of course, such language failed to make it into the junior college recruitment materials. Instead, potential students were lured with promises of undertaking “real” college coursework that, according to a 1924 statement by the American Association of Junior Colleges, was “usually offered in the first two years of the four-year colleges” (as cited in DeGenaro, p. 508). Once enrolled, however, junior college administrators stressed to their students the opportunity to pursue vocational training programs in the form of one- to two-year degrees and certifications, an effort guided by a desire to fulfill what

DeGenaro calls the “terminal function of the junior college” (p. 207). But what most of these students wanted—and what most working-class students (be they “traditional” or “nontraditional”) entering a two-year community college *still* want—was an opportunity for a university degree (DeGenaro 2001; Dougherty 1994; Fullinwider and Lichtenberg 2004; Goldhaber and Peri 2007; Lavin and Hyllegard 1996; NCES 2001; Shor 1987).

Split-personality schools, never quite certain of their primary role in American society, two-year colleges today experience nearly the same conflicting roles they have faced since their inception. Many attempts have been made to define those roles: “liberalism” vs. “vocationalism” (Shor); “gateway” vs. “gatekeeper” (Dowd); “democratization” vs. the “diversion” (Goldhaber and Peri). Whatever the terms, the results have been the same. While upwards of seventy percent of students from all racial, gendered, or socioeconomic backgrounds see a four-year degree as their ultimate goal when enrolling in a two-year college, the percentage who *do* eventually earn a bachelor’s is much smaller. Research cited by Shor conducted in the 1960s and early 1970s puts the number of two-year students who actually matriculated (not graduated) at a four-year school at 30 percent. Actual longitudinal studies are almost nonexistent, but some more current research has been slightly more encouraging. Rouse (1995) looked at the proximity of community colleges to where students live and found that, while students who enter such schools are less likely to eventually earn a bachelor’s degree than those who first matriculate at a four-year institution, community colleges do in fact increase the total number of years those students are educated (by one year). Thus, Rouse concluded that the benefits of community colleges outweigh the negatives of the diversion effect (p. 223). Leigh and Gill (2003; 2004) looked at student’s educational aspirations and found

that, statistically, the democratization effect very slightly outweighed the diversion effect, particularly “for students from low-income families for whom the very idea of attending a four-year college and graduating with a B.A. degree is likely to be foreign” (p. 96). So, *some* “democratization effect” of two-year schools is undeniable, and the author of this study would be loathe to condemn the two-year college that gave me the chance to re-enter formal education after dropping out of high school at the age of 17.

But a reading of the actual policy-making history of two-year schools through a Marxist theoretical lens reveals why students such as myself are exceptions to the general rule: i.e. that the terminal function of two-year schools overrides even the best intentions of educators such as Shor, who has labored his entire career in the community college system. American educators are heavily steeped in the ideology of the American schooling, and although we are smart people who struggle hard to shift our perspective and see that system *differently*—although we, like all conscientious educators, rail against the systemic evils we *do* perceive—we can never truly be, as Althusser asserted, “outside ideology” (p. 175).

Althusser argued that state power structures function not only to maintain the status quo through overt, highly visible systems of force such as the army, the police, and the courts, but through more subtle though no less powerful ideological systems such as the family, the church, and most importantly, school. The overt systems of control, Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs), have the power of physical coercion to the point of imprisonment and death, while the subtle, more covert systems of control, Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) serve to convince all members of a society that their own best

interests coincide with the interests of the ruling class (p. 145). Althusser provides a clear theoretical explanation of the “sorting” function of the school:

It takes children from every class at infant-school age, and then for years, the years in which the child is most 'vulnerable', squeezed between the family State apparatus and the educational State apparatus, it drums into them, whether it uses new or old methods, a certain amount of 'know-how' wrapped in the ruling ideology (French, arithmetic, natural history, the sciences, literature) or simply the ruling ideology in its pure state (ethics, civic instruction, philosophy). Somewhere around the age of sixteen, a huge mass of children are ejected 'into production': these are the workers or small peasants. Another portion of scholastically adapted youth carries on: and, for better or worse, it goes somewhat further, until it falls by the wayside and fills the posts of small and middle technicians, white-collar workers, small and middle executives, petty bourgeois of all kinds. A last portion reaches the summit, either to fall into intellectual semi-employment, or to provide, as well as the 'intellectuals of the collective labourer', the agents of exploitation (capitalists, managers), the agents of repression (soldiers, policemen, politicians, administrators, etc.) and the professional ideologists (priests of all sorts, most of whom are convinced 'laymen'). (p. 155)

While Althusser is describing how the educational ISAs work in France, the French and American capitalist ideologies at large have more similarities (i.e. a need for continuity in the labor market) than differences (the age of “ejection” from school).

Thus American schools and French schools (and British, Canadian, German schools, etc.) serve the practical function of “sorting” to reproduce the labor pool, and each group is “ejected” from the system with a self-fulfilling ideological justification—as we saw with Bowles and Gintis above—of their particular place in the larger social order:

Each mass ejected en route is practically provided with the ideology which suits the role it has to fulfill in class society: the role of the exploited (with a 'highly-developed' 'professional', 'ethical', 'civic', 'national' and a-political consciousness); the role of the agent of exploitation (ability to give the workers orders and speak to them: 'human relations'), of the agent of repression (ability to give orders and enforce obedience 'without discussion', or ability to manipulate the demagogy of a political leader's rhetoric), or of the professional ideologist (ability to treat consciousnesses with the respect, i.e. with the contempt, blackmail, and demagogy they

deserve, adapted to the accents of Morality, of Virtue, of 'Transcendence', of the Nation, of France's World Role, etc.). (pp. 155-56)

So while community colleges sometimes fulfill their promise as gateways to the baccalaureate, their primary function in our capitalist system is to divert and “cool out” such aspirations among the working classes while providing technical “skills updates” for their adult students. In fact, as Bowles and Gintis point out, “systems of discipline and student management” at community colleges “resemble those of secondary education” more than similar systems in baccalaureate-granting institutions (p. 212). A more guided and controlled curriculum with the “ideal amount of specific direction,” discipline, and pedagogical approaches that stressed lectures and strict deadlines in essence provided students with an ideological “refresher course” for those who had earlier failed to learn their proper place in the capitalist system (p. 212).

But Bowles and Gintis are quick to clarify that community colleges themselves are not to blame. Those schools are doing the job politicians and policymakers charged them with perfectly: “processing large numbers of students to attain that particular combination of technical competence and social acquiescence required in the skilled but powerless upper-middle positions in the occupational hierarchy of the corporate capitalist economy” (p. 212). This is, of course, the *effect* of political and educational policy, though it is rarely spelled out as the *intent* of such policy. Wave after wave of “educational reforms” have swept across the nation for its entire history, and while the design of such reforms is subject to intense debate by often well-intentioned educators and policymakers, the cumulative effect of such reforms in action has been overwhelmingly conservative.

The Progressive Era of social reform saw the first serious attempts to transfer the pseudo-scientific methods of bureaucratization and standardization from the corporate world into the realm of public education. The leading corporate capitalists of the day, including J. P. Morgan, Andrew Carnegie, and John D. Rockefeller, put their massive capital to work in the name of “educational reform,” and one of their first efforts was to champion “vocational schools,” formal educational institutions that would compete with and severely undermine organized labor’s apprentice system of education, which had long been a powerful source of leverage in labor’s favor (Bowles and Gintis, p. 193). Public vocational education became such an effective anti-union force that one union secretary called the trade school a “breeding ground for scabs” (p. 193). While these schools were, at least initially, separate from other secondary educational institutions, their creation gave rise to methods of “tracking” high school students into “appropriate” skills-oriented curriculums (p. 193). Thus removed from the dangerous influence of senior laborers who had a lifetime of experience dealing with capitalists, future laborers and foremen could instead learn their professions while being inculcated in the ideology of capitalism. Instead of learning the tactics and strategies of direct action, students were given some of the first standardized tests, “scientifically” evaluated, and then “coached” into what the tests and counselors would have students believe was the vocation best suited for their “natural” abilities (p. 195). Maintaining the ideological veil of voluntary student choices and the newly scientific legitimacy of their testing instruments, the public school system could thus produce a willing and docile labor force, at least relative to the stormy period of labor relations that, in part, led to the progressive reforms to begin with. In the times when the self-policing of ideology was not enough to defuse potential labor

unrest, the system's failsafe training of mid-level managers and foremen helped maintain peace and production—and all of this either on the public's dime or through very nominal endowments such as those set up by Carnegie and Rockefeller (p. 198).

Thus, the era of progressive educational reforms in the late nineteenth century would set the stage for later reforms in higher education, such as the creation of junior colleges and the drive for national standards and accreditation for four-year institutions. Laurence R. Veysey's *The Emergence of the American University* (1965) outlines the early history of heavy corporate involvement in national educational policy and in local postsecondary educational curricula, revealing that our more recent fears about the "corporate university" are nothing new. The ideology of business bureaucracy seeped into the pores of higher education on at least two fronts: 1) from the top-down, as administrators "ran the danger of casually, even unconsciously, accepting the dominant codes of action of their more numerous and influential peers, the leaders of business and industry," and 2) from the bottom-up, as expanding enrollments opened the doors of college to middle-class students and emphasized the practical/utilitarian benefits of a college education (p. 346). Academicians of the more traditional school such as Thorstein Veblen saw the academic administrator's "vanity and love of power" leading universities toward a business model of operation:

Veblen saw the finger of business control in practically every aspect of the modern university: in the tendency to spend money on conspicuous buildings; in the growth of bureaucracy; in the prominence of fraternities and athletics; in what he (as an advocate of research) believed was the subordination of the graduate school to the undergraduate college; in the vocational courses; in the whole competitive search for prestige. (p. 347)

The Progressive Era prepared fertile ground for the bureaucratization of education and provided important precedents for educational reform movements to come. Business

leaders, politicians, and school administrators at all levels, guided by good intentions and the ideology of the American Dream, have perceived one educational “crisis” after another, and in their efforts to combat those crises have in effect continually remade schools in ways that adapt educational goals and standards to meet the needs of industry, reproducing the conditions and relations of production as neatly and cheaply as possible.

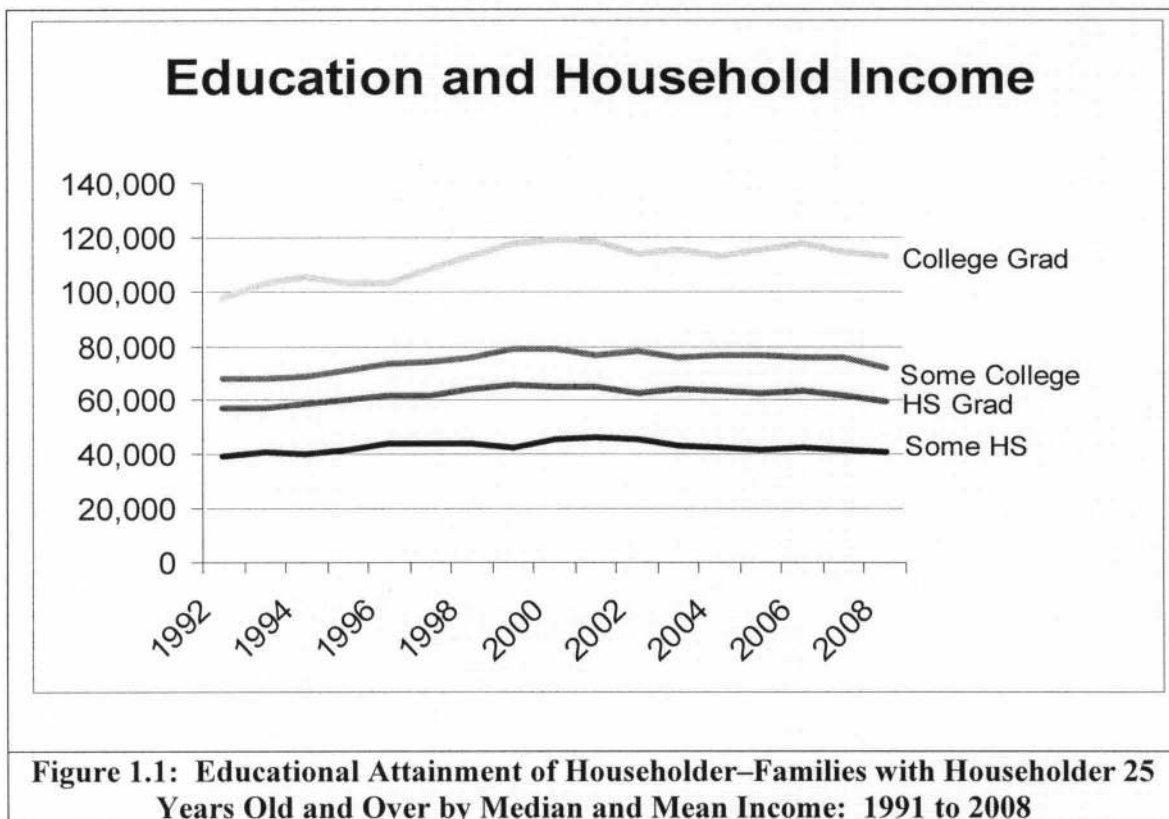
Brint and Karabel (1989) discuss a relatively recent example of such reforms was the 1967 creation of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, a policymaking body charged with creating “a coherent plan for national higher education policy at a time of great social and political upheaval on the nation’s campuses and in society at large” (p. 103). Using the California Master Plan of 1960 as a guide, the Commission issued reports on a rapid-fire basis, urging the creation of occupational and vocational programs at the two-year level while recommending, in its wryly titled 1970 publication *The Open Door Colleges*, that any plans to convert such schools to four-year institutions “should be actively discouraged by state planning and financing policies” (as cited in Brint and Karabel, p. 105). The root of their concerns was becoming alarmingly clear by the early 1970s: a faltering economy coupled with increasing numbers of holders of the bachelor degree among the unemployed spelled political trouble for the status quo, and the commission looked to the example of the third world to make their point: an “overproduction” of college graduates could create “a political crisis because of the substantial number of disenchanting and underemployed or even unemployed college graduates—as in Ceylon or in India or in Egypt” (as cited in Brint and Karabel, p. 106). This quotation comes from the 1973 report titled *College Graduates and Jobs*, which

later concludes in Orwellian, industrial terms that, were this to happen, “higher education will then have become counterproductive” (p. 106).

In addition to Brint and Karabel, empirical researchers such as Clark (1960), Ganderton and Santos (1995), and Pincus (1980) have all found enrolling in community colleges to be more of an *impediment* than an aid for those wishing to complete a four-year degree “because the cost of transferring can be burdensome and because four-year institutions can better help students to stay focused on completing the bachelor’s degree” (p. 115). Additionally, the 2001 numbers from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found students from high socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds are far more likely to transfer from two-year to four-year schools than less wealthy students, with 41% from the highest, 27% from the upper middle, 14% from the lower middle, and 10% from the lowest quartiles, respectively, transferring to a four-year school (p. 114). Those last two numbers are all the more depressing considering fully 21% of students from the lowest two quartiles “expected to complete [a] bachelor’s degree or higher” (p. 114). With tuition increases and rising admissions “standards” at public, four-year universities, Americans are increasingly shifting the burden of educating the working-class to two-year schools, and the stratification and sorting effect of education has only increased.

Thus, community colleges can often create one more hurdle to clear in a long, long educational “race to the top” for working-class adults, and for those who never transfer and earn a bachelor’s degree, it is a race they are clearly losing, at least from an economic standpoint. Mountains of statistical evidence reveal an enduring correlation between educational level and earnings, and studies looking at the recent past show that

positive correlation growing stronger over the past 30 years, especially for those with a bachelor's degree or higher (Haveman and Wilson 2008, pp. 33-34; Fullinwider and Lichtenberg 2005, p. 5; Goldhaber and Peri 2008, p. 102; Mishel, Bernstein, and Allegretto 2005, pp. 152-153). Figure 1.1 charts the latest data available from the U.S. Census on educational attainment and annual earnings for householders 25 years old and over. It is important to keep in mind that these numbers reflect *household* income, not individual income, so all the numbers are relatively large (though trending downward). Still, the gap between "Some College" (roughly \$72K per year) and "College Grad" (roughly \$113K per year) is substantial. More importantly, the gap is an *enduring*, long-term feature of our economic system, while the educational trend is to funnel larger and larger percentages of the working class through the two-year college system, where the



odds against obtaining a bachelor's degree and middle class economic status are significantly steeper.

But as Bowles and Gintis point out, economic arguments alone ultimately play by the rules of the logic of meritocracy, which dominate our current educational debates, and when these measures are the definitive standard of fairness they become a red herring, diverting the energies of those of us who want to see education serve the goals of social justice. Our opponents need only respond: "Must not the principle of meritocracy in schools be efficient? Should not the most 'able' be granted the right to further educational resources, since they will be the most capable of benefiting themselves and society?" (p. 106). So go the claims, following the elitist reasoning that underpins all defenses of meritocracy, such as Sir Eric Ashby's: "All civilized countries. . . depend upon a thin clear stream of excellence to provide new ideas, new techniques, and the statesmanlike treatment of complex problems" (as cited in Bowles and Gintis, p. 208). But as a teacher I believe *all* individuals benefit from education, not just those who are considered "gifted" by an elitist culture intent on self-justification: "That is," argue Bowles and Gintis, "education is something like physical exercise. Some people are more talented than others, but all benefit about equally from athletic involvement and instruction" (p. 107).

So education beyond the two-year school can benefit working-class adults in ways neither they nor their teachers might have anticipated. As Shor says, "Each year they are compelled to stay in school by the lack of jobs, they will be studying at a more mature moment of their own development, and will get more out of their humanities courses thanks to the prior years of college time which habitualize them to intellectual

life” (p. 33). In other words, the longer working-class adults have to learn about and reflect on our capitalist culture and their place within it, the less satisfied they are likely to be with their allotted “station in life”—the place where the education system “ejected” them. Higher education, in fact, might be most valuable to these students when it serves a purpose contrary to “vocational training”: i.e. when it “contributes to worker dissatisfaction on the job” instead of contributing to worker complacency (p. 28).

IV) One Urban University: Its Historical Mission and Current Trends

This study was conducted at an urban, public, four-year university in the Upper South/Lower Midwest United States. Four-year urban universities have long been the exception to the rule for older and working-class students. While such metropolitan schools share some of the same “split-personality” issues with community colleges described above, they have historically provided a relatively cheap alternative to two-year schools while offering students the chance to matriculate at a four-year school and avoid the additional hurdle to a bachelor’s degree evidenced in the research cited above (Clark, 1960, Ganderton and Santos, 1995; Pincus, 1980). As such, urban universities have occupied an important place in the larger national higher education picture, meeting the needs of an older, less-affluent student constituency (Johnson and Bell, 1995). Still, as the following brief history will demonstrate, such schools have been subject to the political and ideological forces at work on all American institutions of higher learning.

For much of its history, what is now The University of Louisville (U of L) was a municipal university, funded jointly by the city of Louisville and by private donations. In fact, U of L and South Carolina’s College of Charleston still debate which school can

claim the title “oldest municipal university in America”—but both agree they predate the founding of New York University by ten years (Cox, 1984, p. 12; Jouett, 1937, p. 406).

In his 1937 Centennial Commencement Exercises address, Chairman of the U of L Board of Trustees Edward S. Jouett proclaimed that “Louisville rejected the narrow view prevailing at one time that the public should not participate in the cost of furnishing education in the professions because it was conferring a private benefit” (p. 406).

Without U of L, Jouett continued:

...many worthy and capable young men and women, because of economic limitations, would be debarred from entering these essential callings, and society would have to depend for professional service upon those drawn only from that class or rank who are financially able to buy this training at any price. This would be an unfortunate condition in a country like ours, whose policy is to avoid class distinctions and to make it possible for the humblest to rise to the highest rank. (p. 406)

Just how close Jouett’s claims have ever been to reality at U of L is subject to debate, yet the 1935 founding of the university’s Department of Adult Education (DAE) initiated a nearly sixty-year span of time in which older, working adults were afforded unprecedented opportunities to pursue a bachelor’s degree at U of L (Cox and Morison, 2000, p. 168). And while Jouett’s language was couched in the ideological phrasing of the American dream, it is a dream of opportunity through education likely shared by the vast majority of working-class students who have attended U of L ever since.

Perhaps most striking about Jouett’s speech are the several passages that, with a few changes, could be delivered at the Spring 2010 Commencement. The Chairman touts U of L’s rising standing among American municipal universities, noting that “such standing is determined by national accrediting agencies according to established standards,” and continuing:

Accordingly, I am happy, and I must also admit proud, to inform you that after eight years of unobtrusive but diligent and efficient efforts upon the part of President Kent and those acting under his direction, the standards and the work of the remaining colleges constituting the University have also been brought up to such a point of excellence that now every one of the seven schools is entitled to be and has duly accredited the highest rank. As a result of this new rating of the University's various colleges, its graduates are now admitted without question to the leading universities in America, in England and on the Continent. When one considers the difficulties that had to be overcome and the distance that had to be traveled by some in order to reach this goal, its achievement seems almost incredible. It merits, and we believe will receive, the admiration and gratitude of every citizen of Louisville as the facts become known. (p. 408)

As Dwayne Cox (1984) argues, Jouett's and President Raymond A. Kent's efforts represented the university's "belated conformity with the progressive era's definition of higher education" (p. 99).

Of course, a good portion of Louisville's citizenry had excellent reasons for withholding their admiration and gratitude for the university's efforts. Seventeen years prior to Jouett's speech, the city's African American population—whose taxes supported a university they were not allowed to attend—helped deliver a crushing blow to a \$1 million U of L bond issue (Cox, 1984, p. 70; Cox and Morrison, 2000, p. 88). The university leadership was shocked, and took the limited action of dedicating a portion of a 1925 bond issue aside for higher education in the city's black community; eventually (in 1931), \$100,000 of these funds were dedicated to founding the Louisville Municipal College for Negroes, a *Plessy v. Ferguson*-era, "separate but equal" institution (Cox and Morrison, p. 91). For the next twenty years, 2,649 African Americans would attend Louisville Municipal, with 513 of those students earning degrees (p. 92). According to Cox and Morrison (2000), "many more women than men attended," and for roughly the final eight years of the college's existence—and after many administrative battles—the

wording on graduates' diplomas read "University of Louisville" rather than "Louisville Municipal College for Negroes" (pp. 92-93). But, as a reporter for the *Louisville Courier-Journal* noted in 1946, Louisville Municipal "fell far, far short of meeting the needs of the Negro community it [was] designed to serve," and it was not until after a further, bitter series of legal fights and legislative wrangling that the university itself was desegregated in the fall semester of 1950 (pp. 96-99). Louisville Municipal closed its doors the following spring, its faculty—all but one—terminated and offered two months' severance pay (pp. 99-100). The university's board of trustees did, however, offer former Louisville Municipal Professor Charles H. Parrish, Jr., a faculty position in the College of Arts and Sciences, which, Cox and Morison point out, allowed U of L to claim "the distinction of being the first historically white university in the South to have a black faculty member" (pp. 100).

The postwar period and its attendant spike in the older student population dramatically expanded the U of L's Division of Adult Education (DAE), whose 2,016 students in Fall 1953 numbered almost twice as many students enrolled in the next-largest program (the Arts and Sciences' 1,109 daytime students) (Faculty Minutes). The influx of new students apparently shook things up considerably at U of L. In 1951, Professor of Social Anthropology Paul F. Angiolillo conducted an "attitude analysis" of DAE students after repeated and vociferous complaints those students raised about the program. Ray E. Marcus, a graduate student in sociology conducted who his master's thesis research on the problem, describes the environment memorably: "For months before the study, complaints about almost everything connected with the adult education program were strongly voiced on the campus. The group that met to discuss designing a

questionnaire...appeared to be able to find nothing but fault with the existing conditions” (p. 29). Yet the results of the survey did not support such a broad level of dissatisfaction, an outcome that puzzled Marcus. He speculated that perhaps the students were not convinced that the questionnaire was truly anonymous, since “many questionnaires had to be discarded because the respondent failed to state his age” (both men and women were surveyed) (p. 30). (Whether Marcus ran the numbers with the discarded surveys included, he does not say, but in hindsight it seems a logical way of testing his hypothesis.)

What Marcus found most interesting, however, were the “Reasons Given for Attending Division of Adult Education.” Responses are given below in Table 1.1.

| Response | Rate |
|--|-------|
| I am attending DAE mainly for cultural improvement | 12.8% |
| I am attending DAE to add to my technical knowledge | 48.8% |
| I am attending DAE because I have always wanted a college education and did not have an earlier opportunity to enroll in college-level courses | 38.2% |
| I am attending DAE mainly for the social life and experiences here | 0 |

Table 1.1: Reasons Given for Attending the Division of Adult Education

Marcus was surprised that no respondents chose the “social life” option, saying, “it has long been believed by many that a great many students attend the University at night in order to make social contacts and recapture the lost dream of ‘Joe College’” (p. 30).

There is no way of knowing if any respondents on the discarded questionnaires chose this option, but—if Marcus’s supposition is true—the results certainly provide a glimpse into differences between what *educators thought* their adult students wanted and what the

students themselves wanted. Marcus does no statistical analysis of the results, but does note that “the majority attends for the purpose of adding to his technical knowledge” (p. 31). What seems far more telling from the perspective of an adult educator today is the fact that a true majority, 51%, were there for reasons other than a “technical knowledge” upgrade. That 38.8% said “I have always wanted a college education and did not have an earlier opportunity to enroll in college-level courses” is a telling snapshot of the educational aspirations postwar, working-class Americans.

In 1970, after nearly a decade of budgetary crises, legislative wrangling between U of L, the University of Kentucky, and a myriad of Kentucky politicians, the University of Louisville became a state-funded school rather than a municipally-funded one. For a time, at least, the state funding solution resolved U of L’s budget woes, and coupled with the ideology of “open admissions” in the nation at large, educational opportunities for working adults saw a healthy expansion. The DAE was re-named University College (UC) in 1957, but had continued the tradition of offering general education courses in the evenings and on weekends to students who otherwise either did not meet the admission requirements for other degree programs or who had to work during regular business hours (Cox and Morison, p. 168). In 1972 UC began offering degrees of its own, and in 1975 established the West Louisville Educational Program, which was “designed to appeal especially,” according to Cox and Morison, “to underprepared students from Louisville’s black community...[but whose] services were made available to all students” (p. 168). During this time University College also initiated the Fort Knox Center, an off-campus facility to help soldiers and their families stationed at the military base 37 miles south of Louisville (p. 169).

In 1983 U of L was faced with yet another budget crisis, and then-president Donald C. Swain chose to respond to the \$4.4 million dollar shortfall by closing University College and ending open enrollment (p. 176). Swain proposed to replace UC with a “Basic College,” which would be “essentially a community college,” according to Cox and Morison, but the “Preparatory Division” unit of the West Louisville Educational Program took over so-called “remedial courses” (p. 176). Open enrollment was finished, and U of L began a concerted effort to “raise the university’s admission standards” by following the advice of the Council on Higher Education, a national accreditation agency (p. 176).

Budget crises were the norm rather than the exception over the course of Swain’s tenure, and his relationship with the faculty was tense, at best, as Cox and Morison detail:

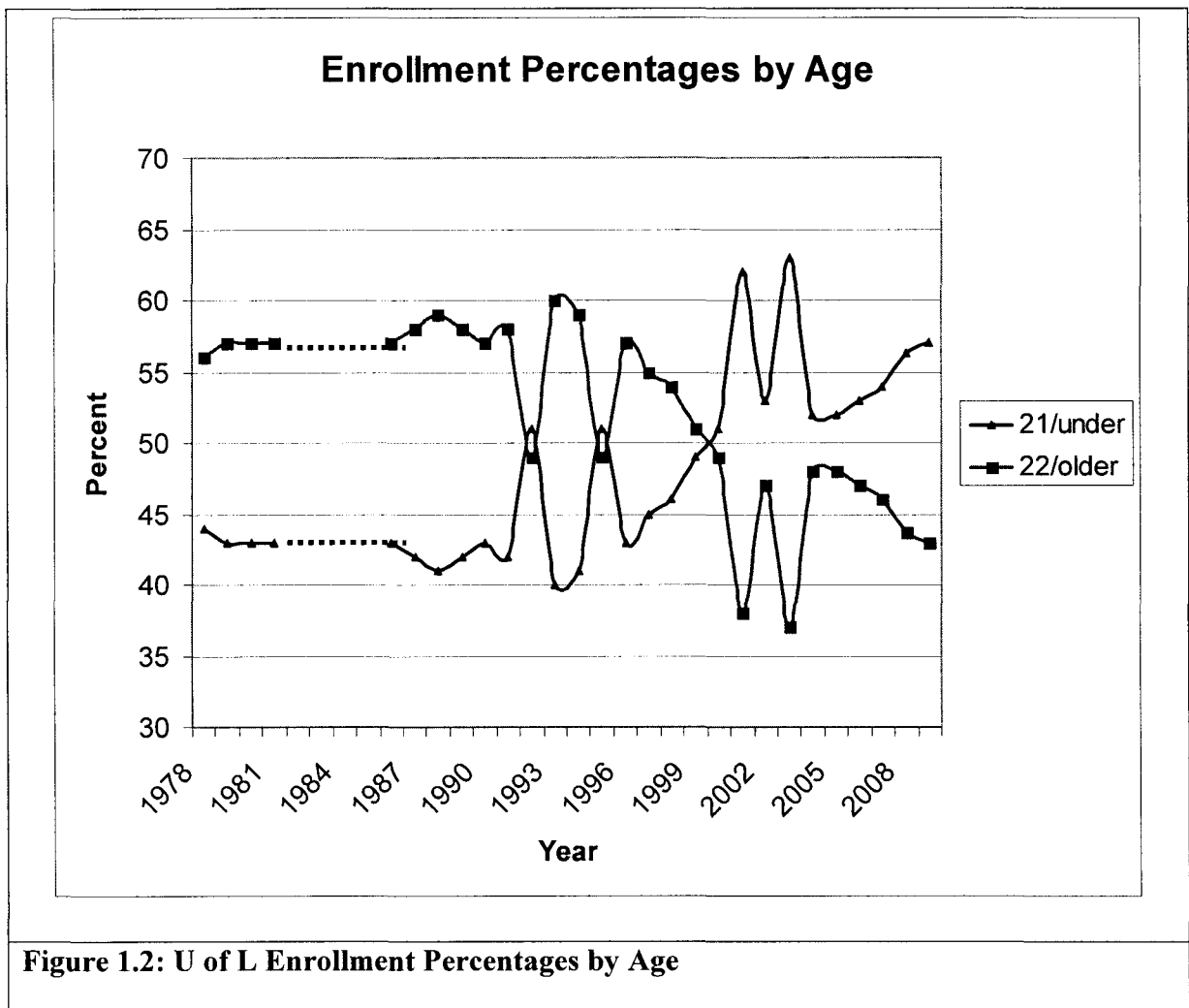
Forced to make one budget cut after another, Swain approached these unpleasant but unavoidable tasks through strategic planning processes that originated in the business world but were becoming more commonplace in academic settings. Units were directed to identify goals and objectives consistent with the university’s overall mission and to concentrate on the achievement of ‘priorities for action,’ or PFAs. Some faculty members charged that the president’s style too closely resembled that of a corporation’s chief executive officer, and complained that he planned ‘from the top down,’ ignoring or undervaluing their advice. Swain countered with the accurate observation that his planning initiatives found favor with the Council on Higher Education. (p. 180)

Given the history of educational reform initiatives above, U of L’s faculty were more than a bit naïve (not to mention a century too late) in their criticism of Swain’s CEO-like behavior. Swain’s “accurate observation” that his plans met with the approval of the Council on Higher Education fit a long-established pattern of educational institutions being brought into ideological line by the political powers that be. Open enrollments did not fit the role of an efficient ISA, and so were discontinued.

Over the course of the last 20 years, U of L has followed the larger trend of four-year schools that have reduced overall undergraduate enrollment¹, and as Dowd describes, “have become more focused on increasing their selectivity and other indicators as markers of quality” (p. 408). The Kentucky State Legislature’s Postsecondary Education Improvement Act of 1997 mandated that U of L work to become a “premier nationally recognized metropolitan research institution” by the year 2020. For such a recognition to be meaningful, it must come from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, whose classification system is the measure of success for all institutions of higher learning in the United States (Mulhollan, 1995, p. 27). In response, then-university president John Shumaker launched the “Challenge for Excellence” plan that called for U of L to be ranked as a Tier I Research University by the year 2008 (“U of L joins top”). The Challenge exceeded its goal by getting U of L ranked as a “Research University-Extensive” in August of 2000. “As such,” trumpeted the accompanying press release, U of L “joins a list of eminent U.S. research and doctoral institutions including Harvard University, Cornell University, Yale University, Johns Hopkins University and Stanford University” (“U of L joins top”). Subsequently, U of L included the achievement in its 2008 “branding” campaign, which claims the institution has achieved a perfect “11 for 11” success rate on the goals set forth ten years before in Shumaker’s “Challenge for Excellence.” This announcement concludes with two sentences explaining, “Carnegie no longer uses this classification system. However, U of L continues to exceed the qualifications that were in place when the goal was set.” The elite Carnegie folks have changed the rules, but U of L still *exceeds* the old rules.

¹ According to the university’s *Fact Books*, undergraduate enrollment at U of L peaked at 18,333 students in 1990, fell to as low as 14, 131 in 2001, and has risen very gradually to a total of 15, 644 in 2010.

Coinciding with each of these events are rather dramatic shifts in the age of the undergraduate student population at U of L. As Figure 1.2 shows, students 22 years old and older had steadily constituted 55-60 percent of the undergraduate population from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. In 1992 and 1995, striking reversals occur, with the 21 and under population suddenly outnumbering their older peers. From 1996 to 1999, a more steady reversal of the historical trend ensues, and beginning in the year 2000 the number of 22+ year-old undergraduates has steadily declined (*Fact books, 1978-2010*).



The local media report that these trends are a result of U of L pushing hard to change its image from a “second tier...inner-city metropolitan college” to one viewed by students as “just like...UK [the University of Kentucky] and Western [Kentucky University]” (Kenning, 2006, para. 9). Admission requirements for first-year students, such as high school grade point averages and standardized test scores, have been raised several times since the turn of the 21st century, and an effort to increase the percentage of resident students—whereas the majority of U of L students have always been commuters—has changed the impression U of L creates with prospective students. One 20-year-old student interviewed by the local media in 2006 has high hopes for results from U of L’s “increasing academic profile,” saying, ““My degree is going to mean more to employers than it would have 10 years ago” (Kenning, para. 30). The same news story paraphrases the university’s director of admissions, Jenny Sawyer, stating that, while “applicant rejections have doubled since 2000...local students aren't being shut out of their own city's main public university” because they can still begin their academic careers at the local community college, “where they automatically transfer to U of L after earning 24 credits” (Kenning, para. 11).

