

## How Do Dual Credit Students Perform on College Writing Tasks After They Arrive on Campus? Empirical Data from a Large-Scale Study

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### ABSTRACT

*Dual credit/concurrent enrollment programs are proliferating because of state and national political support, yet WPAs have almost no national empirical data for judging the nature and quality of dual credit/concurrent enrollment students' writing. This study compared the writing performance of dual credit/concurrent enrollment students in a first-year university course on American history and politics with that of students who had already earned credit for first-year writing from either AP or our institution's first-year writing course and with that of students concurrently enrolled in first-year writing or still planning to take first-year writing—five groups in all. No statistically significant differences for dual credit/concurrent enrollment students were found when they were compared to other groups. Interpreting the results in light of other data from two surveys and four focus groups, the authors surmise that the kind of curriculum or instructor in any particular variant of first-year writing is likely less important than student maturation, cognitive development, and exposure to more writing instruction in improving students' writing abilities. The authors recommend replication (with modifications) of this research at public state and regional universities with more diverse student bodies. Given the national emphasis on making students "college and career ready," the authors also endorse the recommendations of the 2013 NCTE policy research brief "First-Year Writing: What Good Does It Do?"*

WPAs are committed to designing effective writing programs that serve the purposes of the institutions where we work and the needs of the students on our campuses. But our efforts are complicated by what we don't know about the kinds of education that students received in previous writing courses—particularly in courses taught in high school, courses meant to substitute for

first-year writing (FYW) courses when students matriculate. Presently, one of the biggest unknowns is the nature and quality of dual credit or concurrent enrollment writing courses (DC/CE) that students take in high school. (Such courses may also be offered under the name of dual enrollment, concurrent credit, postsecondary options, and college in the schools.) In 2010, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that DC/CE courses were being offered by 98% of public two-year institutions, 84% of public four-year institutions, and 49% of private four-year institutions. At the 2013 National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships conference, Sandra Gonzalez reported that 1.4 million high school students nationwide were enrolled in college courses (qtd. in Mobley). Yet no nationwide studies offer empirical data about the quality of DC/CE writing courses, as measured by student performance in college.<sup>1</sup> This article is an attempt to fill in some of that gap.

Because we know so little about most DC/CE courses, the fact that they are proliferating like kudzu may be worrisome to many WPAs, a group that includes three of this article's four authors who have served, at various times, as the WPA at Brigham Young University (BYU), where the administration decided to grant college first-year writing credit for DC/CE courses without consulting any of us. Governors and state legislatures are enthusiastic about DC/CE because they believe moving some of the college curriculum into the high schools cuts the cost of college. Legislatures frequently mandate that higher education systems develop DC/CE programs. Of the fifty states, forty-six now have statewide policies governing at least one statewide DC/CE program.<sup>2</sup> In the other four states, DC/CE programs are administered by local district and institution-level policies. Now the federal government has joined the states in encouraging DC/CE. In October 2013, education committees in both houses of Congress passed amendments to support DC/CE (Mobley). On August 22, 2013, President Obama released *Fact Sheet on the President's Plan to Make College More Affordable* as part of a "better bargain for the middle class." In addition to providing financial aid, encouraging competition among states for lower tuition, and rewarding technological innovations that get students through college faster, the *Fact Sheet* states,

Colleges can also award credit for prior learning experiences, similar to current Administration efforts to recognize the skills of returning veterans. Dual-enrollment opportunities let high school students earn credits before arriving at college, which can save them money by accelerating their time to degree.

The administration's efforts imply that a major objective in pursuing a university education is getting credentials in the quickest and cheapest way possible.

The national emphasis on speed, efficiency, and cost ought to be accompanied, we believe, by some national performance data. Because we lack such data, the rapid growth and powerful political support for DC/CE programs causes us concern, as does the lack of uniform national standards for preparing teachers and determining student readiness for DC/CE. Various states have implemented standards of their own for DC/CE programs, but there is little uniformity from state to state. As of 2008, according to the Education Commission of the States, only twenty-nine states had written laws stating the qualifications high school teachers should have before teaching DC/CE courses. The requirements students had to meet before enrolling in a DC/CE course also varied widely:

- seven states required students to meet a minimum GPA requirement
- twenty-two states required written approval or recommendations from teachers or other school personnel
- twenty-five states required students to achieve a specific score on a standardized test
- twenty-seven states required other minimum criteria, such as parents' permission or prerequisite courses

States also do not specify a uniform age at which students are allowed to participate in DC/CE. As of 2008, the following variations in age were evident among the states:

- nine states allowed—but didn't necessarily encourage—ninth graders, age fourteen, to participate
- two states permitted tenth graders to participate
- twenty states permitted eleventh graders to participate
- fifteen states reserved DC/CE for twelfth graders (Education Commission of the States)

This is clearly new territory that state education systems are entering into, and as yet, no national map for DC/CE curricula, teachers, students, and outcomes exists. In order to formulate best practices and establish national accreditation standards, in 1999 a coalition of twenty institutions created the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships ([www.nacep.org](http://www.nacep.org)). As of 2011, the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) had issued seventeen accreditation standards related to curriculum, faculty, students, assessment, and program evaluation. These standards are meant to ensure the comparability of a high

school DC/CE course to the corresponding course at the postsecondary institution that offers credit for the DC/CE course. However, NACEP accreditation takes five years, and currently only eighty-nine programs nationwide have met the standards. Only three states—Arkansas, Indiana, and Minnesota—require that all DC/CE programs in their system meet NACEP standards. NACEP is still a small organization: in 2014, it had 261 postsecondary institutions among its members as well as twenty high schools/school districts and thirteen state agencies. Perhaps over the course of many years, NACEP’s influence will spread, and its benchmarks for DE/CE will become well-established norms widely followed. Perhaps also recent policy statements will become influential, including the 2012 Policy and Best Practices Statement of CCCC on Dual Credit/Concurrent Enrollment (Farris et al.); the Council of Writing Program Administrators’ 2013 position statement on pre-college credit for writing (Hansen et al. *CWPA Position Statement*); and the NCTE’s “First-Year Writing: What Good Does It Do?” published in 2013.

However, until NACEP’s benchmarks are more well-established and accepted as norms, WPAs are left with few ways to evaluate the experience students may have had in DC/CE courses and to judge its relative equivalence to first-year writing (FYW) at their institution. Perhaps this doesn’t matter much, since postsecondary institutions have long accepted each other’s credit for all kinds of courses. But perhaps it does. Living in a time when professional careers require ever higher levels of literacy in more diverse forms, we may be shortchanging students by tacitly telling them the writing they did in high school at the age of seventeen, sixteen, fifteen, or even fourteen has made them successful writers, and they have “taken care of” that part of their education (see Hansen and Farris, “Introduction”; Taczak and Thelin; Tinberg and Nadeau).

Some students may have experienced instruction in high school similar to that of the FYW course they would otherwise take on the campus where they eventually matriculate. But we, like WPAs elsewhere, are inclined to think the FYW course we offer adds value to the abilities students bring with them from high school simply because the FYW course is designed for the needs of students at that institution at that moment in the students’ development. The 2002 study of AP students conducted by Hansen et al. demonstrated that FYW enhanced the writing of students who took the course even though their AP scores were high enough to exempt them from it. That study compared two writing samples from four different groups of sophomore students in the same course. Students who had AP scores of 4 or 5 and who had also taken FYW produced significantly better writing

than the comparison groups, as measured by statistical tests (Hansen et al. “Advanced Placement”).

The study presented here replicates some elements of that study but investigates how the writing of DC/CE students compares to the writing of students who had no FYW credit yet or who earned FYW credit another way, such as by taking BYU’s FYW course or getting credit for AP scores. This study attempts to answer the question: When first-year students have to produce academic papers in a required general education course other than FYW, how strong is the writing of those who earned credit for FYW by taking DC/CE in high school? We believe we could provide answers to this question that can have some national utility. Brigham Young University (BYU) draws students from across the US. In 2010, approximately two-thirds of its 29,000 student population came from outside of Utah (“Where”), and this diverse student population allows us to draw a somewhat representative national sample and present a snapshot of performance by students with a wide array of high school experiences.

