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College Faculty Members' Perceptions of Students' Writing Abilities

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MA, Murray State University, 2001

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

The college open door policy initiated in the 1960s made access to higher education available for more students in the United States. People who were once excluded from enrolling in college now have an opportunity to earn a college degree. Some first-time students, significantly underprepared in writing, have been required to enroll in developmental or remedial writing courses before entering college-level English despite research indicating that taking noncredit courses increases the time for college completion and the cost of college, while also reducing the likelihood of completion. This illustrative case study, guided by the constructivist approach to instruction, was designed to discover college faculty members' perceptions concerning university students' writing and the interventions needed to improve writing skills. The qualitative data were collected through audio-recorded semistructured interviews of 12 college faculty members that were transcribed and coded with Ethnograph software. The findings indicated that college faculty members believed most students lacked basic writing skills and did not take sufficient initiative for their learning. Faculty members also thought students' writing would improve if students assumed responsibility for their learning and used the resources available. This study provides insight into college faculty members' views of students' writing skills and recommendations for how these skills might be improved through collaborative efforts across the university, resulting in positive outcomes for both the students and university by increasing student graduation rates and reducing college debt.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this to my mother, my greatest supporter, and two sons who served in the United States Marine Corps.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my Committee Chair Dr. Marilyn Robb, my Second Committee Member Dr. Christopher Godat and my URR Committee Member Dr. Vicki Underwood, who worked tirelessly with me through the writing process, encouraged and pushed me when I needed it.

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Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Over the past 50 years, the economy in the United States has rapidly transformed from a manufacturing economy to a service economy (Zinn, Eitzen, & Wells, 2015). In the past, most jobs did not require a higher education degree (Collins, 2009), and people could usually earn enough money to support a family by having a good work ethic and determination (Brock, 2010; Zinn et al., 2015). Today, earning enough money to support a family without a higher education degree is increasingly difficult.

Twenty to 50 years ago, manufacturing and agricultural jobs were readily available and a college degree was not necessary to perform those duties. There are two major differences in the past and present economies and also in the type of work available to support a family (Brock, 2010; Zinn et al., 2015). In the past, all that was needed was a good work ethic and a willingness to perform hard physical labor; now, an education is required just to perform low-level jobs. Today, many jobs for people with limited education have been eliminated (Brock, 2010). The U.S. Department of Labor predicted that 90% of newly created high-wage opportunities will require a higher education degree (Lockard & Wolf, 2012). The Department of Labor compared today's job market with the job market in the past and reported that some jobs have been moved overseas while others are performed by computers, leaving people with limited education, or without a high school education, few or no options for employment (Amos, 2008).

Since the invention of the first computer, Americans have increasingly relied on them because they have made jobs that were once long and tedious much faster and

easier. As a result, the United States economy has changed to a technology-based economy (Collins, 2009). The economy driven by the new technology requires greater levels of education for family stability and workplace viability. Obtaining a practical or worthwhile job without a college education is virtually impossible (Pew Research Center, 2014a). A college education is usually necessary to earn enough money to live comfortably above the poverty level (Danziger & Ratner, 2010). As Amos (2008) has noted,

> We are moving into a 'learning economy' where the success of individuals, firms, regions, and countries, will reflect, more than anything else, their ability to learn. The acceleration of change reflects the rapid diffusion of information technology, the widening of the global marketplace…and, deregulation of less stability in markets. (p. 6)

There is a need for more people in the workforce who have the skills to use the new technology. Universities and colleges have responded to meet employers' demands for a technologically skilled workforce, and in 2007, presidents and chancellors from a dozen colleges and universities throughout America devised a plan called the "Access to Success Initiative" (Engle & Lynch, 2009). The purpose of this plan was to increase the number of college graduates. By the year 2015, there was to be an increase in the number of minority students and students with a lower socioeconomic status (SES), who earned a college degree. This initiative was prompted by data from the National Association of System Heads (NASH, 2010) that indicated America's racial composition has changed over the years. While the number of minority students enrolling for the first time in

college was increasing, the number of Caucasian students entering for the first time in college was decreasing. However, the number of minority students graduating from college did not reflect the same racial composition as those first entering (Engle & Lynch, 2009).