While this is technically true, Sawyer and the local reporter failed to mention any of the research cited above on the nearly zero net long-term effect community colleges have on the likelihood of their students earning a bachelor’s degree. Also unmentioned in the local media is the alarming trend of declining percentages of African Americans in the overall undergraduate population: 2.5% decrease—from 14.5% to 12.0%—over the last decade (*Fact books*, 2000-2010). When the 2000 Census put the percentage of African American residents in the city of Louisville at 33%, it is clear that the 14.5%

figure was far too low a percentage a decade ago (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). That this percentage is moving rapidly in the wrong direction should be a cause for concern for a university that spares no opportunity to tout its supposed “diversity” and the fact that it was the “first historically white university in the South to have a black faculty member.”

Interpreting what all of this means to students and teachers in U of L’s first-year composition classes will be the focus of the remaining chapters of my dissertation. At this point, however, I should make clear that the local history outlined in this chapter is known by very few U of L composition teachers interviewed for this study. Instructors who do understand this history, however—and in FYC classes they are mainly term lecturers and part-time, contingent faculty—are able to appreciate the historical context in which their students encounter U of L. Those instructors are more likely to understand the lives of their students in a local context, and this tacit knowledge allows them to appreciate the difficulties their students encounter as they come to an institution increasingly more focused on research than on teaching.

The plurality of FYC classes (45% in the spring 2010 semester) are taught by an ever-revolving staff of master’s and doctoral teaching assistants, many of whom have far too little understanding of or interest in the larger politics and policies that shape their own working and learning environment. Lacking the local/institutional knowledge discussed thus far, FYC instructors must draw on the resources available to them if they are to construct a working-adult-friendly pedagogy in their classes. The richest of those resources is undoubtedly the history and theory of composition studies, and the remainder of this chapter will focus on what the field of composition has had to say about working-class nontraditional students in the writing classroom.

V) Working-Class Adults in First-Year Composition

Among the actual coursework older, working-class students will usually encounter early on in their postsecondary education, first-year composition poses a unique set of challenges for those students and their teachers alike. Small classes and interactive, discussion-based pedagogical approaches are among our field's most prized achievements—and rightly so—but for adults who are acutely aware of their distinctions, their class and age markers such as work uniforms, graying hair, or crows feet, the anonymity of the darkened lecture hall crammed with 200 or more students, each facing forward and silently taking notes has its appeal. Yet because first-year composition is likely to be among the handful of courses adult students encounter early on in that crucial time when they are testing the waters of college life, getting a feel for academic culture, and trying to determine if they should entrust the members of that culture with their limited time and financial resources, the field of composition studies has the opportunity—in fact a tremendous responsibility—to welcome such students into academic culture, and even to change that culture when necessary, if we are to fulfill an obligation that we can be, as Joseph Harris (1997) says, “a teaching subject.”

Our field has made great strides over the years to make sure students of all genders, races, and socioeconomic classes benefit equally from our pedagogical practices. In fact, much to our discipline's credit, compositionists have frequently been in the vanguard of academic movements to acknowledge and address the impact of socioeconomic class on our students, ourselves, and our practices. Some of the watershed events in composition's history have been class-oriented or inspired, such as the still hotly debated 1974 statement by the CCCC, “Students' Right to Their Own

Language.” While this statement does not mention class explicitly, there is no doubt that class status and our students’ language practices are two inseparable issues: “The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another” (Conference on College Composition and Communication). In the late 1980s came the “Social Turn” in composition studies, punctuated by heated exchanges between scholars such as John Trimbur, who advocated making the composition classroom as a place for students to critique the American political culture and class system, and Maxine Hairston, who fiercely attacked any politicization of the composition curriculum (as cited in Peckham, p. 94). Lynn Bloom’s “Freshman Composition as a Middle Class Enterprise” (1996) made composition teachers from all socioeconomic class backgrounds squirm with her often too-close-to-home analysis of how our FYC classrooms can frequently function as a “chlorine footbath” of indoctrination into middle-class values systems before students from the lower classes are allowed to the academy’s middle-class swimming pool (p. 656). More recently, several compositionists from the working classes have published their reflections on what becoming a middle-class academic means for their established working-class identities.² And yet, despite the fact that most nontraditional students are by definition “working-class” (as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 2), the FYC experiences of older students from working-class backgrounds have received comparatively little scholarly attention.

² The list of such works long and still growing, but a few noteworthy examples are Victor Villanueva’s *Bootstraps* (1993), David Borkowski’s “Not Too Late to Take the Sanitation Test: Notes of a Non-Gifted Academic from the Working Class” (2004), and significant portions of Irvin Peckham’s *Going North, Thinking West: The Intersections of Social Class, Critical Thinking, and Politicized Writing Instruction* (2010).

This dissertation examines the role first-year composition plays in working-class adult/nontraditional students' academic lives, exploring the first-year composition "experience" of a core group of working-class students 22 + years old, with a particular focus on their experiences with the pedagogical practices employed in mixed-generation composition classrooms. Using a case-study approach of questionnaires and interviews, I explore how these students anticipate, engage in, and reflect on their first-year composition experience. The results of this inquiry may allow a re-theorizing of some classroom practices for composition instructors who regularly teach mixed-generation courses—adding a corrective lens from the *andragogical* theories of adult education to composition's well-developed pedagogical theories, and thus helping teachers of mixed-generation composition courses to: 1) *recognize* the needs of our working-class adult students, and 2) help students of *all* ages meet their objectives in first-year composition.

The major area of inquiry this study addresses is how working-class adult/nontraditional students respond to classroom practices of first-year composition courses at a modern urban university. What approaches to teaching composition—for example, peer review, groupwork, lecture, class-wide discussions, multimedia classroom activities, freewriting, and types of writing assignments—do working-class adult/nontraditional students find more or less effective in accomplishing their course objectives? *Why* are these approaches more or less effective? My own experiences and those of my colleagues were what led me to investigate this issue: for example, I have had older students express their disdain for the work habits of their peers in group activities—"Don't group me with those kids anymore. They don't take any of this seriously and I don't want my grade to suffer because of their laziness."

The research in our field that *has* been done on inter-generational classrooms has revealed certain patterns of conflict that cut across the age spectrum both ways. In fact, more than a few composition researchers have found that younger students are often intimidated by older students because the older students tend to be more outspoken in class and/or tend to spend more time outside of class reading and writing; therefore they were more prepared for class and got better grades (Bay, 1999, p. 309; Kasworm, 2001, p. 13; Morrison, 1994, p. 29; Uehling, 1996, p. 3; Warren, 1992, p. 1). Several studies also found a perception—among students of all ages—that adult students received “special treatment” by the teacher, such as greater flexibility with paper deadlines due to conflicting “real-world” events (Kasworm, p. 13; Morrison, p. 31). As one adult student in Kasworm’s study said, “They [the faculty] seem to show—not that they are rude in any way towards younger students—they seem to be a little more deferential towards older students. They’re adults dealing with adults rather than adults dealing with children” (p. 13). And a 19 year-old student in Morrison’s study elaborated on some of the inter-generational competition between students this way: “Oh, definitely [there is competition]! The traditional students see it as the older students [having] only ... one or two classes to study for, but most of us are taking a full load, so they...have more time to study” (p. 29). It is difficult not to wonder at this teenager’s limited conception of a “full load” when reading what another adult student in Kasworm’s study says: “We’re playing with real houses. The [younger] students are worried about having fun” (p. 10).

But this attitude should not be mistaken for condescension on the part of the adults. On the contrary, most studies found that adult students genuinely value the chance to interact with younger persons in a context other than being “my friend’s mom,”

and they use those sites of interaction to learn about the way younger generations view the world (Kasworm, p. 14). A 48 year-old student in Uehling's study said, memorably:

In the classroom the input from all age groups helps to bring the subject matter into better focus. I have enjoyed being with younger adults, with their fresh approach and carefree attitude, and sharing ideas with them. On the other side, the older adults have life experiences and wisdom to draw from. I would not like to see us without each other. (p. 2)

Similarly, most of the adult students in Kasworm's study reported a "positive, respectful relationship" with faculty, believed faculty valued their presence in the classroom, and even thought that instructors showed deference to the adults in their classes because they saw adults as being more serious about learning (p. 13).

Most interesting, perhaps, is the group of adult students in Kasworm's study who saw themselves as "mediator[s] of learning between the younger students in the class and the faculty member" (p. 14). Such mediators were looked to by instructors for nonverbal feedback to gauge the effectiveness of lectures and as a "last resort" respondent to questions that no other student in the class wanted to address. Additionally, the younger students would depend on the adult students to pose questions to the instructor when the younger students were too intimidated to do so themselves (p. 14). In this instance, the adult students might be performing a role—one that none of the composition scholars discussed here mentions—that has been theorized by educational scholar Etienne Wenger (1998) in *Communities of Practice*. Wenger has much to critique about formal education, but one of his criticisms is aimed at the managerial role teachers tend to play (p. 276). As students encounter teachers in the classroom setting they are not encountering adults functioning in the adult world but adults acting as "representatives of the institution and upholders of curricular demands, with an identity defined by an institutional role" (p.

276). Inter-generational interaction (what Wenger less awkwardly terms the “generational encounter”) is a crucial part of the learning process because it is “not the mere transmission of a cultural heritage, but the mutual negotiation of identities invested in different historical moments” (pp. 157, 275). In classrooms where teachers do not (or cannot) provide such encounters, having a mixed-generation population might provide benefits few of us have yet considered. This study aims to consider them.

Much of the scholarship consulted for this literature review revealed significant differences between the attitudes of older and younger students when it came to sharing their writing. For example, two studies found that adult students tend to perceive themselves as the outsider in writing classrooms, a fear that manifests itself acutely when it comes to sharing written texts with their younger peers, whom they see as more competent writers because the younger students are only a few years removed from their high school writing instruction (Callahan, p. 89; Uehling, p. 3). In Karen Uehling’s “Older and Younger Adults Writing Together: A Rich Learning Community” an adult student refers to this as “critique anxiety”: a fear of “looking stupid” in front of her younger peers. While it is certainly true that writers of all ages can suffer from the same fear, factoring in the age differences can highlight just how deflating such experiences can be for an adult. Callahan’s dissertation also looks extensively at mixed-generation peer-review groups and offers some very moving accounts of adult students who dread peer review, even though the teacher made the process anonymous by replacing student names with pseudonyms. One adult student says, “I know somewhere in my mind that I am as competent as they [the younger students] are, but it is hard to feel it sometimes.

They have, just like my own boys, an assurance just from playing this game [education?] for a while. I don't have it yet" (brackets in the original, p. 89).

Frederickson (1998) did not perform a methodical study but speaks from her own experience teaching in a two-year institution. She asserts that, like all beginning writers, nontraditional students need encouragement on their essays before correction or they will never become fully confident in their writing voices and remain silent in the face of intimidating academic literacies—particularly in the form of published academic prose assigned as reading for discussion (p. 116). Frederickson also notes that TAs, as beginning teachers, are ill-trained to realize the needs of nontraditional students, and as a result often resort to the time-honored practice of marking every mechanical error they encounter (p. 118). Frederickson recommends instead that all comments on first drafts be positive because only positive feedback encourages students to take risks and feel good about their writing; with their initial confidence established, students can then be more thorough and enthusiastic about revising and correcting their later drafts (p. 118). She argues that returning student writers are often hesitant writers, and when those first, tentative steps toward establishing a written voice are met with criticism and correction, they can “cause embarrassment” and “hurt the students’ fragile egos” (p. 118). Further, “Nontraditional students suffer particularly from such criticism,” according to Frederickson, “because they already feel inadequate” (p. 118). Frederickson makes a rather large leap of logic with this last claim, which seems like a condescending assumption—especially since her evidence is personal experience rather than methodical research. I would not feel comfortable making this claim based on such scant evidence. However, my own experience as a writer and teacher make me think that Frederickson is

at least partially correct, here, at least in her claims about beginning writers. The beginning writers that I have taught *do* need more encouragement than correction and—regardless of the fragility of their egos—their identity as writers has not developed enough “scar tissue” to take the criticism of a red-pen-wielding grammarian.

Barbara Gleason’s “Returning Adults to the Mainstream” (2001) is the one piece of scholarship I’ve encountered that attempts to create a semester-long curriculum that accommodates *all* levels of writing skill in mainstreamed, adult student writing classes. Gleason’s curriculum seems to me the most forward-thinking and accommodating of all those examined for this literature review because it endeavors to meet students where they are as writers and takes them as far as they can go over the course of any given semester. As a teacher, Gleason sees her “role [as] one of intervening in a lifelong process of literacy development...” (p. 122). To this end, Gleason structures her course to meet the needs of her very diverse group of students in the CCNY “worker education classes,” which are open to all students, regardless of their test scores, for full college credit (p. 122). Gleason recognizes that most of these students “do not usually experience college as a natural extension of their home communities or even of high school” (p. 123). Drawing on the work of Royster, Bartholomae, and Bizzell, Gleason explains the “gap” that exists between the extracurricular language skills—in which students are often quite proficient—and the demands of school language and literacy. “Despite this” gap, Gleason explains, “many of these students are expert communicators in the oral traditions of their home cultures, a phenomenon that presents special opportunities for teachers in multicultural classrooms” (p. 124). The course of the semester moves from asking students to look inward “on their own literacies and

languages to an increasingly outward focus on the literacies and communication practices of others” (p. 124). As the semester progresses students conduct interviews and transcribe them, and eventually conduct their own ethnography, all of which, according to Gleason (quoting Peter Elbow) helps by “capitalizing on the oral language skills students already possess and helping students apply those skills immediately and effortlessly to writing” (as cited in Gleason, p. 126).

While Gleason does come closer than other scholars to developing an andragogy-influenced pedagogy for the writing classroom, her approach amounts to more of a logical sequence of assignments than a pedagogical approach. My project explores the classroom practices of existing mixed-generation composition courses with the goal of discovering which practices are the most effective for working-class adult/nontraditional students. In all of the research on adult/nontraditional students cited above, socioeconomic class, if it had been considered at all, was considered only obliquely, as one among many demographic categories including race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. None have taken as a specific point of focus the experiences of working-class students who either continue to work and attend school part time or, as Quinnan described above, have been able to leave the working world for a time and discovered college as a “safe haven in which to rest before returning to productive labor” (p. 54). Such students should be distinguished from, for example, the middle-class empty-nest mother or father who decides to pursue a degree she or he delayed or was unable to pursue while raising children. An altogether different set of competing interests ply for the working-class adult’s time and resources, and those differences make for a very dissimilar college experience.

The remaining chapters in this dissertation examine student and teacher perspectives on their first-year composition classes, with a particular emphasis on situating the current FYC context within the longer history of the University of Louisville. What students say about their FYC experiences and how instructors explain their own goals and pedagogical practices reveals much about the current and evolving role U of L plays in the lives of some of Louisville's working-class adult citizens.

Chapter 2 discusses the results of the quantitative survey data from a selection of roughly 300 students, representing 23% of FYC sections offered in the spring 2009 semester. The data offer a glimpse into how younger and older students in mixed-generation FYC sections interact with each other and their instructors, and also reveal some of the classroom practices those students find most/least useful in accomplishing their FYC goals. The questionnaire results provide a reliable, generalizable backdrop against which the more specific, in-depth data from the case studies in Chapter 3 can be studied.

Chapter 3 discusses the case studies of five working-class FYC students—four older and one younger student—and analyzes their experiences through the theoretical lenses of Pierre Bourdieu (1984) and Andrew Sayer (2005). What we call “class” actually happens in world through a complex interweaving of “axes of inequality” such as socioeconomic status, gender, race, etc., all of which combine to afford older students very little of the “distance from necessity” that Bourdieu asserts is crucial not only for writing an essay but for acquiring the type of cultural capital afforded by a university education.

Chapter 4 introduces several FYC instructors who discuss their experiences teaching mixed-generation classes at U of L. Nontraditional students are often these instructors' favorites, and have a reputation as being the most diligent students in class. Often, the very presence of nontraditional students in FYC requires instructors to re-think their pedagogy, crafting a more flexible, individualized approach. However, the high instructor turnover rate created by the graduate programs at U of L pose a problem, as the graduate teaching assistants in those programs initially know little about the university's historical relationship with the urban environment and its residents.

Chapter 5 concludes with the implications of this research on the future of composition instruction, particularly in colleges and universities that have historically served working-class and nontraditional/adult student constituencies. I argue that composition instructors can create positive generational encounters in their mixed-generation writing classes by ensuring that all students are meeting their responsibilities to their peers and by providing students with means for feedback to the instructor over the course of the semester. I also argue that writing program administrators must find ways to increase the involvement of contingent faculty in administrative responsibilities—and, equally important, contingent faculty and graduate teaching assistants must also *seek* and *accept* an active role in administrative matters if compositionists are to have a voice in the directions their home institutions take on issues of importance to working-class, nontraditional students.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

I) Methodological Overview

This study was designed to increase the quality and credibility of its results by triangulating methods of inquiry along three lines: 1) through data collection, by employing both quantitative and qualitative methods, 2) through multiple data sources, by interviewing both students and teachers, and 3) through theoretical interpretive approaches, by integrating Adult Learning Theory, Composition Theory, and New Literacy Studies into my Marxist theoretical grounding. Of course, as Michael Quinn Patton (2002) said, all judgments of quality require some criteria, and starting from a Marxist perspective, my criteria emerge from an interest in pursuing social justice and revealing an understanding of the world that situates the present realities of working-class adults in an historical perspective of class struggles (pp. 542-549). Chapter 1 provides an initial sketch of that historical perspective as it pertains to working-class adult students at the University of Louisville, and Chapters 2 and 3 examine the experiences of those students in their first-year composition classes from quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches, respectively.

Data Collection Methods

According to Babbie (2001), data are *reliable* when obtained through a technique that, when “applied repeatedly to the same object, yields the same result each time”

(p. 140). Reliability is a strength of survey data obtained through questionnaires, which are particularly “useful in describing the characteristics of a large population,” such as a population of first-year-composition students enrolled in a given semester (p. 268). Asking the same questions of a sample of those students, in roughly the same setting (by visiting and distributing the survey in their classroom near the end of the semester) reduces ambiguity when interpreting the meaning of the results (p. 268). To that end, data were collected through a survey by questionnaire of first-year composition sections, targeted to include as many nontraditional-age students as possible. The remaining sections of Chapter 2 discuss the results of that survey.

The artificiality of any survey instrument, however, makes the resultant data ill-suited to exploring complex topics or developing a “feel for the total life situation” of subjects (p. 268). *Validity*, or “the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration,” is the strong suit of qualitative methods such as the case study, the second method of data collection I employed (pp. 143, 298). As Mary Sue MacNealy says in *Strategies for Empirical Research in Writing*, the term “case study” in the composition field refers to a “carefully designed project to systematically collect information about an event, situation, or small group of persons or objects for the purpose of exploring, describing, and/or explaining aspects not previously known or considered” (p. 197). MacNealy points to pioneering studies such as Janet Emig’s *Composing Process of Twelfth Graders* (1971) and John Flower and Linda Hayes’ “Uncovering Cognitive Processes in Writing” (1983) as examples of case study research that broke new ground in our field—and in fact helped establish composition scholarship as an academic discipline in its own right (pp. 195-96).

As detailed in Chapter 1, there is much we still need to learn about how our mixed-generation writing classes function, and detailed case studies of a selection of working-class adults in first-year composition courses are one way of producing valid results that might provide composition scholarship with the kind of new knowledge that can not only encourage more research but also have an immediate impact on our pedagogical practices.

Chapter 3 discusses case studies of five traditional- and nontraditional-age students, in which they reflect on their first-year composition experiences immediately after completion of those courses. I also interviewed seven first-year composition instructors about their experiences, both past and current, teaching mixed-generation classes at the University of Louisville. The results of the instructor interviews are discussed in Chapter 4.

Like surveys, however, case study methods also have their limitations, particularly the problem of generalizing from a small sample. Yet I tend to agree with Robert Stake, whom Michael Quinn Patton considers the “master of case methods”:

To know particulars fleetingly, of course, is to know next to nothing. What becomes useful understanding is a full and thorough knowledge of the particular, recognizing it also in new and foreign contexts. That knowledge is a form of generalization too, not scientific induction but naturalistic generalization, arrived at by recognizing the similarities of objects and issues in and out of context and by sensing the natural covariations of happenings (as cited in Patton, p. 582).

In other words, a deep understanding of the individual (the particular) and how that individual continues to exist as a discrete—although variable—entity in different contexts (the general) is a way of understanding those *contexts*, too, and not just understanding the individual. This concept seems uniquely applicable to an understanding of working-class

adults as individuals in and out of the context of our composition classrooms, since their age and experiences increase the likelihood that they can enrich their own, their fellow students', and their instructors' FYC experiences as well.

Taken together, the survey data and case study interviews can both reinforce and complicate each other, as both convergences and divergences in the resulting datasets can enhance our understanding of how instructors approach mixed-generation writing classes and how students respond to those approaches. As Patton says, “focusing on the *degree of convergence* rather than forcing a dichotomous choice—that different kinds of data do or [do] not converge—yields a more balanced overall result” (p. 559). Complexity is the norm in social science research because human relationships are complex phenomena to study.

Theoretical Interpretive Models

As Patton says, theoretical triangulation involves “examining the data from the perspectives of various stakeholder positions,” as it is “common for divergent stakeholders to disagree about...purposes, goals, and means of attaining those goals” (pp. 562-63). In this study, for example, from a composition theory standpoint, the outcomes statement of the university's Composition Program forms the official, stated goals for students in first-year writing courses. However, adult education theorists such as Malcom Knowles have emphasized the importance of self-directed learning for adult students and might argue that our programmatic goals are quite different than the goals working-class adult students might have for themselves. In other words, measuring how successful such students are in our classes by our own “outcomes” yardstick might in fact be a mis-measure of how those students view their own accomplishments. And further

still, Marxists such as Althusser might argue that we must be more cognizant of the underlying values and competing interests involved when both the composition program and working-class adult students formulate their goals for the semester: instructors proceed with the best of intentions and yet inadvertently reify their adult student's unempowered position within the institutional structure of the university, while those same students believe that the goals they are pursuing are in their best interests, but they are unlikely to realize that those goals were ill-formed in the inescapable ideological web of capitalism.

The usefulness of this multi-faceted theoretical approach will become more apparent at the end of this chapter in my discussion of "class" and the problems theorists have had in defining this complex issue at the heart of so many of social relationships. In fact, the data here reveal in a concrete way some of the reasons *why* theorists have so much trouble with the thorny, contentious, and maddeningly amorphous concept contained in that one, small word: "class."

II) Quantitative Data: The First Year Composition Questionnaire

Overview of Response Data

Near the end of the spring 2009 semester, 23% (18 of the 77 sections offered) of the English 101 and 102 first-year composition courses were surveyed, and the resulting responses represented roughly 16% (300 of roughly 1900 students) of all FYC students enrolled that semester. Because the purpose was to include as many nontraditional students as possible, this was not a random sample. Evening sections were targeted specifically on the rationale that older students could more easily accommodate those

sections in their daily schedules. Still, to obtain a larger sample and an estimate of the number of nontraditional students in all FYC classes, surveys were also gathered from sections meeting in most of the scheduled time slots in the weekly calendar: mornings, afternoons, and evenings (see Table 2.1 for details).

Ten percent (10%) of all students surveyed were 22+ years old, while the remaining 90% fell into the university’s definition of “traditional” age students, 17-21 years old. While 10% is a much smaller proportion than the roughly 46% of students who are at least 22 years old in the larger undergraduate population (see data in Chapter 1), since these are first-year course sequences we can assume a larger proportion of those older undergraduates take FYC elsewhere before transferring to U of L. Moreover, since the sections in this study were targeted to survey as many nontraditional students as possible—by selecting evening courses and by asking instructors if they had older students before choosing their sections for inclusion—the 10% figure is likely higher than the actual percentage of adult students in an average spring 2009 FYC classroom. Thus, the actual percentage of nontraditional students in FYC classes is considerably smaller than the percentage in undergraduate classes as a whole.

Table 2.1 details the meeting times and the percentages of nontraditional students in each of the surveyed FYC sections in this study, showing that 11 of the 18 sections surveyed had at least one student who self-identified as being 22 years of age or older.

| Section | Meeting Time | % of Total Enrolled | % of Surveyed |
|----------------|---------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|
| A* | 5:30 PM | 22 | 50 |
| B | 5:30 PM | --- | --- |
| C | 7:00 PM | 7.7 | 11 |
| D | 11:00 AM | 4 | 7 |
| E | 1:00 PM | --- | --- |
| F | 12:00 PM | --- | --- |
| G | 1:00 PM | --- | --- |

| | | | |
|----|----------|-----|-----|
| H | 2:00 PM | 12 | 14 |
| I | 5:30 PM | 12 | 24 |
| J | 8:00 AM | 4 | 4.2 |
| K | 9:30 AM | 4 | 4 |
| L | 7:00 PM | 12 | 25 |
| M | 2:00 PM | --- | --- |
| N | 3:00 PM | --- | --- |
| O | 4:00 PM | 7.7 | 13 |
| P | 8:00 AM | --- | --- |
| Q* | 11:00 AM | 9.1 | 18 |
| R* | 2:30 PM | 25 | 55 |

Table 2.1: Percentage of Nontraditional Students in Selected FYC Sections

(* denotes “off-sequence” ENGL 101 sections offered in spring semester; all other sections are ENGL 102 courses in the second semester of the 2008-09 academic year)

Higher percentages of nontraditional students are clearly evident in the evening and “off-sequence” English 101 courses (there are always more 101 sections offered in the fall and more 102 sections offered in the spring). The “% of Total Enrolled” figures use the official university enrollment numbers for each course to calculate the percentage of nontraditional students (using the number nontraditionals responding to the survey), while the “% of Surveyed” show the percentage of nontraditionals based solely on the total number of survey respondents. One of the difficulties in interpreting these data stems from what appears to be—based not only on this data but on my experience as an instructor and an administrator in the school’s composition program—a perennial problem for composition teachers at U of L: attrition rates mount steeply as each semester progresses. Surveys in this study were taken in the last three weeks of the semester, a time when attendance is typically ebbing to its lowest point. For the purposes of this study, the problem manifests itself in terms of sample size, and thus in the statistical reliability of the data: i.e. if half the class was absent on the day of the survey, how do we

know the total percentage of traditional- vs. nontraditional-age students? However, since this study employs strictly *descriptive* analytical techniques about the data in hand rather than making *inferences* about a larger population, the problem should be noted as a blind spot in the data set rather than an invalidating factor in its analysis. As Chapter 1 illustrated, the university's population of FYC students is continually evolving, and the data here reflects an historically-situated snapshot image of that evolution taken in the spring 2009 semester.

Dealing with that blind spot is still challenging, however. For example, the data from section B is problematic because only 11 of 26, or 46%, of the students enrolled were present to fill out questionnaires. Thus, the fact that the data reveal no nontraditional students in the class is misleading, since the instructor assured me that there were several older students enrolled in that section. They simply did not show up that evening.¹ Likewise, the data suggesting that 25% of students enrolled in section Q were nontraditional students is probably misleading, since there were only 45% in attendance on the afternoon of the survey's distribution. What the data from all sections reveal, however, is likely an accurate picture of: 1) the typical FYC classroom environment at U of L (as noted above), and 2) the FYC students who attend classes on a regular basis. That is, if they were present on a day in the semester when attendance was generally poor, then they had likely been there most days that semester. Moreover, in light of the attrition problems mentioned above, the students who participated in this

¹ Students could, of course, choose not to participate in the study. However, I collected each questionnaire by hand and noted an extremely high response rate in all participating sections, with fewer than 10 students out of the 300 overall who chose not to respond.

study can honestly be called *survivors* of their first college year—an important achievement that many of their incoming cohorts from the previous fall could not claim.²

As noted above, evening sections in particular were targeted on the rationale that more nontraditional students would be free to take classes at those times. To this end, surveys were distributed in 83% of FYC sections with start times after 5:00 PM, but this percentage represents an overall paltry number: five (5) out of six (6) courses. Over the course of the last decade, as enrollment of nontraditional adult students has been squeezed out by the factors elaborated in Chapter 1, the percentage of all FYC sections offered in the evening³ has gradually declined. For example, in the spring 2002 semester 89 sections of English 101 and 102 were offered, 14 of which (or 15.7%) were evening classes; in the spring 2010 semester, however, only seven (7) (or 8.8%) of the 80 FYC sections offered met in the evening. Of course, enrollment in the evening courses has also declined, which the university administration can point to as a good reason for offering fewer evening sections. When budgets are as tight as they have become at U of L, why fund under-populated courses? But since the decreased enrollment in evening FYC sections is almost certainly an *effect* of the moves to traditionalize student enrollment overall, using it as a *cause* for offering fewer sections becomes, in the end, a tautology, and such circular administrative thinking leaves educational opportunities for working-class adults in Louisville circling the drain.

The survey data were analyzed along three principle variables: 1) course section (multi-generational sections vs. traditional-age sections), 2) student age (nontraditional-age students vs. traditional-age students), and 3) socioeconomic class (working-class

² The full data set on attendance in surveyed sections is available in Appendix A.

³ The percentage FYC sections offered in the evening ranged from 10.1 to 15.7% prior to the fall 2006 semester, but has ranged from 7.5 to 12.5% since spring 2007. Full data are available in Appendix B.

backgrounds vs. middle-class backgrounds). Special difficulties arise with data from the third variable, which will be examined in final section of this chapter, but when examined for differences and divergences along age lines, data from the first two variables revealed some clear trends and consistencies.

Multigenerational FYC Courses: The Survey Data

One of the goals of this project is to explore student experiences with pedagogical practices instructors employ in mixed-generation composition classrooms, specifically to consider the impact of what Etienne Wenger calls the “generational encounter.” As noted in Chapter 1, Wenger considers the generational encounter to be a crucial part of the learning process because it is “not the mere transmission of a cultural heritage, but the mutual negotiation of identities invested in different historical moments” (pp. 157; 275). But in a classroom setting where the teacher is the only older person present, the “generational encounter” is impossible because teachers function as “representatives of the institution and upholders of curricular demands, with an identity defined by an institutional role” (p. 276). However, a classroom in which older and younger students interact as peers is more likely to create a context wherein such encounters occur, possibly benefiting all students.

As illustrated in Figure 2.1 above, 11 of the 18 sections targeted for surveys had at least one nontraditional-age respondent. Several of those sections, however, had *only* one nontraditional-aged respondent, which amounts to only four to seven percent (4-7%) of the total enrollment in those sections. While the experiences of nontraditional students on an individual level is important and will be explored below, calling those sections

“multigenerational” seems a stretch. Therefore, to increase the likelihood of seeing some statistical effect of the “generational encounter,” for the purposes of this study “mixed-generation sections” will be defined as only sections with at least 10% of the responding students aged 22 years or older. Eight (8) of the sections surveyed meet that definition, and they do indeed yield some intriguing data in light of Wenger’s theory.

Relationships with Fellow Students and Instructors

Two of the initial questions in the survey instrument sought to gauge, broadly, the relationship students had with their fellow students and their instructor, asking respondents to rate their interactions with both on a Likert-type scale, as shown in Figure 2.1 below.

| | | | | | |
|---|------------|-------------|----------------|------------|-------------|
| 7. Please rank the truth of the following statements on the following scale: 1 = Never true for me; 2 = Rarely true for me; 3= Sometimes true for me; 4 = Often true for me; 5 = Always true for me | | | | | |
| | Never true | Rarely true | Sometimes true | Often true | Always true |
| I have much in common with most students in my English Composition class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I am comfortable interacting with the instructor of my English Composition class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Figure 2.1: Rating interactions with students and instructor.