## METHODS

The BYU IRB approved the research design in the summer of 2012, and the study began in September of that year.<sup>3</sup> Student participants were recruited from a required first-year course with a semesterly enrollment of about 2,500, roughly half of each new entering class. The course, dealing with American history, politics, and economics, is called American Heritage (AH). We chose this course for three reasons:

1. Well over 95% of BYU’s students take the AH course in a large lecture format, giving us a good chance to get a representative sample of first-year students.
2. The professors teaching the course in fall 2012 required two substantial writing assignments. This is not always the case since requirements change as professors do. In addition, the professors were willing to participate in the study.
3. We wanted to see the academic writing of students as early as possible in their BYU career.

On the second day of the semester, long before their performance in the class might skew their interest in our study, each of the 2,524 students in the AH course was invited to sign a consent form allowing us to email them two surveys and to see copies of the two essays they would write. The consent form stated that students agreed to participate in “a research study of how high school writing courses and college freshman writing courses influence college writing proficiency.” About 61% of the students, 1,552 in

all, signed the consent form; they were emailed a link to a Qualtrics survey, which 713 students completed. The survey results indicated what path—if any—students had taken to complete the FYW requirement, whether through BYU’s first-year writing course, DC/CE, or Advanced Placement (AP).<sup>4</sup>

From the 713 students who responded to the survey, 189 or about 4% of the entire first-year population were randomly selected for closer study.<sup>5</sup> The sample was selected from a population of students who were willing to sign a consent form and fill out a survey, so the sample has a self-selection bias. However, this was unavoidable because IRB principles of voluntary participation and informed consent made it impossible to get a truly random sample from the whole AH class. From the 713 students who completed the initial survey, a random sample of students was chosen from each of five possible options for earning FYW credit. Because of the study’s particular focus on DC/CE students, those student were sampled more heavily in order to ensure robust statistical measures. Table 1 shows how many students in the sample had chosen each of the five options for earning credit and how they compared to each other on high school GPA, mean ACT composite score, and gender.

Table 1.  
 Sample of Students Taking Different Paths FYW Credit in 2012 (n = 189)

Pathway to FYW Credit	n	Mean high school GPA	Mean ACT composite score	Gender Ratio M/F
Had taken BYU’s FYW course	30	3.79*	26.54**	43% / 57%
Taking FYW concurrently with AH	19	3.88	27.79	37% / 63%
Planning to take FYW at a later date	28	3.81	28.43**	57% / 43%
Earned credit by DC/CE	74	3.90*	28.77**	38% / 62%
Earned credit with a score of 4 or 5 on the AP Language and Composition exam****	38	3.85	30.18***	26% / 74%
<b>Totals or Means</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>3.85</b>	<b>28.34</b>	<b>39% / 61%</b>

\*p < 0.01

\*\* $p < 0.01$

\*\*\*The AP students' mean ACT score is significantly different from that of all four other groups ( $p < 0.01$ ).

\*\*\*\*About 34% of the 713 students who completed the first survey had received FYW credit for the AP Language and Composition exam.

Despite the self-selection bias, the students whose essays were chosen for analysis were fairly representative of the entire AH class and reasonably representative of the first-year student population in fall 2012. Table 2 compares pertinent characteristics of the sample to the AH course and to the 2012 first-year class.

Table 2.  
Sample Characteristics Compared to AH Course and Entering Class in 2012

	n	High School GPA	Mean ACT Composite Score	Gender M / F	Average Age
Study Sample	189	3.85	28.3	39% / 61%	18.3
AH Course	2,524	3.75	27.6	49% / 51%	19
First-year class	5,526	3.81	28.7	45% / 55%	18.5

As table 2 shows, the GPAs, ACT composite scores of students, and ages of students in our sample were not significantly different from those of students in the AH student population and the first-year student population. However, female students in our survey were overrepresented (61% female and 39% male) as compared to the gender distribution in AH and first-year class. One or both of two explanations may account for this overrepresentation. First, more female students may choose to take AP and DC/CE courses in high school (see the first endnote). Second, women students have been found to comply more often than men with the request to complete a survey (Sax, Gilmartin, and Bryant). The gender imbalance in this study had possible implications for the results; in 2011 the NAEP reported that female students outscored male students in writing at both eighth and twelfth grade ("Nation's Report Card"). When we separated women's scores from men's in this study, women scored higher than men on both essays, although the differences were not statistically significant, a finding consistent with previous studies (Willingham et al.; Lane and Stone). Thus, we maintain confidence in the sample's representativeness.

The few statistically significant differences among the five groups in table 1 require comment. The average high school GPA of students who

had already completed first-year writing—which almost certainly would have happened in the summer term of 2012—was statistically significantly lower than that of the DC/CE students. Moreover, the average ACT score of students who had already completed FYW was significantly lower than that of three groups: 1) students planning to take FYW later, 2) DC/CE students, and 3) AP students. We know anecdotally that BYU often accepts new first-year students for summer term on a probationary basis because these students might be less academically prepared than first-year students who matriculate in the fall. Our analysis supports this understanding: The students who took FYW during the summer term had the lowest GPAs and ACT composite scores. They seem to have started with a possible disadvantage and then compounded it by taking the condensed first-year writing course (seven and one-half weeks rather than fifteen) in the summer.

Other demographic features of our samples may impact the results. BYU is a private institution that draws students from all over North America and 130 nations beyond. As a result, the sample included a wide range of geographic representation: Students came from forty-seven of the fifty states (none from Delaware, Rhode Island, or Vermont). There is a westward tilt due to our location: About 40% of the sample were from Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington. BYU also has very selective admission standards, so the average high school GPA of 3.85 in the sample is significantly higher than the average GPA of 3.0 reported by the National Assessment of Educational Progress in 2009, the most current data available. The sample students' high grades are supported by their ACT scores. According to the ACT, the average ACT composite score in 2012 was 21.1, a score that is just above the 55<sup>th</sup> percentile nationally (ACT); by contrast, the students in the samples had an average ACT composite score of 28.34, about the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile. We were clearly studying an academically motivated segment of the national student population.

We did not ask students who took the first survey questions about their parents' educational achievement and income, but in 2013, we received information from the College Board that indicated the students we were studying likely enjoy other academic advantages. In 2012, the 3,962 students applying to BYU had scores from 17,154 different AP exams reported to the registrar; in other words, students who want to attend BYU take, on average, about four different AP exams. Forty-eight percent of the students who had their AP scores sent to BYU in 2012 have one or two parents with a graduate degree; this figure is nearly twice the 25% reported to the College Board by all other students who took AP tests in 2012. Moreover, only 8% of students sending BYU their AP scores in 2012 came from low-income homes; by comparison, 23% of all AP test-takers nationally in



2012 reported being from low-income homes. We think it likely that not only AP students, but also DC/CE students and others who matriculate at BYU, come from homes with well-educated and possibly affluent parents. So the student writers we studied were not only high achievers in their high schools but also more likely to have gone to strong high schools and received educational encouragement and support at home.

After creating the samples, we obtained copies of the two essays written in AH by each student in the five groups. The first essay, which required students to take a position on a particular political philosophy, was completed in late October 2012 (see prompt in Appendix A). The entire essay was to be no more than 900 words and was supposed to include an introduction, thesis, evidence, consideration of one or two counter-arguments, and a conclusion. Students wrote the first essay in three stages. Stage one required students to write an opening paragraph that included a thesis statement, due by September 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> (depending on TA groups they were assigned to). In stage two, the revised opening paragraph and two supporting paragraphs were due September 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup>. Students received feedback and grades on these two partial drafts from their TAs, who helped the students improve the final draft of their first essay, which was due October 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup>. We examined only the completed essay.