In order for America to continue to lead the other nations in the development of new ideas and products, it must have a productive society. A good quality higher education cannot continue to be something that is attainable for only a select few of its members. A worthy and valuable education must be attainable for all members of society (Pew Research Center, 2014b). If America does not make a change, it will lose its strength and ability to produce income (Azerrad & Hederman, 2012).

President Barack Obama (2013) stated, "If we want America to lead in the 21st century, nothing is more important than giving everyone the best education possible from the day they start preschool to the day they begin their career." The president launched an initiative that declared, by the year 2020, every American should have had at least one year of college or some post-secondary career training (Obama, 2013). In the past, the United States has led other nations with the most educated and career-trained adults. Today the education level in the United States has fallen into the third place (Complete College America, 2012). The United States is striving to return to its original position with the largest number of graduates in the world. The Obama administration awarded $5 million dollars to community colleges through the Complete College Initiative (Complete College America, 2012). This initiative was designed to enable community colleges to

serve more students and to meet the goal of increasing the number of college graduates by 2020.

In 2009, the Lumina Foundation developed a strategic plan to increase the strength of America through a higher education initiative. The main goal was to increase the number of people with higher education degrees by 60%. The Lumina Foundation hopes to accomplish this goal by 2025. The primary focus of this initiative is to produce more college graduates by increasing the number of degree completions for adult students who already have some college credits, and by expanding the number of programs that award associates degrees. The increased number of students who earn associate degrees may also increase the number of students who can transfer to 4-year universities (Zanville, 2014).

Americans, especially those who are traditionally underrepresented, have begun to rethink and reevaluate old concepts, that working hard doing manual would produce enough money to support a family to live above poverty. They have begun to think differently about seeking a higher education degree because they have realized the benefits (NASH, 2010). This new thinking has influenced (and increased) the number of students who enter college from the following groups: minorities, low SES, educationally disadvantaged, and the underprepared. Engle and Lynch (2009) stated that the number of minorities who enter college has doubled since 1970. Additionally, the number of students that enrolled in minority-serving institutions increased from 1.9 million to 4.7 million during the years 1984 to 2004. The Hispanic population has had the greatest increase of 247% (Nealy, 2007).

Financial stability is not the only benefit of earning a higher education degree. Both the Institute of Higher Education Policy (2005) and Salazar (2013) have found that the benefits of earning a college degree affect both social and private aspects of life. Salazar noted that people with a college degree are most likely to participate in the voting process and have better health because they know and understand the benefits of living a healthy lifestyle. Barbatis (2010) stated that people with college degrees are more likely to volunteer, help others, and are less likely to use public assistance. Barbatis added that college graduates earn higher wages and have employee benefits such as health insurance, which allows their families to have regular scheduled visits to the doctor and dentist. They are also able to save money so that they can participate in leisure activities and hobbies, thereby enriching their lives and enabling greater participation and leadership in their communities (Salazar, 2013).

Background

The number of students who enroll in remedial or developmental courses has continued to rise. Tomlinson (1989) and Collins (2009) documented an increasing number of entering underprepared college students. Smith (2013) reported the number of students who needed to enroll in remedial courses has continued to increase, and minority students need more remediation than White students. Most importantly, all unprepared first-year students face a higher risk of failure because of their pressing needs for remediation (Smith, 2015).

In two separate studies, Greene and Forster (2003) and Russell (2008) collected data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of

Education, and analyzed them by state, region, race, and ethnicity. These studies focused on first generation college students and the challenges they face while pursuing a higher education degree. Some of the issues that first generation college students face include those related to SES. Many of them have to work while attending college. Although it is common for students to work and attend college, for less academically prepared students, working contributes an extra burden, making it even less likely that they will persist until graduation (Macarthur & Philippakos, 2013). They may also have other family obligations that influence their ability to persist until graduation.