The scale and resulting data are “Likert-type,” but not a measure of summated data in the way Rensis Likert devised (a method which is apparently rarely used or understood in the social sciences, in any event). From a statistical perspective, the most meaningful analysis comes from looking at: 1) the distribution, 2) the measure of central tendency (for Likert scales, typically the mode and/or the median), and 3) the variability of the responses (Clason and Dormody, 1994). The statistical average, or mean, is less useful in analyzing Likert-type data since the scale employed is ordinal/sequential and

not a scale of equidistant intervals (i.e. no one can respond 3.5 or 1.75, so finding an average of 20 “rarely true” responses and 30 “always true” responses does not produce a meaningful integer) (Mogey, 1999). The mode and median, however, more accurately represent the respondent data, and examining the data’s distribution around those numbers points to the direction in which the distribution is skewed. Thus, they reveal tendencies in the attitude of the group’s responses.

| Section | 7a Mode | 7b Mode | Section’s % of Nontraditionals |
|---------|---------|---------|--------------------------------|
| A* | 3 | 5 | 50 |
| C | 3 | 4 | 11 |
| H | 3 | 5 | 14 |
| I | 3 | 5 | 24 |
| L | 3 | 4 | 25 |
| O | 3 | 4 | 13 |
| Q* | 4 | 5 | 18 |
| R* | 3 | 5 | 55 |

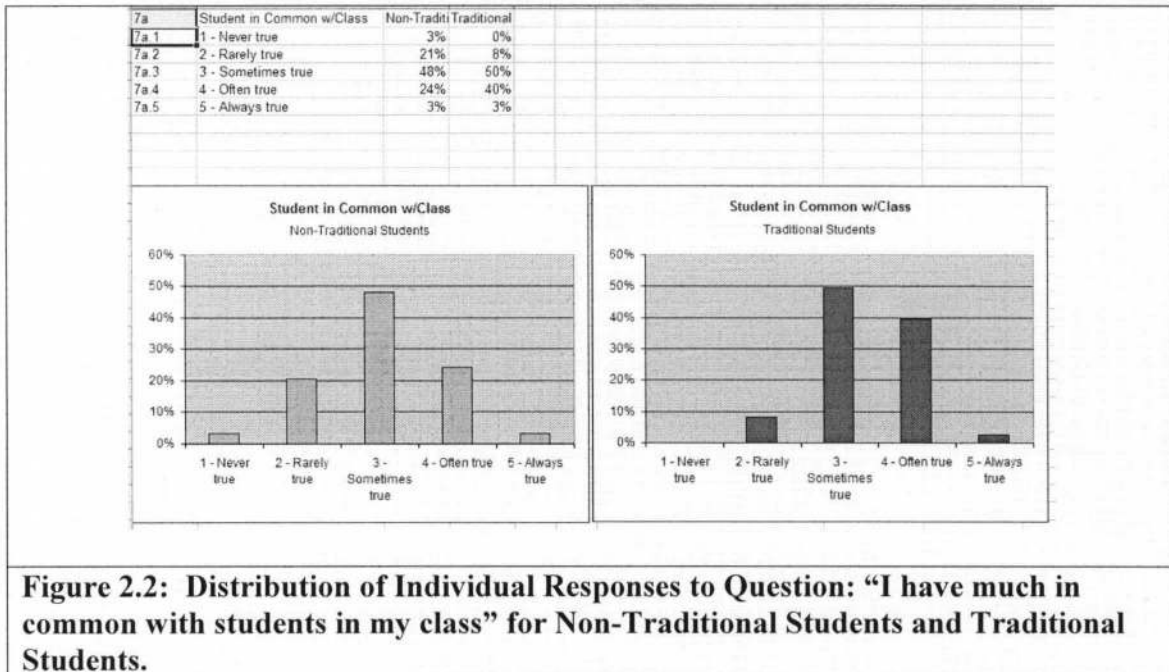
Table 2.2: Mixed-Generation Sections Mode for questions 7a (“in common with classmates”) and 7b (“comfort level with instructor”)

| Section | 7a Mode | 7b Mode | Section’s % of Nontraditionals |
|---------|---------|---------|--------------------------------|
| B | 4 | 3 & 5 | -- |
| D | 4 | 4 | 7 |
| E | 4 | 5 | -- |
| F | 4 | 4 | -- |
| G | 4 | 5 | -- |
| J | 3 & 4 | 4 | 4.2 |
| K | 3 & 4 | 5 | 4 |
| M | 3 | 5 | -- |
| N | 3 | 4 | -- |
| P | 3 | 5 | -- |

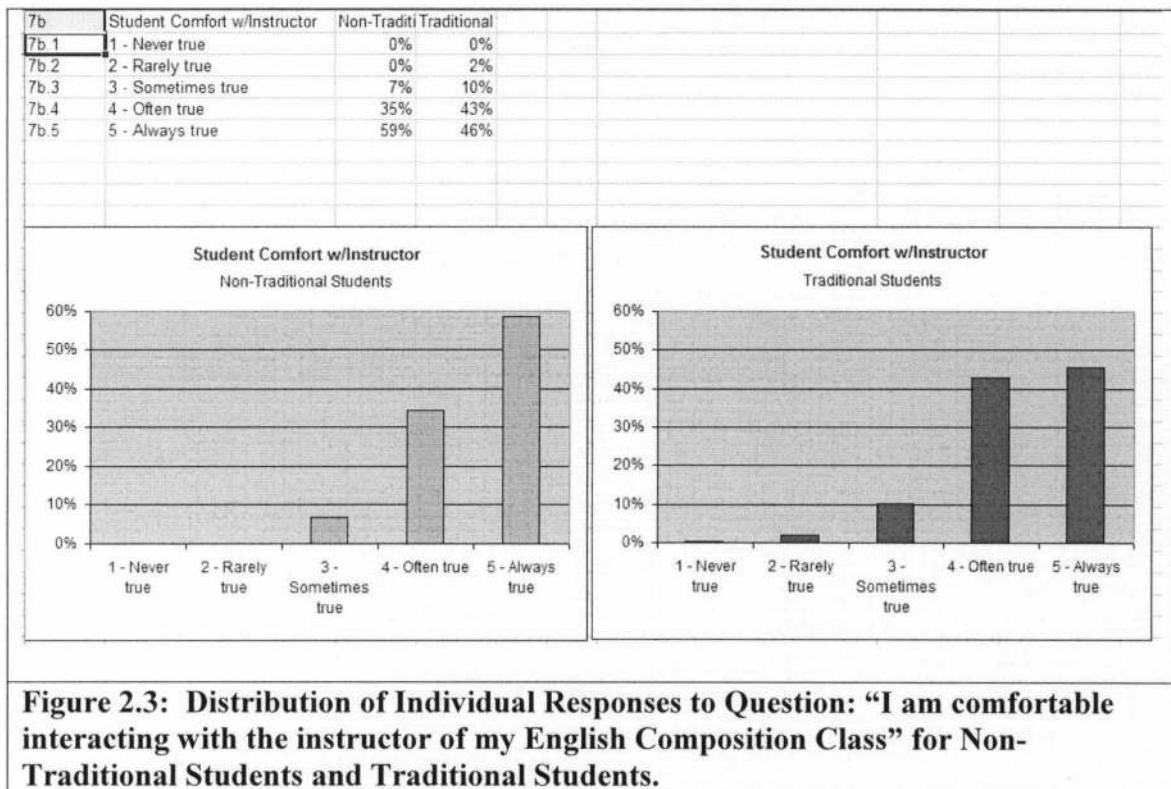
Table 2.3: Traditional-Age Sections Mode for questions 7a (“in common with classmates”) and 7b (“comfort level with instructor”)

Table 2.2 above shows the mode responses for sections of FYC that meet the definition of a “mixed-generation,” while table 2.3 shows the mode responses for

“traditional” age sections. While the difference between “3” and “4” seems minimal, the clear pattern is for higher perceived levels of commonality between students in the traditional-age classes than for mixed-generation classes, and the fact that the difference appears so clearly and consistently seems significant. Could the mix of ages be a causal factor in these scores? It seems likely, given the data in Figure 2.2, which shows the distribution of responses to the same question from *all* individuals surveyed, with non-traditional-age students represented on the chart to the left and traditional-age students on the chart to the right. In both cases the modal response is “3,” but with traditional students the distribution is clearly skewed toward “often true” while the non-traditional student distribution resembles the classic “bell curve” of a normal distribution. Thus, the increased age affinity of younger students seems to be the force pulling up the modal numbers of traditional-age-only sections.



No clear patterns emerge from the modal responses to the “comfort level with instructor” question, but evaluating the question on a class-by-class basis seems less important—unless one were evaluating the individual instructors—than looking at the relationship between students and instructors on an individual level, which the question is more appropriately worded to gauge. Figure 2.3 shows the distribution of individual responses to the “comfort level with instructor” question, which reveals a pattern of age-affinity between non-traditional students and their instructors similar to the pattern of age-affinity that emerges between students in all-traditionally aged sections.



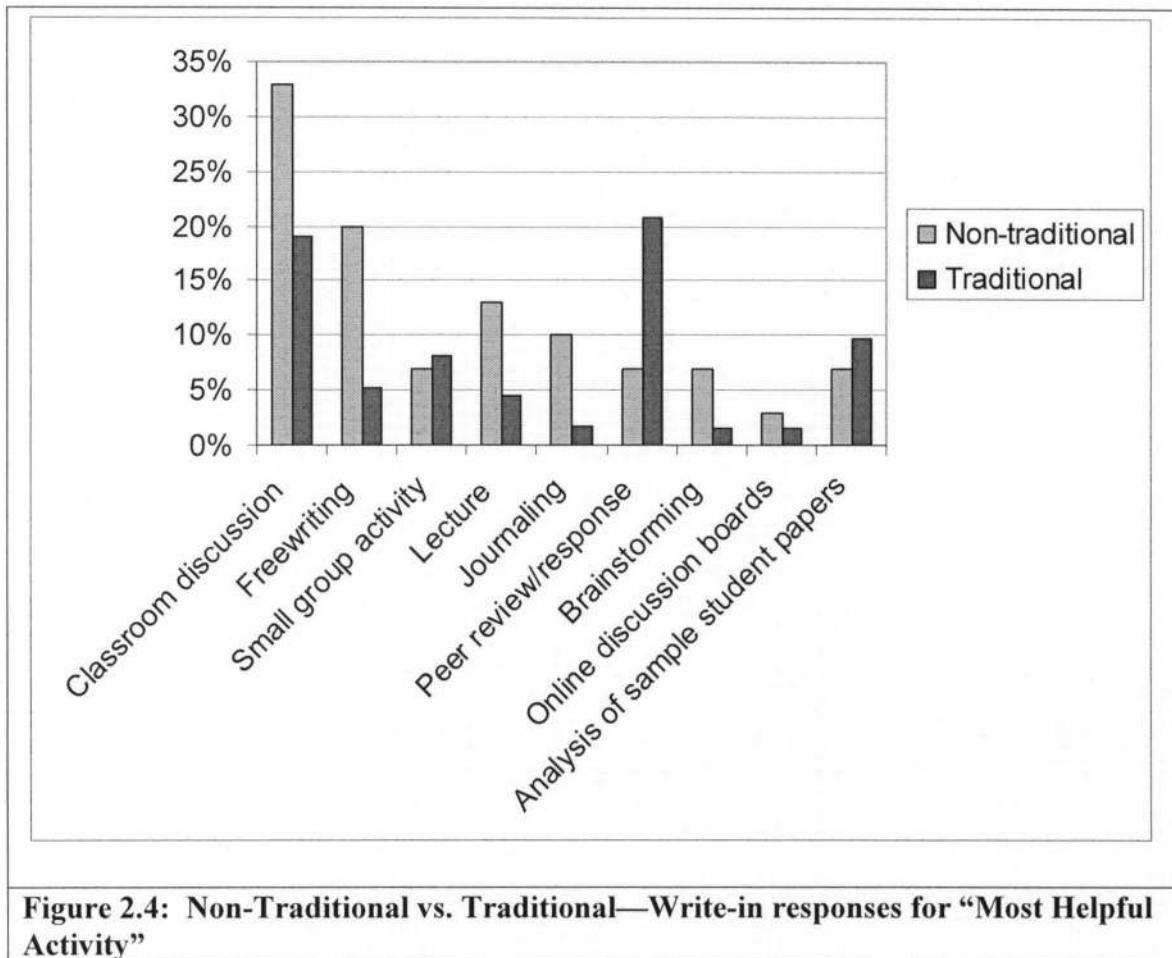
What this means in terms of Wenger’s theory of the generational encounter is unclear, but it does seem to set up an environment in which older students could act as a type of intermediary between the instructor and the younger students in the class. We will explore this possibility in more detail in the case studies in Chapter 3, but any

evidence of it from the survey data is most likely to emerge in data on classroom activities that featured a high degree of interaction between students: classroom discussions, small group activities, and peer review/response sessions.

Classroom Discussion and Dynamics

A major portion of the questionnaire asked students to rank a list of classroom activities on a scale from “not at all helpful” to “very helpful.” However, to obtain more qualitative-type data from the questionnaire, respondents were asked to elaborate in brief written responses about the activities they thought most helpful and least helpful. These responses can be useful in a quantitative way, too, since the students themselves are able to single out and identify the activities that stood out most in their minds, and taking the time to write about a given activity does reflect a certain level of enthusiasm either for or against those particular activities. Quantifying the data must be done with a degree of caution, however, since students were able to write in more than one activity, so the total percentage for all activities can add up to over 100. What seem most meaningful are comparisons between different demographic groups on any one particular activity: i.e. comparing the percentage of traditional-age students who took the trouble to write in “peer review” versus the number of nontraditional students who did the same.

Figure 2.4 below illustrates the percentage differences between nontraditional- and traditional-age students who wrote in responses for the “Most Helpful Activity,” revealing differences in several categories, but most significantly in “classroom discussion,” “freewriting,” and “Peer review/response,” where at least 20% of respondents in either age group wrote in one of those particular activities.



The 15-point percentage gap between older students who chose “freewriting” as their most helpful activity is intriguing, and would certainly be worth exploring further if other data in this study could help explain or interpret it. Unfortunately, there is no such data, and for this I take full responsibility as the researcher. Students in the interviews simply did not discuss their freewriting experiences, nor did I ask.⁴ However, class discussion and peer review are topics many students had formed strong opinions about, and this data from the write-in responses reveals a pattern that both the quantitative and qualitative results repeatedly reinforce: older students responded positively to class-wide discussion sessions but less positively to peer review, while younger students—although they also

⁴ My analysis of the survey data was still in its initial stages when the interviews were conducted.

responded positively to class-wide discussion—were much more likely (21% to 7%) than their older classmates to respond in kind to peer review.

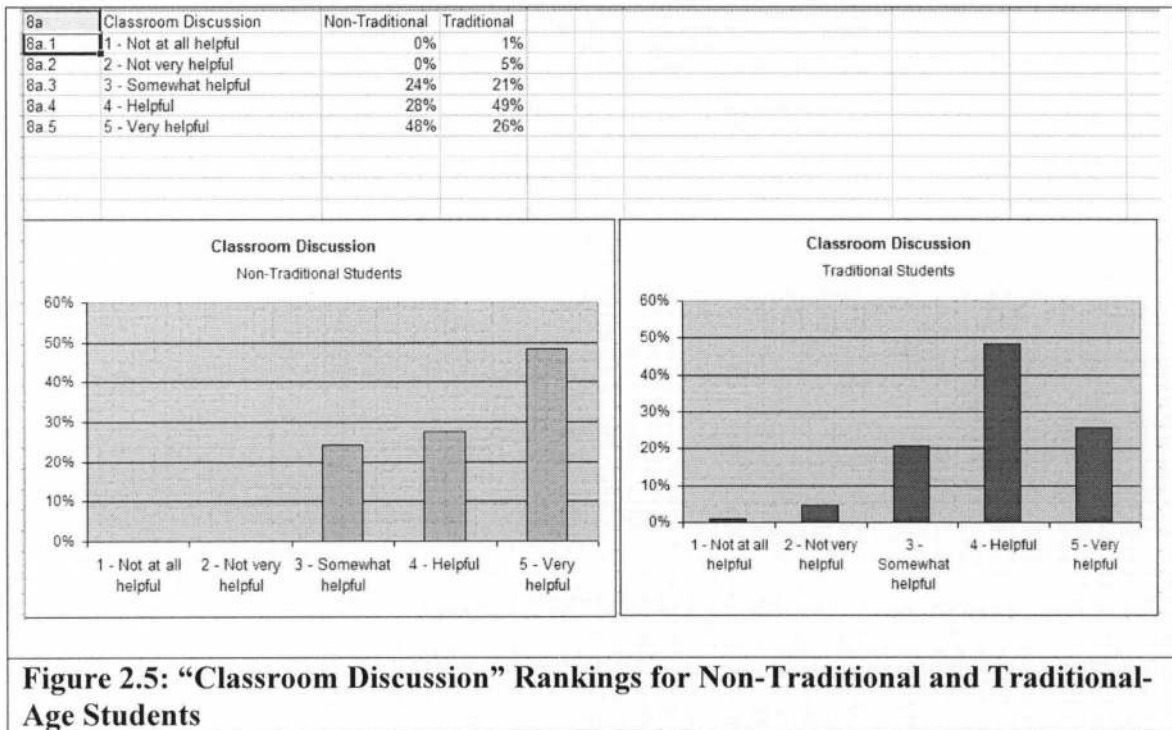


Figure 2.5 above displays the rankings, on a scale from “not at all helpful” to “very helpful,” that students gave to classroom discussions; non-traditional students are on the left, traditional-age students on the right. There is a clear disparity in the mode and distribution between the two groups, with 48% of nontraditional students rating classroom discussions “very helpful,” while only 26% of their younger classmates did the same. No definition of “classroom discussion” was provided to those taking the survey, and any teacher (not to mention most students) knows that what constitutes “discussion” can vary widely between classes and even days of the week. Rather than debate how closely these classes could approximate what Brufee (1984) called “the conversation of mankind,” listening to the voices of the students seems most appropriate here. Taken

from the write-in portion of the survey, here are some of the nontraditional students' comments on why they believed classroom discussion was so helpful:

- The classroom discussions are very helpful, because it breaks down a lot of questions, & we get other views that are helpful to understand topics. *–26-year-old white male, trade worker.*
- Class discussion helped have a broad understanding of the subject due to the fact I get to share others ideas. *–23-year-old white male, military and medical worker.*
- Classroom discussion seems to help me; I get my ideas from our homework to write about. *–37-year-old white female clerical worker*
- Classroom discussion. The very open atmosphere of the class precipitated a willingness to contribute. *–22-year-old white male maintenance worker.*
- Classroom discussion helps because you realize that others are having the same problems as you and they can help you fix their mistakes. *–30-year-old white female clerical, sales, and trades worker.*
- Classroom discussion was definitely the most helpful because it gave us the opportunity to bounce ideas of how to improve our writing of one another. *–22-year-old white female clerical worker.*

These are exactly the type of benefits to classroom discussion that proponents of discussion-based critical pedagogues espouse: open exchanges of ideas, commiseration on common problems, encouragement in further participation, etc. And the fact that these are older students in courses largely populated by younger ones does support the notion that, not only are intergenerational exchanges of ideas taking place in these FYC classrooms, such exchanges are quite popular with young and old alike.

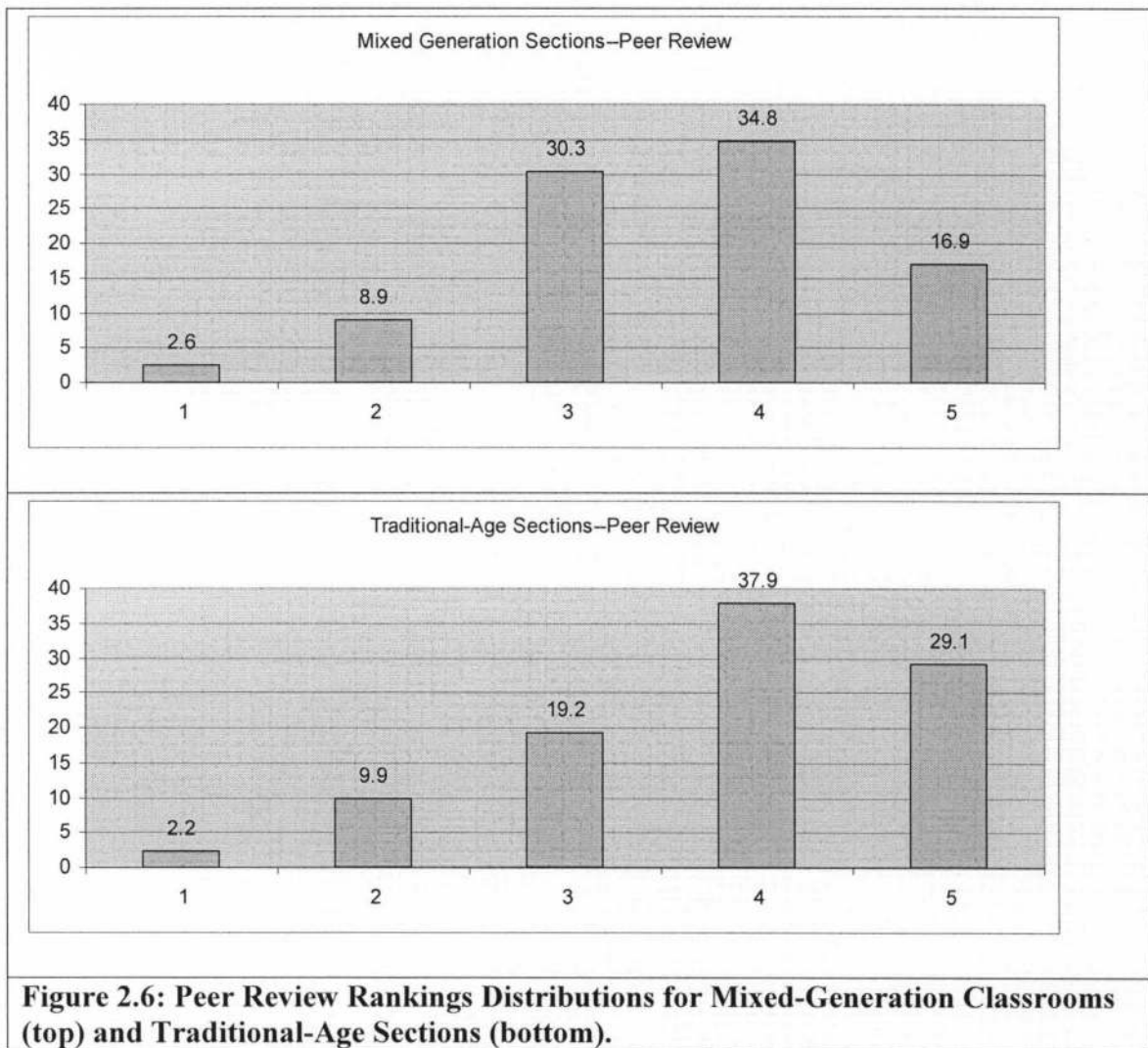
Of course, not all older students appreciated the classroom discussions. For example, one 32-year-old white female with sales and managerial experience said, “The individuals in the room, a lot of the time, did not seem to have opinions much different than my own.” Some younger students, meanwhile, also chose to write in explanations of why class discussion was “the least helpful classroom activity”:

- Class discussions. I was uncomfortable voicing certain opinions to my classmates. I do not enjoy speaking in front of a large group of people. Rather than help me, it seemed like something I just had to get over with. *–18-year old Asian female clerical worker*
- I would have to say that discussion b/c my teacher didn't explain well sometimes and sometimes it confused me. *–19-year-old white female with sales and service sector work.*
- Classroom discussion and small group activity were hand and hand [least helpful]. I'm just the type of person who works better on my own. *–19-year-old African American daycare worker.*
- Classroom discussion – we talked about things I already knew. *–19-year-old white female sales and service sector worker.*
- Classroom discussions because he tried to make everyone talk and so we had to rush because he only allowed one minute per person. *–19-year-old white female sales and clerical worker.*
- Classroom discussion was very interesting and gave me great perspectives. However, only a few people spoke and if I was not knowledgeable on the subject it was useless. *– 20-year-old white female sales and clerical worker.*

Not enough people talked. Too many people talked. I know everything already. I did not know enough so it was “useless.” With a few important exceptions—the silencing of “certain opinions,” for example, has an ominous ring to it—but by and large these are not exactly well-reasoned complaints, and it should be noted that for every traditional-age student who chose to write-in that class discussion was *least* helpful, approximately five chose to write-in that it *most* helpful. However, the numbered rankings still indicate that traditional-age students did not rate class discussion as highly overall as the non-traditional students.

Peer Review and Small Group Dynamics

Questionnaire data on small group dynamics reveal small differences in distribution between mixed-generation sections and all-traditional age sections, yet those small shifts in distribution hint at more significant differences that emerge in the qualitative data and thus provide a useful backdrop for understanding the case studies in Chapter 3. Figure 2.6 below illustrates those distributions for the ratings on peer review, with mixed-generation sections on top and traditional-age sections on bottom.



In both datasets the modal response is 4, with 34.8 percent and 37.9 percent of students ranking peer review sessions as “Helpful” in mixed-generational and traditional-age classrooms, respectively. But the distribution of answers to the right and left of the mode reveals a clear difference of peer review experiences between mixed- and traditional- age classrooms, with 30.3 % of students in the former sections ranking peer review as “Sometimes Helpful” and 29.1 % of students in the latter sections ranking it “Very Helpful.” In statistical terms, the distribution for nontraditional students is negatively skewed around the modal response while the distribution for traditional students is positively skewed around the mode. Age is certainly not the only variable at play in these two groupings of classes—one might argue, for example, that the time of day impacts the quality of peer review sessions because students are more likely to be physically and mentally tired in the evening, and since more mixed-age classes meet in the evening, the meeting time could impact these data. However, the mixed-age dynamic is definitely *one* of the major differences between courses in the two groups, and given what subjects said in their interviews, these skewed distributions are noteworthy. In my study, student populations in mixed-generation sections of FYC appear to find peer review sessions less helpful than FYC sections populated by students solely within their peer 17-21 year old age range.

III) Class and the Definition Problem

Most subjects of this study are working-class college students. If only it were as easy to say what that means as it is to speak the words. For several reasons, I initially sought to define my subjects’ class status by the educational level of their parents: *First*,

basing class distinction on parental education fits the demographic statistics outlined in Chapter 1 about household earnings and education level. *Second*, it is an easy and practical way to make a distinction based on demographic questionnaire information. Wealth and status—even “household earnings”—are prickly subjects for Americans to discuss, even highly educated Americans, as we will see in Chapter 3 when FYC instructors discuss their own class backgrounds. Asking subjects how far their parents got in school can certainly be considered a “personal question,” but it is far less personal (not to mention more accurate) than asking about their yearly household income.

Third, Shirley Brice Heath’s *Ways With Words* was and is a fundamental influence on my thinking about class and education, and the children of Trackton and Roadville are quite real in my mind’s imagination. I lived for many years in the foothills of Appalachia, within a few hours’ drive of where Heath’s study took place, and I know well the culture of the Carolina “Mill Hill,” and went to High School with people who bore a striking resemblance to Heath’s subjects; I knew first hand the differences in the home and school lives of kids whose parents had a college education and those whose parents did not, and Heath’s study was the first scholarship I encountered that put that experience—I have to face it, *my own* experience—into an academic context. Reading *Ways With Words* for the first time was unsettling, even uncanny, yet it was also wonderfully affirmative and “true” to me in ways beyond my ability to articulate here.

Fourth and finally, all of the above reasons fit nicely with Pierre Bourdieu’s theory (discussed below) about the formation of *habitus* in childhood and its lifelong impact on our class status. All of these reasons make defining my subjects’ socioeconomic class principally by their parents’ educational level a common sense

approach. Fortunately, my subjects had their say in the matter, and the data I have gathered, combined with a deeper understanding of Bourdieu's complex theory, have shown me that the our evolving image of "class" will always be more complex than any single aspect of class status can reveal. Therefore, before discussing the survey data, we require a more nuanced definition of class, and the following section of this chapter will create a theoretical framework for that discussion.

Defining Class: Two Theoretical Approaches

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes....Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinct feature: it has simplified class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other — Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.

— Karl Marx and Frederich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848

If Karl Marx had been able to finish the third volume of *Capital* we would have a more satisfactory definition of what "class" means and meant: for Marx, his contemporaries, and for us today. Although class antagonisms and "society as a whole" may have been simplified by the age of bourgeoisie industrialism, as Marx and Engels assert in their landmark, mid-nineteenth century manifesto, the concept of class has never been simple for those who study it seriously. On the contrary, theoretical models of class have been increasingly complicated by sociologists brave enough to rise to the challenge of Marx's legacy. More than a century after the publication of the *Communist Manifesto*, Ralf Dahrendorf (1959) endeavored to complete what Marx could not do before "death

took the pen from his hand”; Dahrendorf compiled an “unwritten 52nd chapter” of *Capital*’s third volume by “systematically ordering a number of quotations and connecting them to a coherent text” (p. 9). However readers might judge the success of Dahrendorf’s effort, the result is at least valuable in that it presents in one place many of Marx’s thoughts on the problems of defining class.

From the third and second volumes of *Capital*, Dahrendorf gives us Marx’s “two false approaches” to class, the first of which is essentially demographic: i.e. classes are the people who populate them, which, when divided up into the three largest groups, become the laborers, the capitalists, and the landowners. Marx disliked this approach because it produces an “infinite fragmentation of interests and positions which the division of labor produces among workers as among capitalists and landowners” (p. 11). The second approach is that of the “vulgar mind” which “commutes class differences into ‘differences in the size of purses’ and class conflict into ‘trade disputes’” (p. 11). But these purely economic or professional definitions of class fall short, too, since members of a common class can have more or less wealth and perform “very different types of work” (p. 11).

Both approaches are essentially flawed because they put the cart before the horse: “property, income, and the source of income are themselves the *result* of the class structure,” and therefore cannot be used as class determinants (emphasis added). For Marx, class must be defined in *relational* terms: “In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their culture⁵ from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the

⁵ Dahrendorf inexplicably substitutes “education” for “culture” in this quote. All translations of the text I have found use “culture.”

latter, they form a class” (p. 13). This quotation comes from Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, yet Dahrendorf leaves off a crucial portion of the thought, one which concludes what may be the closest Marx ever came to defining class: “In so far as there exists only a local connection among these farmers, a connection which the individuality and exclusiveness of their interests prevent from generating among them any unity of interest, national connections, and political organization, they do not constitute a class.” (Marx and Engels, 1961, p. 338). In other words, the working class must be defined by the people who constitute it (the proletariat), who know and agree on their shared culture and interests, and who understand that those interests are not shared by—are in fact opposed by—another group of people (the bourgeoisie) who own land and/or the means of production (economic capital); additionally, to truly constitute a class, the oppressed proletariat must be willing and able to organize politically to defend their shared interests from exploitation by the oppressing bourgeoisie, i.e. they must, as a group, have a *class consciousness*. This definition of class—an admittedly simplified summary of Marx’s complex thoughts—is a very demanding one indeed, especially given its last and crucial provision: a class consciousness leading to *political organization*.

Michele Lamont’s *The Dignity of Working Men* (2000) explored some of the differences in attitude between American workers and their French counterparts, finding that while the French working class have a politicized understanding of their *ascribed* class status, American workers tend to focus on individual merit and effort to explain their own *achieved* status in the larger socioeconomic picture (as cited in Sayer, 70). This is hardly a surprising finding, but it is a crucially important one in light of the definition above. Given this definition, there should be little wonder that the American

working class, for whom the formation of a class consciousness has been so elusive, has had such a tumultuous history, filled with bitter defeats, collective amnesia, and repeated erasures of that very history executed by the dominant classes who write the *official* history—i.e. the history learned in school.

Andrew Sayer (2005) calls Marxist concepts of class “abstract” rather than “concrete,” by which he does not mean “‘vague’ (on the contrary) but *one-sided* or selective, in that they focus on a particular aspect of the social world, abstracting from others which may coexist with it” (p. 72). Sayer contrasts abstract approaches to class with those that are “concrete, or many-sided, in that they attempt, more ambitiously, to synthesize diverse forms of differentiation....[and] see class as the product of many influences which they attempt to synthesize” (p. 73). One such approach is that of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, whose *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984) undertakes the colossally ambitious task creating a grand theory of class based on actual ethnographic evidence: a survey of 1,217 French persons from all class and professional backgrounds, inquiring into their tastes in art (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 503).

While purely Marxist approaches define class membership in terms of relationship to the means of production, i.e. possession of and/or potential to generate economic capital, Bourdieu’s concept of class is more nuanced, considering the complex interaction of resources such as cultural and social capital in addition to economic capital. Bourdieu’s complex theory is summed up by the formula: [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice. Central to Bourdieu’s understanding of class is his concept of *habitus*, which is the set of internalized organizational structures by which we make sense of the world and our place in it:

The habitus is not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes. (p. 170)

Our habitus begins to form through our earliest social interactions and continues to shape, at an unconscious level, how we see the world around us, what we are disposed to like and dislike (our tastes), and also what we see as possible in our current and future lives.

The complex interplay of habitus and class are perhaps best summed up in the following passage from *Distinction*:

The schemes of the habitus, the primary forms of classification, owe their specific efficacy to the fact that they function below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will. Orienting practices practically, they embed what some would mistakenly call *values* in the most automatic gestures or the apparently most insignificant techniques of the body — ways of walking or blowing one's nose, ways of eating or talking — and engage the most fundamental principles of construction and evaluation of the social world, those which most directly express the division of labour (between the classes, the age groups and the sexes) or the division of the work of domination, in divisions between bodies and between relations to the body which borrow more features than one, as if to give them the appearances of naturalness, from the sexual division of labour and the division of sexual labour. Taste is a practical mastery of distributions which makes it possible to sense or intuit what is likely (or unlikely) to befall — and therefore to befit — an individual occupying a given position in social space. It functions as a sort of social orientation, a 'sense of one's place', guiding the occupants of a given place in social space towards the social positions adjusted to their properties, and towards the practices or goods which befit the occupants of that position. It implies a practical anticipation of what the social meaning and value of the chosen practice or thing will probably be, given their distribution in social space and the practical knowledge the other agents have of the correspondence between goods and groups. (pp. 466-67)

Habitus essentially informs us of our "place" in the world, within the structure of power relations among class, sex, race, gender, etc., and this notion, formed early, retains such a powerful hold over our worldview that we pass it on, from one generation to the next

through the early process of socialization. Thus, our habitus makes inevitable our participation—albeit on an unconscious level—in “the reproduction of relations of production” from a Marxist perspective.

For Bourdieu, the habitus is extremely durable and resistant to change:

Early experiences have particular weight because the habitus tends to ensure its own constancy and its defence against change through the selection it makes within new information by rejecting information capable of calling into question its accumulated information, if exposed to it accidentally or by force, and by avoiding exposure to such information (Bourdieu, 1990, as cited in Sayer, 25).

But in *The Moral Significance of Class* (2005), Sayer’s analysis of Bourdieu’s theory is careful to show that the habitus, while powerful and resilient, is not deterministic: i.e. how a person responds to a given situation is not a foregone conclusion but still depends on the context—the *field* in Bourdieu’s equation—in which the stimulus and response occur:

Our responses to the world are mostly at the level of dispositions, feelings and embodied skills. When we are in a familiar context, these dispositions give us a ‘feel for the game,’ an ability to cope and go on effectively without conscious deliberation and planning. In such conditions, the workings of the habitus tend not to be noticed; its influence is clearer when we experience the discomfort of finding ourselves out of place, in an unfamiliar setting, in which we lack a feel for the game. (p. 25)

Thus in familiar settings, the habitus operates unseen and unnoticed, but when we are in an unfamiliar setting, or out of our field of comfort, our guiding unconsciousness is at a loss to provide us with the appropriate course of action, or *practice*.

Like Marx, Bourdieu acknowledges that economic capital is a powerful and integral part of the class equation. However, his idea of capital goes beyond economics to consider our cultural and social wealth as well. Cultural capital is a type of symbolic wealth which obtains its value simply by *being valued* by the elite classes. On one level,

cultural capital is what separates “high culture” from “low culture”—Beethoven’s sonatas, say, from *Meet The Beatles*. But having cultural capital also means knowing how to act in a given field of practice, knowing how to “mind your manners”:

Knowing that ‘manner’ is a symbolic manifestation whose meaning and value depend as much on the perceivers as on the producer, one can see how it is that the manner of using symbolic goods, especially those regarded as having the attributes of excellence, constitutes one of the key markers of ‘class’ and also the ideal weapon in strategies of distinction... (p. 66)

Bourdieu does not use the word “weapon” by accident, for actors within social systems that make the types of distinctions between those inculcated in a lower class habitus versus those born and raised in the elite segments of society commit a type of symbolic or “inert” violence (Sayer, p. 193).

Perhaps most germane to this project, *education* is also a type of cultural capital, and formal, systemic educational institutions credential their students not only with specific, skills-oriented knowledge, but with a more generalized degree of competence in the types of cultural capital valued by the bourgeoisie: “Thus it is written into the tacit definition of the academic qualification formally guaranteeing a specific competence (like an engineering diploma) that it really guarantees possession of a ‘general culture’ whose breadth is proportionate to the prestige of the qualification” (Bourdieu, p. 25). And in fact, the more readily this “general culture” can be inculcated from the earliest stages of socialization—i.e. in the home or outside of formal schooling—so much the better for the child, since he or she will “bank” that cultural capital far sooner than children from the working classes, who must depend more heavily on formal schooling to make those “deposits”:

Total, early, imperceptible learning, performed within the family from the earliest days of life and extended by a scholastic learning which presupposes and completes it, differs from belated, methodical learning not so much in the depth and durability of its effects... as in the modality of the relationship to language and culture which it simultaneously tends to inculcate. It confers the self-certainty which accompanies the certainty of possessing cultural legitimacy, and the ease which is the touchstone of excellence; it produces the paradoxical relationship to culture made up of self-confidence amid (relative) ignorance and casualness amid familiarity, which bourgeoisie families hand down to their offspring as if it were an heirloom. (p. 66)

The richest of cultural inheritances, according to Bourdieu, is to have the *right* “feel” for the *right* “game” and to perform in that highly specialized field as though it were no big deal: the detached attitude, the supposedly “natural” or “gifted” ability to appreciate the truly excellent and to behave as though you have been there before (because you have)—plus the spare time and distance from necessity required to become absorbed in elite culture.