The second essay was due November 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup>. Student work on the essay was expected to start the third week of October. First, students were to watch a video opinion piece by David Frum about issues such as the collective good, the causes of political gridlock, and the idea of patriotism and then select one of Frum's arguments to write about. They were to construct a compelling thesis agreeing or disagreeing with Frum and write an essay of no more than 900 words in response (see prompt in Appendix A). Then they were to attend a peer review workshop on October 25<sup>th</sup> or 26<sup>th</sup> and present their one-page thesis and outline of their planned argument to two fellow students for feedback. Although students were also required to give a copy of this one-page thesis and outline to their TA to prove they had done it, no formal TA review and grade on the thesis and outline was part of the process. After students handed in their second essay in mid-November, we surveyed them a second time about the process they had gone through to complete the second essay.

We received electronic copies of both Essay 1 and 2 from our 189 student sample.<sup>6</sup> We removed all identifying information and put our own identification numbers on the papers. In December 2012, the 378 essays were graded by raters from our part-time and graduate student teaching pool. Raters used a holistic rubric, with possible scores from 1 to 6, developed from the rubric the AH professors provided as part of their writing

prompts. The rubric described the traits of a 5–6 paper, a 3–4 paper, and a 1–2 paper (see Appendix B). Readers were trained to use the descriptors for the following seven traits in order to come up with holistic scores: thesis, critical awareness, evidence, counter-arguments, organization, grammar and style, sources and citations. After training sessions to clarify the standards and norm raters, ten papers were then rated by all readers. Because our time to conduct the reading was limited, one day later the raters met again and rated the same ten papers so that we could measure intra-rater reliability. Our informal measure of 0.86 (based on exact or adjacent ratings) satisfied us that raters were quite consistent in their judgments, and we moved forward with rating all the essays. Each essay was read at least twice, and 15% were read a third time. Our informal measure of inter-rater agreement was calculated by determining the rate of exact or adjacent agreement, which was 0.85 for our scoring session. However, our statistician, Eggett, calculated an inter-rater reliability measure of 0.4 based on comparing the variance between judges to the variance between essays. While this statistic is not as high as desirable, it is due to the fact that our 6-point holistic scale inordinately magnified every 1-point difference between ratings.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the quantitative analysis of the students' essays, we conducted four focus groups with students from the sample during January and February 2013. We wished to probe more deeply into students' reasons for choosing a particular path to FYW credit and to gather information about the instruction and curriculum they experienced in the high school versions of FYW they took. Initially, we expected twenty-five to thirty students in the focus groups, but difficulties of coordinating schedules and the failure of students to appear meant we interviewed only eleven students, not sufficient for making broad generalizations. Nevertheless, the results gathered offer valuable insights into students' motivations for taking pre-college credit options and the learning experiences they had.

## RESULTS

### *Quantitative Results*

The first survey, emailed to the 1,552 students who signed the consent form, was started by 839 students and completed by 713. From this survey, we learned a sizable percentage of the 2012 first-year class had chosen an option for potentially earning FYW credit while still in high school, as shown in table 3.

Table 3.  
 Survey Results about Students' FYW Choices in High School

High School Path to College Writing Credit	Number	Percent of Total
AP Language and Composition with score of 4 or 5	247	30
Dual Credit/Concurrent Enrollment	128	16
International Baccalaureate	14	2
Took a college writing course but did not get credit*	231	29
Did not take a college writing course	219	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>839</b>	<b>104**</b>

\*This category includes students who got less than 4 or 5 on the AP test, those who took DC/CE but didn't get credit for some reason, or those who took some other path in high school that failed to bring them college credit.

\*\*The percentage is more than 100 because some students marked more than one answer, suggesting that students are perhaps hedging their bets by seeking more than one avenue to college credit while in high school.

Before comparing the sample of 189 students' two essays group by group, we tested the limited null hypothesis that the scores of students who took DC/CE courses would not differ significantly from the scores of their peers who chose other ways to complete FYW. The initial analysis of variance showed that there were marginal differences between groups ( $F_{4, 184} = 2.17, p = 0.074$ ). After getting the ANOVA results, we did pair-wise comparisons of all mean scores between groups and within groups to see if any differences were statistically significant. Table 4 presents the results of these *post hoc* tests.

Table 4.  
 Mean Essay Scores of Students in the Sample Groups (df = 184) (n = 189)

Pathway to FYW Credit	n	Mean Score of First Essay	Mean Score of Second Essay	Standard Error
Students who had taken BYU's required FYW course	30	3.52	3.53	.16
Students who were taking FYW concurrently with AH	19	3.13*	3.13	.20

Pathway to FYW Credit	n	Mean Score of First Essay	Mean Score of Second Essay	Standard Error
Students planning to take FYC at a later date	28	3.73	3.36	.16
Students who earned credit by DC/CE	74	3.69	3.49	.10
Students who got FYC credit with a 4 or 5 on the AP Language and Composition exam	38	3.89*	3.58	.14
<b>Means</b>		<b>3.59**</b>	<b>3.42**</b>	

\* $p < 0.01$

\*\* $p < 0.05$

The results of the pair-wise comparisons can be divided into two parts: differences between groups and differences between essays.

*Group differences* For the first essay, the only statistically significant difference was between the mean score earned by AP students and that of students concurrently taking FYW. There were no statistically significant differences between any pairings of the other groups; this supported our limited hypothesis that DC/CE students would score the same as their peers. For the second essay, there were no statistically significant differences between any pairs of groups. The scores of DC/CE students, the group we were focused on, were not significantly different from those of the other students in any group on either essay.

*Differences between essays* Although, at first glance, three of the groups appear to have performed worse on the second essay, none of the differences between first and second essay within any group were significant. The only statistically significant difference was between the overall scores on the first essay and the second essay. We used t-tests to determine whether the difference between men's and women's scores may have influenced the overall outcome since women scored an average of 3.73 on the first essay and 3.42 on the second while men scored an average of 3.54 on the first essay and 3.36 on the second. However, the differences between genders were not statistically significant (for Essay 1,  $t = 1.33$ ,  $p = 0.19$ ; for Essay 2,  $t = 1.18$ ,  $p = 0.24$ ).

When students handed in their second essay in mid-November, we asked the 189 students in the sample to take a second survey answering questions about the process they followed in composing their papers. A total of 169 answered most or all of the second survey. Space does not permit a complete presentation of the results, but inspection of the open-ended answers to the questions about process showed that nearly all students claimed to have followed a careful process of planning, drafting, and revision—including seeking feedback from friends, roommates, TAs, tutors, and even their professors—as they wrote their second essay. They reported spending an average of 7.4 hours on all the steps of planning, drafting, and revising the second essay.

### *Qualitative Results*

To learn more about our students' experiences in their pre-college courses, we invited students in our study to participate in one of four different focus groups. This invitation went out to all 222 of the students whose writing we initially planned to analyze. (This number included the IB and transfer students, who were later dropped from the study.) Of the twenty-five students who agreed to participate, eleven came to a focus group. Of these, six arrived on our campus with DC/CE credit, four with IB credit, and one with AP credit. Three of these students came from Utah, two from California, and one each from Colorado, Idaho, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia, and Washington. Of the eleven, only one had taken the course at a college near his high school; the rest, including ones with IB and AP credit, had taken their course at their local high school. By comparison, 60% of DC/CE students in our first survey reported that their course was taught by a high school teacher at a high school.

Students in the focus groups told us that earning college credit early was not their main motivation for taking a college-equivalent course in high school. Only two admitted to taking a pre-college writing course in order to “get FYW out of the way.” When asked why he took a DC/CE course, Joe (this and all subsequent names are pseudonyms) explained, “My main reason was mostly to get it out of the way, and I knew it would be easier at a community college . . . and [that] it would be easier to get a good grade and just less work.” Lisa also claimed, “I wanted the easy way out. I did dual enrollment to try and get rid of freshman writing.” Their language indicates that some of our students (and perhaps their parents and advisors) view FYW as a nuisance to be dealt with swiftly and painlessly, and they believed that they could complete it more easily by taking a DC/CE course. Perhaps in their high schools, DC/CE courses had the reputation of being

easier than the course students were likely to encounter in their first-year on a college campus.