The data collected by the NCES indicated that 37% of Caucasians were college-ready, while only 20% of African Americans were college-ready. The data showed that Hispanics were even less prepared, with college readiness of 16%, and Native Americans were the least prepared of all ethnicities, with college readiness of 14%. Students who were at the lowest SES levels were more likely to need remediation. In fact, 63% of students who lived in homes with a low SES needed remediation, while only 25% of students who lived in homes with a higher SES level required remediation. In 2003, the NCES indicated that the number of graduating high school students prepared for collegiate coursework had decreased (Ross & Kena, 2012). There was an increase in the number of college students who reported that they enrolled in at least one remedial course in 2007-2013 (Hodara & Jaggars, 2013). This increase was noted for students enrolled in public 4-year institutions with open enrollment that awarded associate and bachelor degrees. There was an increase in the number of female students who had taken remedial courses, while the number of Caucasian students who took remedial courses has

decreased steadily each year (Sparks & Malkus, 2013). The data also showed a steady decline in the number of students prepared for scholarly writing from 2003-2010, especially for some minority populations.

The American College Test (ACT) is an assessment taken by high school juniors and seniors that is used by colleges and universities to determine the students' academic preparedness for college and the likelihood of their success. In 2016, 64% of graduating high school seniors took the ACT; this marked an 8.6% increase from previous years. The rise in the number of students taking the ACT was a result of seven states requiring students to take the assessment. The importance of this increase is that it gave a better representation of student preparedness because the ACT was able to identify students with varying degrees of academic preparedness. The increase in the number of students taking the ACT decreased the percentage of academically prepared students because more students from underserved populations were assessed. Some of the students assessed may not have planned to enroll in a higher education institution.

When the data were organized by racial composition and collegiate level work to determine student preparedness in the four subject areas, the statistics showed only 11% of African American students, 17% of American Indian students, and 23% of Hispanic students met the standard. Caucasians were more prepared than the African Americans, American Indians and Hispanic students, with a preparedness rate of 49%, and Asian Americans, were the most prepared with a preparedness rate of 60%. While the number of students taking the ACT increased by 25.5% from 2012-2016, the number of college graduates only increased by 1.3% (ACT, 2016).

Research conducted by the Arkansas State Department of Education indicated that Arkansas' high school seniors are not prepared to succeed in college. The Arkansas Study noted a gap between the knowledge and skills obtained by high school seniors and the knowledge and skills college freshmen need to perform when they entered college (Arkansas State Department of Education, 2006). D'Agostino and Bonner (2009) also noted a discrepancy between the knowledge and skills graduating high school seniors are expected to have acquired according to state guidelines, and the knowledge and skills that college faculty members expect entering college freshmen to have already obtained. They stated, "Underprepared students are the most serious problem that colleges and universities are facing" (D'Agostino & Bonner, 2009, p. 25). State standardized testing scores and benchmarks of high school seniors are lower than those that colleges and universities expect of incoming freshmen (Butrymowicz, 2017).

Entrance Exams and the Open Door Policy

Rounds and Anderson (2000) used college entrance exam results to determine whether entering first-year students had been adequately prepared for scholarly work. They also used the results to predict if a student would be successful at the collegiate level. Colleges' and universities' use of entrance exams steadily decreased in the late 1960s and 1970s. Boylan and Bonham (2007) later documented this same trend. The U.S. Department of Education (1987) published findings indicating 14% of entering college students needed to take developmental or remedial courses (Ross & Kena, 2012). In 1997, more than half of entering students were enrolled in developmental or remedial courses. These numbers showed a significant increase in the number of students engaged

in remedial coursework over a 10-year period. This was the first time data were collected on the number of students who needed remediation. This study was highly significant because it was the first research concerning students' writing abilities, and it also provided documented evidence that the number of students needing remediation had increased. The number of students who entered college unprepared for collegiate writing was a trend in education that should be tracked in the following years to determine if the number of entering first-time students who needed remediation increased or decreased.

Colleges' and universities' use of entrance exams began to decrease because students complained that the tests were biased, and that they violated their civil rights (Rounds & Anderson, 2000). Some students believed colleges used the entrance exams to exclude minorities and students who were from low SES families. Students also complained that the lack of college degrees most likely kept them in a low SES level and affected their ability to provide for their families in the future.