And yet this description, too, is an oversimplification of Bourdieu’s way of looking at how class distinctions develop and endure. What he attempts is no less than trying to accommodate *all possible factors* that go into determining class status:

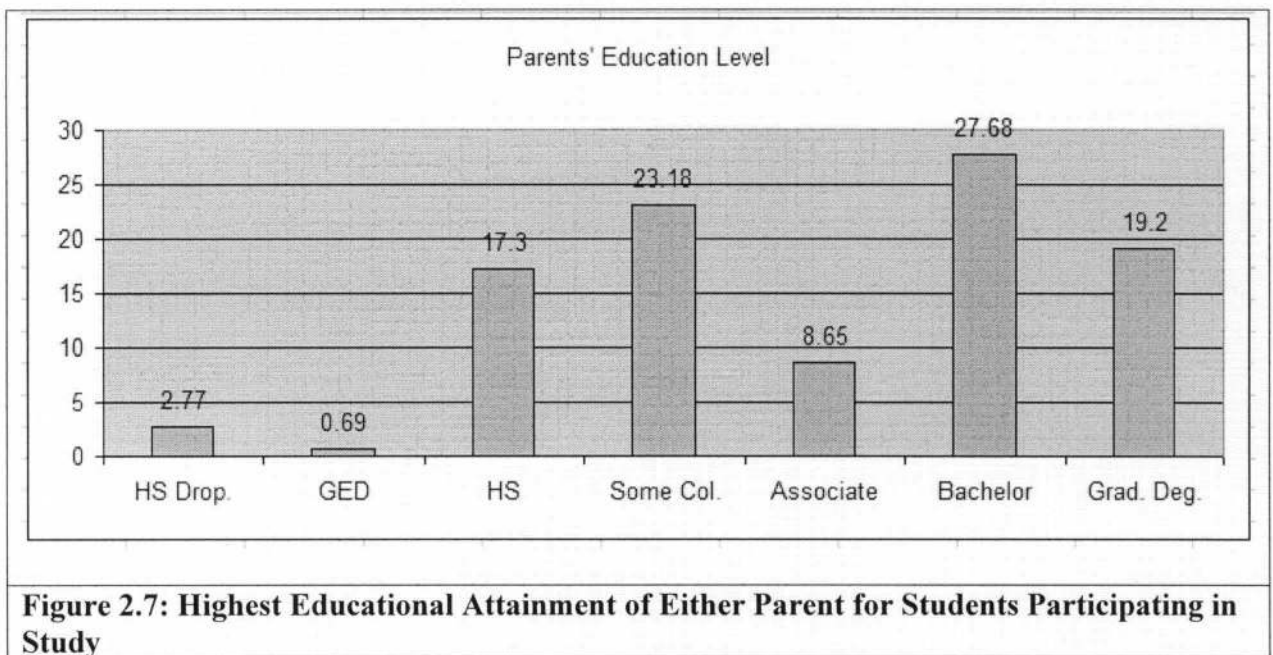
Social class is not defined by a property (not even the most determinant one, such as the volume and composition of capital) nor by a collection of properties (of sex, age, social origin, ethnic origin—proportion of blacks and whites, for example, or natives and immigrants—income, educational level etc.) nor even by a chain of properties strung out from a fundamental property (position in the relations of production) in a relation of cause and effect, conditioner and conditioned; but by the structure of relations between all the pertinent properties which gives its specific value to each of them and to the effects they exert on practices. (p. 106)

This definition, too—like Marx’s definition above, but for different reasons—is very demanding indeed.

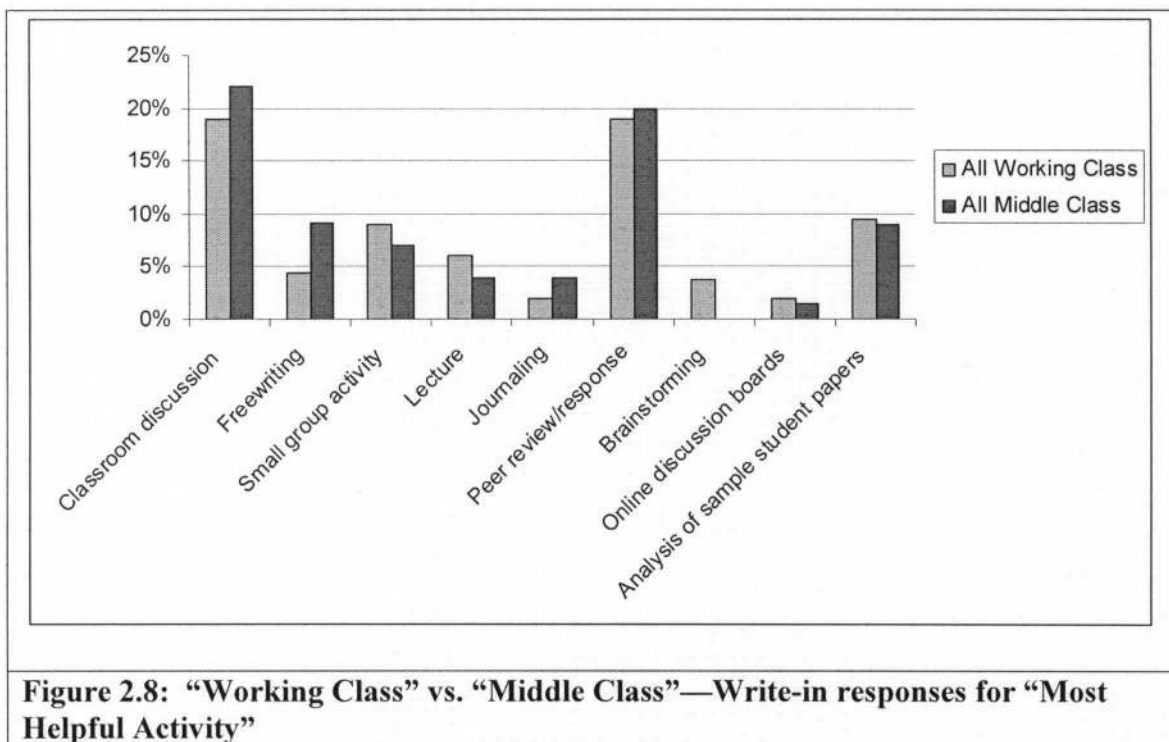
The point I want to emphasize about these two definitions is that, while as Sayer says, they differ in degree on a continuum of from the concrete to the abstract, neither definition alone can preclude the usefulness of the other in terms of making meaning of the data in this study. Sayer contends that both concepts “refer to different aspects of the social world and are used for different, but possibly compatible, explanatory purposes” (p. 72). The final section of Chapter 2 and the case studies in the following two chapters attempt to show how these definitions can be applied in a compatible way to the data from my study.

Working-Class Students in First-Year Composition

Fifty-three percent (53%) of the 300 students surveyed met my initial definition of having had a “working-class background” (neither parent earned a bachelor’s degree), while forty-seven percent (47 %) met the definition of being from a middle-class background (at least one parent earned a bachelor’s degree). Figure 2.7 illustrates a more nuanced breakdown of the parents’ educational levels.



Yet from the remainder of the quantitative data collected in this study, the differences between “working class” and “middle class”—by this definition—practically end with Figure 2.8. Very little divergence between the two groups is detectable in almost all of the survey questions, including the one area of the survey where students were free to write in their own responses to “most helpful” and “least helpful” classroom activity. Figure 2.8 below illustrates the remarkable parity between the two groups on the write-in questions.

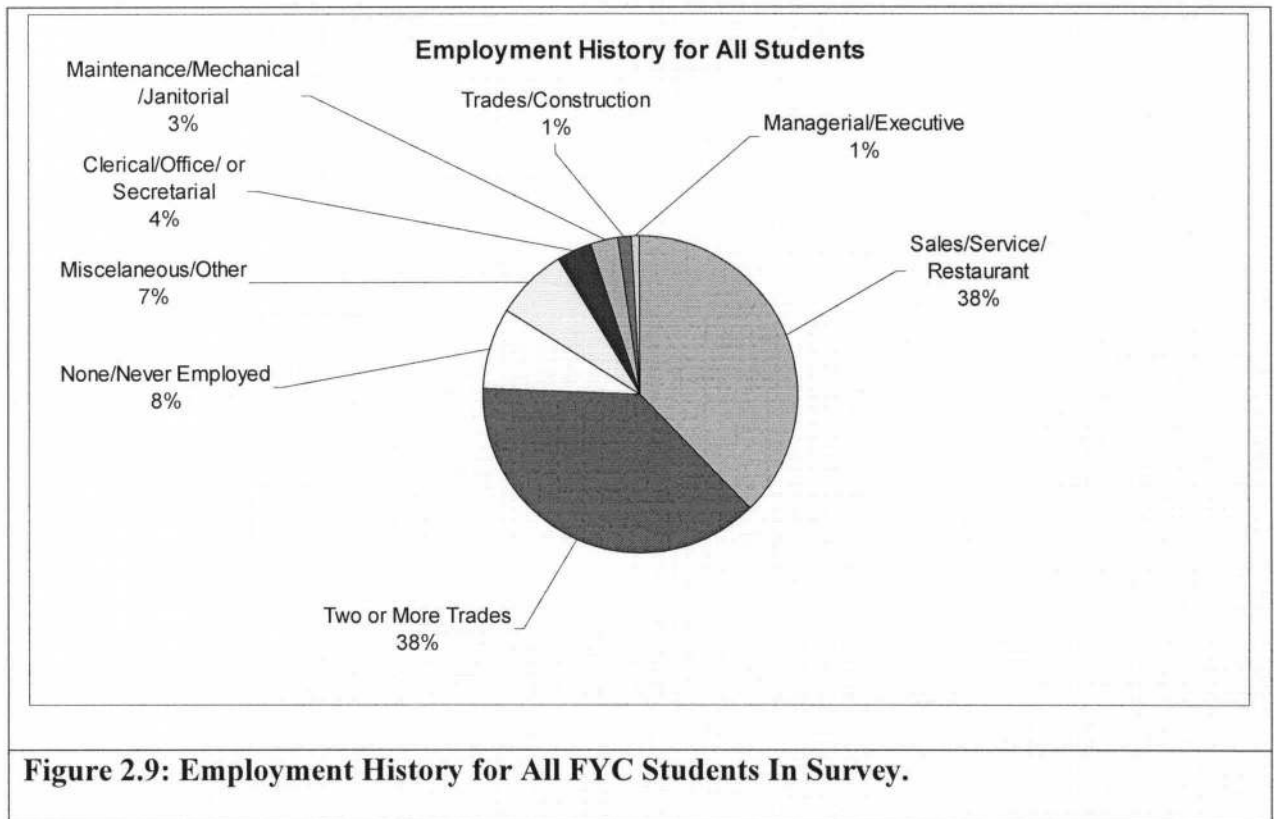


Some slight differences are detectable. For example, when class differences are defined by parental education level, freewriting seems to be preferred by more “middle class” than “working class” students, but then as was the case when comparing older and younger students, freewriting seems to elicit the most unpredictable of responses. Here, however, the difference appears as a mirage, since the data for the freewriting question

itself do not reflect any real difference between the two groups. In fact, in item after item on the survey differences are nonexistent or negligible.

Perhaps, though, the parity between the two groups should not be too surprising when one considers the data from the “employment history” item on the questionnaire.

Figure 2.9 below illustrates the percentages for all students.



The sales, service, and restaurant sector is well represented at 38%, and an equal percentage have worked in two or more trades. With the additional 17 % (not represented in Figure 2.9) of the “two or more” jobs coming from the sales/service sector, it is easily the dominant occupational field for FYC students at U of L, with 55% either currently or at some point being employed in sales, service, or restaurant work. More telling, however, is the 8% of students who answered “none” or “never employed,” which

means that *fully 92%* of FYC students at U of L either currently work or have worked at some point. Even with the increasing “traditionalization” of the student population along age lines at U of L, these students by and large are not “going away to school” for four years. Students here work. They start work young and they work a lot. Like their predecessors who attended U of L throughout the history outlined in Chapter 1, today’s U of L students have an intimate, first-hand familiarity with blue-collar life. Moreover, of the 24 students who answered “none” or left the employment history item blank, their parents’ educational level does not seem to be a predictor of whether they will have to work while attending school. In fact by the parental education level definition of class, “working-class” students are *less* likely to be employed than their “middle class” peers, with 54% of the former versus 46% of the latter answering “none” or leaving the employment history item blank.

This perplexing data is perhaps less confusing if we return to Marx’s and Bourdieu’s understanding of the *relational* definition of class: i.e. for both theorists, a “class” is only a class when seen in relation to another class. Without the foil of the other, homogeneity abounds and distinctions become nearly impossible to identify. In short, the data here reflect the simple truth of the statement I made at the beginning of section III above: most of the students in this study are working class. Students at the University of Louisville are mostly working class and have had remarkably similar life experiences regardless of their parents’ educational level—be they college-educated working-class parents or high school-educated working-class parents. And while this homogeneity appears to cut across age lines, the older the student at U of L, the more likely they are “working-class,” at least according to Bourdieu’s definition, for they

would not be seeking the educational credentials afforded by a U of L degree if they had come from a bourgeois background:

To a given volume of inherited capital there corresponds a band of more or less equally probably trajectories leading to more or less equivalent positions (this is the *field of the possibles* objectively offered to a given agent), and the shift from one trajectory to another usually depends on collective...or individual events—encounters, affairs, benefactors, etc.—which are usually described as (fortunate or unfortunate) accidents, although they themselves depend statistically on the position and disposition of those whom they befall (e.g. skill in operating ‘connections’ which enables holders of high social capital to preserve or increase this capital”, when, that is, they are not deliberately contrived by institutions (clubs, family reunions, old-boys’ or alumni associations etc.) or by the ‘spontaneous’ intervention of individuals or groups. It follows from this that position and individual trajectory are not statistically independent; all positions of arrival are not equally probable for all starting points (p. 110).

In other words, had adult students been born and raised in a middle- or upper-class environment, they would have either gone to college when they were younger or else have been credentialed in some other way—simply by the cultural or social capital they began accruing from their birth into the more elite circles of society. Simply put, an adult undergraduate students’ present class status is the result of a lifelong trajectory, and that trajectory is unlikely to have begun in the middle or upper classes.

There are exceptions, of course. Parents, for example—particularly mothers—from otherwise middle-class households often enroll in college after raising children, so “empty-nest” mothers do constitute an exception to my broader claim about the class status of nontraditional students. However, from Sayer’s perspective “class” results from the interplay of “axes of inequality,” and such women do have a gendered and aged status—in some ways akin to class—that is ascribed to those who sacrifice their own educational and career objectives, which may have been independent of their roles as

wives and mothers. In other words, their formal⁶ educational trajectories, independent of their shared, familial class trajectories, essentially remained static while they raised their children.

Only so much can be learned of such trajectories through statistics, however, and if we failed to listen to the stories of those who have taken those trajectories we would see things only from our own perspective. To see things from the perspective of our “retrograde” adult students, we need to start where they are starting, to see things from their point of view. Chapter 3 gives us that perspective in the form of four case studies of working-class adults in the first-year composition classroom.

⁶ “Formal” meaning education occurring in a credential-granting institution.

CHAPTER III

“A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT SITUATION THAN MOST OF THESE KIDS”:

NARRATIVES FROM THE RETROGRADE

“The College Dude Who Sat Next to Me”

Case Study I: Eugene Walker

While collecting surveys in a multigenerational, “off-sequence” section of English 101, I reminded students to include their first name and email address if they wanted to participate in an interview later to help me gather more information. Out of the blue one student spoke up and said, “I’ll talk to you right now. What do you want to know?” Eugene was one of the handful of obviously older students in the class, certainly a student I wanted to “target” in my study, but for a moment I just simply stared, dumbfounded, and could not respond. Fortunately, his teacher—my friend and colleague of several years—stepped in and explained, “Thanks, Gene. Sometimes, though, when we’re collecting data in our research we don’t know the questions we need to ask later until we look over the research we’ve done so far.” Relieved—I was not prepared to conduct an interview that day—I thanked Gene and assured him I would speak with him again soon

if he included his email address on the survey. I made sure to place his questionnaire on top of the stack as I left the classroom.¹

Gene's story is one of four adult student case studies presented in this chapter, and while each reveals a unique individual's FYC experience, taken together they offer valuable insight into the common obstacles faced by adult students at the University of Louisville. If compositionists are to develop pedagogies that benefit all students in their mixed-generation classes, and also press at an administrative, policy-making level for a more just educational environment for working-class adults, we must first listen to what those adults have to tell us about their FYC classes and the adjustments they have made to meet the pressures of academic life. As I argued in the previous chapter, most adult students are by definition working-class students, and the case studies here offer a glimpse into how their experiences at U of L are indeed *classed* experiences, as are those of their younger, working-class fellow students.

Eugene Walker is a 33-year old Army Reserve Private who enrolled at U of L in the spring 2009 semester after returning from service in the Iraq War. Gene is engaged to be married and has two children from a previous marriage, both of whom live in North Carolina with their mother. This is a difficult subject for Gene to discuss, but he otherwise describes his home life as "fantastic":

¹ The initial response rate for interviews was far from overwhelming. While 75 of the 298 students surveyed (or approximately 25%) supplied an email address on the survey instrument, 13 of the emails sent to these addresses (or 17% of those supplied) were returned as "undeliverable," despite multiple repeated attempts to decipher handwriting and re-send emails to those students. Thus, according to my faculty email application, a total of 62 emails were successfully delivered to the email addresses designated by students on their surveys. In the end, 12 of those emails actually resulted in interviews. The success rate (i.e. completed interviews) for emails that actually made it through was about 19.4 %.

Since the emails were sent after the completion of the spring semester, students were given the option of responding to questions via email, which I believed would increase the response rate. All of the six (6) students who chose to respond via email were traditional-age (18 & 19 years old, specifically), and all four (4) non-traditional aged students interviewed chose to meet in person. Two (2) traditional-aged students also chose to meet in person.

I have a wonderful fiancé, and she's real supportive. And when I came back from Iraq, she actually knew I was going to school...and in our little house there was this weird cubby hole in a random spot. She turned it into an office for me, set up a printer and all that other stuff. So...my home life was fantastic—very conducive to learning. She worked during the day, so I could study during the day and she'd come home at night and we'd get to spend time together.... I'd say the whole time I was in [school], I had no problems from home or work or anything.

Gene's tuition is funded by the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, commonly referred to as the "New GI Bill," which is making a measurable impact on the numbers of returning students in higher education, though it is certainly not comparable to sea change of the original GI Bill in the 1940s and 50s (Greenburg 2008). In this case, at least, the legislation seems to have helped Gene's family create a physical and intellectual space for study—a "distance from necessity," in Bourdieu's terms, so crucial to the process of embodying the kind cultural capital offered by higher education.

On the whole, nontraditional students—and working class U of L students of any age— have very little distance from necessity, but the New GI Bill and Gene's fiancé function together for Gene as what Brandt (1998) has called "sponsors of literacy." As Brandt describes them, sponsors are "usually richer, more knowledgeable, and more entrenched than the sponsored, [yet] sponsors nevertheless enter a reciprocal relationship with those they underwrite. They lend their resources or credibility to the sponsored but also stand to gain benefits from their success, whether by direct repayment or, indirectly, by credit or association." In an immediate and intimate way, Gene's spouse—who has already earned her bachelor's degree and holds a professional position earning sufficient funds to support the household while Gene attends school—stands to benefit once her future husband's degree is completed and he can contribute to a dual-earner household. In the case of the United States Army's sponsorship, the reciprocation is in one respect

retroactive: you serve, then your education is sponsored. Still, the Army gains considerable clout from the publicity attached to the New GI Bill, just as it has certainly earned a favorable name in U.S. history (and educational lore) as sponsors of all the World War II veterans who gained a college education and went on to essentially create the modern American middle class.² Gene's educational pursuits, too, are historically situated, and as Brandt reminds us, sponsorship of his and all current veteran's literacy is the result of a political struggle: "...the course of an ordinary person's literacy learning—its occasions, materials, applications, potentials—follows the transformations going on within sponsoring institutions as those institutions fight for economic and ideological position" (p. 177). For the U.S. military, facing recruiting challenges caused by two running wars that have lasted longer than the Second World War itself, the positive ideological implications of a "New GI Bill" far outweigh the capital necessary to finance such a program—especially when the military budget is always the last government program to be placed on the budgetary chopping block.

The university itself is at least a limited sponsor of Gene's literacy, as he is enrolled in the Continuing Studies (CS) Program, which is the latest incarnation—perhaps the last vestige—of the Division of Adult Education (DAE) and University College (UC), whose history was discussed in Chapter 1. But CS is still a bright spot in the otherwise darkling field of academic opportunities for working-class adults at U of L. Students who are at least 25 years old and have either a high school diploma or GED can enroll in coursework without submitting past transcripts or test scores, earning credits on something of a "tryout" basis. Students who earn credits in CS—usually General

² Brandt details this historical development, too, in her article, "Drafting US Literacy." *College English*. 66.5, p485 May 2004.

Education Requirement credits such as English 101 and 102—can transfer them into degree-granting programs once they establish themselves, to the university’s satisfaction, as being serious, capable students. Although Gene is both serious and capable, as we shall see, his educational goals are not all that clear at this point. “Right now I’m kinda in the works of doing dental hygiene,” says Gene, which is a way “to get into a few classes,” but Gene is currently a volunteer firefighter and is also considering majoring in paramedic medicine or fire administration, programs offered by Eastern Kentucky University, located about 100 miles from Louisville. Closer to home, the Army base at Fort Knox, Kentucky offers a Physician Assistant program that is also on Gene’s academic radar. So, the broad latitude afforded by CS does seem to fit Gene’s educational needs at this point, and he is genuinely enthusiastic about the possibilities: “I could expand into many different avenues, if you will.”

Gene contrasts his current academic optimism with his attitude toward school when he was younger:

My focus wasn’t there at all. Right out of high school I was like, I’m done with school. I hated being there. It just wasn’t important to me. I was more interested in doing other things, and I got right into the military. And I was like, I don’t even need school. I just turned 17 and got into the delayed entry program. I didn’t even take an SAT or an ACT. I was like, “I don’t need it. I’m going into the military.”

After a pause, and in a more thoughtful, reflective tone, Gene adds:

And then, I spent my whole adult life trying to go *back* to school. So, it really put me behind the 8-ball. I didn’t have the focus at 18, 19 that I do now, because now I know the importance of an education. And I know that its....its....it’s *mine*. It’s *my* education. I’m not doing it for anybody but me. So, to me, doing well is the only thing that’s important. [emphasis in original]

With Gene we glimpse a concrete, specific example of Fromm's generalized contrast between the "stormy period of youth" and contemplative maturity, a time when the reflective adult, with more experience in living, is capable of undertaking serious study—which will allow him to pursue occupations he would never have imagined possible at the age of 17, even if he *had* gone to college.

At 33, Gene is more than capable of serious study, and his discussion of the literacy work in his English 101 class reveals what most FYC teachers would see as a model student. Yet his expectations for the class were not high: "I had it figured that I'd be writing papers and it would be more like A + B + C type stuff, just dot-to-dot-to-dot, just write this paper....Yeah, I read [the assigned reading]. This is what it's about. This is my paper....almost like a book report." As is turned out, the coursework was far more challenging for Gene, but the instructor's guidance allowed him to develop a patient and methodical approach to reading and writing:

The writings that he gave us weren't easy for me to read. Some of them were just off the beaten path. And I didn't understand a certain thing, and [the instructor] was like, "well, this is in relation to language." And I'm like, "it's about a guy going to Loyola...how is this *language-driven*?".... Once we finally had open discussion about things, nothing was ever as it seemed, if that makes any sense.

It wasn't just, come in, do your work, and get out. He just made you think, and there was never a quick response, you know what I mean? Sometimes I was like, "I just want to answer the question!" and [the instructor] was like, "No, I want to know *more* than that. What do you *mean* by intuitive? Or, what do you mean by this word?" And he makes you break down words, and makes you explain yourself. [emphasis in original]

The teacher's direction was clearly a powerful force in Gene's recollection of the class discussion, but fellow students played an equally important role:

You'd come in there and you'd think you have a decent perspective and you think you have a certain thing written down—at least I did—and we'd

start talking about it and I'd hear some of the different perspectives from the different students and I was like, "I completely missed it." Like, I had no idea. And then I would either re-read it and be like, "Ahhh... there it is!" You know what I mean? So it [discussion] really forced you to think—especially in the beginning, [when] I didn't know what to expect. But by the end of the class, I kinda knew the M.O. and kind of figured it out. And I would actually start looking into words and picking up on words and then start questioning certain quotes that way. So it forced me to do *more*, and to be *better*, about what he was wanting us to get out of the class. [emphasis in original]

Thus Gene was careful to stress the dialogic nature of his learning experience and how that dialogue influenced the development of his learning strategies over the course of the semester. The acts of reading and writing, the instructor's guidance, the classroom discussions all worked to reinforce and compliment each other:

The readings were the medium to the discussions. I mean if you just read it you wouldn't understand it. But once you start actually getting into it and figuring out what they're [the authors are] trying to say, then it takes on a whole different meaning than what's on the surface, or what I thought was on the surface. So, the readings were huge, but again the discussions actually brought some of that stuff to the surface for me, personally.

And writing, too, performed an important role in the dialogic turns of Gene's FYC experience:

[I learned] how to connect better with *my* readers *as* a reader, so...becoming a better reader allowed me to become a writer because I would question my work as I would somebody else's work. I never really read my...read *my* material as a reader, if that makes any sense. I would write it and it made sense to me in my head, but I never looked at it from the perspective of somebody else not knowing what I'm talking about. So having read pieces that confused me and not really knowing—or left a lot of questions, then that made me want to be more specific and more, not only vocal, but more *descriptive* in what I was trying to relate. So, when someone read a piece...of...one of my pieces there was less question and more connection. Does that make any sense? That's kind of what I took away from the class. [emphasis in original]

As FYC teachers we can only hope and pray that some of our students "kind of" take such lessons away from our classes. Gene's description reads much like an exemplary

“literacy narrative” from one of the ubiquitous FYC readers clogging the faculty mailboxes.

Lest Gene’s narrative paint too rosy a picture of his FYC experience, his discussion of small group interactions with his younger classmates clouds this image considerably. His assessment of the peer review sessions, in particular, are bleak. Gene’s class met in a classroom equipped with networked computers for each student, and his instructor relied rather heavily on Wiki-based student interactions, both in and out of class. One group project required members to read and post a 300 word response to each group member’s draft. But, “they didn’t do it,” said Gene with a mildly disdainful chuckle:

They didn’t do it, right? So...I said [my instructor] has a certain perspective...but what about other people? We all have different perspectives, and I never got that other perspective from my group. We never exchanged writing ideas....I never got to read their two [papers] and they never read mine. So, in my experience it [peer review] was kind of useless because they didn’t do the work.

Part of the problem seems to have been poor timing, since, as Gene recalled, this project came late in the semester and the instructor commented that “the peer reviews seemed to fall apart” for every group, not just Gene’s. However, part of the problem, in Gene’s assessment was clearly a lack of effort on the part of his group members, both of whom were in their teens.

Gene grouped himself with the same two students most of the semester, and says that the “in-class groups were okay, but the things that actually mattered, as far as the response [assignments that were] on the syllabus, which were pretty, I figured, pretty important, it just fell apart. Didn’t work well at all in my opinion.” Gene is hesitant to I

impugn the age or maturity level of the younger students in his class as a whole, but he believes a lack of focus was definitely an issue for his group members:

In this particular case, obviously their focus wasn't Comp 101. I mean their focus was football, which is understandable. They have pretty busy schedules. And, the other guy, although a super nice guy, um...whether he was overloaded—I didn't really see his schedule—he always kinda seemed to be forgetful as far as, like, “When is that due?” And I'm like, “It's due today, brah.” And he was like, “Oh, goddammit!” And then he has to go talk to [the instructor], who was very, I thought, was pretty flexible. He wouldn't let you fail if you wanted to do it he'd let you make it up. [But the group member], he just didn't seem to really care, so I'm assuming it was age. There's people that are that age that are button-down, and can do, like, five different extracurricular activities and, you know, like 18 [credit] hours and still make good grades, and make time for everybody. I couldn't tell you what the exact cause [was], between those two guys, though.

Needless to say, such sentiments do not bode well for positive “generational encounters.”

However, Gene's experience has given him the wisdom to take a more realistic, philosophical approach to his younger classmates:

I see a lot of how I was in them, and, um...I don't offer unless asked, as far as guidance on it, um, so...if they're messing up, it's not my place to say, “Hey, you're screwing up, blah, blah, blah,” unless it affects my grade, which it kinda did, somewhat. I don't counsel them unless they want to be. So, if they say, “Hey, man, I don't understand this,” I'm like, “oh, it's just X, Y, and Z.” But if they come to me with questions, then I'll give them the answers that I think would help them out. But I don't just offer counsel. Like “Hey, bro, this is a great opportunity,” because I didn't listen, and I'm sure they [won't] either.

Gene is not too surprised that no younger students sought out the “wisdom of his age,” but that is not quite what Wenger has in mind for generational encounters. Wenger's “communities of practice” are something like Bourdieu's concepts of “field” and “practice,” in which older, more experienced members lead by example. Practice, according to Wenger, “is not an object to be handed down from one generation to the next” (p. 102). Rather, “older generations share their competence with new members by

a version of the same process by which [those competencies] develop” (p. 102). In other words, younger members of the community learn by sharing the *field*, and for Bourdieu and Wenger in this case that would be the classroom, with older members of that community as they practice. By this reasoning, Gene should not be too disappointed in his younger peers, since they did at least share that field with him *as* he practiced and they might have learned far more than he can know.

However, we all have reason to share Gene’s pessimism in the following passage:

But nobody asked me anything other than, “What did you do in the military? Did you kill anybody?” That’s basically the only question I get, you know? And I’m like “ok, whatever.” Yeah, nothing to do with organization, or like, “Hey, how do you stay focused?” Nothing like that, because I don’t know if they even knew that I was so serious about school. They just knew I was a student too. I don’t even think that they had the perspective to know that was my goal: to be a good student.

Gene is clearly and justifiably resentful of his fellow students’ limited understanding of his war experience. Of course, only veterans of war can know what other veterans have gone through, and I did not ask how his classmates’ inquiries made Gene feel. However, the lack of intellectual curiosity on the part of the younger students about what was going on *then*, in that English class, and how Gene focused or performed as well as he did—that lack of curiosity reflects poorly on the younger students themselves.

To Not Be Afraid to Write”

Case Study II: Ann Winfield

Ann Winfield is a 23-year-old white female who transferred to U of L from a community college after several semesters of part-time coursework. Ann has five years’ experience as a clerical worker, but when she moved from nearby Elizabethtown, Kentucky to her parents’ home in Louisville, they provided the financial support

necessary for her to leave her job and devote all her time to school for the duration of the spring 2009 semester: “I’m fortunate enough that my family has been supportive—*extremely*—of me getting my degree, so they’ve kinda allowed me to take the time.” She understands the importance of her family’s assistance, and from her description of the experience, Ann was more than slightly intimidated by the prospect of her first semester at a large university: “I was kinda nervous about getting back in school, and that whole [idea of] giving up a job that I had been working for quite a while that had good potential, and the whole idea of just getting back in school. I definitely wanted to get a good semester under, you know, underway before I started trying to work and include other elements into it.” With Ann we see a firsthand example of the community college transfer hurdle, and also examples of the kinds of support systems necessary to smooth and stabilize that transition. Higher education holds forth vague promises of a better future for such working adults, but giving up her own, self-reliant financial situation was clearly a traumatic experience for Ann. Many of her uncertainties seem rooted in her immediate, post-high school attitude toward higher education:

It’s kind of interesting. I had a like, a full ride out of high school to come to U of L, but I wasn’t ready to make the large university transition. I needed to go to community college to kind of get the feel for it. So, I did two semesters at...Elizabethtown Community Tech College. And I liked it. I did. But I felt like a lot of things were kinda handed to you on a silver platter. It didn’t really require you to think outside the box as much. So I decided it that probably wasn’t for me.

For the teenage Anne, psychological barriers to university study trumped any financial barriers, and as a working-class teenager from a smaller town, the intimidation of leaving home to live on a large, urban campus—even though U of L is less than an hour’s drive away—outweighed the familiarity of a small school closer to home. Ann’s language

even mirrors Bourdieu's concept of having a "feel for the game," or the subconscious, "bodily learning through repetition or practice" which benefits all of us when we are functioning in familiar social fields (Sayer, p. 26). And we are disposed to excel in new social fields most similar to those in which we have had considerable practice, so while Ann's decision to attend community college was surely based on several factors—proximity to home, commuting expenses, etc.—she deliberately credits this familiarity of *field* with her conscious decision to attend community college rather than take advantage of the "full ride" to U of L (p. 26). She wanted to get a "feel for" higher education at the community college before transferring to a university because she believed it would better approximate the scholastic world of her habitus, the academic world she had already excelled in, which at that point in her life had been the public school system.

Based on Ann's description of her community college experience, she certainly did have a "feel" for that world, but after a couple of semesters, she subsequently decided that it was not academically challenging enough for her, and that she wanted a chance at the university education she had turned down at the age of 18.³ Yet this realization alone was not enough for her to pick up and move to Louisville (or another university): having passed up the scholarship and with no support structure in the city, Ann's educational pursuits were basically on hold for several years while she worked. She eventually became engaged to marry, but the engagement fell through, just at a time when her parent's family came to a major turning point in their own lives:

After my family decided to move to Louisville I...you know it took a few years, but it was just the perfect opportunity for me to kind of transition with them and get back into school. I know I need to finish my degree. And it's kinda been like calling for the last four years. I've just been trying to get back in. And now that I am, I can't imagine going to another

³ Ann did not elaborate what type of scholarship she turned down as a teenager.

university, to be honest. So, yeah. I just kinda worked and lived life...got a little bit of experience, you know, and now I'm back.

Ann's words echo Gene's, here, as he spent his "whole adult life trying to go *back* to school," while for Ann school has been "calling" her "to get back in." One could dismiss these sentiments as Romantic longing for a youthful past, or even simple regret for a bad choice, and either of these explanations are possible, but to do so would mean overlooking two important truths about formal education for Americans we discussed in the first chapter: 1) education has a powerful ideological hold over our sense of life quality, and 2) for those who have left school, "getting back" into formal education can seem like returning to "square one," as it were, or re-initiating one's movement on a linear path that stopped the last time they stepped out of a classroom—as though no learning has occurred in the intervening years and they must mentally "retrograde" to an earlier perspective in order for that learning to begin again. The important countervailing lesson that Ann has learned—and by her account, learned largely in her FYC classes at U of L—is that, once in a nurturing college environment, an adult student's experience can work to dispel those myths so they feel less paralyzed by fears of the unknown. This is clearly the case with Ann. With her first semester successfully accomplished—and the uncertainties of university life now less mysterious—Ann has established a firm foundation from which to continue her studies: "I'm working now [in the summer term] and it's not quite as hard to juggle both" school and a job.