More often than not, the students reported that they took a DC/CE, AP, or IB course because they wanted a more challenging curriculum in high school. For example, Jake, who took an IB course in North Carolina, stated, "I took the IB credits because they were the hardest classes offered [at my high school]." He went on, "I wanted a challenge. It was nice to get college credit, but that wasn't really [my] motivation." Valerie's explanation was similar: "My main motivation . . . was because I didn't feel pushed or stretched in my abilities in regular classes." These students also wanted to be in classes with equally motivated peers. "I took my [AP] classes because I didn't want to be in a bunch of classes with a bunch of potheads," said Steve. Many of these students admitted that college credit factored into their decisions—because it "saved time and money" and "knocked out" FYW once they came to college—but they were more interested in an academically rich experience in high school that would help them prepare for college. After explaining that she had "been scared of all the stuff that I had been hearing about college," Allison said, "my main motivation was just being at the level of writing I would need to be at for all the different [college] classes."

The courses taken by the students in our focus groups were, in almost every case, literature based. A notable exception was the DC/CE course Joe took at a community college. In fact, he claimed that there was "no real reading at all" in his course. He described writing argument, research, analysis, expository, and descriptive papers. By contrast, the students who took IB and AP courses routinely wrote timed essays in preparation for exams. In addition to writing literary analysis papers, they also wrote narrative, personal essay, descriptive, and comparison/contrast essays. Only six of the students reported writing a research paper; five students claimed that they did not write a research paper, or they noted research played "a minor role" in their course. The six who wrote research papers reported their topics ranged from Jane Austen to the role of Swiss banks during World War II to the effects of energy drinks on teenagers. Four of these six had access to a college library. The others used their high school and public libraries, along with the Internet.

What the students reported to us about the kinds of writing they did differs somewhat from the data generated by our first survey regarding the genres practiced in DC/CE courses (see table 5). Based on what students reported in the survey, we believe the students in the focus groups may be somewhat atypical since they reported writing more about literature than the students who completed the survey. Another explanation might be that

our survey respondents didn't really understand or remember the kind of writing they did in high school.

Table 5.  
 Genres Students from DC/CE Courses Reported Writing in High School

<b>Genres of Writing Assigned in DC/CE</b>	<b>Percent of Surveyed Students (n = 118)*</b>
Argument/persuasion	84%
Personal narrative or essay	77%
Informative/expository essay	76%
Library research paper	75%
Analysis of literature (fiction, drama, poetry)	61%
Analysis of speech, essay, ad, film, etc.	54%
Creative writing (poem or short story)	49%
Description	40%
Opinion editorial	25%
Other	3%

\*This number is higher than the DC/CE number in table 1 (n = 74) because some students who took DC/CE did not end up receiving credit for it.

While 64% of students in our first survey indicated that their papers were four or more pages long, students in our focus group reported writing papers of a variety of lengths. For example, Valerie, who took an IB course in Washington, wrote four papers between her junior and senior years, the longest of which was a research paper on women in history that was fourteen pages. Fiona, who took a DC/CE course in Idaho during her senior year, wrote four essays on literary topics, each three to four pages in length; she did not write a research paper. In a DC/CE course in Utah, Tess wrote a paper every week (one to six pages in length) and a research paper.

Regardless of the content of the DC/CE, AP, or IB courses, students reported receiving writing instruction that reflects current best practices. Students reported writing multiple drafts, doing peer review, and consulting with their instructors. Even if consultations were not required, the students explained that their instructors made themselves available for one-

on-one conferences, and the majority of the students we talked with took advantage of these opportunities, showing once again their eagerness to succeed. The responses in the focus group confirmed the survey data which indicated students thought their DC/CE course had prepared them to write in various rhetorical situations (80% surveyed said “agree” or “strongly agree”), to use flexible writing strategies (69%), to participate in peer review groups (83%), and to write using sources found through library or database research (70%). While these percentages are relatively high, there is still clearly room for concern that nearly a fifth of students surveyed did not believe that their DC/CE courses helped them write in various rhetorical situations or participate in peer review, and about a third reported they hadn’t been helped to use flexible writing strategies or do research.

Perhaps most importantly, the students in the focus groups believed the skills they acquired in their college-equivalent courses transferred to the university. “I felt really well prepared,” Fiona said of her DC/CE course. Tess likewise stated, “I feel like I can do it [writing] just fine.” Lori explained,

I came here already used to the high demand and knowing what was expected of me. . . . Even though [the AH papers were] different than the English papers that we would write [in the DC/CE course], I still knew the format and the best way to go about writing that because [my teacher] prepared us so well for it.

In our survey, 78% of DC/CE students also said their course was “good” or “very good” preparation for college writing assignments.

By contrast, a few of the focus group students admitted to struggling with some writing tasks. Allison, who took an IB course in Texas, described having “problems . . . with field-specific types of writing.” Lisa, whose main motivation for taking a DC/CE course in Virginia was earning college credit, said, “I don’t know how well prepared I felt for it [college writing]. I think that probably taking the writing class here would have been the smarter choice.” One of the more confident writers we interviewed even acknowledged that there may be more to the first-year experience than college credit. Cathy, an IB student from California, explained,

People are trying to cram all of these college courses in [high school] so that education will be cheaper. . . . And they tell you it will be faster and cheaper, and I don’t know that that is a good thing.

She went on:

Even if I came here as a sophomore with all these credits, I’m still a freshman; I still don’t know what’s going on. I still need to figure



out how it works and what's going on. I think that high schools are becoming more and more obsessed with college.

Such a sophisticated perspective is rare but suggestive of the pressures put on students by the pre-college credit industry and perhaps by parents, advisors, and even politicians.

Interestingly, four of the eleven students in our focus groups had either taken the FYW course at BYU or were taking it concurrently with their AH course. When we asked them how their experience in our FYW course compared to high school, one of those four described the course as “kind of repetitive for me.” Jake, who was writing a rhetorical analysis paper in FYW at the time he participated in our focus group, believed that the FYW course “is basically the same thing as I had been doing in high school.” The others similarly viewed it as redundant, although they were not sorry to have taken it. Allison called it “a good refresher.” Even though they did not think the BYU FYW course offered them much that was new, three of the four students appreciated the opportunity to practice and refine their skills. As one said, “I feel confident that I can write, and I know that I can write well. And I'm still taking in as much as I can to improve myself.”

## DISCUSSION

This study yielded four kinds of results:

1. survey data from a sample of 713 students from across the United States, 390 of whom, or nearly 55%, had taken some version of FYW in high school before coming to our campus;
2. scores on two essays written by 189 of those students enrolled in a first-year required American Heritage course, 112 of whom (59%) had taken AP or DC/CE before they came to BYU, and 77 of whom (41%) had either taken, were currently taking, or were planning to take our FYW course;
3. survey data from 169 students who answered questions about their writing process on the second AH essay;
4. interview data from eleven students, seven of whom were part of the group whose essays we scored.

What do the results of these inquiries imply for us, for our fellow WPAs, and for future research?

A main purpose of this research was to test the hypothesis that the scores of DC/CE students would not differ significantly from those of students who earned FYW credit by other means. We found no significant differences between the scores of DC/CE students and those of other groups

for either essay. Thus, it seems clear that, for the students whose writing we analyzed, taking a DC/CE course in high school prepared them as well for the AH writing assignments as other pre-college or college versions of FYW did. In that respect, some concerns we expressed at the beginning of this article were allayed. But when we also consider that students in our sample who had not yet taken *any* FYW course wrote as well as every other group we studied, we are a bit perplexed by the results. Three main findings demand some explanation:

1. None of the groups differed significantly from each other on either essay except on Essay 1, where the AP group performed better than the group concurrently taking FYW with AH.
2. The majority of students' scores clustered around the middle of the rubric—which described adequate writing but not writing of a quality one might predict given the students' high GPAs, high ACT scores, and high socioeconomic status.
3. On the whole, students did better on Essay 1 than Essay 2.

We will discuss each of these in turn.