In an attempt to make opportunities in education more accessible to minorities and the underprivileged, colleges and universities responded by requiring fewer assessments, and opened more classes to all students without requiring prerequisites (Mullins, 2012). Colleges and universities acknowledged the complaints of the students and reduced or omitted entrance exams; this was the beginning of what was called the *open door policy*. The open door policy removed the entrance exam that served as the gatekeeper. It gave students the right to attend a higher education institution and succeed or fail on their own merits. It was premised on the idea that higher education should not

be for a select few, but should be accessible to all members of society regardless of their economic status (Rounds & Anderson, 2000).

Initially, the open door policy seemed to be a viable solution to higher education restriction and social disparity; however, it created some unforeseen predicaments for students (Brock, 2010). The first noted effect of the open door policy was that it produced an increase in the number of minority, underprivileged, and unprepared students who were able to enroll in colleges and universities, which was a positive effect. The problem it created was that students were able to enroll in college whether or not they were prepared. Brock (2010) reported that many of the students who enrolled failed because they were able to enroll in courses they were academically unprepared to take.

Prior to the open door policy, some students would not have had the opportunity to attend a higher education institution because they were not able to attain a score high enough to gain entrance. The open door policy simultaneously created a higher cost and an increase in student debt. Underprepared students borrowed money they would have to repay, many unprepared students failed or dropped out. The repayment of the loan was difficult because they had not earned their college degree and earned low wages. (McKinney & Breed, 2014). The higher educational costs and larger student debt loads were the result of students entering college and taking remedial courses. The remedial courses did not provide college credits that would count towards a college degree, and the student could pay for and take anywhere from 3 to 18 hours of courses that would not lead to a degree (Rickert, 2011).

In 1998, the Board of Higher Education in Massachusetts discussed who should pay for college remediation with lawmakers. The Board of Higher Education wanted lawmakers to develop policies that would provide funding for remedial education, but state lawmakers were concerned about paying for classes twice (Martinez & Bain, 2013). Taxpayers paid the first time when students were in high school, and they would pay again if a student needed remedial courses as a first-time college student. Colorado and Georgia also introduced bills to have the state pay for remedial courses, but those bills were defeated. The governor of Maine introduced legislation that would require high schools to help pay for the cost of remediating students. Several community colleges in Maine complained that they had to spend a significant amount of their state budget to help students gain skills they should have learned previously in high school (Lawrence, 2012). The national cost of remediating students was $2 billion in 2007-2008, and this cost has continued to escalate (Adam, 2010). The Education Reform (2016) reported the cost of remediation has decreased slightly to $1.5 billion dollars. The argument concerning who should pay for unprepared students continues because their incomplete education has led to students incurring debt with little possibility of earning enough money to pay back student loans, and has added a financial burden to higher education institutions (Calcagno & Long, 2008; Barrow & Richburg-Hayes, 2014).

The federal government responded to the growth of student debt by requiring higher educational institutions to provide data that demonstrated their ability to provide students with an education that was attainable, cost efficient, and valuable (State Higher Executive Officers, 2005). In 1983, the Commission for Excellence in Education, under

the authority of the Secretary of Education, investigated what Americans were getting for their money (Yaffe, Cole, & Pliskin, 2009). As a result, higher education needed to become more transparent and produce data that demonstrates its ability to provide the public, investing institutes, and students with the services for which they had paid. Providing the public with information about the services could serve as an incentive for an institution that performed well, or penalize an institution according to its results (McCormick, 2010).

Higher education institutions were charged with devising plans that would demonstrate their commitment to providing students with a quality, cost-efficient education. These plans would document ways in which higher education institutions would use funds to reinvest monies, increase enrollment of undergraduate students, and increase access and affordability, especially for students who may not be able to afford a college education (State Higher Education Executive Officers, 2005).

Summary of Background

Student unpreparedness, student debt, and academic failure are problems some students still face today. These problems are the purpose driving this study. Too many students still enter colleges underprepared, specifically in the area of writing. Inadequate student writing abilities may prevent some students from earning a degree, and students may increase the amount of their debt. In an effort to understand faculty members' perceptions concerning students writing abilities, I examined college students' writing abilities at one university, discussed the results, and provided recommendations. In the

literature review, I offer a detailed examination of the research concerning students' writing abilities.