Without solid, material and financial support—in Brandt's terms, sponsorship—from Ann's family, it seems unlikely that she would have even attempted transferring to U of L. Once enrolled, however, other, less material sources of support have come into play. At 23, Ann is currently considered an adult student by this study's definition and

by U of L's statistical records, but she feels some ambiguity about her age status in comparison with both her younger and older classmates: "It's such a weird age. For me it's been so weird, because I'm transitioning. I don't really fit in with my age group most of the time." However, she has clearly "fit in" with her English 101 and 102 peers, and has much praise for her FYC classmates—crediting the small class size and "mixed group" of students in her 101 class for the sense of camaraderie they developed:

I made several friends in [my 101] class, actually. I keep in contact with them even now that we're not in class together. Via Facebook, of course. Really, it was a good experience. We became really close. It was a small class, so I really liked that about it—the fact that we could work really close together. We had opportunities...to work in groups a lot. And, really...got to kinda get feedback from each other and that's really important. And in [my 102] class we've got to do that as well. It's really helpful having, like, peer revision on the papers we're writing and getting their feedback.

Small group work is one of Ann's favorite activities in FYC, and this opportunity to identify with stories of other returning students seems to have helped ease her own transition into university life:

[English 101 had] a lot of nontraditional students, not right out of high school, which is good, because I'm not right out of high school either. And, um, a lot of older classmates, which is, I find really helpful. They've got a lot of life experiences, and so, their writing was just really rich with that kind of, you know, when you're able to add things from your life? And it was basically kind of like a mixed group. Some just right out of high school. And I actually made quite a few good friends. It was a good experience.

Although Ann values the fact that her class is a "mixed group" of ages and experiences, the presence of other nontraditional students has clearly played an important role in making her feel comfortable with and capable of doing academic work at the university level. Ann says her English 102 class has even more nontraditional students, "maybe because it's a summer class."

Ann readily shares the credit for those who have been most helpful in making the university transition:

My teachers, really....I'm not saying anything negative against the advising staff. I talked to my advisor once. But I've actually been able to go to my course instructors and get advice. And they've kind of mentored me and help me transition. So, the faculty has been like a huge, huge help. And of course other students. I mean, upper level students who waited to take English until kind of later. Their experiences so far in college.

They've been able to say, "you should do this, or you shouldn't do this." Faculty and classmates—particularly fellow students who are more experienced in the university environment—have formed a mentoring network for Ann that is guiding her through the transition period, and this experience stands in marked contrast to her experience (at least with the faculty) at community college:

At ECC [her community college] it wasn't like that. The faculty, um, I felt like they kind of looked at it as a job, and that's all it was. I mean, when you're a teacher, an educator, I think the overall goal should be to enrich the lives of your students. Not just academically, but overall, you know? And, I didn't feel like they really had that gusto that you should have when you're a teacher. So, yeah, it's been completely different here [at U of L].

Of course, Ann was delivering these praises for U of L faculty *to* a U of L faculty member (me, her interviewer), and that fact could certainly have colored her descriptions. Yet she clearly had less positive interactions with faculty at her community college than at the university, and the distinctions she draws between the two schools do not end there, as we shall see.

Ann's professional goal is to teach high school English, a fact that not only lends some authority to her critique above but makes her reflections on the difference between high school English and first year composition at U of L all the more illuminating:

My major is education. I'm going to be a high school English teacher. It's my goal—as of right now, it's my goal. I really expected there to be a lot of your standard high school grammar, punctuation. You know, that

sort of thing, and I was not looking forward to that. So I was really delighted and surprised when I found out that it [the focus of English 101] was on academic writing and, you know, reading texts and learning how to really read and write. And it wasn't anything to do with the technicalities of writing, 'cause I'm *full* of that [laughs]. I mean, I know it's something that I have to improve on, but.... Yeah, I kind of expected it to be like that [i.e. focused on the 'technicalities'], but it wasn't, which was a good thing. [emphasis in original].

Ann's expectation was essentially that she would be returning to the point where she left off in formal education, the "drills and skills," grammar-centered lessons she remembered from her teenage years: "because in high school, you know, they teach you that only certain ways of writing are acceptable." Her experiences at community college did little to contradict this expectation. She could have even completed a four-year degree at the school, but had clear reasons for not doing so:

I wouldn't feel like I got the same education. I was not pushed there. I was not challenged at all. Everything was kinda like handed to you. Like, they would hand you papers and say, "memorize this. This is what's on the test. This is what you need to know." And I don't work like that. I want to be challenged. I want to know when I'm going out there to teach my students that I'm giving them everything that I learned. That's completely different than here [at U of L].

Ann's testimony reveals the type of rote, mechanistic pedagogy for the working class that scholars have been critiquing for many years⁴. For Paulo Freire (1970), this is the infamous "banking concept of education," wherein:

- the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;
- the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined (p. 73).

Freire's response to this "necrophilic" approach is the "problem-posing" method, and Chapter 4's discussion of my interviews with FYC instructors will delve deeper into the

⁴ Perhaps most famously Jean Anyon's "Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work" (*Journal of Education*, Vol. 162, no. 1, Fall 1980).

pedagogical debate between “liberatory” educators such as Freire and more the immediately pragmatic educators such as Delpit (1988), who argue that working-class and minority students need to have the rules made explicit or spelled out before they can become “a participant in the culture of power” (pp. 568-69). Placing the particulars of that debate aside for the moment, there is no question which approach Ann encountered in community college, and her testimony reveals the shortcomings of this “one-pedagogy-fits-all” approach for working-class students. Ann has clearly had her fill of it and wants something more from higher education. Of course, Ann is *one* student who attended *one* community college, but in her case, at least, DeGenaro’s (2001) claims about these schools aiming to prepare a “docile work force” ring despairingly true.

Ann’s experiences in first-year composition at U of L have, thankfully, been different in several key ways. Like Gene, she says her instructors have repeatedly stressed the importance of reading and writing academic prose—with a particular and repeated emphasis on reading. And also like Gene, Ann makes a distinction between “real” reading and some other, vaguely implied type of “not real” reading, which she further illuminates when describing two texts from her current, English 102 summer course. One is John Krakaur’s *Into the Wild*, and the other is Joseph Harris’s *Rewriting*. Of course, the two books have vastly different purposes—the first being an adventurous *bildungsroman*-type narrative and the second a textbook on approaches to college writing—and it is not too difficult to guess which book Ann preferred. She discusses her preference in a well-reasoned, articulate manner, however, revealing that while Harris’s textbook was *useful*, it was perhaps *misused* in the class:

I mean, it’s not a bad textbook. It’s just that...I think we do better with, like, the lectures and the class discussions. I feel like the [Harris] text is

not necessarily as helpful as the group discussions. Now when I'm at home the text is great because it has a lot of good information in it but as far as using it in class, it's just kind of....I don't know.... not something I want to talk about for an hour and twenty minutes [laughs hard].

While Ann found the text useful as a reference source, as a tool for class discussion it paled in comparison to Krakaur's "amazing book, because it applies not only to real life but...also to research, because it is a research novel." While Harris' text is "how to," Krakaur's says, "here's how," and served not only as the basis for good classroom discussions, but also an exemplary model for how to incorporate research into compelling, nonfiction prose. Moreover, Ann says those classroom discussions modeled a way of reading deeply, of examining the author's rhetorical approaches that might betray Krakaur's own beliefs regarding the story he has researched:

When you're reading, it seems at first that it's just like a research paper. But when you do an in-depth reading of a specific passage and the way that he uses his words, you can see the emphasis from his own life and his own experiences come through. And you can see that maybe he has a bias one way or another....You can...see by doing the in-depth...reading what John Krakaur thinks. Even though he's not supposed to pick one side or the other, you can see that he really *does* without blatantly saying "this is what I think." So, [we practiced] just reading *differently*. And now everything I read I look at like that, and so it makes it more interesting.

It is clear that the FYC activity that made the biggest impact on both Ann's and Gene's literacy practices was the practice of "reading *differently*," reading deeply by examining and re-examining assumptions, then comparing these assumptions or initial, individual interpretations with those of their classmates and instructors.

Writing appears to have played a less significant role in Ann's FYC experience, at least as she described those experiences in our interview. Most importantly, she learned:

To not be *afraid* to write. That's a huge thing for me. My mom's a journalist—or has been—so it's always been kinda...intimidating because she's really talented. [My instructor] was always really good about letting

us know what we were doing well. He did give us constructive criticism and ways to improve, but it was always really nice to feel comfortable with our writing and to feel like our ideas were validated. So, that was really enlightening because in high school, you know, they teach you that only certain ways of writing are acceptable.

When the words Ann uses to describe her pre-FYC writing experience are brought together—afraid, intimidating, standard high school grammar, punctuation, the technicalities of writing, “only certain ways of writing are acceptable”—they paint a powerful picture of a student who apparently loves reading and language but was so fearful of “doing it wrong” that she avoided writing whenever possible. It is no surprise to hear her say, “I was a huge procrastinator before, and I would always put assignments off. I always had problems starting and getting an idea and trying to get my head around it.” But English 101 and 102 classes have given her a different way of approaching writing tasks: “Now, we learned some very valuable tools as far as tunneling in on one specific [area], not just looking at it as like a large, broad topic but looking at the project and what’s inside of that and what you want to focus on and that really helped a lot. So, now I definitely start well in advance and take my time with it.”

“This Imaginary Class”

Case Study III: Rhoda Folsom

A 35 year old white female, Rhoda Folsom is currently a junior pursuing a bachelor’s in history and has been taking one or two classes per semester since 2003. Rhoda delayed enrolling in FYC because she could only afford to take a limited number of courses at a time and wanted to concentrate on major-specific classes. After losing her job in the fall of 2008, she enrolled full time and completed English 101 in the spring

2009 semester; at the time of her interview she was enrolled in a summer term English 102 with the same instructor. Her experiences in FYC have been radically negative when compared to Gene and Ann's. According to Rhoda, those bad experiences are mainly attributable to her classmates, and she ascribes some of blame to their youth. A large share of the blame could also be laid at the feet of the university, the athletic department, and—in a more problematic way—her FYC instructor. A standard question I asked every interviewee was: “can you describe for me a day in your 101 or 102 class that you think was useful or productive?” Rhoda's response was a simple “No.” Knowing her instructor, I had a hard time comprehending this reply, and given the acerbic quality of some of her responses, I debated whether to include Rhoda in this study at all. The deeper I analyzed my qualitative data as a whole, however, it was clear to me that Rhoda's story *must* be included. She certainly had strong opinions, and they often leaned negative to the point of sounding personally embittered, but even if her commentary contains exaggerations of what occurred in her FYC classes, it is a contextually relevant commentary because Rhoda's are the complaints of a working adult who has taken those classes for credit alongside exclusively traditional-age students, and hers may reflect the experiences of other older students who did not have the built-in, older-student support system that Gene and Ann had.

After losing her administrative job at the start of what has since become the “Great Recession,” Rhoda's husband encouraged her to enroll full time and finish up a degree she had been building on in piecemeal fashion for six years. Like Gene and Ann, Rhoda does have a familial support system: “My husband said, ‘Don't go find another job in our industry, because you are miserable. Go back to school and get your degree.’”

But Rhoda is *herself* a “support system,” as the mother of two teenage children, president of their high school PTA, and head of a soccer program for 75 local public school students. She cites these responsibilities and “time” as the biggest obstacles to her education, which she wants to continue through the Ph.D. level to become a history professor. Her multiple leadership roles outside of college give her a very different perspective on the “kids” with whom she attends class.

Rhoda describes her current English 102 course as “ridiculous,” largely due to the fact that she is enrolled with what seems like half of the university’s athletes:

This semester, I was in a group with two football players and a football hanger-on, and it was ridiculous..... We have four freshmen basketball players and at least two kids from the football team and all the freshmen baseball players in the class. And my classmates, when we are supposed to be in groups discussing work, and I try to engage them and ask them questions about their classes, they are talking. One of the players informed me that all of his classes are like [this], which kind of scared me, and then [he] said that one of his classes all they have done is a gone on a scavenger hunt and colored. So we really don’t have much to talk about.

Needless to say, Rhoda has not developed the kind of working rapport with her classmates that Ann has—though there are clear echoes of Gene’s experience with his irresponsible group-mates. Rhoda continues in further detail:

I think in the 101 class my group actually did at least exchange papers and check each others’ papers. But in the 102 class, the basketball players don’t take their headphones off and they text messaged the whole time. My group only discusses the task far enough to make sure that I have done whatever work it is that we are supposed to turn in for them, and then they go back to their text messaging and talking about their Saturday nights. They come to class only because they want to make sure that the football guy sees that they are there, but there is not really any work being done. There is no work. Maybe for them there is but I don’t see how.

I did not ask Rhoda to elaborate, but the “football guy” is presumably one of the athletic department’s academic support personnel, who at U of L regularly check in to make sure

their student athletes are making satisfactory academic progress. From Rhoda's account, the fact that so many athletes are in one class has done neither those athletes nor the few non-athletes in the class any favors. In the context of this study, it seems to have reduced this adult student's FYC experience to one of a disgruntled babysitter: "I just think that I haven't learned anything, so it has just been a big waste of my money and time."

Rhoda's expectations for FYC were quite limited (and limiting), which—other than the financial reasons cited above—is perhaps why she delayed taking the course sequence for so long. Rhoda wanted and expected a "refresher" course:

I was really hoping that it was going to be a refresher; it has been 15 years since I was in high school. So I thought I would be getting a refresher of how to cite correctly, and commas and paragraphs. I thought it would be a refresher course and it wasn't....At one point in the semester we did actually have to cite movies we had watched in class. When I raised my hand and asked the question, "What citation form do you want us to use?" We were told we could just make it up because that was beyond the students in the class to understand how to cite correctly. [That] was not my expectation at all. I have had to actually go on my own and refresh and get that because I have to be able to cite Chicago Style. I'm a history major. So I have had to actually go on my own time and refresh all that and learn all that. I had a 300-level writing class in the history department last semester and my professor completely ripped my paper apart. I have had to go back and re-teach myself all [of] what I thought I would be learning in 101 and 102.

Clearly, Rhoda's expectations for FYC were not high, but they were very specific and were informed, as were Ann's and Gene's expectations, by her high school English experience. Rhoda's ideal "refresher" course would mean *going back* to the last English class she ever took to re-learn what she had forgotten from it: "commas and paragraphs," "citations," and all the mechanical skills of the usage handbooks. But whereas Gene and Ann were pleasantly surprised, challenged, and engaged by their FYC courses, Rhoda's experience was abysmal. In all cases, the retrograde expectation was false, but Rhoda

felt betrayed by the reality of her English classes, and perhaps part of the reason lies in fact that Rhoda actually *wanted* to “go back” while Gene and Ann were *dreading* the prospect going back. There is little doubt that Rhoda’s class was far from what any good FYC course should be, but the course Rhoda wanted and would have considered ideal would also be a very bad FYC course indeed—at least from the perspective of most compositionists. Although Rhoda does not consider the possibility, her 300-level history professor might have “ripped [her] paper apart” even if she had taken two semesters of usage and mechanics.

Whereas Gene was literally a “role model”—showing his younger classmates by example how to be a successful college student—and Ann played the role of willing participant, a friend to the younger students and older students alike (all the while learning from those older students), Rhoda withdrew from her classmates as much as possible, finding instead a mentor in her instructor. “She understands,” says Rhoda, “that I’m coming from a completely different situation than most of these kids.” Generational encounters were clearly happening in Gene’s and Ann’s classes, but generational warfare was more typical in Rhoda’s classes—that is, until Rhoda stopped attending class altogether with the intention of completing English 102 on an independent study basis, with the blessings of her instructor, of course: “Her and I have a great rapport, and she understands. And she lets me turn in papers so that I don’t have to continue in this imaginary class. So we have had a good relationship.” Rhoda and her instructor have worked out a solution, but from a utilitarian perspective, it hardly seems to benefit the class as a whole. Rhoda benefits in some ways, since she no longer has to put up with her classmates’ shenanigans. The slacking athletes benefit because they must now do

their own group work. The instructor benefits since she does not have to hear Rhoda whine about “these kids.” But as a whole, everybody loses in this highly dysfunctional environment, nobody getting the FYC experience they could have had with a more balanced enrollment: with fewer traditional-age students, fewer athletes, and more adult students, Rhoda’s classes would have been better for all involved. That is the university’s failing—and the failing of the athletic department’s academic advising staff for funneling so many athletes into one section of English 102 (which, in my experience, is a fairly common practice at U of L). In the end, although the university let her down, the instructor could have made the best of a bad situation by holding all students accountable—the younger students and Rhoda alike—for the role they have in making the class a success. Such an approach would likely have made some of the students, including Rhoda, resentful in the short term but would have gone much further toward meeting at least some the goals I am sure the instructor has for her FYC classes.

“Some of the Students Were Actually Rude”

Case Study IV: Mary Hayek

Mary Hayek is a 55 year old U of L staff member who has worked for the university for 34 years and has been taking a class or two per semester for last the several years. Currently a junior at U of L, Mary’s educational goals are at once unconventional and straightforward: “To finally get a degree, no matter what age [laughs] in Liberal Studies.” As someone who has been in the higher education environment for so long, Mary appreciates learning simply for the sake of being educated. She is not pursuing a degree as the means to a professional end, but has an enthusiasm for intellectual

enrichment wherever opportunity presents itself: “I also take in a lot of lectures on campus. I can’t necessarily do it during work hours, unless it’s on a lunch break. But I’ll go to evening lectures, and some of the networks during lunch, during the day, just to get a broader perspective on certain topics.” Mary’s demeanor is thoughtful, patient, and articulate as she describes her degree program: “it’s a step-by-step process, you know—checking off those classes. But not just checking them off, actually *learning* in each of those classes.” As an employee, Mary’s tuition is covered by the university⁵, as is her children’s tuition, both facts which figure prominently in her long-term professional and educational goals: “The way I figure it, I don’t know when I’ll actually be able, financially, to retire, but I know I need to stay here at least until my two sons get their degrees, because of that tuition remission. But in the end if I’m almost finished, but not quite, and I’m ready to retire, I figure I can just finish it up as a senior citizen, full time.”

Broadly speaking, then, U of L is a key sponsor of the Hayek family’s literacy and education, and Mary—whose Lebanese immigrant father earned a high school diploma but whose mother dropped out—is grateful for her immediate supervisor’s encouraging approach to her education: “He’s really supportive of me doing this. And he knows that if it means I have to stay late, he knows I’ll do that. I was here ’till 7:30 last night.” Given Mary’s long experience at U of L, she knows how to navigate the individual personalities of a large bureaucracy, and she knows what “will fly” and what won’t: “Some supervisors are supportive, and others are sticklers. I’ve always managed my classes during my lunch break, or an extended lunch break, or an evening class. This [English 102] is my first four o’clock class, and I’m not sure that all supervisors would

⁵ Prior to the fall 2008 semester, tuition remission was available for employee spouses as well, but the university discontinued the practice, in yet another move which put increased downward pressure on the enrollment of nontraditional students.

approve of that.” Mary’s supervisor is quite high up in the university’s administrative hierarchy, however, and had not only the flexibility but also the authority to approve a three-week leave of absence for her to pursue an internship in Kenya the previous summer, part of a program that also earned her academic credit in her Pan-African Studies minor. “I had to get a lot in order before I left, and do a lot of catching up when I got back,” Mary says, and she makes it very clear that such flexibility is a rare and valuable commodity for U of L staff members.

Mary, the oldest student I interviewed, clearly has different educational goals than Gene, Ann, and Rhoda. Yet the fact that she is a single mother whose educational sponsorship is essentially limited to her employer, the university itself, has led to a more protracted undergraduate career than those other students, and is a powerful demonstration of Sayer’s (2005) argument that what we call “class” actually happens in world through a complex interweaving of “axes of inequality” such as socioeconomic status, gender, race, etc. (p. 73). Mary’s gender, marital status, socioeconomic standing, and lack of a more intimate sponsor such as Gene’s fiancé, Ann’s parents, and Rhoda’s husband, have compounded her disadvantage, and Mary has been afforded precious little of the “distance from necessity” that Bourdieu asserts is crucial not for acquiring the type of cultural capital provided by a university education⁶. Based on the limited information we have, we cannot know whether Mary’s educational goals are a result of her class trajectory or vice-versa. We can recognize, however, that her educational trajectory leaves her in a different place with different options once she graduates than the other

⁶ Axes of inequality line up in particularly devastating ways for single American mothers. The US Census Bureau figures for 2007, before the onset of the Great Recession, reveal that the poverty rate for custodial mothers (27%) is more than twice the rate for custodial fathers (12.9%) (Grall 2009).

students in this chapter, and that her “class”—the powerful coming together of axes of inequality—has severely limited her available options.

Mary’s experience interacting with her almost exclusively younger classmates was similar to Gene’s: certainly far less disastrous than Rhoda’s, but not entirely positive. A thoughtful and engaged student, Mary was sometimes disturbed by what she saw as her younger classmates’ disrespect for their teacher:

[The instructor] would interact with the class a lot, so we had a chance to discuss topics. Some of the students were verbal and some were just *there*—I mean, not real engaged. Sometimes, I thought some of the students were actually rude to [the instructor]. She would be talking and they would be having their own conversations, doing their own thing, or distracted by media, their laptop or whatever.

This inattention to or blatant disregard for what was happening in class frustrated Mary, but as the mother of two teenage sons, she took it in stride, for the most part. Still, peer review was not one of her favorite activities:

We did share one of the papers that we wrote among each other, where you could make editing marks or suggestions. And, uh...it was...it was OK, it wasn’t real in-depth. I mean, there wasn’t a lot of feedback on mine. There were four of us in the group, and they were younger. Occasionally, we would...like, one of the students was really into music like my son likes, so we ended up talking about things like Fender guitars, and certain guitarists. I probably gave more feedback. I’m real detail-oriented. One of the papers was really well written, and I gave positive feedback. I don’t think I made too many suggestions. Another was really rough [laughs], but I made a few suggestions. I think it was a positive experience, but I’m not sure how helpful it was.

While Mary did not get much feedback from them, she certainly did give feedback to her younger classmates, which seems to be a role she was comfortable with, particularly when her age and experiences allowed her to assist her classmates in ways they were unable to do for each other:

One of our papers was on music, so I was familiar with a lot of music from the sixties and seventies. Where, they were not as familiar. I was very surprised, there was one African-American student who really didn't know a whole lot about Motown. She was having trouble coming up with a topic, and I think I'd suggested a topic to her that she liked.

Beyond this rather limited role, however, generational encounters do not seem to have played a significant part of Mary's English 102 class, at least from her perspective, and to me this seems a tremendous waste of potential for the class as a whole. But again, like Gene, Mary was modeling the role of a conscientious, "good student," and her impact as a role model (sharing the field of FYC with her younger classmates) is almost impossible for us, or even Mary, to gauge. Only her younger classmates know, and none of them volunteered to be interviewed for this study.

For Mary, most of the positive interaction in English 102 took place between herself and her instructor:

Oh, I loved her. A lot of the information that was helpful to me, was when I had a chance to ask her questions walking back to work, out of class, together. She even was helpful in that...she brought over some books one day that might help me with one of my topics. I was pretty impressed that she just walked over to my office and did that. I did a paper on Rosa Parks, so it was pertinent to that subject. It gave me a little bit more history, without diving into deeper research—although I did do that....Any kind of feedback that I needed. If I got to a point where I had a question or anything....even though we had class discussions, she gave that extra assistance, and showed an extra interest. She's very knowledgeable about a lot of things, is what I found. She was always helpful in sharing whatever information she might have, or helping students come up with a topic they might be interested in.

Mary's bond with her instructor, like Rhoda's, echoes what the adult student in Kasworm's study said: "They [the faculty] seem to show—not that they are rude in any way towards younger students—they seem to be a little more deferential towards older students. They're adults dealing with adults rather than adults dealing with children" (p.

13). But, if what Mary says about the younger students being “rude” to her instructor by talking amongst themselves or playing with their laptops during class discussion is true, perhaps the fact that instructor shared a tighter bond with Mary is not too surprising. To risk an easy explanation, it sounds like human nature to me.

Mary took English 101 many years ago, “right after high school,” but has delayed taking English 102 for many semesters. As with Rhoda (when she was employed full time), since Mary could usually only enroll in one class per semester, FYC was frankly not high on her priority list. Also like Rhoda, Mary’s main expectation for the class was simple and clear: she wanted to learn proper source documentation. And Mary shared Rhoda’s disappointment and frustration by the course’s lack of focus on “correct” documentation:

One expectation that, I’m not sure it was totally fulfilled—[my instructor] wasn’t a real stickler on it—was documenting your resources. That was kind of sketchy, and I would go back [on my own] and be more specific about the correct way, and you know, what style to use..... It was new to me, something I hadn’t done probably since high school, or a long time ago. I didn’t want to spend *too* much time on it...but I was really...not wanting to plagiarize. That was a big concern: that I not plagiarize.

Eventually, Mary’s instructor gave her an extra copy of a style and usage handbook, which helped allay Mary’s fears about plagiarism and answer some of her questions about documentation. In composition studies, where we have tried so hard to overcome mechanistic beliefs about writing as a discrete and transferable skill, one that—once mastered—can be easily replicated in any context and for any purpose, it is quite easy to dismiss the fears of students such as Rhoda and Mary. We do this at *their* peril, though, not our own, since they face evaluation by the larger academy who are, to quote Lynn Bloom (1996), “death on plagiarism,” and who still believe, despite our discipline’s best

efforts, in the seamless transfer of writing skills between classes and areas of study (p. 659). One solution is to do as Mary's instructor did and give such students our unused handbook desk copies (what English department does not have a pile of these moldering in the corner office?); thanks to the internet, however, the cheaper and easier solution is available free online through such sites as Purdue's Online Writing Center (OWL). Taking a few minutes of class time, or even dedicating one class or portions of several classes, to make our students aware of those resources seems the minimum amount of effort we should put into preparing our students for the documentation demands of the academy, and doing so will allow students who are extremely apprehensive about issues such as plagiarism settle those matters in their minds and move on to what we consider more important issues in the composing process. This appears to have been the case for Mary, whose reflections on what she actually learned in FYC, and has since applied in at least one other course, is quite different than what she had expected to take away from the class:

It was interesting, I'm glad I actually took [English 102] before I took my last sociology class, "Anthropology of Refugees," because all of our exams were take-home essays. She [the anthropology professor] would usually give us about a week...for about two essays, five pages [each]. I think it helped me for that class, and I really liked that, the essay writing, because you had to think about it, and it wasn't just memorizing information and then trying to spit it back out on a written test. So I think it was a good experience for me to take English 102 before that class, which I had no idea would be all essays.

The simple *practice* of writing seems to have helped Mary in her anthropology class because the entire course curriculum was essay-based. And Mary repeatedly emphasized how much she learned about her own writing process in 102, mainly because the class was all about process, particularly the process of writing research-based papers.

Moreover, what Mary learned in 102 and has applied in her anthropology class reflects the best of Freire’s “problem-posing” approach to education, an approach Mary clearly understands and values.

Conclusion: “I Grew Up Without Money”

Intergenerational Class Connections

As the examples of Gene, Ann, Rhoda, and Mary show, one of the most critical elements in the academic success for working-class adult students is a support system that meets their economic needs and thereby creates both a physical and psychological space in which such learners can engage in the process of embodying academic cultural capital. As I discussed in Chapter 2, however, nearly all students at U of L are *working* students, regardless of their age, and the economic demands of their lives are in constant competition with the intellectual demands of school life. Just as Ray E. Marcus found in his 1951 master’s thesis, the hypothesis that adult students attend U of L “in order to make social contacts and recapture the lost dream of ‘Joe College’” is pure fantasy, and historically speaking, only a small percentage of even the traditional-age students at the university have had the “Joe (or Jill) College” experience. Genny Milton, an 18 year-old English 102 student and pre-med biology major, describes what she sees as essentially a class divide at U of L:

I am one of 11 children, and I am the baby girl, too. I grew up without money and so I think people from...[long pause]. For instance, I know lot people who do not have to work and they are in school and they are only taking 12 hours and do not have to work. I think it is a little bit different working 37 hours and having to study and not having free time to go do whatever—be in this sorority and do this and that. I hope that with my application to med school they look at these things, that they see how busy I have always kept myself, on top of keeping my grades up, on top of

being active and well-rounded, versus somebody who is just in a sorority and can do five volunteer hours per week and keep a 3.7 [GPA]. I know a lot of people who have to work for UPS to go to school, and I think it really takes a toll when you are working from 12 to 4 in the morning and then you have to go to class versus people who wake up at 11, go to class, and go home and study. I think that background makes a difference.

“Background” here is a far safer, more comfortable word than “class,” but it is clear that class is what Genny is talking about. It is also clear that she herself is a working-class student, as are the UPS students she describes, and that she is acutely aware of the injustices of our classed society as they play out on the U of L campus, even if she chooses to frame those observations in somewhat “safer” terms. Genny now lives on her own, but had the extraordinary experience (for the 21st century) of being the 11th child born to her family, and although her father attended college, he also fought in Vietnam before working as “a book salesman for 90 percent of his life,” says Genny: “I think his company went bankrupt.”

Genny’s statement above came in response to the following two interview questions:

- Do you see any obstacles to your education? What are those obstacles?
- Do you think these obstacles are unique to students from your background? (Your age? Your gender? Your socioeconomic class? Your race?)

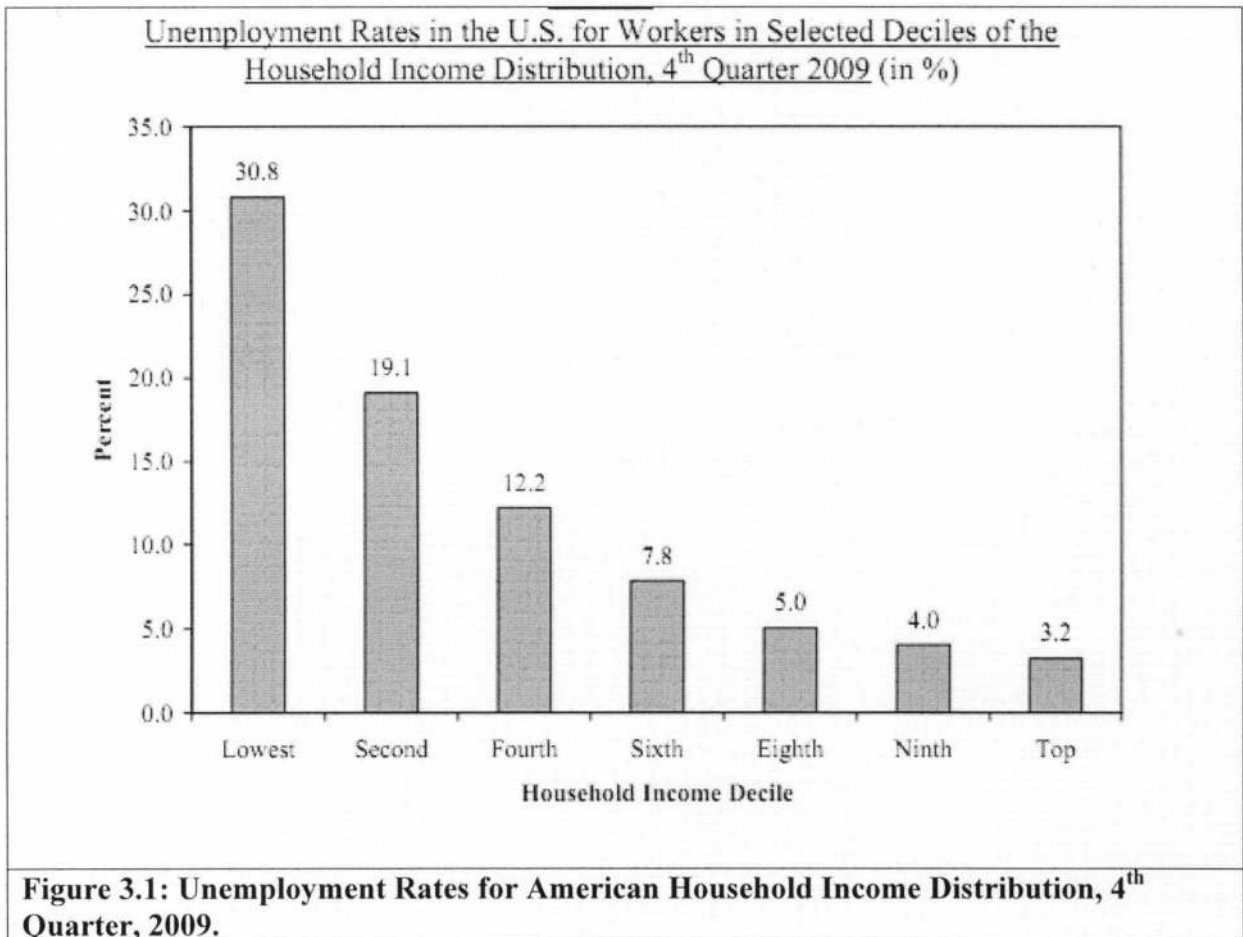
While portions of Genny’s response to these questions are quite unique, the primary obstacle of *funding* their education was ubiquitous for working-class interviewees⁷ of all ages. Here are the responses (to both questions, combined) of three more working-class, traditional-age students:

⁷ Study participants were classified as “working-class” by virtue of their parents’ educational level (for more details of this classification and its complications, see the discussion of class in Chapter 2).

- Finances. My family is not able to aid my tuition, nor aid my room and board if I chose to live in a dorm on campus. However, they provide a place for me to eat and sleep. I do not have a good enough job to provide tuition or room and board, so I rely solely on financial aid. Everybody I know has financial problems, regardless of age, gender, or ethnicity. Socioeconomic class is obviously a different subject matter (the more money available, the less pressure of creditors calling for unpaid bills), but still may have financial problems if personal financial irresponsibility is present. —*19 year-old white male with sales and service experience*
- The only obstacles I can foresee would be money problems. My family isn't rich and it's so hard to get help these days with finances. I don't think this situation is unique to me because everyone seems to be having this similar problem right now. —*19 year-old white female tour guide*
- At [this] point the only obstacle that I see is paying for college. Its already hard to do with this economy and even harder with the rates of college [tuition] steadily going up. I don't think its unique to me or my culture, I think its what ever american is going through. [I'm the] first to go to college and I'm working my way to pay for it, even though I have a great supportive family. Its just so hard for anyone to do right now. —*19 year-old white female with clerical and sales experience*

The first student above is the only one of all my interview respondents to specifically use the word “class” at any time, and this was after being prompted by the question itself to consider socioeconomic class in discussing these obstacles. Significantly, the latter two students include that oft-repeated mantra of the current recession: “everyone seems to be having this similar problem right now,” and “it’s just so hard for anyone to do right now.” It distresses me to hear these working-class teenagers parroting an ideology that is blatantly false, when the economic facts of the matter are brought to light, and I cannot help but wonder if the more mature students in this study, given the chance, could enlighten their younger peers to a deeper truth: it may be tough on everybody, but it is not *equally* tough on everybody. For example, a recent study by Sum, Khatiwada, and Palm (2010), found that in the fourth quarter of 2009, “workers in the lowest income decile faced a Great Depression type unemployment rate of nearly 31% while those in the

second lowest income decile had an unemployment rate slightly below 20%” (p. 8). Meanwhile, “workers in the top two deciles of the income distribution faced unemployment rates of only 4.0 and 3.2 percent respectively, the equivalent of full employment,” which, economically speaking, means anyone in those deciles who actually *wants* a job *has* one (p. 8). Figure 3.1 below further illustrates these findings.