The first finding was that, although we might have predicted more variability among the groups, they were all about the same. Students who had not yet taken any version of FYW, either in high or in college, wrote as well as the other groups. Students with significantly lower high school GPAs and ACT scores who had taken FYW in a rushed seven-and-one-half weeks wrote as well as students who had taken a year-long AP or DC/CE course in high school. Students concurrently taking FYW with AH posted the lowest scores, although they were significantly lower only on the first essay and only when compared to the AP group. These results may lead some to question whether FYW even matters. We are not ready to say it doesn't matter because we think these results are consistent with other findings about the level of proficiency in writing demonstrated by students of a similar age and stage of development.

For example, we've learned from excellent longitudinal studies, such as those of Haswell's *Gaining Ground* and Sternglass' *Time to Know Them*, that first-year students are only setting out on the learning-to-write quest. While they may receive excellent college-level instruction, they may not be able to show what they've learned quite yet—they may have declarative knowledge about writing or rhetoric without the procedural ability to put those knowledge domains onto the page (Sommers, "The Call of Research" 154; see also Carroll 72 ). It is difficult to demonstrate exactly what students have learned from a course shortly after they take it—or while they are still enrolled. Echoing White, Haswell has argued persuasively that "a

causal relationship between an instructional program [such as FYW] and writing improvement is very difficult to establish” (Haswell, “Documenting Improvement” 340), especially when one college-level writing class is taken as the treatment. “The story of the freshman year,” write Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz, “is not one of dramatic changes on paper; it is the story of changes within the writers themselves” (144).

Furthermore, as Sommers has learned from “The Call of Research,” her massive and heroic study of student writing at Harvard, writing development doesn’t follow a tidy linear trajectory:

Writing development involves steps both forward and backward, gains and losses, and requires some amount of “bad” writing while new skills are practiced. These steps backward, which often defy our best attempts to describe progress, are often indicators that students are struggling to learn something new. It is not uncommon to see students regress in one area as they practice another. From a longitudinal perspective, writing development is neither linear nor sequential, nor entirely predictable. (154)

Sommers’ observation seems particularly pertinent in the case of the students who were concurrently taking FYW with AH. These students were in the throes of learning something new in both courses. Their scores were the lowest of all groups studied on both essays; nevertheless, it is interesting that the students concurrently enrolled in FYW and the students who had already taken FYW maintained the same level of performance on the second essay, rather than losing some ground as the other groups did. It may be that their ability to demonstrate the same level of performance had something to do with their instruction in FYW.

The second main finding was that the quality of student writing in any group was not as high as we might have predicted. As noted in table 4, the overall average score on Essay 1 was 3.59; on essay 2, it was 3.42. These scores indicate that readers found most of the papers were described by the following criteria found in the middle of the scoring rubric:

*Thesis* announces an identifiable claim, though it may be ordinary and uninteresting, ambiguous or too broad.

*Critical Awareness*: the writer does not fully identify or explain the gap, tension, or question he/she is addressing; arguments and reasons are adequate but unqualified.

*Evidence*: connections to the thesis may be tenuous, and the evidence may be inadequate (only one source, for example) or lack credibility; sources may not be adequately analyzed or discussed.

*Counter-Arguments* are considered only in passing and the refutation is not convincing.

*Organization*: the paper has an introduction, thesis, evidence, counter-argument, and conclusion, but the various parts come without the connective tissue of transitions; the conclusion may summarize without offering compelling implications for the argument.

*Grammar and Style*: generally clean prose, with some grammatical errors.

*Sources/Citations* are not always suitably incorporated or documented, but there is an attempt at correct citation style (APA or Chicago).

While we recognize that, because of our holistic method of scoring, some of these traits perhaps carried more weight for raters than other traits, we did provide a summary statement to guide the holistic scoring, describing a 4 or 3 paper this way: “Solid, if not perfectly developed or reasoned; mostly clear and correct writing with some mistakes, but without an engaging style.” Perhaps, when one is eighteen or nineteen and in the first semester of college, it may be good enough to have one’s writing described in this way. (We note, however, that the Common Core State Standards for Writing for Grades 11–12 are far more rigorous than the criteria above.) We may feel more encouraged about the students’ performance by looking at their mean scores from another perspective. If the scoring rubric is considered in a binary way, more than two-thirds of the students’ first essays were judged to be in the upper half of the scoring grid because 69% of the students scored a 3.5 or higher (when two readers’ scores were averaged), and 44% scored 4 or higher. The same way of looking at the second essay shows that 57% of the papers were judged to be in the upper half of the scoring grid. These statistics draw some attention away from the descriptors of ordinary performance.

Nevertheless, scores are one thing and performance standard another. Cizek and Bunch quote Kane, who states that “the performance standard is the conceptual version of the desired level of competence, and the passing score is the operational version” (15). Cizek and Bunch also note that “all standard setting is unavoidably situated in a complex constellation of political, social, economic, and historical contexts” (12). Taking these contexts into account at our institution, we would define a score of 4 or 3 on this assessment as competent, or just barely meeting our performance standard for students receiving credit for FYW. Still we would have expected such high-achieving students as we studied to write at a somewhat higher level, particularly on papers they had several weeks to complete—and this is a cause for concern. Their high school GPAs and ACT scores and their

ability to meet other admission requirements at a very selective university suggest they are bright, motivated, and capable of high performance. But as we have noted, it may simply take more time and practice for knowledge about writing to manifest itself in the performance of even high-achieving students.

The less-than-impressive results tend to support the observations of Haswell, Carroll, Sternglass, and Sommers and Saltz. We have learned from cognitive development research that writers develop from novices to experts only after a significant apprenticeship period in which they develop genre awareness, domain-specific knowledge, working memory, audience awareness, and task schemata appropriate to various situations (Bazerman, “Genre”; Kellogg; McCutchen, Teske, and Bankeston). This is one reason we look askance at attempts to shorten students’ “cognitive apprenticeship,” as Ronald Kellogg has called it (19), by encouraging students to take FYW in high school, especially as young as fourteen or fifteen. Doing so may ask them to practice writing skills before they are developmentally able to do so (see Taczak and Thelin for evidence of this), and it may actually decrease the amount of deliberate practice with writing that students are able to have.

The third main finding is that, overall, students wrote significantly better on the first essay than the second. There are a number of explanations for this. It’s possible that the second essay prompt was more difficult than the first. It may have been intrinsically harder for students, or they may have perceived it as harder. Even if it wasn’t more difficult, perhaps students chose to invest less time and effort on the second essay, since it came later in the semester; they may have been busier or not convinced they could change their overall grade in the course. It is also possible that students could have performed as well on the second essay as on the first with more time and the same amount and type of feedback they experienced with the first essay, which was developed over a longer period of time and had at least two partial drafts graded by TAs before the final draft came due. The AH professors told us that their objective was to help students enough on the first paper that the students would be able to go through the writing process on their own for the second essay. Although students were required to participate in a peer workshop with two classmates to review their thesis and outline, and most of the 169 students who answered the second survey reported they followed sound writing processes, those who had taken a high school version of FYW or no FYW at all scored lower on the second essay (no group scored significantly lower by itself). Perhaps peer review of a thesis and outline was not as helpful as the TA review students got with partial drafts of the first essay. Perhaps more peer, TA, and teacher review

as well as more time to mature as a writer are precisely the benefits provided by an additional writing course after matriculation at college.

With maturation and more experience, students who achieved the average level we measured in this study may simply become better writers on their own. Yet we can't help but think that students who have had a high school substitute for FYW would profit from taking another writing course after they matriculate. The Hansen et al. study of AP students' writing, after which the present study was partially modeled, showed that some students start college with an advantage by taking *both* a high school AP course and then an appropriately challenging course (honors or second-semester FYW) when they get to college. In that study, students who earned an AP score of 4 or 5 but still took FYW in college posted scores on two essays that were significantly higher ( $p < 0.002$ ) than those of students who had only AP and no FYW. The authors speculated that by taking FYW in college—even when they could be exempted—AP students may solidify the gains they have made in writing and “expand the repertoire of texts they know how to write well” (489). Students who avail themselves of more opportunities for writing instruction will be able to revisit and reapply what they learned initially as well as learn more, as indicated by recent scholarship on distributed learning and optimal intervals for learning (Carey 65–79). Taking the ostensibly unnecessary college writing course is likely to help even the best students see writing as an iterative, open, and perpetually improving activity. We're inclined to believe the same would be true for DC/CE students or those who have taken some other high school path to earning FYW credit. In all honesty, we must add that students who don't take a high school DC/CE or AP or IB course and depend on a single semester of FYW at college to become strong writers also need to have opportunities to revisit and reapply their learning—whether in a sophomore course, linked courses, a WAC program, or all of these. We need to help students understand that learning to write is not like learning to ride a bike but is, instead, like learning to play the piano. Students can always improve their style and technique and expand their repertoire.

#### IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We believe the quantitative results of this study support the recommendation of the NCTE's 2013 policy research brief, “First-Year Writing: What Good Does It Do?” The authors of this brief state unequivocally, “Allowing college credit for writing courses completed while in high school will not help students to fully develop capacities for engagement, persistence, collaboration, reflection, metacognition, flexibility, and ownership that

will help them to grow as writers and learners.” That’s a large claim, but it aligns with the claims of the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* which stresses the importance of allowing students opportunity and time to develop the habits of mind exhibited by more mature students as well as greater rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking, flexible writing processes, and knowledge of writing conventions. The NCTE policy brief recommends that any decision to grant FYW credit for high school work “should be made on an individual basis and should be based on actual writing samples from the student that are read by instructors at the school they will attend.” If college writing programs have specific outcomes for their campus that they aim to produce in students, it behooves the administrators of those programs to determine whether students coming to campus with AP, IB, and DC/CE credit can demonstrate they have already met the outcomes.

We believe the qualitative results of our study also offer support for the NCTE position. In our surveys and focus groups, students reported having done significant amounts of writing in high school and having experienced solid process pedagogies. According to our first survey, more than 70% of students who took substitutes for FYW in high school wrote papers in the genres of argumentation/persuasion, exposition, and library research—genres that FYW courses typically focus on. But high percentages also reported writing analyses of literature and of speeches, essays, ads, films, and so forth—genres that are less common in FYW. Nearly half of the students also reported writing fiction and poetry in their high school classes meant to substitute for FYW—whether they were AP, IB, or DC/CE. The respondents in our focus groups described reading literary works almost exclusively in their DC/CE, AP, and IB first-year writing courses. Oddly enough, students who had experienced a literature-based curriculum in high school *and* BYU’s first-year writing curriculum did not see any major differences between what they did in high school and what they were doing in their FYW course, a course which includes a strong focus on rhetoric, with assignments to write arguments from sources, to analyze rhetoric, and to combine media and modes of presentation.<sup>8</sup> The different purposes and genres of writing that constitute the focus of our course did not seem to make much of an impression on the students we interviewed. For most of them, writing is writing, and whatever it is about or what form it takes doesn’t matter. (In that respect, students may be the strongest proponents of faith in general writing skills, a notion roundly criticized by Petraglia, Russell, and others.) In our discussions with students, we saw a need for them to become more sensitive to many concepts of rhetoric and to prac-

tice with more genres of reading and writing than they had encountered by their first year in college.

Based on the evidence provided in this research, we add our voice to the NCTE's in recommending that, rather than stop their study of writing after they have completed a FYW option in high school, students study writing after they come to college—in an additional first-year course, a sophomore course, linked courses, WAC/WID courses, or all of these. The NCTE research brief states,

Decisions regarding college writing course requirements and student placement should acknowledge that writing development occurs over time and reflects students' emotional, social, and cognitive maturity. Writing competence—for students of all ages—is continually developing and depends on exposure to many diverse experiences requiring writing, revision, problem solving, and creative thinking. ("First-Year Writing")

We realize that requiring more writing of students who already have FYW credit would mean that WPAs would have to create appropriately difficult and different writing courses for AP, IB, and DC/CE students to place into when they come to campus. But taking a challenging writing course early in their college careers, we believe, will strengthen the gains those students have begun to make by taking a challenging path in high school such as AP, IB, or DC/CE (see Whitley and Paulsen's study of AP students for evidence of this).

We understand the desire to have students finish their college education in an efficient time frame to keep their college expenses and debt as low as possible. We understand why government officials, parents, and students believe that taking pre-college writing courses will help achieve these objectives. But perhaps students and parents are trying to economize on the wrong things. At our institution, students who matriculate with anywhere from six to sixty credit hours earned in high school—including for first-year writing—don't graduate from college significantly faster; at most, they graduate about half a semester ahead of their peers. Perhaps these students realize that they are not as well-prepared or as well-educated as their transcripts seem to imply. Perhaps they come to realize what Cathy told us in a focus group:

They tell you [taking college courses in high school] will be faster and cheaper, and I don't know that that is a good thing. Even if I came here as a sophomore with all these credits, I'm still a freshman;



I still don't know what's going on. I still need to figure out how it works and what's going on. I think that high schools are becoming more and more obsessed with college.

We are also learning that, even though our admissions office allows students to bypass FYW on the strength of high school learning, some departments at BYU are requiring first-year writing as a prerequisite for their majors anyway. Departments such as psychology and English want their majors to write better, thinking it folly to excuse students from further writing instruction because they were able to pass tests or produce a few essays when they were fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, or seventeen but have done little in the meantime to maintain and develop their skills or to add to their repertoire of writing genres.

To help students see the value of additional writing instruction, we recommend that WPAs consider how they package and advertise courses to students who come to college with credit for first-year writing already on their transcripts. Students in our focus groups tended to describe our FYW course as a repeat of what they had already learned in high school. We may tend to dismiss such claims, believing that our curriculum is different from and more rigorous than high school courses, particularly when students with pre-college credit describe having taken literature-based writing courses, having written mostly timed essays, and having done minimal to no research. But perhaps we should be less concerned with selling students on the idea that FYW offers something new or different and be more concerned with convincing them that it offers them something *more*—more opportunity to refine and develop their skills as writers. Administrators and faculty on college campuses often wrongly assume that FYW is a one-stop fix-all course from which students emerge fully prepared to do the kinds of writing expected of them at the university. WPAs rightfully respond by noting that writing acumen develops over time through practice. College-equivalent writing courses, theoretically, prepare students to do college writing (whatever that entails). But given that most of the students in our study—whether they came to us with pre-college credit or took our FYW course or took no course at all—did not perform as well as their academic profile seemed to predict they would, perhaps the real issue is not that students need to be sold on the distinctive nature of FYW. Rather, perhaps the real issue is that they need to be shown how an additional course presents another, and needed, opportunity to develop their writing skills.

We also believe it is important to examine the broader culture in which DC/CE, AP, and IB courses have now become a growth industry. We feel compelled to ask what is behind the effort to try to fast-forward students' literacy development. Why are so many students feeling pressure to enroll

in so-called college level courses at ever younger ages? Deborah Brandt's research has taught us to pay attention to what she calls the "sponsors of literacy," any agents "local or distant, abstract or concrete, who enable, support, teach, model, recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy and gain advantage by it in some way." In short, "sponsors are those agents who want our literacy as much as we do" (xiii). One of the most powerful sponsors of literacy is, collectively, the businesses and industries competing for an edge in the economy by trying to get the best human capital to improve production and profit. What we often view as "literacy crises" that must be addressed in our schools are really economic demands, Brandt says, on "more and more people at younger and younger ages to do more and more things with symbols" (xiv). The constant pressure to change standards for literacy achievement are driven by economic competition and the changing communication technologies our economy now runs on.

The growing pressure put on today's high school students to take so-called college-level writing courses in high school and thus get FYW "out of the way" is one manifestation of what Brandt describes. Some of the most prominent lobbyists encouraging state governments to establish concurrent enrollment programs and to mandate participation in AP, IB, and DC/CE programs are organizations such as Achieve, the American Youth Policy Forum, the Institute for Educational Leadership, Jobs for the Future, and the National Center for Educational Accountability. Representatives from these organizations authored many of the chapters in the 2007 book *Minding the Gap: Why Integrating High School with College Makes Sense and How to Do It* (Hoffman et al.), and their main argument is that, without college credentials, today's adolescents will be left out of the mainstream economy. But who bankrolls these organizations that make this argument to the state legislatures? The answer is the non-profit foundations established by such well-known for-profit corporations as Microsoft, Eli Lilly, Ford, General Electric, Boeing, IBM, and Wal-Mart (see Hansen and Farris, Introduction).