Problem Statement

Entering first-year students who have inadequate writing skills seem to be a growing trend for colleges and universities. The Texas College and Career Readiness Initiative charged Texas education institutions with aligning high school standards with college entrance expectations. The report indicated that high school standards were aimed toward students receiving a high school diploma, and not toward college preparedness (Conley, Hiatt, McGaughy, Seburn, & Venezia, 2010). Many American colleges and universities throughout the nation have reported an increase in the number of first-year students unprepared for higher education (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013). According to the ACT (2009), high school graduates had deficits in reading, English, and computation of math. The assessment revealed that only 67% of high school graduates could perform at the collegiate level. A greater understanding of this phenomenon is needed to help students gain the required skills.

My interest in this topic began when I was employed at a university in rural Kentucky in 2003. In 1997, the institution in Kentucky began to notice that more than the usual number of first-year entering students exhibited deficits in college-level writing. Before 1997, students admitted to the rural Kentucky university exhibited sufficient writing skills. They were able to pass English Composition 101 with the letter grade of a C or better. Fewer students had to repeat the course to improve their score. Three years

later, university faculty members reported that fewer students were able to write effectively.

The remedial program at that university was called the Academic Center for Excellence, or more commonly, ACE. Students had to complete the remedial writing course successfully and receive a passing score before they were allowed to enroll in English Composition 101. Some students successfully completed the remedial writing course and the English Composition course. Other students continued to exhibit inadequate writing skills even after completing both courses successfully. Some students self-reported that they repeated English Composition twice, while course grades showed that other students had repeated the course three times to earn the letter grade of C or better.

Some students were unable to attain the letter grade C in English Composition and were therefore not allowed to continue with their education. There is conflicting data about the effectiveness of developmental education. Collins (2010) found that the mixed results were because researchers had used a variety of research methods to perform their research, and that the methodologies were not comparable. Collins noted that some students who earned a passing grade of C or higher in English Composition continued to exhibit poor writing skills in upper division courses. The findings of Boatman & Long (2010) also demonstrated a growing trend towards more first-year college students being allowed entry into colleges and universities with inadequate writing skills.

In a large public university in Tennessee, faculty members expressed concern about students' writing abilities. These concerns were similar to those that had been

expressed by faculty members at the university I worked at in rural Kentucky. Institutions in other states are also having similar discussions, and researching this issue (Carter & Harper, 2013), and other researchers have documented an increase in the number of unprepared students in college settings (Bahr, 2010; Jones-White, Radcliffe, Huesman, & Kellogg, 2008; Roper, 2009).

In February 2014, the governor of Tennessee stated that 70% of graduating seniors would need to take at least one developmental course. The Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) is the governing body for all public colleges and universities in the state of Tennessee, and all colleges and universities governed by TBR have the same admission criteria for students (TBR, 2012). The Compass (ACT, 2016) is an assessment the TBR has used to determine students' writing abilities for course placement for all colleges and universities within the system. Entering first-time students who score below 17 on the ACT and students who are 21 and older are required to take the Compass test.

Prior to 2011, students who scored low (76 or below) in the writing portion of the Compass were required to enroll in the developmental writing course. A score on the Compass of 76 or below is an indicator that a student has insufficient or weak writing skills (ACT, 2012). In fall 2012, public 4-year universities in the state of Tennessee were no longer allowed to offer developmental courses (Augenblick, Palaich, & Associates, 2014). Therefore, universities in Tennessee designed a new approach to writing that would provide support to students while they are enrolled in an English Composition I course. Students who score a 76 or below in the writing component of the Compass test would be required to enroll in the learning support lab (instructional support combined

with additional resources) while enrolled in an English Composition course (TBR, 2012). This new approach has allowed students to enroll in English Composition, a college credit course, regardless of their weak writing skills.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to discover the perceptions college faculty members have about students' writing abilities. Wolsey, Lapp, and Fisher (2012) noted that faculty members have perceptions of what constitutes academic writing, as well as how students should demonstrate it. Sometimes it may be difficult to ascertain these perceptions without deep discussions with college faculty. In this study, I sought to discover faculty perceptions by using semistructured interviews to document collegiate faculty members' detailed descriptions of students' writing skills, including both students' writing strengths and weaknesses.