Still, if the working-class students above have some ideological blindness to deal with, they are not alone. From the vantage point of two teenagers whose parents held graduate degrees and thus likely occupied one of the more secure rungs of the economic ladder, platitudes such as the following two responses to the “educational obstacles” questions (again, to both questions) must make perfect sense:

- None. All are opportunities. Obstacles don't really exist. *—19 year-old Hispanic/Latina female with clerical experience*
- I don't really see any obstacles other than the basic ones that every college student faces. The choice to study or party, go to class or sleep in. Those are the only things that might keep me from doing well. These obstacles aren't unique to me at all. Almost every if not every college student faces these same obstacles. *—19 year-old white female with clerical and sales experience*

These middle-class students reveal a different but equally false ideological blindness:

there are no obstacles, only opportunities, and studying or partying is the big “choice” you have to make as an American college student. Just make the right choice and the world is your oyster. I think Gene, Anne, Rhoda, and Mary—as well as Genny and the other working-class teenagers in this chapter—might disagree.

CHAPTER IV

“JUST REALIZING I COULD ADAPT”: INSTRUCTORS OF MIXED-GENERATION FYC COURSES

I) First-Year Composition Instructors at the University of Louisville

In the previous chapter we glimpsed first-year composition at the University of Louisville through the eyes of four working-class adult students. Now, we turn our attention to several U of L instructors, each of whom has experience teaching FYC in mixed-generation classes. Since more FYC sections are offered in fall than in spring semesters at U of L, more instructors are employed each fall to teach those sections. This typically results in more instructors employed as “part-time lecturers” (PTLs) in the fall semesters and fewer in the spring, but even in a typical spring semester PTLs constitute a sizeable percentage of FYC instructors; in spring 2010, when the interviews for this study took place, they taught 35% of the sections offered. As Figure 4.1 illustrates, that semester 14.3% of composition instructors came from the school’s Master’s in English program, 29.8% from its the Doctorate in Rhetoric and Composition program, and 19.5% from the fairly constant, though small, pool of “term faculty,” made up of spousal hires of tenure-line faculty members from across the university, and/or former PTLs who have been rewarded with more permanent employment status. In spring 2010, three FYC sections were taught by tenure-track faculty, including one section of English 102, which is slightly lower than the seven sections taught by tenure track-faculty the previous fall.

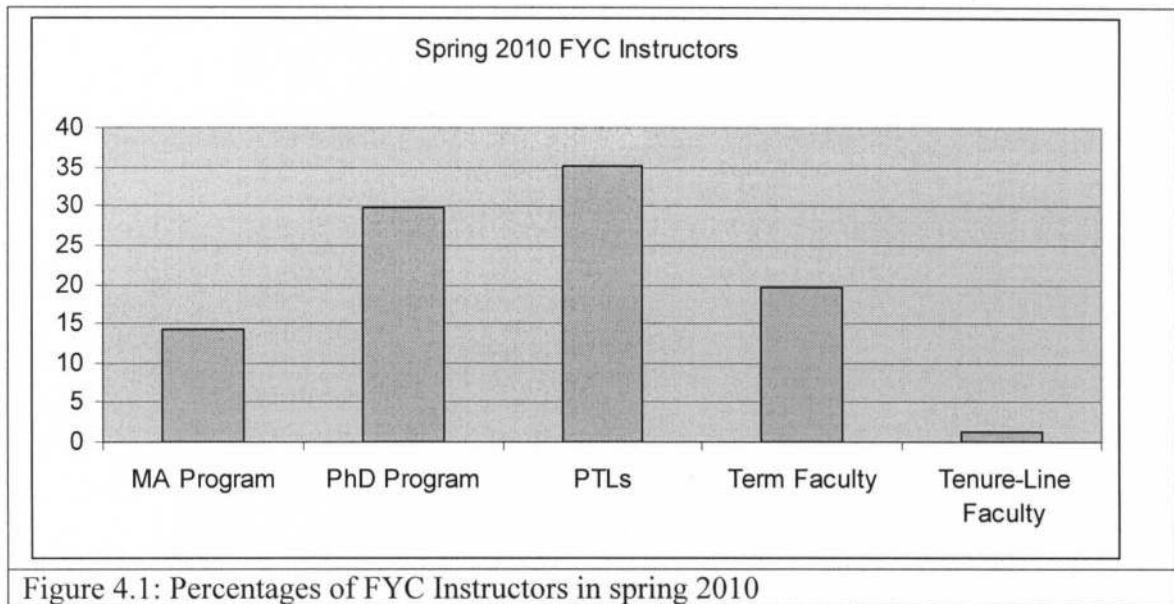


Figure 4.1: Percentages of FYC Instructors in spring 2010

My goal in this chapter is not to critique the English Department’s labor practices, *per se*—although university labor practices *need* critiquing, and badly, as many scholars in our field have argued over the years.¹ Rather, my purpose here is to explore how mixed-generation FYC classes are understood and approached by faculty with varying degrees of experience and expertise in teaching writing at the university level. I conducted a series of interviews with the seven FYC instructors, represented in Table 4.1 below, to hear what they had to say about U of L, its student population, and their FYC pedagogies, particularly when teaching mixed-generation writing classes.

| Name | Title/ Educational Level | Age | Sex | Years teaching FYC | Years teaching at U of L |
|---------|-----------------------------|-----|-----|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Dawn | MA Student | 24 | F | 1 | 1 |
| Floyd | PhD Student | 29 | M | 3 | 2 |
| Eve | PhD Student | 27 | F | 6 | 2 |
| Lonnie | PhD Student | 33 | M | 8 | 4 |
| Daniel | PTL | 36 | M | 6 | 6 |
| Neil | PTL | 34 | M | 9 | 8 |
| Eleanor | Term Faculty | 64 | F | 28 | 28 |

Table 4.1: The Seven FYC Instructors Interviewed for this Study.

¹ For an excellent recent addition to this scholarship, see David Bartholomae’s 2010 article in *Pedagogy*, “Teaching on and off the Tenure Track: Highlights from the ADE Survey of Staffing Patterns in English.”

The resulting data are presented in Part II of this chapter not as individual case studies of these instructors, but rather as a series of conclusions drawn from their experiences teaching nontraditional FYC students. Again following Michael Quinn Patton's (2002) advice, to avoid sweeping generalizations in data analysis, and to allow instructors to retain their own nuanced take on each issue, these conclusions are drawn from significant *points of convergence* within the data, wherein instructor accounts tended to reinforce each other, the student testimonials in the previous chapter, and/or the established scholarship on adult students. Conversely, there are also several *points of divergence*, where instructors had ideas and experiences teaching mixed-generation classes that either conflicted with or significantly differed from those of their colleagues, the student accounts in the previous chapter, and/or established scholarship on adult students. In both cases we see the impact such students have on their FYC courses—and often how mere *presence* of working-class adults requires instructors to reconsider their pedagogical approaches. If pedagogy and andragogy are seen as a continuum, as many adult learning scholars now view them, bringing adult students into the FYC spectrum requires a maturation of our pedagogies, a move that can benefit students of all ages and class backgrounds (Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner 87).

Part III concludes the chapter with a look at several instructors' personal histories and an examination of how their educational backgrounds and professional goals influence what they bring to their classes, just as their students' histories and aspirations shape what matters to them in FYC. Instructors who are long-term Louisville residents share much of their own students' understanding of the city's university, which gives

them a tacit understanding of their students' lives that instructors from the PhD program rarely have time to develop, given their short tenure at U of L.

II) "Dedicated to the Course": The Impact of Working-Class Adults in First Year Composition Courses

Conclusion #1: Adult Students in FYC tend to Perform at High Academic Levels

Much of the data gathered from the students and teachers in this study reinforces previous scholarship on adult students in higher education. For example, Gene's return from the Iraq War and Ann's broken engagement were significant, life-changing transitions in their lives that coincided with their enrollment at U of L, and such moments of transition have long been cited as a prime factor motivating adults to continue their formal educations (Merriam, Caffarella, Baumgartner, pp. 62-63). Likewise, once adult students are enrolled they (generally) have a reputation for being among the hardest-working and highest-performing students in class (Carney-Crompton and Tan, 2002; Kasworm and Pike, 1995; Kevern et al., 1999; Makinen & Pynchyl, 2001). Adult students' reputation for hard work and excellent results is also a major point of convergence in the qualitative data from my study. As the following quotations reveal, most older students take their FYC class more seriously, put in more effort, and often produce better work than their younger classmates:

- They tend to be, on a whole, as a group, very dedicated to the course and very dedicated to their education. And they tend to be really good students. Now every once in a while I'll have problems with some of them, like, missing classes for work-related things. But even if they do, they still turn in their work and it tends to be exemplary stuff. It's obvious that they've devoted a considerable amount of time to it. (Floyd).

- They seemed like they really wanted to learn how to write well. And I used them as models for the younger students in that class because they *didn't* seem to care. Older students...[are] almost completely prepared, as far as homework or writings that need to be turned in. I find that a lot of them write earlier in the process because they have to budget their time, because of children, or whatever. (Daniel)
- They tend to read the assigned text more, as a general rule... I'll see the ones who are outside waiting for class to start...the older students will tend to be reading the text, whatever it is. The younger students will tend to be *not* reading the text, whether they're on their phone, or laptop, or whatever. ... Maybe it's an issue of respect, or even common sense or logic, like, "I spent the money for this book. I'm gonna get my value out of it and actually read it and engage with it more than just buying it because I have to buy it." (Lonnie)
- I would say that most of the nontraditional students tend to see more value in having an education, and I think that probably comes from life experience, and knowing what it's like to be out in the world and not have an education. (Eve)

It is important to remember that these instructors are reflecting on many experiences teaching mixed-generation classes, and while some comments reveal specific students in specific courses, others are more general impressions. Nevertheless, their observations reinforce much of the existing statistical evidence from studies such as Kasworm and Pike (1995), which showed a significant positive correlation between age and Grade Point Averages (GPA), and Carney-Crompton and Tan (2002), which not only showed the same age/GPA correlation, but also less grade variation within the older student population: "The performance within the Traditional group was more varied (grades ranged from 54% to 92%), whereas the performance within the nontraditional group was more consistent (grades ranged from 74% to 90%)" (p. 144-45).

This evidence seems particularly significant in light of the fears students in the previous chapter expressed about returning to school, and in fact supports Erich Fromm's

assertion in *The Sane Society* (1955, quoted in Chapter 1) that college might be more appropriate for adults than it is for children.² The idea of a “returning student,” a phrase so prevalent in education literature and popular usage, is itself problematic, because, as even 18-year old adults quickly learn, no college student is in fact “returning” to any previous educational experience but is moving into a different educational/cultural environment unlike what they experienced in their primary and secondary schools. And this is the distinction between “retrograde” movements and “returns”: in the latter case, the movement is *actually* backward while in the former case, the movement only *appears* to be backward from another’s ideologically situated perspective, when it is in fact a movement into new territory. The myth of the “return” is ideologically powerful, dominating our conceptual model of adult learning because it is based on the dominant model of educational trajectories. As sketched in Chapter 1, Louis Althusser famously demonstrated that we move in linear paths through the educational system, just to the point where we are “ejected” into productive life in the capitalist system, with “a certain amount of ‘know-how’ wrapped in the ruling ideology” (p. 155). Or as Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976) said, “by the time most students terminate schooling, they have been put down enough to convince them of their inability to succeed at the next highest level. Through competition, success, and defeat in the classroom, students are reconciled to their social positions” (p. 155).

It is a wonder that *anyone would want* to “return” to such a system! But life in what Althusser called “production” (today, more likely in the service economy) being

² College educators wary of so-called “dual credit” or “dual enrollment” courses (or even Advanced Placement credit) for high school students might also make this distinction between learning in childhood and learning in adulthood. The context in which any learning takes place—where and with whom a lesson is learned—is part of the lesson itself.

what it is—dreary, humiliating, filled with terrifying uncertainties—millions of American working-class adults are willing to give formal education another chance since it offers hope of improving their lives. How many more might do the same if they understood college as a *path forward* rather than a step back into the “competition, success, and defeat in the classroom” they remember so well from their primary and secondary schools? Advocates for adult learning opportunities must offer a competing narrative to the ideology of “returning students.” I am not necessarily advocating use of the *term* “retrograde,” which already has enough negative connotations attached to it, but I do offer the idea of retrograde motion as a different conceptual model for educators who find Althusser’s model a compelling yet ultimately a paralyzing way of seeing the educational encounter. Althusser described education as it *exists*. The retrograde model describes adult learning as it *might be*, which I see as more in line with hopeful educational theories such as Paulo Friere’s. Hopeful educators do not see the “truth” and “lay the truth bare” before their students, asking them to adapt. They move first to their students’ realities and see the world from their students’ perspectives; the retrograde model affords the students’ truth the dignity it deserves, which seems particularly important when teaching adult human beings who have spent a lifetime *coming* to that truth. As Freire says in his *Pedagogy of Hope* (2004):

The educator needs to know that his or her “here” and “now” are nearly always the educands’ “there” and “then.” Even though the educator’s dream is not only to render his or her “here-and-now” accessible to the educands, but to get beyond their own “here-and-now” with them or to understand and rejoice that educands have gotten beyond their “here” so that this dream is realized, she or he must begin with the educands’ “here” and not with her or his own. At the very least, the educator must keep account of the existence of his or her educands’ “here” and respect it. Let me put it this way: you never get there by starting from there, you get there starting from some here. This means, ultimately, that the educator

must not be ignorant of, underestimate, or reject any of the “knowledge of living experience” with which educands come to school (p. 58).

Adult students are awash in a culture that belittles their intellect because of a perceived lack of educational achievement, but over and over in my study, students and instructors speak of how much the knowledge nontraditional students bring to class enriches the FYC experience for everyone involved. If educators of adult learners could do a better job articulating this fact to the public, we could combat the many common misperceptions about adult learning that foster the anxiety students in this study expressed about “going back” to school. We might even help counteract the type of public misperceptions about “adult ed” that lead to cruel *Saturday Night Live* parodies such as the “Night School Musical” skit discussed in Chapter 1.

**Conclusion #2: Adult Student Relationships with their Younger Classmates are
Frequently More Problematic than Complementary**

When I began this project I wanted the data I gathered to prove that adult students made valuable contributions to FYC classes, and I must admit Neil’s account below is exactly the type of evidence I not only *expected* to find, but the news I looked forward to trumpeting loudly to my colleagues at U of L and to the wider field of composition:

I love them. I think those are my best classes. When I first walk in and I see 20-25 new faces staring back at me, the more diversity there is, just in terms of not only culture and race, but age, I like it. The more I see different viewpoints...people who are 18 have one perspective versus people who are 65 who have lived, say, outside of the school environment. Just completely different perspectives. And I think they can really learn, you know, teach one another. I see that in my discussions.

Plato’s [allegory of the] cave is always a staple I have in my class. That’s usually how I’ll start the semester, and the responses I get from nontraditionals vary greatly from the ones I get from my more traditional students. And you can see that, not only are they learning from the

reading they're also learning from the responses and interpretations of the reading by [and] from one another. Some of the leaders in those class discussions were some of the nontraditional. And although they butted heads a little bit [with the younger students], it was mostly learning from each other just based upon the experiences they had gone through resulting in their own interpretation of that reading.

This is certainly a quote worth repeating to those who ask about the benefits of mixed-generation writing classes. Neil's is the type of success narrative most composition teachers, weary after returning yet another stack commented drafts, fantasize about, and truth be told we all have such narratives to tell about that one special class or student or group of students. Having known Neil for six years and seeing him work with his students countless times in the office, I admire his skill in developing a rapport with his diverse groups of students, and his level of optimism is probably a prerequisite for any instructor who has taught as a PTL for nine years. However, as most experienced FYC instructors such as Neil know, we confront real challenges when trying to create the kind of classroom environment he describes, and we should not allow our necessary optimism or idealism to keep us from confronting the problems we face in teaching mixed-generation FYC classes. As Stephen Brookfield (2005) reminds us about the sometimes Pollyannaish attitude with which adult educators are tempted to view their practices, there is a "learning as joyful self-actualization ethos that sometimes pervades adult and continuing education programs today" (p. 111). Evidence in my study suggest that if we resist this temptation and actually recognize the *difficulties* of teaching mixed-generation FYC classes, confronting those difficulties will improve our practices and mature our approach to teaching FYC in many contexts, not just in mixed-age classes. The adult students in my study took FYC very seriously, knowing that learning is indeed hard work, and, as Gene's and Rhoda's stories in Chapter 3 remind us, such students expect

younger students to be held equally accountable for class assignments and obligations to fellow classmates. If we do not meet their expectations, we risk having our older students throw up their hands and essentially give up on the course, as Rhoda did.

Integrating older and younger students into daily classroom proceedings is a challenging task for composition instructors at U of L. Our program is not an anomaly in this regard, however, as Kasworm and Pike and Quinnan's scholarship both report generational tensions in mixed-age classrooms. Likewise, each of the older students in the previous chapter had difficulties with, and in some cases stinging critiques of, their younger classmates. So, data from both students and instructors converge to a significant degree on this point: there are real tensions between older and younger students in FYC, and as Eve's account below reveals, the age difference itself is one obvious source of this tension:

It seems like some of the younger students would get sort of frustrated with some of the older students. They would feel like [older students] were sort of condescending to them. And I think there's a way in which, sometimes, some of the nontraditional students tend to take on almost a parental role in their relationship with some of the younger students.

These are obviously not the types of generational encounters most conducive to learning, but such tensions may be inevitable when older and younger students are basically ascribed the same status, as peers in a general education classroom, even while the older students have acquired experience and the attendant wisdom beyond the years of their younger classmates. Here is Dawn's account of her older students' interactions with their classmates:

Generally, as far as socializing, I'd say they [the older students] just *don't*. They're kind of like, to themselves. Last semester when I had conferences, I would say, "remember when you were working in group work with so-and-so?" And they were like, "who is that? I don't know

that person's name" [laughs]. And so it's like, basically... "why do I care anything about my classmates? I'm doing my own thing."

But while Dawn's account resonates with the type of resentment Rhoda had for her classmates, instructors more often discussed a sadder, lonelier type of dissonance between their older and younger students. Floyd, for example, recounted a story from his current English 101 class in which his lone nontraditional student's attempts to connect with his classmates and join class discussions:

The 101 students that I have, they're concerned about going out to parties and drinking, their boyfriend and girlfriend, and what they're gonna do after school, and that sort of thing. The nontraditional student has a family, and he's got other concerns, that we [instructors] describe as 'more serious,' in quotation marks. And so, his interaction is interesting. In class, when we have class discussion, he does feel a little separated from the rest of the group. And I don't know what to do about that. I think it's kind of the nature of the beast a little bit. That's just how it works.

He has really smart and interesting things to say. Yeah, he contributes to class discussion. It's just that...there's just like this place where he sits, and it always feels like he's separated from the other class members a little bit. Even though we do group stuff, he interacts and participates, you can feel...you can almost feel the separation there, I guess. It's not tangible; I can't give you a better description of it.

Efforts to reach out to their fellow students can be risky for nontraditionals, though, and if those overtures are rebuffed, can lead to the older students simply shrugging and giving up—not just on the effort to socialize, but on the class altogether, as Eve's unhappy experience below suggests:

I'm not sure if I've ever had more than one older/nontraditional student in a class. Last semester I had a student who was 68 years old. He seemed like he wanted to connect with the students in the class but couldn't. And he eventually dropped the class, three or four weeks [into the semester]. I was really sad. He had written...in a paper that he was talking to somebody and they asked him, "what are *you* getting an education for?" and he said, "To have it." And I thought that was such a great answer. I thought that was such a cool thing to say, so it was really sad when he disappeared from the class.

But then, some of the students told me that they had run into him, because there was a group paper that they were working on he was part of their group...and he told them that he wasn't in the class anymore, and they were really sad about it.

Eve's sadness was apparent as she told her former student's story, and it was undoubtedly one of the most distressing stories I encountered in this study. Of course, Eve did not know for sure why this student dropped her class, but given the circumstances she described, her student's isolation in a class full of youngsters was quite possibly a contributing factor. Given the high attrition rate at U of L discussed in Chapter 2, it is clear that many similar "disappearances" happen each semester, and the dwindling number of older students in the general student population is quite possibly creating a vicious cycle, a problem that feeds on itself and accelerates attrition among older students such as Eve's as they find fewer and fewer nontraditionals on campus with whom they can identify.

Daniel, Neil, and Eleanor, who have been teaching FYC at U of L for six, nine, and twenty-eight years, respectively, have noticed the same trend that I noted from my own experience in Chapter 1—i.e. a dwindling number of nontraditional students in FYC since 2004. Daniel noticed a difference not only between the number of older students in his previous classes, but a decline in their participation as their numbers have declined:

I think the first class I taught had a bigger mix of older students and younger students, and that was an evening class, spring of 2004. They seemed to get along well, and the older students came back [next semester for English 102].

Some other classes I've had, where there's been one or two older students, I felt like the older students tried to remain invisible. They don't want to rock any boats or express their opinions on anything. Even when a young student might totally be getting off track and half of the class realizes it and you want to say something but don't, and you're hoping that they [the older students] want to say something—but they don't.

Fortunately, as we will see below, Daniel has some innovative ways of encouraging such students to participate more, but are his observations generalizable to the wider population of adult students at U of L? Perhaps. The quantitative data indicating an increased perceived sense of commonality among students in classes with all traditional-age students (see Figure 2.2 in Chapter 2) and the testimonies of alienation from their younger peers that nontraditional students offered in Chapter 3—especially Rhoda’s, and to a lesser extent, Mary’s stories—reinforce Daniel’s observations. And while Anne’ and Gene’s stories reveal a more communal classroom learning environment, they were in classes with at least one other nontraditional-age student. Additionally, both Anne (23) and Gene (33) were slightly younger than Rhoda (35) and Mary (55) when they took FYC.

Previous scholarship on individuals who are the only member (or one of very few members) of a particular demographic group in an occupational or academic setting has examined issues such as women in primarily male workplaces (Kantor 1977; Macke 1981), African Americans in primarily White workplaces (Jackson et al 1995), and African American students in primarily White high school classrooms (O’Connor 2002). Much of this research is concerned with the idea of “tokenism,” or situations in which minority participants are either selected for participation because of their minority status (and to satisfy equal employment laws) or looked to as “representatives” of their particular minority group and expected to either act according to established stereotypes for that group or defy those expectations and prove the stereotype wrong (O’Connor, p. 245). The Black high school students in O’Connor’s study, for example, were often lone

representatives of minority students in high academic “track” courses. Tracking in O’Connor’s study essentially re-segregated integrated schools along racial lines:

As the only Black student in these classrooms these students were under tremendous pressure. All of them made reference to their racial isolation in these classrooms and the extent to which their connections to the other Black students in the school were disrupted, strained, or complicated by these institutionalized divides. They reported on their anxiety and resentment of having been positioned such that they were expected to speak for all Black Americans. They lamented not being affirmed as Black people in these classrooms and indicated that it was more difficult to develop in-class peer relations that would further support their academic excellence. Moreover, they were profoundly troubled by the burden of having to personally prove White people wrong or at least not prove them right in light of any negative impressions Whites might hold regarding Black talent and ability (p. 244-45).

The nontraditional students in my study did not experience anything close to the type of alienation O’Connor’s Black students experienced. It is unlikely, indeed almost absurd to suggest, given the data I have, that older students in FYC are seen as “tokens” of “all old people,” or feel pressured to “represent” mature adulthood (whatever that might mean) to a younger group of students.

Having said this, we might still learn from the experiences of African American students in predominately White classrooms and apply some of those lessons to adult students who happen to be in the extreme numerical minority in their classrooms. For example, the “institutional divide” O’Connor’s students faced by being separated from other Blacks in the school might be similar to the divide created by general education classes for nontraditional students at U of L, who constituted 46% of the total undergraduate population in 2009, yet only 10% of the population in the FYC classes at large. I say, “at large” to distinguish between all FYC classes and the evening sections which, as we saw in Chapter 2, had significantly larger percentages of nontraditional

students than morning and afternoon sections. Is there a threshold percentage or a “magic number” of nontraditional students that would make a FYC class better for older and younger students alike? Maybe future research could answer this question, but my study cannot. Should academic advisors suggest to nontraditional students that they take evening FYC sections so they can be in class with other older students? It makes me uncomfortable to say “yes” as a general rule, but if I had a friend close to my own age enrolling in FYC at U of L, I would suggest that he/she take an evening class, and I would cite the examples from this study as reasons why.

Those older students who do enroll, and remain enrolled, in FYC sections with predominantly younger classmates seem to participate less in class discussions, a phenomenon that is particularly frustrating for instructors who know those students have something worthwhile to contribute but instead choose not to. Often, as Lonnie explains below, older students will simply wait until after class to talk privately with the teacher:

Older students tend to be quieter, I’ve noticed. Just because I think they feel overwhelmed or outnumbered, maybe. They’re more inclined to say, “Well, I’ll only ask a question if I don’t get it.” And, they’re more likely to do that [than the younger students], honestly.... My older students will be more likely to raise their hand and say, “I didn’t understand this about the assignment sheet, because you said *this*, but you also said *that* later on.” They have no difficulty, for the most part saying, “I didn’t understand,” whereas the younger students tend to avoid that phrase.

But if it’s something that they just want to contribute to class discussion, a lot of times they’ll wait until class is over and come to talk to me and say, “You know, that reminds me of this story that I went through,” or “this thing that happened with my kids this one time”....or “I had this job ten years ago....” They’ll bring it up afterwards. It’s like we can discuss it one on one, but if it’s not a question that they need answered, they won’t contribute in class.

Most composition teachers have experienced something similar to Lonnie’s frustration, here, asking students after class or in the margins of their paper, “Why didn’t you

mention this in our class discussion?” But if Lonnie’s observation is accurate, if older students are more likely to ask for clarification and direction, then they are certainly performing an important role for the wider class by being straightforward about their confusion. If something in the teacher’s instructions appeared contradictory to the older student, the same issue likely appeared contradictory to others in the class, and in this case the older student, like Gene and Ann in the previous chapter, is in fact acting as a type of intermediary between the instructor and the other students. The nontraditional student is *modeling the role* of the clarifier, essentially enacting for his or her younger classmates how they should proceed in the future when they are confused in this or another class. If this is in fact the case, Dawn’s complaint below about having to spend extra time explaining assignments to her nontraditional students seems to (at least partially) miss the point:

Oftentimes, they [older students] just have problems with basic assignments...that people who’ve been in school for twelve or so years, and they’re still working through school, that they’re used to. For her, it’s like everything is odd and unfamiliar. And I feel like I have to do a lot of extra explanation.

Dawn’s younger students are likely more accustomed to, and thus have fewer questions about, the more recent composition pedagogies she is apt to employ (see, for example, the discussion of KERA portfolios below). But it may also be true that Dawn’s younger students are benefiting from this “extra explanation,” but they were in fact reluctant to request it. In fact, it is possible that Dawn’s relative lack of experience might lead her to believe that explaining something more than once is “extra,” when, as most teachers know, multiple explanations of what may seem “basic” from our own perspective are actually part of a teacher’s job description. These are speculations, I admit, but in any

event, this appears to me to be a *good* problem for a younger teacher to run into early in his or her teaching career rather than a situation to be avoided. By encountering such issues, discussing them with her peers—particularly other teachers with more experience—Dawn is learning her profession “on the job,” as it were, which is exactly the type of experience that makes for excellent, thoughtful teachers such as Lonnie. Such learning is also, as I will discuss in Part III of this chapter, the most extensive and important phase of a young composition teacher’s training.

**Conclusion #3: Adult students tend to have more complex relationships with their
FYC instructors than their younger classmates do**

Susan Miller’s “The Feminization of Composition” (1991) created a great stir in composition theory by positing the idea of the writing teacher as a “mother figure,” with all the negative—but sometimes subversively positive—connotations such a metaphor entails in the patriarchal domain of academia. But having adult students in FYC classes can turn even a controversial-but-established trope such as this on its head: “I have one student this semester who’s very mother-like toward me in a very weird way. That kind of like, you know, ‘You should quit smoking, and you should try to eat more healthy.’ It’s just that motherly instinct, you know? I’m sort of like, ‘yes, but you’re my *student*. You need to focus on *this*...’” Lonnie’s student clearly made him uncomfortable with her “mothering” ways, moving him out of his predictable and well-worn teacher identity and creating in him an immediate urge to re-enforce that identity by emphasizing the hierarchical student-teacher relationship. But by moving Lonnie out of his “comfort zone” in the first place, this older female student seems to have created exactly the type

of situation that Miller might describe as “irrefutably counterhegemonic” because she has made visible one of the inherent contradictions in the dominant ideology of education: teachers are supposed to be the older ones, just as parents are older than their children. Lonnie’s student is performing, in Miller’s words, “active resistance to the ‘traditions’ that should have become cultural embarrassments long ago” (p. 533), and she has the opportunity to do so because, as Miller hoped for two decades ago, Lonnie’s mixed-generation composition class has been “redefined as a site culturally designated to teach *all* students, not an elite group” (p. 532).

The mere presence of older students in our FYC classes challenges our roles and expectations, our very identities, and it often happens as a “shock” for young graduate assistants, early in their teaching careers, who may (or may not) have a couple of semesters under their belts teaching 18-19-year-olds—enough time to start getting comfortable leaning on the lectern. Lonnie articulates this experience from his perspective:

It was really awkward, like probably anything else related to teaching, when I first started, because I was, like, 22, 23. Even my standard students were 18, so you know, five years didn’t make that much difference. But it really hit home once, in my second year, where I had a student who was in the Korean War, which made him 60 or thereabouts, at that time. And, you know, [he was] just calling me “sir” out of habit because I was the teacher. And I was like, “OK, you *killed* people in another country before my dad was born, so...I should probably be calling you sir, shouldn’t I?”

It always made me feel that much more like an amateur, I guess. The assumption was that, “you’ve lived so much more life than I have....” I’ve always been a more popular teacher with younger students. Things I do in class, I’ll swear, tell off-color jokes, odd stories...all the online stuff that I look at, I’ll bring up. You know, if we’re having a discussion about Facebook or MySpace or Snopes Urban Legend web page, and somebody who’s in their 50s, who’s children are in college....that “click” isn’t automatically there, you know? That off-color joke I tell is just sort of

inappropriate instead of just funny, because here's a teacher swearing. So, it always made me feel more like a kid, I guess.

And it led me to realize that I could adapt [my pedagogy]. When I did start [teaching], I was five years older than them and I was looking for any reason for them to *like* me. You know, "I'll get them to like me first, and that will lead to them listening to me, and then we can get a discussion going." You know, trying to be their friend first. The more chances I had to see different kinds of students—through the most obvious lens, you know the ones that look like their in their 40s versus the ones who looked like they were teenagers—made me realize that because I have different students, I can change the way I present myself to different students. Even writing comments on their papers, you know...not necessarily that I'll be more formal with the older students and less formal with the younger ones—although that was part of it—but just realizing that I could adapt. It wasn't just me being "the teacher" but realizing that I could take on all these different roles.

I don't think it's enough to describe them [older students] and say, "they're all like that." Which, maybe, in and of itself makes me think more about how much I stereotype traditional, 18, 19-year old freshmen. You know, to say that they all go out and get drunk every weekend, they hate studying, they want to party and they're all out trying to hook up with as many people as possible. That's not necessarily true, either.

We can see parallels to Lonnie's "mothering" student in his reflection on the Korean War veteran, revealing that those "irrefutably counterhegemonic" moments began early in his teaching career and continue even today, requiring a continual reenvisioning of his role in the classroom. Adaptive, reflexive pedagogies such as this, those capable of responding to students on an individual basis, are the product of teaching experiences enriched by a multiplicity of students, and the more homogeneous our classrooms become, the less likely we are to be rewarded with the kind of thoughtful teachers Lonnie represents. And in this example, the benefit of mixed-generation writing classes is paid directly to the field of composition, quite apart from the benefits incurred by older and/or working-class students themselves. Since our interview, Lonnie has earned his PhD in Rhetoric and Composition, has published in the field, and secured postdoctoral employment at a major state university. The age diversity in his FYC classes now significantly informs his

pedagogy and cannot help but inform his future scholarship (in ways that are admittedly difficult to predict at this point). Yet if the political and administrative pressures discussed in Chapter 1 to continue the homogenization of FYC courses at U of L along age and class lines, our program will have surrendered a promising resource for educating future doctoral students in the field.

Both quantitative and qualitative evidence converge decisively in this study to illustrate the high level of interaction between instructors and nontraditional students, a relationship also widely recognized in adult learning scholarship (Kasworm and Pike, 1995). Of course, saying that older students tend to have *more interaction* with their instructors does not mean that all such relationships are *positive*, and a significant portion of adult learning scholarship also deals with instructor-student conflict. Quinnan's study (1997) found adult students frequently complaining "that faculty appear to employ different standards in evaluation the academic performance of differently aged learners" (p. 77). Other students in Quinnan's study complained about "arbitrary expectations" when it comes to issues such as absences and deadlines: "I also have experienced that professors tend not to be lenient when it comes to homework. Some are not keen to the idea that homework may not get done due to a child being ill. It's tough being a parent and a student" (p. 77). And as Lonnie's experience reveals, younger instructors in particular may struggle more with nontraditional students than their older, more experienced colleagues, and those different levels of teaching experience mark a significant point of divergence among instructors interviewed for this study. Dawn, a 24 year-old female in her second year of the Master's in English program, discusses here some of her difficulties with two older, female students:

This semester, both [older] students are female and I sort of, I don't know if it's a gender thing—well, I don't have enough information to say that. But, I feel like having female nontraditional students, they've sort of made their presence more *known* [laughs], like they wanted me to know that, which I thought was interesting. Particularly one student, she's an older, African-American woman of about 50, so that's *quite* a difference [laughs]. And that's been really interesting, working with her.

She seems to think that she can come whenever she wants and be as late as she wants. And one day, she came in about 15 minutes late, and they were doing some sort of group activity, and she came up to me and said, "I gotta leave 20 minutes early today" [laughs]. She very much is like, "*Yeah*, you're the age of my child!" And that's kind of frustrating to me.