We understand the desires of corporate America to have well-educated workers. But what if the acquisition of deep, wide, versatile, and easily deployed literacies is not something that can be sped up? We believe corporations would be better served by hiring employees whose educational experience has been deep, deliberate, and relatively slow, rather than superficial, compressed, and rushed, with advanced instruction presented to ever-younger students instead of instruction that is appropriate to their cognitive, emotional, and social development. What if, instead of pushing more and more college learning into high school, we set the bar for graduating from high school higher, and we laid the foundation deeper? What

if we had challenging courses like AP and IB in high school but didn't allow double counting of high school courses for college credit? What if we gave adolescents more time to become mature writers, developing audience awareness and working memory through a more complete cognitive apprenticeship? Would we get a better prepared cadre of workers for the knowledge industries? We think the answer is yes. We believe students would be far more "college and career-ready" if they studied writing in many different contexts rather than being led to believe that writing is a low-level set of skills that one acquires once and for all, as one might purchase a set of pliers and wrenches to use again and again. As Adler-Kassner has recently argued, "*Competencies are always situated within contexts*. Just as there is no such thing as 'general skills writing,' competencies are not generic; they are developed and closely linked to specific sites" (449; emphasis in original). As Bazerman has stated, perhaps the most important thing students will learn from taking multiple writing courses and practicing writing in several domains is that it is "worth working hard at writing" ("Response" 257).

We hope this study causes readers to think about their institutions' policies and practices concerning high school versions of FYW. We strongly recommend that this study be replicated elsewhere because, like Anson, we believe decisions about writing program policies and instruction should be based whenever possible on empirical evidence, not simply beliefs. Although we began this study with the hope that our national student population might give us generalizable findings, we caution that the findings may not be generalizable to institutions where entering students have different academic and demographic profiles. With Haswell ("NCTE/CCCC's"), we believe that replication studies are too few and infrequent, so we particularly encourage state and regional public institutions to adapt our methods to study their own populations to see whether they find similar results. We would be happy to advise WPAs on how they might adapt our methods (particularly scoring methods) to get results that would contribute to a robust set of national findings about the nature and quality of pre-college writing programs.<sup>9</sup>

## NOTES

1. Some local studies offer support for the value of DC/CE courses in writing. Oregon University System and Oregon's Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development discovered that DC/CE writing students who received credit for the first semester of a FYW sequence passed the second semester at close to the same rate as students who took FYW in the Oregon University System (North and Jacobs). While some studies show that college-level writing does not serve students who haven't yet reached a critical adult-like level

of maturity (Taczak and Thelin), other studies—like one by the Community College Research Center—demonstrate that high school students who take DC/CE are more likely to graduate from high school, more likely to enroll in college, and more likely to stay in college after the first semester than students who do not (Karp et al.). The CCRC also noted that DC/CE students were predominantly white, female, and unlikely to be labeled English language learners.

2. According to 2008 data from the Education Commission of the States, twelve states required “all high schools and eligible public postsecondary institutions to provide dual enrollment opportunities.” In twenty-one states, “dual enrollment programs are based on voluntary partnerships between K-12 and postsecondary partners,” and in nine states, “policy does not specify whether the offering of dual enrollment is mandatory or voluntary” (Education Commission of the States).

3. Our IRB Protocol number was 20291.

4. For a quick summary of the differences among these various paths to FYW credit, see Hansen’s “What Is Pre-College Credit?” in *A Rhetoric for Writing Program Administrators*.

5. At first, we had intended to include International Baccalaureate (IB) students and transfer students. However, there were only fourteen IB students in the population, and we found that a high proportion of them were taking or had already taken FYW because BYU does not yet grant first-year writing credit for IB. The IB students’ scores were left out of the statistical analysis of scores. Additionally, after reading the students’ answers to the question of whether they had transferred credit from another institution, we realized nearly all of them had not understood the question and had misidentified themselves, so we left their scores out of the analysis as well.

6. We acknowledge there are problems related to holistic scoring of student papers—challenges that have been considered and debated since White’s article “Holisticism” was published in *CCC* in 1985. White argues that holistic scoring has two general weaknesses: 1) it lacks diagnostic power and 2) it tends to bias us into thinking that the scores represent some kind of absolute value. We accept that scoring writing is an inescapably subjective process and that values assigned to writing can be no better than approximations (Haswell, “Rubrics” 244). We also know that in some cases analytic or primary trait rubrics, when used ethically and rigorously, can provide more nuance for a study such as ours, regardless of the reliability that might be sacrificed when training raters to rate across domains. Cizek and Bunch do allow for holistic rubrics that allot points based on the quality of various characteristics in the response, but they caution that rubrics yield data only about the item being scored with them, e.g., the whole paper. These data, they caution, must then be related to performance level descriptions or definitions (31). In the end, we believed a holistic rubric was suitable for our purposes because we were looking for overall impressions of writing ability based on shared

standards of rhetorical knowledge, argument, style, and conventions—something “qualitatively different than the mere aggregate of many parts,” in the words of one research study (Singer and LeMahieu). With Huot, we believe that holistic scoring can be “a sound and valid measure of directly assessing student writing,” but we understand its limitations (228).

7. Undoubtedly, it would have been better to have more writing from the students—either another essay or longer papers or both—to base our judgments on, as opposed to two 900-word essays. However, the sample we got was representative of the course under examination. We were fortunate that the AH professors who cooperated with us valued writing enough to assign even six to eight pages of writing to every student in a course that enrolled over 2,500. We admire the thought the professors put into their assignments and rubrics, as well as their efforts to use sound pedagogical processes to teach writing and to norm the grading of such a mountain of papers with their small army of TAs. Further, we note that the AP English exams also use a relatively small amount of holistically scored writing (three first-draft essays completed in forty minutes each) to judge students’ ability; nevertheless, important decisions about whether to have a student take first-year writing or not may rest on the scores of these short, timed AP essays. We were fortunate to assess student writing that had been drafted, revised, and edited over a period of weeks.

8. Christine Denecker’s dissertation speaks to this point as well. Studying DE/CE writing courses in Ohio, Denecker found that “secondary and post-secondary writing instruction are rarely aligned” in such programs (iii). She argues particularly that the site of instruction matters and that so-called college-level writing instruction provided by high school teachers in high schools may serve simply to “re-inscribe already established gaps, assumptions, and misconceptions between writing instructors at secondary and post-secondary levels” (iv).

9. We thank the Council of Writing Program Administrators for the targeted research grant that made this study possible. We also thank our colleagues Danette Paul and Delys Snyder for reading early drafts. We are particularly grateful to the rigorous reviewers and the editors of the journal, who made this article stronger.

## APPENDIX A: WRITING PROMPTS

*[Authors’ Note: The following prompt was composed by two professors who taught American Heritage in fall 2012. For our study, only Essays 3 and 4 were scored; what the professors call Essays 1 and 2 below (actually only a few paragraphs) were assigned as partial drafts building up to Essay 3.]*

This semester, you will write **four** essays. The first three essays will give you practice constructing the various parts of an academic essay, and the fourth essay will give you another opportunity to practice those skills by constructing a full essay from beginning to end. Each essay will come with specific word limits.

The essays are worth the following point totals:

Essay #1: 10 points

Essay #2: 20 points

Essay #3: 50 points

Essay #4: 70 points

Together, the essay assignments are worth 150 points – as much as the final exam. You should, therefore, take each assignment very seriously. Due dates for each essay are listed in the course syllabus and in this document. Please pay careful attention to these dates, as the penalties for late work are severe. The grading rubrics the TAs will follow for each assignment are available on the American Heritage website.