The participants also provided recommendations and ways to improve the students' writing abilities based on their observations in the classroom settings. The participants provided data to inform the university about students' deficits in writing and offered possible solutions to the problem. An additional purpose of this study was to include the voice of the faculty members who teach the students to promote the idea that the entire school community should take an active role in improving the writing deficits of its students.

Research Question

The purpose of this illustrative case study was to examine the occurrence of a phenomenon in its natural setting using the following research questions.

1. What are faculty members' perceptions of students' writing skills at the local university?
2. What interventions do faculty members believe are needed to improve the writing skills of students at the local university?

Conceptual Framework

This study was supported by the constructivist theory with a focus on adult learners. Constructivist theory is based on the belief that students build new knowledge on previous foundations (Taylor & Hamdy, 2013). This theory informed my development of the research questions, the literature review, the methodology, and I used it as a lens through which to view the findings. I used constructivist theory to help bring meaning and understanding to the study.

Bahr (2012) reported that students who had the greatest skill deficits were also the least likely to develop collegiate level skills. Bahr also noted that students may not remember what they learned previously. Students who are unable to recall what has been previously learned lack the foundation of prior knowledge to build upon (Kyllonen, Lipnevich, Burus, & Roberts, 2014). Prior knowledge is more than memorization, it is a vital part of the learning process; therefore, students must move beyond merely memorizing information. Students build this foundational knowledge when they are able to connect thoughts, ideas and concepts to form meaningful learning (Sher, 2014). When students have an established knowledge base, they are able to increase their knowledge and extend their learning (Kyllonen, Lipnevich, Burus, & Roberts, 2014).

There are two major instructional methods used to teach developmental writing. The first is a skill-based instructional method, where each skill is taught independently of the others in the writing process (Conforti, Sanchez, & McClarty, 2014). Students must be able to combine the individual skills in order to develop comprehensive writing skills. The second instructional method is the constructivist method. This instructional method uses writing skills and strategies that are interrelated. This method illustrates the relationship each skill has with the others. One of the strategies characteristic of the constructivist method is the use of learning communities or cohorts (Perin, 2013). In learning communities, students can build relationships as well as receive and give support while learning from their peers (Parisi & Graziano-King, 2011). The constructivist method enables students to remember more about the writing context (Edgecombe, 2011).

Developmental education was referred to as *basic writing* or BW by some during the 1970s; however, Shaughnessy (1997) a researcher of college students' writing, strongly disliked the term BW, believing that the skills that students needed were not basic, but complex in nature. Shaughnessy had a different view of developmental writing than other researchers and college faculty members. Shaughnessy supported the open door admission policy because the open door policy was a way for poor students and students who did not receive an equally funded public education to have a better life, or a life more equal to students who did not have SES challenges. Shaughnessy claimed that students had the intelligence to write effectively; however, they were not familiar with the structure of the written language and therefore made systematic, patterned errors

while writing. Finally, Shaughnessy believed that the importance of helping students remediate the errors in their writing extended far beyond the responsibility of the writing program and encompassed the entire college.

Shaughnessy's overall belief was that students entered the classroom with some skills, however, they may not know how to use or adapt those skills to new and unfamiliar demands. Instructors should get to know their students' writing abilities indepth and use what they had learned as the foundation for beginning instruction. Shaughnessy made her classrooms student centered, identifying with some of the foundational principles of constructivist theory.

Overall, constructivist researchers have contended that students possess the ability to develop or increase their writing skills. The writing process is complicated and sometimes requires different instructional methods. The constructivist method seemed to work best because it allows the student to take an active role in the learning process (Bruner, 1966). Students' writing skill levels increase within developmental programs when the entire college or university share the responsibility and make every effort to help students to improve their writing abilities (Grubb, Bonna, & Frankel, 2011).

Nature of the Study

In this study, I used a qualitative research design. Creswell (2013) described the qualitative approach as entirely different from the quantitative approach. One of the main differences of qualitative design is that it focuses on people, their experiences, and the setting in which these occur, and then tries to explain a phenomenon that has occurred. The researcher usually goes to the site where the phenomenon has taken place, to conduct

an interview with the participants where the phenomenon occurred (Hatch, 2002). Qualitative researchers use words rather than numbers to try to understand what is happening (Maxwell, 2012). In the qualitative approach, the researcher is highly involved in the process and examines the data to discover common threads to give meaning to the phenomena.