Most composition teachers, recalling their first few semesters in the classroom, can sympathize with Dawn. As a former Assistant Director of Composition at U of L, I have worked frequently with beginning teachers and know that—despite the mentoring and training we provide in the form of a seminar on the “theory and practice of teaching composition,” the week-long, pre-semester series of workshops, and the ongoing mentoring over the course of new teachers’ first year—new composition teachers in our program face an uphill battle trying to “figure it out as they go along.” As Margaret J. Marshall said in her 1997 *CCCC* essay, “Marking the Unmarked: Reading Student Diversity and Preparing Teachers”:

Anyone who has taught such [an introductory] seminar or worked closely with beginning teachers knows that a single seminar is simply insufficient to “cover” the complex problems of designing a course, representing it in a syllabus, leading class discussions, commenting on student papers, prompting meaningful revision, supporting language development, understanding the institutional and historical contexts of writing instruction, seeing the connections between reading and writing, learning the contours of the field of composition studies, or grasping the controversies that inform particular practices in the teaching of literacy. (pp. 244-45)

Bluntly put, most master's programs in English, particularly programs such as U of L's that emphasize literature, prepare composition teachers according to the “trial by fire”

plan. Moreover, Dawn is clearly learning through experience, here, what many young women beginning their teaching careers find out eventually: young female teachers often have to work much harder to gain the classroom authority than many of their male peers gain simply by donning a shirt and tie. Education scholarship has shown that female teachers have higher stress loads than male teachers, often stemming from student behavior problems and particularly from behavior issues with adolescent male students (see, for example, Klason and Ming, 2010). I found no existing research on younger female instructors teaching nontraditional-age students, but Dawn's story might indicate this is an important area for future scholars to investigate.

Having said all this, Dawn's response to her older students is still troubling. Their difficulties could be due to gender conflicts, as Dawn speculates, but as she says: we "don't have enough information to say that." The information we *do* have on Dawn's limited teaching experience and youth suggest that these are both almost certainly factors contributing to her difficulties. Certainly there is little defense for Dawn's student coming late and leaving early without any explanation, but such behavior is atypical of the nontraditional students in this study and others, leading me to speculate that there were likely communication barriers already in place between teacher and student before this incident occurred. For whatever reason—personal animosity, gender, age, race—Dawn and her student were not communicating about the reasons behind the tardiness problem with the facility that Lonnie, for example, was able to communicate with his older students:

They're less likely to waste my time. Even points like sending an email saying why they won't be in class, like, "I'm sorry I won't be in class because I have to take my daughter to the emergency room," or whatever.

They won't even bother with that. They'll just explain when they get back.

But the flip side of that is true, too. I'll get some that will send me the email saying, 'I have to do this. I have to pick up my kid,' or 'my ex-husband is gonna be out of town and won't be able to take my daughter this weekend, so I have to take her. So, what will I miss?' So, there more likely to offer more back-story.

In Lonnie's explanation, there are multiple points where the communication process could break down. If the students who failed to send emails had not followed up by explaining the absence in person, or if Lonnie had *expected* that email and not been receptive to the students' follow-up explanation, barriers to future teacher-student communication could have formed, building misunderstanding and hence mistrust or animosity. The fact that Lonnie had been teaching for eight years and Dawn for only one- and one-half semesters looms large in any explanation of their different experiences. Again, the relationships between adult students and their instructors are complex. The difference here lies in Lonnie's experience and his facility in dealing with students in a nuanced and individualized way.

Likewise, Daniel employs some individualized strategies to evoke classroom involvement from his older students:

[I have] said things like, "Bob is a home builder. He works as a contractor. Why would you [Bob] need this class in order to do that?" And I'd have him explain it, and stuff like that. Or one guy was a workshop teacher at a [vocational] high school...woodworking and all that sort of stuff. And he was coming back to get his degree 'cause he never got his undergrad. And so I would ask him, "why do you feel you need to come back? What do you think this class can do for you?"

And I always try to pull that out of them, I guess, a little bit. Mostly because I want them to talk in class and not be shut down. But, you know, it still happens. You can only invite them for so long to get in the conversation.

There are potential problems with this approach, particularly the risk of embarrassing older students in class by singling them out and calling attention to the fact that they are, in fact, older. It is not too hard to envision this approach developing into a significant teacher/student conflict. But the rewards could outweigh those risks if done with care. Simply discussing the matter with the student before class and getting the builder or woodworker's OK would provide those students with an opportunity to think through the question with the instructor and come up with a response, and also spare those students unneeded embarrassment if they did not wish to respond. Moreover, it would allow them to make a connection between their education and their professional lives, and such connections are vitally important to many (though perhaps not all) adult learners. In 1984, adult learning pioneer Malcolm Knowles added a sixth "assumption about adult learners" to his androgogical model: "adults need to know why they need to learn something" (Merriam, Cafarella, Baumgartner, pp. 84). Thus, Daniel's approach could serve the dual purpose of helping such students articulate this connection while also making a valuable contribution to class discussion.

III) The Long Memory: Resident and "Visiting" FYC Instructors

These tidy little decade packages are only a media convenience used to trivialize and dismiss important ideas and events....The long memory is the most radical idea in the country. It is the loss of that long memory which deprives our people of that connective flow of thoughts and events that clarifies our vision, not of where we're going but where we want to go.

—U. Utah Phillips, American Folksinger

All instructors interviewed for this study make important contributions to U of L's Composition Program. Moreover, as we have already seen in Part II of this chapter, the

very presence of adult students in FYC classrooms works to both enhance instructor pedagogy and contribute to the molding of stronger teachers, regardless of their other individual strengths. Not surprisingly, though, for such a large and diverse program, each composition instructor at U of L brings something unique to her or his classroom, which makes it difficult to generalize about the program's areas of strength. Still, the data converge to a significant degree on two points: 1) graduate students, particularly PhD students, are exceptionally strong in their disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge, while 2) part time lecturers (PTLs) and term faculty have a stronger sense of U of L's institutional history and mission. Neither claim is too surprising, of course, and *all* instructors I interviewed leverage both of these areas of knowledge to strengthen their writing classrooms. As it stands today, however, while the composition program's commitment to our discipline's ever richer theoretical and knowledge base has never been stronger, the ties to our home university's historical mission are growing more tenuous, at least among rank and file FYC instructors. While such a detachment is probably inevitable today for any major university department with a terminal degree program, there are still negative consequences for the university, its composition program, and FYC students—not to mention for the instructors.

I asked every instructor interviewed for this study what they knew about the history of the University of Louisville, and the responses were widely varied, but none could rival Eleanor's in breadth, depth, and detail:

It was originally a reformatory; the location we're at right now was a home for wayward boys....The Playhouse, the little white structure which used to stand where the library is, was originally a chapel—you know, a rectangle and steeple—and then at some point they added wings [in the chapel] for the little Black wayward boys. Then it became...the start date of our university in 1798 marked the beginning of an extension in

Kentucky of Jefferson's University of Virginia, and there [have] been medical school pieces of U of L since [then]....Well, you know the idea.... I'm sorry, this is much more than you want....

Here at the Belknap campus, it was a private school until it joined the state system in the early 70's, I believe, so there was a part in the 50's when it [the student population] would have been all White. Shortly after it joined the state system, higher education across the country was sort of big into open admissions. Open door. If you had a high school diploma from the State of Kentucky, you could come to the University of Louisville. It didn't matter what your ACT score was, and there was a huge swelling of enrollment at that point, and new buildings, and basic writing programs, and basic math programs to assist the students who were unprepared. And because this is Kentucky, a lot of first-generation college students, and a fair number of returning, non-traditional students: the average student age was 28 for a long time.

Then the whole push to become—what?—a research university, to up the ante, to become suspicious of helping to prepare under-prepared students so that in the 90s we had the whole pathways project and the state legislature that required that developmental courses be moved out of four-year colleges into two-year colleges. And now, actually, were getting called on by the state to account for how we assist our under-prepared students...so, what goes around comes around.

Here, in three concise paragraphs, is a summary of a good portion of my first chapter, and when I interviewed Eleanor I wished I had talked to her before beginning to research U of L's history on my own. Eleanor is not a native Louisvillian, but "came here as a faculty wife in 1972," and has taught FYC at U of L ever since, so her own history and the institutional history over the past 28 years are intimately entwined. At times her account above slipped into the practiced, cadenced recitation of a veteran teacher who seems to have delivered portions of this talk many times to her students.

Neil and Daniel did not provide histories as detailed as Eleanor's, yet both PTLs are native Louisville residents and had a deep sense of the university's place in the city and the larger region. Here are Neil's impressions of U of L:

When I was younger, the main thing I remember was the athletic program. That's huge here in Louisville; it's huge around the state. In terms of academics, it was never...as harsh as this is going to sound, it was always like U of L was seen, from my perspective, as like a lower-tier college.

It wasn't until I was an undergraduate, when I started to look at graduate programs that I started to learn what a research university really is, how much better of a school it was than I had previously thought. It [Neil's education] was very Catholic school from first grade all the way up to Bellarmine, which is very steeped in the Catholic tradition. So it was very sheltered in terms of different types of schools, colleges, universities.

As “harsh” as Neil sounds, his early impressions are exactly how many native Louisvillians view U of L, particularly those who have gone to and/or sent their children to the private Catholic school system that Neil experienced. As an instructor and former/current graduate student at U of L, however, Neil has learned much about the school (and its evolving history) and can put that new understanding/ appreciation for the U of L into the context of his former disregard/disdain for it. Moreover, he knows that his students also share his earlier impressions of the university—and in my own experience, some do—allowing him to understand their perspective from the first day of class.

Likewise, Daniel describes his understanding of U of L's identity as a school with a sometimes unhealthy dose of an inferiority complex to the state's other major school, the University of Kentucky (UK):

I've always thought of U of L as an urban university, not as like the “flagship of the state”-type of university. Not like Ohio State or the University of Texas. You just feel like those schools [are] going to attract everybody from around the state. I've always felt like Louisville was trying to *project* that image but knew that it was still an urban university in a decent size city, [and] that it had to service most of the people around it *in* the city, while trying to grow.... I think everybody just realizes that, while people from all walks of life around the state can come to U of L, it's still primarily going to be almost a commuter school. Whereas the

state school has a farther-reaching attitude, not necessarily just centered in Lexington. Like, people come to Lexington for school.

I went to high school here in Louisville, and my friends that were going to UK, they didn't know anything about Lexington, *per se*; they were just going to UK and Lexington *was* UK. That's it. The whole city of Lexington *was* UK. But I don't think people say, you know, "going to U of L" is "going to Louisville, the city," or that sort of thing. There's still a separation, but Lexington *is* UK.

Daniel had some difficulty articulating his "always felt like"- knowledge of U of L, and at one point in the discussion commented, "this is gonna sound really dumb on the interview." But for those who have lived in the city for any length of time, Daniel's description is anything but "dumb." His tacit, lived knowledge of the city and its university leads him to preface claims about U of L being "almost a commuter school" with the phrase, "I think everybody just realizes that"—acknowledging that while non-native students might view this as a drawback of attending U of L, native Louisvillians and Kentuckians in general see "commuter school" simply as a defining characteristic of the university and not (necessarily) a shortcoming.

Both Daniel and Neil sound something like early Christian "apologists," but rather than defending their faith to an outsider (in this case me, the interviewer, probing with questions that might have made them slightly uncomfortable), they are defending the institutional history of U of L, both explaining and justifying the school's historical role in the city and region (Kennedy, 1999, p. 153). And of course, while both Daniel and Neil earned their bachelors' degrees elsewhere, both took their masters' degrees at U of L, and they do have some personal investment in the school's reputation.

All three of these instructors have "long memories" of the University of Louisville, and their knowledge of its historical/regional context brings to the classroom

something intangible that does not translate directly into a pedagogical approach, but no amount of pedagogical or theoretical knowledge can duplicate their tacit understanding, their “wisdom,” for lack of a better term, of the local perspective. It can be “learned,” in a way, but it must be *lived* to learn it, as they have done. In Bourdieu’s (1990) terminology, local instructors such as Daniel and Neil have a “feel for the game” at U of L. Their *habitus* having developed in the local area, they have a local perspective on and understanding of regional *field* in which U of L is situated. As Bourdieu says, “this phrase [“feel for the game”] gives a fairly accurate idea of the almost miraculous encounter between habitus and a field, between incorporated history and objectified history” (p. 66). For Daniel, Neil, and Eleanor, this “miraculous encounter” has been going on for decades, but all encounters have a beginning. Lonnie’s much briefer experience at U of L reveals how his initial encounter has evolved over time:

I’ve learned a lot more about the students themselves [in five years at U of L]. It’s much more of a commuter campus, but it’s *touted*. You know that, to me, used to be sort of a signpost of its intellectual integrity. If it’s a commuter campus it meant that, since very few students lived on campus...they either lived at home, lived on their own, had jobs and kids of their own, and college is sort of a side business in addition to their regular life.... The assumption was that this wasn’t really a very serious school. Even the name of it, to me, sounded...*odd* when [his former professor] first mentioned this place, “the University of Louisville.”

But over the years, you know, the assumptions that I’d made about a commuter campus were dispelled. You know, *everybody* juggles their real life with school. You figure out, or I’ve figured out, that people were really proud of that commuter campus *badge*. It meant that they were, for the most part—the student’s *I’ve* had—are busting that much more ass because they *do* have families. They *do* have more than one job.

Lonnie’s five years in Louisville and at U of L have earned him a more nuanced and reflective perspective than two of his PhD program colleagues with shorter tenures at U

of L. Here are Eve's and Floyd's responses to same question Lonnie answered above, "what have you learned about U of L since you've been here?":

- I think I was surprised by how significant the commuter population is. I was surprised by how many first-generation students are here. I think, because it is a big research university, I think I wasn't expecting what I saw here. (Eve)
- The truth is...I have to be honest about this...I've never been really curious about the university in general. Like, I've never been a sort of...other than...I know....You know, I feel a lot of attachment to the Rhetoric and Composition Program. I feel we have a very good program here, and where I came from, the English program, it wasn't quite so good. So, I feel a lot of attachment and a lot of enthusiasm for the Comp/Rhet Program here. (Floyd)

Having quoted Eve and Floyd in a somewhat unflattering light, I feel compelled to say in their defense that at the time of their interviews both instructors were in their last semester of coursework in the Rhetoric and Composition PhD Program and had been taking three courses while teaching two each semester, an often grueling schedule that I know from experience. Over the course of that year-and-a-half, neither Eve nor Floyd has had much time to do anything other than study, write seminar papers, prep for teaching, and grade papers. As their schedules become more flexible over the coming two years, both will likely learn a great deal more about the city and the university. In the meantime, as they gain that experiential knowledge about their host institution, they will put both it and the expertise they have gained through their coursework, exams, and dissertation research to use in the classroom. Then, like Lonnie and I before them, they will graduate and move on.

And this last fact poses a problem for the University of Louisville and its students, traditional and nontraditional alike. It takes time for new instructors to understand and appreciate the primarily commuter student body at U of L, and the biases revealed in

Eve's, Lonnie's, and Floyd's responses above are typical for faculty educated at schools with primarily residential student populations. Barbara Jacoby (1995) discusses the expectations such faculty members bring with them to metropolitan schools with a significant nontraditional and commuter student population:

The majority of today's faculty members earned their undergraduate and graduate degrees at traditional residential institutions. The time-honored system of instruction with 120 credit hours of coursework earned between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two is a formula that is ingrained in faculty well before they take charge of a classroom. Most faculty members seem to expect the institutions at which they teach to be similar to those they attended and, therefore, impose the values and goals of those institutions (e.g., total immersion in the intellectual community) on their new environments....

Many administrators and faculty still have not adjusted to the fact that students frequently attend part time and have job and family responsibilities. It may be difficult for some professors and administrators to accept what may seem to them to be a lesser academic commitment. Many of them have acquired from their own experience as students deeply rooted ideas about higher learning that may hinder their ability to respond to new circumstances. For that reason faculty sometimes shun assignments to an urban campus. And commuters, both of traditional-age and older, continue to be thought of as apathetic or uninterested in campus life. (pg. 55).

Faculty members who have been at U of L for any length of time understand the fallacy of such a line of reasoning, and the dedication of the nontraditional students in this study certainly undermines the myth of the "apathetic or uninterested" commuter student. But roughly 44% of FYC classes in the Spring 2010 semester were taught by masters- and doctoral-level graduate students, many of whom have not been around long enough to learn what Lonnie has learned. By the time they have learned to appreciate U of L's intellectual environment and the commitment of the university's working student body, many will be graduating and moving on to put their educational credentials to work elsewhere. That is good news for their future students, especially if their future schools

have a significant nontraditional and/or commuter population, but it is bad news for U of L's nontraditional composition students, who have a significant chance of having an instructor new to the university, likely as uninformed about schools with nontraditional students as were Lonnie, Floyd, and Eve.

Moreover, as Eli Goldblatt reminds us in *Because We Live Here* (2007), "all literacy learning is local.... Even when the subject matter or audience is national or international, the acquisition and exercise of language is always mediated by and reflective of conditions that can be traced to the geographical, social, and economic locations of the speaker, writer, listener, or reader" (p. 9). Apart from the tacit, intangible factors about living in the local community addressed above, contingent instructors at U of L know the specific literacy practices and historical trends of incoming students, as Eleanor reveals here:

They [recent incoming students] write better because of the KERA portfolio, and it is going to get really interesting to see what happens as they gradually phase that out or make it count less because students now come able to write, used to writing, practiced in writing. It doesn't necessarily mean that they are excellent writers, but you say "write something" and they will sit down and write it. They don't give you back something that has nothing written on it.

Part of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990 was the adoption of a portfolio system of writing assessment for high school students in the state. A continuous debate over the success of what has commonly been known as the "KERA portfolio" followed, and in 2009 the Kentucky Legislature eliminated the writing portfolio assessment score from calculation of the overall student score, in a move the local newspaper described as a "tragic evisceration" of the portfolio program ("Death of Reform," para. 7). Most FYC instructors at U of L in my tenure here have been very

familiar with the KERA portfolio and have heard their students either laud or deride the portfolio system every semester. Now, that system has for all practical purposes vanished from the writing education landscape in Kentucky, and in our program only instructors such as Eleanor, who taught before, during, and after the portfolio system can appreciate the whole context of the portfolio system and what that system meant and its absence will mean for incoming students. Rank-and-file instructors currently in the program will witness the immediate post-KERA impact, but many of us will soon move on to other jobs and careers.

Eleanor herself is nearing retirement, and as she and the handful of other long-term instructors leave U of L, their loss will contribute to the continuous FYC instructor turnover in our program, a process that creates a knowledge and experience vacuum, a sort of self-perpetuating amnesia of institutional and regional history among contingent faculty and graduate student instructors, the two groups who teach over 90% of FYC classes in any given semester. Of course, all graduate programs whose students teach for the department in which the program is housed face similar problems, so these circumstances are far from unique to our program or university. And in fact the problem is not disciplinary, but professional, fundamental to academia as a whole—nationally and even internationally—because professional academics envision “academia” on national and international scales and forge their principal allegiance to discipline rather than to home institution (Quinnen, p. 51). Our primary allegiance in the field of rhetoric and composition is to *the discipline* of rhetoric and composition. Like Floyd, graduate students in programs such as U of L’s are immersed in the culture of academia, habituated by example to the folkways and mores of the profession, and join a

“community without place,” sustained by the internet and conferences, as Robert Brooke (2006) describes:

I think of my own history here as symptomatic of the way American education promotes migration. For instance, I know more about national trends in composition scholarship than I know about my local place. The people I converse with daily dwell elsewhere, and I reach them primarily through electronic means, in the strange conversation that is email....Most of us mark our professional identity through conferences, to which we travel in order to network in the placeless environs of well-equipped conference centers. Professionally, our home community of scholars is an abstract, placeless community (p. 148).

For many—I would say most—Americans, including most of our students, this is a very strange way to live. In contrast to the migratory academic, Brooke quotes Paul Theobald’s (1997) description of a more familiar place-centered and place-conscious human existence:

Throughout most of human history, people lived their lives in a given locality and were highly dependent on the place itself and on those others with whom the place was shared. It has only been since the seventeenth century or so that intradependence of this sort has eroded and people have begun to think of themselves as unencumbered by the constraints of nature or community (as cited in Brooke, p. 142).

This does not mean that “migratory” academics cannot teach writing to students whose lives and literacies are more regionally focused than their teachers. As Goldblatt says, “writing in a university may vary from discipline to discipline, but disciplinary discourse is a thing apart from region or locale” (p. 11). But Goldblatt continues: “I’m not saying this separation is necessarily wrong, but at times it renders us incapable of understanding our students or ourselves as actors on a local stage, and it tends to obscure the role of our particular institutions within their regional economies” (p. 11). At Philadelphia’s Temple University, which like U of L is a metropolitan research university, Goldblatt is working to create a writing program sensitive to the literate lives of its students beyond a first-year

course sequence, and even beyond college itself, which means mean building a program with administrators and instructors who “understand that program in its very specific locale, based on the kinds of students in the university, the economic climate of the region, the state of public and private schools in the area, and many other crucial considerations, both contemporary and historical” (p. 9).

The richest resources for this type of local understanding in U of L’s program are clearly the “contingent” faculty. But this more permanent pool of FYC instructors is anything but stable, as the hard-working but ill-compensated PTLs who manage to eke out a tenuous living are frequently unsure where their next rent check will come from. Neil, for example, has decided to quit teaching FYC to become a social worker, and he was enrolled in the master’s program at U of L’s Kent School of Social Work at the time of our interview. “Doing a little bit of a career change,” he observed. Similarly, as long-term PTL Daniel reflected on his own socioeconomic class status and that of his friends from childhood, he hit upon one of the deep, ambiguous realities of the American class system, particularly as it applies to highly educated PTLs with their abundance of cultural capital and social status and their lowly economic status:

I think my social class has stayed the same. You know, the people I grew up with are still about in the same social status, and...[long pause]. They may be a little bit better than me economically because they’ve been able to put more money away over the past ten years. But, it doesn’t *show*. There might be a dollar figure in their bank account, but...it doesn’t *show* that they’ve moved up. Ah...as far as, like, economics, economic class, I mean, I guess I’m still maintaining the *appearance* that we’re all the same [laughs]. Until...until they start cutting more classes around here. I don’t know if that makes sense....

“It does,” I hear myself replying in our interview’s recording. Daniel’s explanation makes a great deal of sense to me, but this well-hidden blurring of social and economic

class distinctions was not an easy concept for me to learn. Wealth in cultural capital is not always easily convertible to economic wealth, or in the case of PTLs, even economic well being. Like the teachers in Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984), they make "a virtue of necessity by maximizing the profit they can draw from their cultural capital and their spare time" (p. 287). But for many PTLs, this use of "spare time" means driving from campus to campus around the greater metropolitan area to try to piece together a living. Of course, these "freeway fliers," as they are often called in the literature on contingent faculty, are not the disenfranchised poor. As Sue Doe and her co-authors (2011) recently reminded us of in a special issue of *College English* on the treatment of contingent faculty in composition, they "can hardly be described as the long suffering who are unable to look out for their own interests or value opportunities for professional growth and career success" (p. 445). And yet their economic insecurity can make the teachers in Bourdieu's analysis look solidly bourgeoisie by comparison. Eleanor explains, "If you make that identification based on how much money a person earns, *I'm* working class. If I had a family—well, if I was still supporting a family, I'd be under the poverty line. And part-time people...but it's hard to think about teaching college as a working-class job." It is hard to think about it, but for most PTLs in our program, it is harder to ignore.

It takes time, work, learning, mentoring, and experience to become the kind of effective FYC teacher U of L students deserve. University administrators, even from a purely economic perspective, which is a perspective they tend to value, should know that the university, the English Department, and the Composition Program have all *already* invested a tremendous amount of time and resources in creating good FYC instructors. We learn from our own professors, from our colleagues, and from our students—and, as I

hope this chapter has shown, we learn a great deal in particular from our nontraditional students. Squandering this investment serves no one well, but the system as it exists today allows a lot of potential knowledge and expertise to go to waste. And our situation is far from unique. Nationwide, university administrations reap short-term benefits of a cheap labor at the expense of long-term institutional stability by treating contingent faculty as though they were disposable, as Doe et al found in their study:

Our study participants valued their flexibility and adaptability as much as the university did. They did not, however, appreciate—nor does the university’s teaching system benefit from—a sense that flexibility translates roughly into expendability. Adam concluded, for example, that, barring the development of a professional advancement system, his best course of action was to look for work in another field. Every time a contingent faculty member reaches this conclusion, the university’s teaching system loses—and has to replace—a well-trained professional. The result is a constant and wasteful turnover that ultimately undermines the university’s goal of supporting student learning. (p. 444)

Adding to this “constant and wasteful turnover” are the graduate instructors, from whom the program and university get a few years of teaching while equipping them for careers elsewhere. The combination is a volatile mix, and our program’s present vitality and historical stability are remarkable testaments to the individual people who have come together to teach here. But the fact that it *does* work, that it *has* worked for so long is not a good enough reason for attempting to maintain the status quo. It will not work forever. The university, its composition program, and its students would benefit greatly from more stable, mutually reinforcing relationships among its instructors.

And fortunately, such relationships already exist here, as they do in all composition programs, but institutional barriers exist that tend to keep those relationships from fully blossoming into what it might become. In discussing his own pedagogical influences, Neil said:

I find myself being drawn more to colleagues and their ideas and thoughts. I still read comp theory a little bit, occasionally, but it's usually based upon the suggestions of my colleagues.... Like Lonnie, I've borrowed several of his ideas, and I said, "Where'd you come up with this idea?" and he said, "Well, it grew out of this...and I got the idea from the idea specifically from this book..." I'll go out and I'll read that book. I'll go out and I'll do a little bit of research based on the people that he mentioned, but in terms of my own...

I seem to be more like a borrower of other ideas and trying mold them to myself rather than really go out and find an author purely on my own. Usually it's based upon recommendations...usually it's just colleagues. If someone has a really great idea, I'll borrow it, tweak it, make it my own.

I do that a lot, especially with Lonnie, and Danielle [another PhD student]. I love her. I borrow a lot of stuff from her. We exchange a lot of different ideas. I think it's because we look at teaching a lot the same way. She's one of my favorite buddies in terms of just exchanging ideas. We've borrowed a lot from each other. A *lot*. Entire core ideas for classes.

Of course none of this will sound surprising or new. Such relationships exist in any (healthy) teaching environment. But if those relationships could be built into a more formalized exchange between contingent faculty and graduate student instructors, the two areas of expertise mentioned at the beginning of this section might be mutually reinforcing rather than simply different strengths. Contingent faculty could be encouraged to engage in mutual mentoring relationships with new graduate instructors as they arrive from around the country and the world, sharing their knowledge of Louisville and its people, the university and its students. Graduate students could be encouraged to reciprocate with some of the more recent scholarship in composition theory and research as they progress through the program. The details of how such reciprocal mentoring relationships would be built is far beyond the scope of my study, but I will conclude this chapter with a very brief sketch of what such an initiative might look like, in case they may be useful to a future WPA or assistant administrator. I am confident such an

initiative would benefit future FYC students, particularly nontraditional, commuting, and/or working-class students—those students who make new instructors such as Lonnie, Eve, and Floyd, who come to U of L for its PhD program but know little about the school itself, express surprise when they first learn about their students' lives.

Mutual mentorships would essentially mean formalizing (to an extent) what already occurs informally in the composition instructors' offices and break rooms, recognizing and rewarding the types of relationships between contingent faculty and graduate teaching assistants that expand/reinforce pedagogical practices and help new instructors adapt to and learn about living and working in Louisville. For such relationships to work, they would have to *mean something more than just more work*, because both groups have enough work to do already. Reciprocal mentoring would have to be built on friendships made by the participants themselves, not on assigned partners. And although they may involve some initial “staged” introductions, they would also need time to develop, evolve—even end, if they were not a good match.

These are all important considerations because of the inherent tensions between the two groups of instructors, each with their own and sometimes contradictory interests at stake, each with their own status within the program and the department, and program administrators should know from the start that such an initiative would be no panacea. But the rewards might warrant the risk if those rewards included graduate student instructors with more understanding of their new home city, the university, and its students, not to mention FYC faculty who are kept abreast of the most important new scholarship in the field. This last point is in fact a frequent complaint against “part-timers,” and something Joseph Harris (2000) mentioned a decade ago as part of the

bargain for increased pay and job security for contingent faculty: “But better pay and conditions for adjunct faculty would also require us to insist on their ongoing professional development and on higher standards for their work as teachers” (p. 61). There are many ways contingent faculty could demonstrate that development, such as classroom observations and sample lesson plans/assignments that put their new knowledge to use. Both parties involved could also periodically reflect on their relationship and report to the WPA on how it is evolving.

And both parties must be rewarded for their participation. An actual, program-acknowledged title for their *curriculum vitae* such as “Reciprocal Faculty Mentor” is a start, and would be particularly beneficial to the graduate student participants. Instructor status is real and compensated for in our program, even if it is not always distinctly marked or obvious, so for contingent faculty such an initiative would have to be more than just “lip service,” more than just a feint in the direction of increased equity. In short, for the contingent faculty it would have to be accompanied by increased economic and job security. Without going into budgetary details, those who were willing to participate in the mentoring program could be offered a fall contract that guaranteed a minimum number of spring courses, a constant, steady paycheck between August and May of the academic year, and the option to purchase health insurance on the university’s plan. In fact, such a contract already exists in the form of the university’s “L-11” contract for temporary lecturers, but not everyone in the program is given the opportunity to have one. Part-Time Lecturers such as Daniel and Neil have proven they are able to respond to the changing dynamics at U of L as it has evolved. They understand what the institution has meant and means to Louisville residents, past and present, and they

already *do* help new PhD and Master's students adapt to living in Louisville and working at U of L. Offering such faculty a concrete, economic return for their expertise and commitment to teaching would be a small gesture of appreciation, but would also do more for those teachers with their "boots in the classroom" than even several special issues of *College English*.

CHAPTER FIVE:
LOOKING BACK, MOVING ON
I) Joe College and Joe Biden

This February my wife Christine and I attended a speech by Vice President Joe Biden at the University of Louisville's McConnell Center. Minutes before Biden was scheduled to speak, he was delayed when news came through that then-Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak had been forced to resign, following weeks of civil unrest and massive protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square. Most of the audience members had no clue of Mubarak's resignation at that point, and as the Vice President was briefed on the situation behind the scenes for slightly less than an hour, the crowd grew visibly restless; while we waited for Biden to take the podium, the McConnell Center's multiple flat-screen monitors sprung to life and began to play one of the university's latest marketing videos: *UofL Has Changed*.

A slick production, the brief video opens with black and white footage of a railroad crossing, its gates closed as a massive diesel engine lumbers past. A train horn blares over slow, dramatic violin chords, and I immediately recognize the intersection as one that has made me late for office hours countless times. Next, we see grainy footage of the wider network of on-campus railroad tracks, overgrown with weeds and stretching out beneath a lazily swaying American flag. The voiceover begins, "Once a private institution nestled in an industrial area near Interstate 65, it was not a destination for top

students across Kentucky and the nation.” Then, as the video zooms out from the center of an old aerial photograph of the campus, artificially created flecks of “dust” appear on the screen, as though we were viewing archival footage on a film projector. Next, we see a line of cars rushing down a highway as the narration continues, “From the time it joined the state university system in 1970, the University of Louisville was primarily a commuter school, catering to Louisville-area students. Just nine percent of students lived on campus as recently as 1999.” The screen fades to black and the strings build to a crescendo as the narrator announces: “Today, *that’s all changed!*”

Now the screen explodes with lively, sweeping, in-color views of the current campus, and the narrator’s voice picks up tempo to match the rapid, synthesized drumbeat:

Today, the University of Louisville is a different, dynamic institution. One-point-two billion dollars has been spent over the past decade building and renovating facilities, turning U of L into one of the nicest campuses in the region. That’s helping us attract students from around the state, the region, and the world. These days, sixty percent of our students come from outside Louisville. A quarter of all students live on campus, or in campus-affiliated housing—some pretty *nice* housing, as a matter of fact!

As I watched the images of young men and women enjoying their sun-drenched, swimming-pool volleyball game, I leaned and whispered two words to Christine: *Joe College*. Indeed, Ray E. Marcus and his post-war peers would have a difficult time recognizing the university as it appears in the video, and if he were writing his master’s thesis today he would likely get many more affirmative responses to the question about attending college “mainly for the social life and experiences” (see Chapter 1, page 26). But as the video’s narrator touted some genuinely impressive statistics, such as the increased ACT scores of incoming students and the 60% increase in graduation rates over

the past 12 years, I could not help but think of some deeper truths those numbers obscure: yes, ACT scores have increased by three points in the last decade, but applicant rejections have doubled, funneling ever more Louisville students through the community college system (Kenning, para. 11). As for the graduation rates, most nontraditional students such as Gene, Mary, and Rhoda are by definition part-time students, but full-time workers, spouses, and/or parents. *When* they graduate is less important to them than *if* they graduate, and had any of them matriculated at a community college instead of U of L, their probabilities of earning a bachelor's degree would have decreased significantly (Brint and Karabel 1989; Clark 1960; Ganderton and Santos 1995; Pincus 1980).

UofL Has Changed condenses over 200 years of institutional history into a (misleading) 30-second clip, then spends the roughly six minute balance of its running time exalting the accomplishments of the past decade. This is a marketing tool, of course, and no one expects an actual history lesson from such materials. But its creators almost certainly did not have a clear understanding of, nor an appreciation for, U of L's richer, authentic history, and for me this disrespect for the truth of the school's past devalued what was otherwise an important event, adding significance to something the Vice President later said: "We are not passengers of history, but we are drivers of history." The University of Louisville has made such significant contributions to the economic, social, and cultural life of this region and its citizens that it is almost a crime for the school itself to belittle those contributions. And the accomplishments *UofL Has Changed* hypes do not mean the university is doing a better job serving its community and its historical student clientele. They mean it now has a *different* community, different clientele, and is increasingly leaving those whom it had served in the past,

including adult students from Louisville’s working class, to find their own way into and through higher education.

II) Study Goals and Outcomes

The goal of this dissertation was to explore the role first-year composition courses play in the academic lives of working-class adult students in the University of Louisville. I sought to understand who the adult students enrolled in our program’s courses were, where they came from, what their educational goals were, and what their FYC *experience* meant to them, with a particular focus on their interactions with their younger classmates and instructors. By interviewing nontraditional students and their instructors, I also wanted to inquire into how working-class adult students responded to the classroom practices they encountered in FYC courses at U of L. What approaches to teaching composition—for example, peer review, small group work, lecture, class-wide discussions, and writing assignments—did working-class nontraditional students find more or less effective in accomplishing their course objectives? Their educational objectives? *Why* were these approaches more or less effective?

Chapter 1 contextualizes the current FYC environment for working-class adults at U of L by examining its institutional history, and by situating that narrative into the broader chronology of higher educational opportunities for the working class in America. Those opportunities have been repeatedly compromised, co-opted, and manipulated, often deliberately by law, but always and continuously in the more subtle ways that Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) such as educational institutions themselves function. One educational “reform movement” after another has repeatedly diverted or

“cooled out” the higher educational aspirations of the American working class, both adults and their children: from the vocational school systems that replaced labor apprenticeships in the late 19th Century to the “diverted dreams” of community college students into the 21st Century. Still, that history has not been entirely bleak, as the radically democratic (in effect if not in intent) post-World War II G.I. bill and the later growth of open enrollment institutions throughout the late 1960s and 70s demonstrated.