The essays you will write are not book reports or mere summaries of someone else's position or 5-paragraph descriptive essays of the kind many of us wrote in high school. Instead, they should be essays in which you announce a thoughtful, compelling thesis and construct an effective college-level argument, using appropriate evidence and analysis to defend your position. Each essay should include the Honor Pledge (see the "Policies" section of the syllabus).

Your first three essays will be drawn from one of the topic statements below, each of which touches on one or more key themes of the course. The statements are designed to be controversial – people of good will may agree or disagree with them, sometimes passionately. You should critically evaluate the topic you choose. Your goal is to construct a thoughtful, compelling, insightful argument about the topic.

1. Government action invariably means a loss of individual liberty.
2. When designing a government (or writing a constitution), you should focus more on individual rights than on virtue or on community welfare.
3. An individual can achieve the greatest freedom only when bound to a community.
4. Inequality is a natural condition of human society, not a reason for government intervention.
5. Economic systems work best when producers and consumers set virtue aside.

### *Essay #1*

For this essay, you will choose a topic from one of the five topic statements above, and you will formulate an effective introduction and thesis for a paper that deals with that topic. Your thesis should not merely be a restatement of the topic sentence, but should, instead, be the main idea or proposition that could be the heart of a longer essay. To complete this assignment, though, you will only write the introduction and thesis statement. You are limited to **NO MORE THAN 150 words**.

As you construct your thesis statement, it may be helpful for you to consult a few scholarly sources. The course readings also address the topics listed in this writing assignment. [. . .]

Writing this essay will help you learn to...

- **Identify a problem worth writing about (a motive).** A successful essay must attract the reader's attention and explain the intellectual puzzle or challenge you will be discussing. Why should readers care or want to read further?
- **Formulate an arguable thesis in response to the motive you have identified.** Your goal is to create a compelling argument. Without a thesis, your essay will be mere description of someone else's ideas.

### *Essay #2*

For this essay, you will write on the same topic that you chose for Essay #1. Based on the feedback you received about Essay #1, you should revise your introduction and thesis statement. In addition, you will write two new paragraphs in which you provide evidence in support of your thesis as well as some analysis of that evidence. You are limited to **NO MORE THAN 400 words**, including both the revised introduction and the new evidence. [. . .]

Writing this essay will help you learn to...

- **Revise your writing in response to comments.** Writing is a process. To produce high-quality academic argument, which is our goal, your written work should be much more than what you type in to the computer at 2am the day the essay is due. Revision will be a key part of this process. Revision literally means "seeing again." When engaged in effective revision, a writer begins to see an argument from a different perspective and can therefore articulate a sharper focus. Writing specialist Nancy Sommers has found that when experienced writers revise, they often radically alter their idea and reorganize the entire essay. By contrast, when inexperienced student writers revise, they change a few words here and there but leave the essay essentially unaltered. Think hard about your TA's evaluation of your first assignment. Try to see your thesis anew, and make changes that will strengthen your introduction.
- **Use appropriate evidence to defend your thesis and analyze the evidence.** A thesis needs to be defended with compelling evidence. But usually, the evidence does not just speak for itself. It needs to be analyzed and interpreted. You should think hard about the case you are trying to build for your thesis. What evidence supports your thesis and why? As you incorporate evidence, think hard about the sources of that evidence.

### *Essay #3*

This assignment is your opportunity to expand upon the work you have already done and to develop a full essay that includes an introduction and thesis, evidence, consideration of one or more counter-arguments, and a conclusion. You will write on the same topic you chose for the first two essays. You should revise your

introduction, thesis, and evidence after considering the feedback you received from Essay #2. For this essay, you should add any additional evidence and analysis that is needed to fully develop your argument. You should also consider and respond to at least one counter-argument. The essay should include a thoughtful conclusion. You are limited to **NO MORE THAN 900 words**. [ . . ]

Writing this essay will help you learn to...

- **Structure an essay effectively.** Writing an effective academic essay is not an exercise in stream of consciousness or associative writing, nor is it a mere summary of the arguments of others. You should develop an argument of your own that grows and develops (and does not merely restate the thesis multiple times). As you develop your argument, you should articulate and respond to potential counter-arguments to your main idea. Every good idea has potential counter-arguments, and you should engage with those in the course of your essay. Choose the strongest counter-argument you can think of, not a weak or straw-man objection. If you cannot think of a suitable counter-argument, your thesis is probably not as strong as it could be.

#### *Essay #4*

This assignment is your opportunity to bring all of the elements of the academic essay together once again, but this time for a different topic. In order to choose a topic, please view the following video opinion piece from David Frum: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uD3NTGO5CCM>. (A link to the video is also available on the American Heritage website.)

Frum is well-respected author and public intellectual who writes about contemporary politics, generally from a conservative perspective. Your essay should take up and respond to one of the arguments Frum makes in the video. For example, Frum addresses such issues as the collective good, the causes of gridlock, and the idea of patriotism, among other themes. Select one of his themes or arguments, construct a compelling thesis, and write an essay of no more than 900 words. Your essay can agree or disagree with the position Frum takes. As with Essay #3, your work should include an introduction and thesis statement, evidence and analysis, a counter-argument, and a conclusion.

#### APPENDIX B: SCORING RUBRIC

*5–6 Paper: Perceptive and fully developed; reasoned and organized effectively; an obvious command of conventions with a rhetorically-effective, engaging style.*

- *Thesis* is clear, perceptive, and focused; leads to an incisive, creative argument; is specific and limited in scope.
- *Critical awareness:* the writer sets up the argument by identifying an inconsistency, gap, tension or question; the student may offer a qualification for his or her argument.



- *Evidence* includes compelling and reliable sources (*plural*) and specific examples, which are analyzed insightfully.
- *Counter-Arguments* (objections, alternatives, or problems from skeptical readers) are considered and are responded to, building the writer's case.
- *Organization*: the argument builds effectively with connective tissue such as transitions; the intro and conclusion are compelling, and they support the thesis and suggest implications or consequences for the argument.
- *Grammar and Style*: clean, polished, and sophisticated prose with virtually no grammatical errors.
- *Sources/Citations* are appropriately incorporated and documented with a clear citation style (APA or Chicago).

**3–4 Paper:** *Solid, if not perfectly developed or reasoned; mostly clear and correct writing with some mistakes, but without an engaging style.*

- *Thesis* announces an identifiable claim, though it may be ordinary and uninteresting, ambiguous or too broad.
- *Critical Awareness*: the writer does not fully identify or explain the gap, tension, or question he/she is addressing; arguments and reasons are adequate but unqualified.
- *Evidence*: connections to the thesis may be tenuous, and the evidence may be inadequate (only one source, for example) or lack credibility; sources may not be adequately analyzed or discussed.
- *Counter-Arguments* are considered only in passing and the refutation is not convincing.
- *Organization*: the paper has an introduction, thesis, evidence, counter-argument, and conclusion, but the various parts come without the connective tissue of transitions; the conclusion may summarize without offering compelling implications for the argument.
- *Grammar and Style*: generally clean prose, with some grammatical errors.
- *Sources/Citations* are not always suitably incorporated or documented, but there is an attempt at correct citation style (APA or Chicago).

**1–2 Paper:** *Poorly supported and/or reasoned; weak style—errors impede reading.*

- *Thesis* is nonexistent or is too obvious, broad, or vague; the sentence-level writing might be adequate, but the argument is weak.
- *Critical Awareness*: the topic is addressed too personally or matter-of-factly, and there is no sense of a gap, tension, or question.
- *Evidence* is inadequate (e.g., no sources), of poor quality, not analyzed, and/or not connected to the thesis.
- *Counter-Arguments* are nonexistent or, if present, are not adequately stated and responded to.
- *Organization* is mysterious or confusing; the transitions are weak or nonexistent; the conclusion merely summarizes the argument.

- *Grammar and Style*: simplistic, unpolished prose, with noticeable and distracting grammatical errors.
- *Sources/Citations* are not incorporated and documented correctly or effectively; there may be no works cited page or citations at all, or the works cited page is made up only of links.

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