I selected a qualitative approach for this study to answer questions about a specific population, faculty members, and their perceptions about student writing abilities. Qualitative research follows a set of predetermined guidelines for collecting and analyzing data (Creswell, 2013), as I did in this study. Creswell (2003) described the quantitative approach as post-positivist, a view that examines the causes that may influence outcomes from collected data. I did not use the quantitative approach because it uses statistical data, and quantification of student grades or scores (Creswell, 2004). Quantitative methodology incorporates groups, manipulates independent variables, and yields valuable results that can be used to make decisions about programs (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2013). It does not provide data that can be used to explain a phenomenon (Mohr et al., 2004).

I used a case study approach with in-depth interviews of 12 university faculty members to gather data about the writing skills of university students in both English Composition courses and other professional courses. Therefore, a quantitative design would not have been an appropriate method for this study, because a quantitative design uses numbers to show relationships between variables, and uses numerical data to test theories. In Sections 2 and 3 I discuss additional research methods.

According to Robinson (2014), it is not necessary to include everyone within a population in the data collection process to have valid findings in a study. The objective, or research questions, should guide the selection of participants. Potential members are chosen according to predetermined measures selected by the researcher. These measures help to ensure quality participants in a study who can provide the best representative of an experience. My criteria for selecting faculty participants for the study were as follows: (a) the participants must have taught at the university for a minimum of 5 years, and (b) they must have required students to submit a minimum of two scored written assignments. These assignments were in the form of essays, reports, research papers, or any combination thereof.

Definitions

It is important to identify, clarify, and provide an explanation for the terms used in the study. The key terms I used in the study are listed and defined below:

Developmental education: "A holistic approach to student learning, it addresses three domains intellectual, social, and emotional, which makes it different from remedial education" (Kozeracki, 2002, p. 84).

Knowledge-based economy: "Employability and earnings that accrue from more education" (Kozeracki, 2002, p. 88).

Knowledge society: "A learning society, in which information and knowledge are produced to maximize learning, stimulate ingenuity and invention, and develop the capacity to initiate and cope with change" (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 3).

Open door policy: "Policies of inclusion implemented by institutions that may include the reduction of entrance exams, prerequisites for some majors, the aim of the policy was to counteract social inequalities" (Moss & Yeaton, 2006, p. 216).

Underprepared students: "Students who have done poorly in high school in all subjects, or students who are deficient in a single subject, or students who have performed satisfactorily in high school studies, but their skills have become rusty because of disuse" (Levin & Calcagno, 2008, p. 183).

Assumptions

I assumed that the selected participants understood the writing strengths and weaknesses that students demonstrated within their classrooms in the local setting. People who have experienced a phenomenon may not be able to discuss or describe it in a meaningful way. I presumed the 12 faculty participants in this study provided honest responses when asked questions concerning student writing problems at the university in Tennessee.

Scope

I did not include participants who were employed in a faculty position at the study site for less than 5 years. Selecting participants employed in a faculty position 5 years or more allowed for responses reflecting deeper understanding of the problem examined. It also resulted in participants who offered the highest level of expertise that was needed to provide recommendations to improve student writing. I also limited the scope to participants from just one university to identify specific problems and provide recommendations to address the problem at this university.

Limitations

Case studies involve human subjects who may or may not have the same experiences, or may experience them in a variety of ways. Some participants may not provide accurate information during the interviews because they think it may cast a negative view on the institution. Thus, this case study cannot be generalized to other universities (Simon & Goes, 2013). Additional research is necessary to determine whether other institutions are experiencing a similar phenomenon before generalizing this study to other universities. A qualitative study is subject to the interpretation of the reader; therefore, the findings of this study may be subject to other interpretations.

Delimitations

During the participant selection process, I eliminated participants who had been employed in a faculty position at the study site less than 5 years. Choosing participants who had been employed in a faculty position 5 years or more allowed for a deeper understanding of the problem and a level of expertise that is needed to provide recommendations to improve student writing. In addition, I only interviewed participants from one university to identify specific problems and provide recommendations to address the problem at this university.