The University of Louisville has been around long enough to have taken part in nearly all of the cultural, social, and political moments discussed in Chapter 1, and when it has lived up to the better angels of its nature, has been a tremendous resource for working adults in the Louisville region. In other historical periods this has not been the case, and I believe that the current political environment in Kentucky is steering U of L in a direction we should ponder very carefully. The Kentucky General Assembly’s Postsecondary Education Improvement Act of 1997 mandated that U of L work to become a “premier nationally recognized metropolitan research institution” by the year 2020, and one of the university’s responses to that charge has been to make enrollment more selective by raising minimum standardized test scores, which has in turn decreased the percentage of commuter students and increased the six-year graduation rate. Combined with rapid annual increases in tuition and the dwindling number of courses offered in the evening, the impact of these efforts on portions of the student population such as nontraditional students and African Americans has been increasingly negative, as I detailed in Chapter 1.

Against this historical backdrop, Chapter 2 discusses the results of my quantitative survey data from 23% of the FYC sections offered in the spring 2009

semester, which revealed: 1) an increased percentage of nontraditional-age students enrolled in evening and “off-sequence” semester courses versus courses offered in the morning and early afternoon, 2) a decreased perception of commonality among students in mixed-generation sections, and 3) a greater comfort level among nontraditional students than their younger classmates when interacting with their instructors. Chapter 2 also discusses the class backgrounds of U of L students, and I argue that the vast majority of students of all ages here come from the working classes, whether class is defined statistically, demographically, or theoretically. Moreover, as Bourdieu (1984) demonstrated, a person’s class status is the result of a lifelong trajectory, and for nontraditional students that trajectory is unlikely to have begun in the middle or upper classes; simply put, most nontraditional students are by definition working-class students.

The case studies in Chapter 3 demonstrate Deborah Brandt’s concept of literacy sponsorship and show that nontraditional students with strong support systems both on and off campus have a distinct advantage. With the help of “The New GI Bill” and his college-graduate fiancée, Gene was able to carve out a space for protracted engagement with the readings in his English 101 course, and found discussion of those texts with his younger classmates a rewarding, perspective-altering experience. Likewise, Ann’s supportive parents allowed her to leave her job and concentrate solely on her coursework for her first semester at U of L. The youngest student in my study, Ann forged lasting bonds with some of her classmates and found her FYC courses more satisfying for the increased challenge they offered over her previous work at a community college. Rhoda, slightly older than Gene and Ann, found her role as the only nontraditional student in class far more difficult. Frustrated by the lack of commitment to the course demonstrated

by her younger classmates, Rhoda's close relationship with her instructor allowed her to cease attending regular class sessions and finish the course by working independently. Mary likewise forged a strong bond with her instructor and had some difficulty with the "rudeness" of her younger classmates. As a single mother of two children, Mary's lack of sponsorship beyond the limited (though crucial) support of her employer, U of L, allowed her to take only one class per semester, drawing out her educational trajectory into her retirement years, when she can "finish it up as a senior citizen, full time."

Chapter 4 presents a series of conclusions about nontraditional students at U of L based on interviews I conducted with FYC instructors. First, almost across the board instructors echoed the existing scholarship on adult learners, saying their own adult students are some of the hardest-working and dedicated students in class (Carney-Crompton and Tan, 2002; Kasworm and Pike, 1995; Kevern et al., 1999; Makinen & Pychyl, 2001). This quality does not always facilitate the teaching of mixed-generation FYC classes, however, and in fact the second important conclusion of Chapter 4 is that the relationship between traditional and nontraditional-age students is sometimes rocky and even resentful. Often, those older adults are the lone nontraditional student in class, which can create a lonely environment, silencing their contributions to class discussions. The third conclusion, that nontraditional students often have more complex, richer relationships with their FYC instructors, opens the door to some solutions to the friction between those students and their younger classmates. Doing so takes a skilled and experienced teacher, however, and the graduate programs at U of L, with their high turnover and frequently young, inexperienced teachers, creates a knowledge gap that is

difficult to bridge for instructors who may lack that experience and/or depth of knowledge about their local students' lives.

III) Suggestions for Future Research

The interviews for this project revealed some of the isolation and alienation adult students can feel in the writing classroom, which represents a first step in the kind of detailed research needed into the experiences and writing practices of adult, working class students. What I have learned from my work with the students and instructors has pointed me toward other sites and approaches to research for myself and others in the field. For example, in-class observations were not built into my methodology, but have the potential for enhancing our knowledge of both the overall dynamics of mixed-generation FYC classes and smaller-scale generational encounters between individuals and small groups of students. An observer's presence will always trigger a certain amount of reactivity in the subjects, meaning the act of observation itself changes in some way what is being observed (Davies 1999, p. 7; Patton 2002, p. 326). But carefully planned, executed, and analyzed qualitative research involving observation of mixed-generation classes could add invaluable knowledge to the results of this study. For example, observing two or more sections of FYC with different percentages of nontraditional students enrolled might help determine if a certain threshold percentage of older students makes for a more comfortable learning environment for those students, reducing the negative effects such as student isolation and silencing observed by instructors in this study.

Writing samples would also add new dimensions to our understanding of nontraditional students in FYC. While my study focused more on student/student and student/instructor relationships, artifacts from the actual literacy work being done by participants in those classes might help explain, among other things, why instructors viewed nontraditional students as some of the hardest workers in class. Early drafts, feedback on those drafts, emails between students and the instructor, or analysis of differences between “low stakes” and “high stakes” writing assignments could all add significantly to the findings I present here. Researchers might, for example, choose a particular small, mixed-generation group of students who work together over the course of the semester, collect documents such as homework, rough drafts, and in-class writing to examine the role those individual written contributions play in the overall group dynamics.

My biggest regret in conducting this study is failing to recruit any nontraditional students from Louisville’s minority communities for interviews. As I detail in Chapter 2, my method was to distribute the initial questionnaires in selected courses, particularly evening sections likely to attract older students, and encourage respondents to provide an email address if they wished to participate further by being interviewed. Also in that second chapter I discuss some of my difficulties obtaining actual responses from those who did provide email addresses, including multiple attempts to decipher handwriting after the initial emails were returned by our campus mail server stamped “user unknown” (see Chapter 2, page 51). As it turned out, given the demographics of the survey respondents, I would have been extremely fortunate to get an interview with one of the three (3) African American nontraditionals or either of the two (2) nontraditionals who

checked off “two or more races” on the questionnaire (1% and 0.7% of all 297 respondents, respectively). None of the handful of respondents who checked off “American Indian or Alaska Native,” “Asian,” “Hispanic or Latino,” or “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander”¹⁸ were past the 22 year age threshold of “nontraditional” student by my study’s definition. At the point in my data collection when I realized that all the in-person interviews I had secured were with white students, I considered inquiring with my colleagues about minority students in their classes who looked as if they might be older than their traditional classmates. I decided against this approach at the time because it somehow felt disingenuous to my method, but in hindsight I probably made the wrong choice. This study could have been greatly enriched by accounts from minority nontraditional students, and in my future work with those students I will take pains to recruit minorities from the study design stage forward.

IV) Implications of Findings

If an instructor knows how to bring about the type of interactions that will foster positive generational encounters, nontraditional-age students in FYC can offer a wealth of knowledge and experience for their younger classmates. On the other hand, negative experiences for some or all participants are possible if an instructor does *not* foster such interactions. Most constructive generational encounters, as Etienne Wenger (1998) employs the term, are not explicit moments when an older student instructs a younger peer on a particular assignment or “life lesson,” and in fact those exchanges are likely to foment resentment on the younger students’ part, as Dawn noted: “They would feel like

¹⁸ I used the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau’s Racial Categories on the rationale that they might be most familiar to study participants. A table with the categories, numbers, and percentages of all respondent groups is provided in Appendix C.

[older students] were sort of condescending to them...some of the nontraditional students tend to take on almost a parental role in their relationship with some of the younger students” (see Chapter 4, page 123). On the contrary, positive generational encounters are more likely to occur when older students model the types of behaviors and habits that successful students have, such as diligently completing the assigned work on a daily basis and being rewarded for that diligence. Likewise, students who do *not* complete their work, especially in group situations such as peer review sessions or teamed writing assignments, should be held responsible in some way that makes up the offense to their group-mates. Had Gene’s instructor held the younger students accountable for not doing their part in peer review sessions, perhaps they would have been more inclined to ask Gene questions like “Hey, how do you stay focused?” and not just the ubiquitous question of war veterans: “Did you kill anybody?” (see Chapter 3, page 90). It sounds simple, but as a teacher who is not exactly a disciplinarian in the classroom, I know how tempting (not to mention easier for me) it is to let seemingly small matters “slide.” But fostering mutually rewarding relationships in a mixed-generation classroom might require defusing *potential* conflicts before they occur, like those that were so destructive in Rhoda’s “non-existent class.”

The presence of nontraditional students in FYC classrooms complicates and pluralizes instructors’ understanding of who their students are and how they might be taught. Experienced FYC teachers must re-think their well-worn teacher habits, and less experienced teachers must develop new, *different* teacher habits that accommodate more than just the typical classroom full of teenagers. And I said in Chapter 4, while the problems that arise in mixed-generation FYC classes are frequently productive learning

experiences, they are not always welcome. For example, younger students in Kentucky who typically have some experience with the KERA portfolio are more likely to understand and appreciate process-oriented approaches to teaching writing, while older students such as Rhoda and Mary may believe that traditional, explicit and rules-based instruction is more appropriate. In mixed-generation classrooms, instructors are likely to encounter *both* student expectations and must therefore find a way to accommodate their older students' expressed desire for "the rules" while still making a case for process pedagogy that convinces those students of the value of such an approach. The instructors in this study are certainly up to the challenge. If composition theory has prepared us for anything, it is a defense of process pedagogy.

Of course, teachers will know a lot less about what is going on in their mixed-generation classrooms if they fail to listen to their students, and I know—because I know *them*—some of the instructors in this study would have been surprised by what their students had to say. Indeed it seems odd that in a field where process pedagogy is so ubiquitous, the most significant feedback most instructors receive from their students comes *after* the semester is over, in the form of course evaluations, when no "revision" of our most current pedagogical practices can occur. Having some mechanism for students to give feedback as the course progresses would allow FYC teachers to address problems earlier, before the situation has eroded beyond the point of repair. Stephen Brookfield's (1995) "critical incident questionnaire" (CIQ) is one such mechanism. Developed for use in adult learning classes, Brookfield's CIQ simply asks students to anonymously answer a series of questions at the end of each week:

1. At what moment in the class this week did you feel most engaged with what was happening?

2. At what moment in the class this week did you feel most distanced from what was happening?
3. What action that anyone (teacher or student) took in class this week did you find most affirming and helpful?
4. What action that anyone (teacher or student) took in class this week did you find most puzzling or confusing?
5. What about the class this week surprised you the most? (This could be something about your own reactions to what went on, or something that someone did, or anything else that occurs to you.) (p. 115)

For the first ten- to fifteen minutes at the start of class at the next week, Brookfield reports on what the students had to say. Sometimes this results in changing his teaching approaches, sometimes not. The main point for Brookfield, though, is that the students are heard and their feedback, both positive and negative, is addressed in an open forum, bringing those matters to light for all class members.

Such an approach would address at least two difficult issues raised in my study.

1) It would potentially give voice to students (young or old) who feel silenced in classroom discussions, for whatever reason, and would make public for the class some of the after-class discussions that usually only take place between the instructor and a handful of students. 2) The CIQ could also bring to light potential student conflicts in a manner that keeps the “complainer” anonymous and informs the “offender” in a non-hurtful way that their behavior may be causing problems with their peers. The CIQ even has the potential of resolving those issues before the teacher has to play “babysitter,” in effect, and make sure everyone is contributing to their group and doing their homework.

The implications above are rather “common sense” suggestions for FYC teachers, relatively easily put into practice and potentially effective in any composition class,

regardless of the participants' age or class background. The final implication of this research, U of L's changing direction and push to become a "premier metropolitan research university," is much more difficult to address, and is *well* beyond the ability of a single administrator, or program—or even department or college—to deal with. As I hope my dissertation has made clear, however, this issue is vitally important for U of L's working class students, young and old, and a concluding section on "implications and findings" would be remiss without some closing thoughts on the matter.

What *is* a "premier nationally recognized metropolitan research institution," and does becoming one leave any room for U of L to accommodate its historical identity—and its historical student demographic—into that *new* identity? For one definition of "metropolitan university," Eli Goldblatt quotes Charles Hathaway et al (1995): "although metropolitan universities are likely to share certain characteristics, such as high enrollment of commuter and minority students, metropolitan universities are best recognized by an interactive philosophy by which these institutions establish symbiotic relationships with their metropolitan areas" (p. 9). The University of Louisville has long-standing symbiotic relationships with residents of the metropolitan area, and part of the same "Strategic Plan 2020" that the university devised to become a "metropolitan research university" calls for "Achieving indicators for Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement" ("2020 Plan," p. 23). Partnerships with such local organizations such as The West Jefferson County Community Task Force, Neighborhood House, and the Louisville Coalition for the Homeless, among many others, enables U of L to do immeasurable good for the metropolitan area.

However, one of the chief needs among the people of Louisville is education—particularly residents with bachelor degrees. “The Greater Louisville Project,” a 2010 study funded by local businesses and charitable organizations,¹⁹ measures the city’s educational and economic development against a list of peer cities nationally (“Deep Driver”). The study ranked Louisville ninth out of fifteen peer cities in attainment of bachelor degrees, with 30% of all adults aged 25-64 possessing a four-year degree. That percentage tops the national 27.5% figure, and in itself is quite good. The figures for African-Americans are more dismal, however. Louisville ranks “among the lowest of its peer cities,” with only 14% of African Americans having earned a bachelor’s degree. The fact that U of L’s enrollment of African Americans has decreased significantly—from 14.5% to 11.0% over the past decade—should be cause for great concern for the “Greater Louisville Project’s” authors, as it no doubt is for any educator interested in shaping educational opportunities into a force for social justice. According to the report, “Raising education attainment in Louisville comes down to two major challenges: [1] Reducing the racial achievement gap. [2] Improving the proportion of all students who go to college and earn a degree.” In this light, one of the most important “community engagements” U of L could tackle is to educate Louisville’s citizens. Yet the university is moving in the opposite direction, electing to limit postsecondary educational opportunities for working-class Louisvillians and recruit high-achieving, non-resident students in order to boost the university’s national rankings.

¹⁹ According to the project’s website, “The Greater Louisville Project is an independent, non-partisan civic initiative organized by the Community Foundation of Louisville and supported by a consortium of philanthropic foundations that includes The James Graham Brown Foundation, Brown-Forman, The C. E. & S. Foundation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, The Community Foundation of Louisville, Gheens Foundation, The Humana Foundation and The JP Morgan Chase Foundation and the Stephen Reily and Emily Bingham Fund.”

The problem seems to be an identity crisis rooted in the definition of that compound term, “metropolitan research university.” “Metropolitan universities” are fairly well theorized and defined, and the definition of a “research university” is even more widely accepted in academia as it is defined by the Carnegie Classification System. But *combining* these two concepts may result in an inevitable and uneven sacrifice of one idea over the other, as in U of L’s case, where service to commuter and minority students has suffered in exchange for greater national recognition in the highly charged, competitive university ranking system. Would this still be the case if U of L felt free to define itself rather than strive to fit into one of Carnegie’s categories so it can be evaluated next to “peer” institutions (with localized histories and identities all their own)? And might it be bad idea to allow a national organization such as Carnegie define how a school is best involved locally? Seasoned university administrators will no doubt marvel at my naïveté, but these appear to be questions worth asking, even if none of us involved in higher education like the answers.

Which brings me to the most difficult question for those who believe, as I do, that the university’s push for elite research status is hurting the educational opportunities for working-class adults in Louisville: *what can we do about it?* To have a voice in the matter, we need to wield power in the university’s administrative structure and exercise power in the larger state and local political systems. When I say “we,” here, I do not mean sympathetic compositionists alone, but anyone involved in higher education who believes in its democratic possibilities more than its conservative sociopolitical function. Educators who want higher education to live up to its democratic possibilities must, at a minimum, commit themselves to participating in the administrative steering of their home

institution. Goldblatt quotes Richard Miller's *As If Learning Mattered: Reforming Higher Education* (1998): "Those truly committed to increasing access to all the academy has to offer must assume a more central role in the bureaucratic management of the academy" (Goldblatt, p. 29). Shunning what is often tedious, boring, and frustrating administrative/committee work is certainly easier, but cannot be an option for those with a conscience. As Goldblatt argues, "we must not only complain but act within the power structure of the university and its surrounding community if we are to produce meaningful change in students' lives" (p. 29).

I understand this is a tall order for the rank-and-file composition instructor. After all, a program full of graduate students and contingent faculty wields almost *no* power in the university administration, and everyone involved in such programs is savvy enough to realize this is no accidental arrangement. Yet even tenured composition faculty and WPAs can find themselves hamstrung by campus political forces, and they are often in little better position to do anything more than make noise about issues of importance to their programs. They need like-minded allies with a voice.

Many who have written on the contingent faculty issue have argued in favor of alternative ways to earn status and job security within the university (Doe et al 2011; Goldblatt 2007; Harris 2000). If that increased status were accompanied by increased opportunities, even requirements, for administrative and committee duty in exchange for more permanent status, those contingent faculty might supply existing tenure-line faculty in administrative positions with like-minded allies on matters of importance, such as historical institutional ties to the local community and its working-class residents. As Goldblatt says above, "If we feel any allegiance to this [community-centered] way of

thinking about higher education, we must exhort and encourage colleagues to pay attention to the problems of the people among who we live” (p. 6). If they were granted more than symbolic committee status, contingent instructors who have both deep ties to the metropolitan/regional communities and an increased commitment to and investment in the university community are potentially the strongest allies such faculty could ask for.

VI) Moving in Circles

Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst. What is the right use? What is the one end, which all means go to effect? They are for nothing but to inspire. I had better never see a book, than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system. The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul. This every man is entitled to. –Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The American Scholar”

My siblings and I were raised by a single mother, and I remember one day coming home from middle school and asking her, “mom, are we middle-middle class or lower-middle class?” I showed her the table of annual income figures in my social studies textbook and I was confused and embarrassed when mom pointed to the column labeled “working class.” The daughter of a union steelworker, my mom was of course far wiser about the American class system than her budding-bourgeoisie son, and I believe to this day that she took as much pride in that moment as I took shame.

I do not mention this episode to draw attention to my childhood hardships. On the contrary, my childhood was an easy affair compared to those of the American poor, and almost all children from a working-class American family can recall a moment like the one above, when they first began to realize that we are not *all* middle class. This was my first awakening to that fact, and perhaps the beginning of my long, slow realization of

why mom worked so much. A nurse who rotated shifts at Akron City Hospital, it seemed like mom was *always* at work, and keeping up with when she would be home in the mornings, in the afternoons, or in the evenings was challenging for my two older sisters as they dutifully played their part in raising me, the baby boy.

This bit of autobiographical truth might be why I was particularly drawn to Mary's story. A single mother raising two children, the only real sponsor of Mary's educational efforts is her employer, and the combined effect of these factors for Mary means a significantly prolonged trajectory toward her bachelor's degree. Her account is a clear illustration of how Sayer's "axes of inequality" compound one another, and stories like Mary's are repeated over and over across our society:

Many things happen to us—good or bad—which we neither deserve nor do not deserve: they happen regardless, driven by forces which have nothing to do with justice or human well-being. While philosophers are apt to portray these as random contingencies impacting on individuals and coming from nowhere in particular, they also include the largely unintended effects of major social structures such as those of capitalism. In other words it is possible to identify structural features of society which add to the lack of moral well-orderedness in the world, and do so not merely randomly but systematically and recurrently, so that the goods and bads tend to fall repeatedly on the same people. Thus there is a great deal of path dependence and cumulative causation in the reproduction of class and geographical inequalities. (p. 204)

In Mary's case, those cumulative social structures include sexism and classism, but for her children—both boys who, funded by Mary's labor, will have bachelor's degrees—those gender and class inequalities will likely have less cumulative effect, just as they have had less cumulative effect for me than they have had for my mother—and my two sisters, for that matter.

Sayer's analysis makes sense to me, and his explanation of how class operates is the most precise sociological description of the issue I have seen. The depth of his focus

on class' moral significance, the breadth of his engagement with previous philosophers—particularly how he advances Bourdieu's work—and the clarity of the implications he draws for contemporary western cultures makes his analysis perhaps the most important philosophical statement on class today. Crucially, he acknowledges the emotional work of class, the shame it produces, the embarrassment it evokes when brought up at inopportune times—and it is *always* an inopportune time.

Class shames and embarrasses us, and for good reason. “To ask someone what class they are,” according to Sayer, “is not simply to ask them to classify their socio-economic position, for it also carries the suggestion of a further unspoken and offensive question: what are you worth?” This profound yet simple truth is why I am very happy I did not ask the student participants in my study about their class, though I *did* feel bold enough to ask that of my colleagues, the instructors whom I interviewed. Although they squirmed in their chairs and blushed a bit, my colleagues knew me, our program's lunatic Marxist, and thus knew that question was coming sooner or later. They also know and have studied class academically, in that detached way that academics have of making the most personal into a table or a graph—or of obfuscating life into the language of theory. I doubt that Gene, Anne, Rhoda, or Mary have much experience with such detachment, so asking them “what class are you?” would have needlessly embarrassed them in front of their mysterious academic inquisitor. Besides, I have Bourdieu and Marx and Althusser: I'll *tell* you what *class* you are!

Which brings me right back to the retrograde: as I conducted this research, I was not travelling in “my subjects'” lives, on their trajectories. Even if I were their teacher, I could only accompany them for a short while, and as I did I should take care that my own

trajectory does not warp them clean out of their own orbit. Educational encounters must not be institutional interventions. We are not charged with arresting our students in their tracks and “saving them” from, for example, “the dropout crisis in America.” Nor should we necessarily accelerate our nontraditional students’ movement back into the workforce, back into “production” or service, depending on their jobs.

I said earlier in this chapter that for most older students, *if* they graduate is more important than *when*, and that is true, even for Mary, the oldest student in my study. When she graduates, Mary will probably have retired from her work as a U of L staff member. How will she use her degree? I cannot say, other than to say that she is *using* her education now, and has been all along. Her credentials will qualify her for a job in her major field, and she may in fact begin a second career as a “senior citizen,” in her words. Human mortality being what it is, Mary is unlikely to become a nuclear physicist. But as educators we should not be limited to asking only questions of *what comes next* for our students. We must also ask, *what matters now?* I think that might be the most important lesson nontraditional students can teach *us*, if we listen to them.

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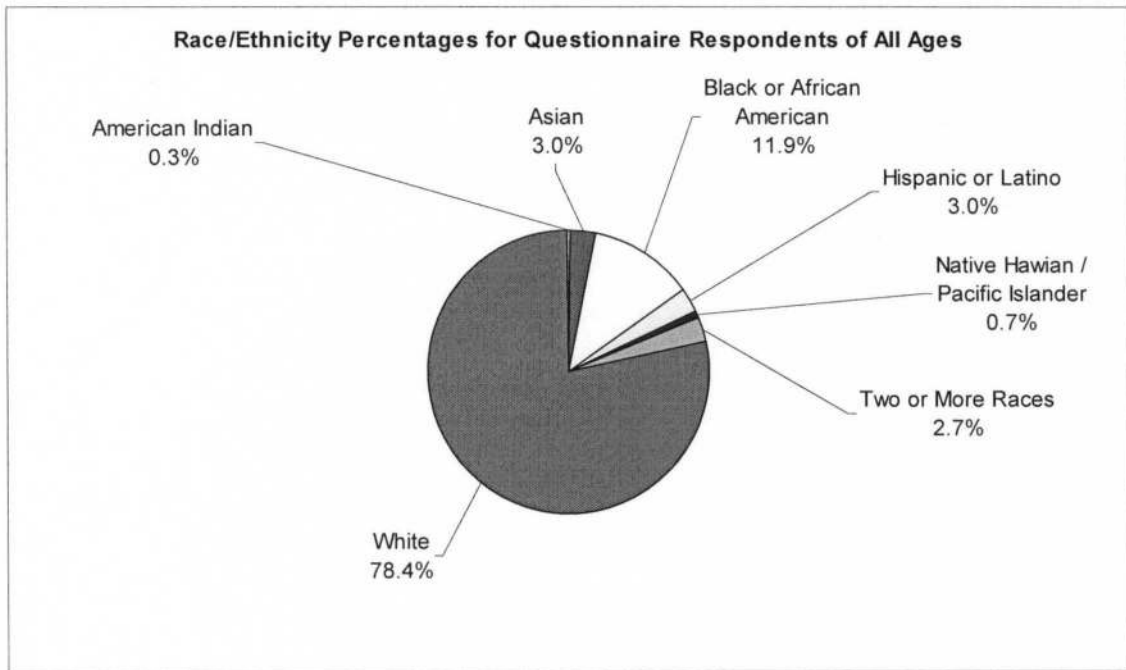
Appendix A:
Attendance in Surveyed Classes, Spring 2009 Semester

| Section | Meeting Time | Total Enrolled | Number Present | Number of Nontrads | Percent Enrolled | Percent Surveyed |
|----------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| A | 5:30 PM | 22 | 12 | 6 | 22 | 50 |
| B | 5:30 PM | 26 | 11 | -- | -- | -- |
| C | 7:00 PM | 26 | 18 | 2 | 7.7 | 11 |
| D | 11:00 AM | 26 | 14 | 1 | 4 | 7 |
| E | 1:00 PM | 26 | 15 | -- | -- | -- |
| F | 12:00 PM | 25 | 16 | -- | -- | -- |
| G | 1:00 PM | 26 | 23 | -- | -- | -- |
| H | 2:00 PM | 25 | 22 | 3 | 12 | 14 |
| I | 5:30 PM | 25 | 12 | 3 | 12 | 25 |
| J | 8:00 AM | 26 | 24 | 1 | 4 | 4.2 |
| K | 9:30 AM | 26 | 25 | 1 | 4 | 4 |
| L | 7:00 PM | 25 | 12 | 3 | 12 | 25 |
| M | 2:00 PM | 26 | 15 | -- | -- | -- |
| N | 3:00 PM | 26 | 16 | -- | -- | -- |
| O | 4:00 PM | 26 | 15 | 2 | 7.7 | 13 |
| P | 8:00 AM | 26 | 19 | -- | -- | -- |
| Q | 11:00 AM | 22 | 12 | 2 | 9.1 | 18 |
| R | 2:30 PM | 20 | 12 | 5 | 25 | 55 |

Appendix B
Percentage of Evening FYC Sections Offered, 2000-2011

| Semester | Total Sections | Evening Sections | % of Total Offered |
|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Fall 2000 | 98 | 13 | 13.3 |
| Spring 2001 | 91 | 11 | 12.1 |
| Fall 2001 | 94 | 14 | 14.8 |
| Spring 2002 | 89 | 14 | 15.7 |
| Fall 2002 | 97 | 14 | 14.4 |
| Spring 2003 | 83 | 9 | 10.8 |
| Fall 2003 | 119 | 12 | 10.1 |
| Spring 2004 | 83 | 11 | 13.3 |
| Fall 2004 | 111 | 16 | 14.4 |
| Spring 2005 | 81 | 11 | 13.5 |
| Fall 2005 | 118 | 16 | 13.6 |
| Spring 2006 | 83 | 11 | 13.3 |
| Fall 2006 | 123 | 10 | 8.1 |
| Spring 2007 | 88 | 11 | 12.5 |
| Fall 2007 | 116 | 14 | 12.1 |
| Spring 2008 | 82 | 7 | 8.5 |
| Fall 2008 | 125 | 12 | 9.6 |
| Spring 2009 | 80 | 6 | 7.5 |
| Fall 2009 | 118 | 12 | 10 |
| Spring 2010 | 80 | 7 | 8.8 |
| Fall 2010 | 118 | 13 | 11 |
| Spring 2011 | 79 | 7 | 8.7 |

Appendix C:
Race and Ethnicity of Questionnaire Respondents, All Ages



CURRICULUM VITAE

James Eric Romesburg

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Education

Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition, Dissertation Defense (Expected) July 2011
University of Louisville, Louisville, KY

Dissertation: "Retrograde Movements and the Educational Encounter: Working-Class Adults in First-Year Composition." Committee: Bronwyn Williams (Director), Karen Kopelson, Beth Daniell, Beth Boehm, and Susan Ryan

Master of Arts in English, August 2003
Clemson University, Clemson, SC

Thesis: "'A Mournful Satisfaction': Exhuming the Self in Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son*" Committee: Hallman Bryant (Director), Frederick Shilstone, and Harold Woodell

Bachelor of Arts in English, Magna Cum Laude, August 1998
Clemson University, Clemson, SC

Associate in Arts, December, 1994
Tri-County Technical College, Pendleton, SC

Conference Presentations

"Keeping the Gate and Cashing our Checks: First-Year Composition Pedagogies and the Working-Class Adult Student." 2010 Conference on College Composition and Communication. Louisville, KY.

"True Stories, Tour Stories: Heritage Tourism and the Crisis of Authority." 2006 Thomas R. Watson Conference. Louisville Ky.

"A Mirror to My Self: Working-Class Academics and Their Student Peers." 2006 Conference on College Composition and Communication. Chicago, IL.

Workshops and Presentations

“Socioeconomic Class in Composition Studies.” Professor Bronwyn Williams’ Fall 2005 and 2006 *Teaching College Composition*, Required Seminar for FYC Instructors and Teaching Assistants at the University of Louisville.

“Preparing for College Writing: Papers, Papers, and More Papers!” 2005 and 2006 NIA Conference for African-American High School Juniors.

“Blackboard Essentials and Eccentricities: Making Use of Blackboard in Your Composition Classroom.” Fall 2005 and 2006 Orientation for Instructors in U of L’s Composition Program

“APA Research and Style for the Social Sciences.” Professor Charles Sharp’s Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 *Integrative Marketing Strategy* course for the College of Business and Public Affairs, a capstone course for marketing seniors.

“Web Tools for the Comp Class: A Nuts and Bolts Approach.” U of L Composition Program Workshop Series, Fall 2006.

“Another Tool of the Trade: Classroom Practices in Computer-Assisted Instruction.” U of L Composition Program Workshop Series, Fall 2005.

Teaching Experience

Part-Time Lecturer: Summer Terms, 2005-2010

Fall and Spring Semesters, 2008-Present

Graduate Teaching Assistant: Fall and Spring Semesters, 2004-2008

University of Louisville Department of English, Louisville, KY

Business Writing (ENGL 306, 12 sections, plus 3 honors sections)

Upper-level course for business, law, and government students emphasizing practice in meeting specific business writing needs and a working knowledge of the communication theory needed to make wise rhetorical choices in a professional environment

Scientific and Technical Writing (ENGL 303, 1 section)

Upper-level writing course for engineering, science, and technology majors emphasizing research, design, and the rhetorical concerns communicating in multiple technical genres

British Literature II (ENGL 302, 2 sections)

Upper-level survey course primarily for English majors focusing on Romantic, Victorian, and Modern writers and incorporating diverse texts and perspectives into the canonical curriculum

Intermediate College Writing (ENGL 102, 10 sections)

First-year course that continues building student writing strategies and rhetorical skill with a particular emphasis on argumentative and research-based writing

Introduction to College Writing (ENGL 101, 7 sections)

First-year course in recognizing and responding to rhetorical situations by developing multiple writing strategies for meeting students' current and future academic writing needs

Lecturer of English (2003-2004 Academic Year)

Graduate Teacher of Record (Fall 2000-Spring 2003)

Clemson University Department of English, Clemson, SC

Technical Writing (ENGL 314, 1 section)

Upper-level, project-based writing course providing rhetorical training in multiple technical writing contexts

Major Forms of Literature (ENGL 202, 2 sections)

Sophomore literature survey course introducing mostly non-English majors to the major literary genres of drama, poetry, and fiction as well as critical literary theory

Accelerated Composition (ENGL 103, 3 sections)

First-year writing course for advanced placement students, emphasizing research and argumentation in expository essays

Composition II (ENGL 102, 6 sections)

First-year writing course continuing introduction to college composition with additional experience in research and argumentation

Composition I (ENGL 101, 7 sections)

First-year writing course offering an introduction to expository writing at the college level

Adjunct Instructor (Summer 2003)

Piedmont Technical College English Department, Greenwood, SC

Professional Communications (ENG 165, 1 section)

Introductory course in genres of business communications, taught to students in five distance-learning county centers through a live satellite video up-link on the South Carolina Educational Television (SCETV) Distance Learning Network

Administrative Experience

Faculty Committee for Incorporating Critical Thinking Standards into the Business Writing Curriculum (May 2010 – July 2011)

University of Louisville Composition Program

- Assist in writing Ideas to Action (i2a) grant, part of the University of Louisville's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for SACS accreditation, funding committee of six faculty and graduate students
- Revise Course Outcomes for composition program's Business Writing course to incorporate Paul/Elder Critical Thinking Model
- Interview university faculty across the curriculum, seeking ways to improve student critical thinking skills in business writing contexts
- Revise syllabi, rubrics, and assignments to create model documents for future business writing instructors

Assessment Coordinator for English Department (Fall 2010 Semester) University of Louisville General Education Curriculum Committee

- Direct the collection of 800 student writing samples and assignment prompts for 100 general education courses in the English Department as part of the SACS Accreditation process
- Organize, digitally process, and redact private information from writing samples before uploading to university's LiveText database

Business Writing Consultant (2007-2008 Academic Year) University of Louisville College of Business and Public Affairs (CBPA)

- Edited/proofread faculty articles through all stages of the journal submission process, from first submission through each round of peer review
- Consulted with doctoral candidates in Economics, Marketing, and Entrepreneurship on articles for submission to professional journals and conferences
- Consulted with undergraduate, master's, and doctoral students on academic papers
- Assessed undergraduate business school papers according to writing outcomes criteria established for SACS Accreditation of the CBPA
- Delivered in-class presentations on rhetorical approaches for academic and professional audiences to senior undergraduates in four capstone marketing classes

Assistant Director of Composition Program (2005-2006 & 2006-2007 Academic Years)

University of Louisville English Department, Louisville, KY

- Assisted the Director of Composition in teaching the required Introduction to Teaching College Composition seminar for new instructors in the department
- Worked in concert with Composition Director to schedule up to 90 composition courses with 30 instructors per semester

- Scheduled all Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI) classrooms for the English Department for the 2005-2007 academic years
- Arbitrated disputes between students and instructors in the composition program
- Reviewed program syllabi to ensure compliance with program and departmental policies
- Evaluated writing portfolios of incoming first-year students for placement into composition program classes (approximately 50 portfolios per term for seven consecutive terms)
- Constructed CAI website for the English Department and Composition Program, including tutorial videos for first-year library research, program news and announcements for upcoming workshops, and online scheduling forms and calendars for instructors who wish to schedule classes in the computer classrooms