Significance of the Study

The number of students who require remedial or developmental courses has increased, and this is not just a concern in the state of Tennessee (Lawrence, 2012). This study will contribute to empirical research by providing insights from faculty members concerning students' writing and the university's current methods of remediation. In the

study, I delved into faculty members' experiences with students' writing, and their views regarding interactions with students via written assignments. The results from the study combined with the constructivist learning may be used by writing program directors to make changes to developmental writing programs, and they provide empirical data that could be used to address writing issues across the university.

Implications for Social Change

Hargreaves (2003) stated that the knowledge society is an economy that runs on brain power rather than on machine power. The society needs the power to think, learn, and innovate to be successful. A knowledge society is comprised of three components. The first is an expanded scientific, technical, and educational sphere. The second is the processing and circulation of knowledge and information gained; this is passed down to a service-based economy. The third component is an outline of simple changes within the corporate organizations' function. These changes improve the types and variety of creative products and services. The changes produce systems and teams that establish a culture that increases learning (Goldrick-Rab, Kelchen, Harris, & Benson, 2016). Technology and consumer service-based employment requires an education, primarily to produce and maintain a society that continues to be on the cutting edge.

A college degree is more important today than it was in previous years because job vitality and life stability tie closely to it. Without a college degree, it is difficult to maintain a comfortable lifestyle, and not live paycheck to paycheck. The ability to write well is a skill that is necessary for earning a college degree. Students who are not able to write well may not persist in college to earn their degree. Therefore, a study that

examines faculty members' perceptions concerning students' writing abilities could provide data which could be used to make curricular changes that may have a positive effect on students' writing. Specifically, this research may be used by university leaders to develop new programs at the study site.

This study could contribute more in-depth knowledge from sources that have first-hand information about the students' writing skills. Further, it may encourage faculty members to participate in developmental course redesign, thereby enabling them to play a more significant role in helping students attain collegiate writing skills. More faculty involvement may produce more graduates from higher learning institutions, which may result in more students getting higher-paying jobs after graduation that will allow them to pay back their educational loans. It is important to all the parties involved to seek possible solutions to students' inadequate writing skills.

Summary and Transition

As the United States progressed from a society that produced goods to a technological society, the skills needed to earn a living also changed. More and more jobs required a college degree; therefore, more high school students entered into colleges and universities. Some of the students who entered college were unprepared because they did not take rigorous courses in high school, or they just lacked the necessary skills.

Many first-time college students who do not have the writing skills needed are required to take developmental writing courses (Addison & McGee, 2010). Despite their enrollment in developmental courses, students continue to struggle with writing effectively; some fail, and while doing so, incurred debt from loans by taking courses that

do not offer college credit. Students who are not able to complete their degrees do not gain the benefits of a college education.

In the following literature review (Section 2), I examined the details of previous studies related to issues in developmental education, with a focus on writing and student learning.

Section 2: Literature Review

In this literature review, I examine scholarly research related to the problem of poor writing achievement at the college level. I also discuss the challenges associated with developmental courses. This literature review includes references that are older than 5 years to document the progression and increase of students' need for developmental education since the implementation of the open door policy. I discuss developmental programs, with a focus on writing and its effect on students. The writing concerns I address in this literature review are: (a) the cost of developmental education, (b) how developmental writing courses affect student retention and graduation rates, and (c) the assessment of developmental programs. I also include a summary of how faculty members perceive students' writing abilities, discuss instructional methods used by community colleges and 4-year colleges and universities in developmental education, and present information related to perceptions of faculty members about college or university student writing.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search included scholarly peer-reviewed articles and literature found in books. I retrieved scholarly literature by using Walden University library to access EBSCOhost research databases, ProQuest Digital Dissertations, ERIC Document Reproduction Service, and U. S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics. I retrieved books from the study site's university library through interlibrary loans.

In the databases, I searched for the following keywords and phrases: *developmental writing*, *teaching methods*, *assessment of developmental writing programs*, *cost of developmental education*, *teaching with technology*, *retention,* and *graduation*. Other keywords included *faculty perceptions*, *first generation and first-time entering college students,* and *methodologies*, all important factors that may affect students' ability to gain lacking writing skills.

How to Improve College Students' Writing Skills

Historically, colleges have designed their developmental writing programs using theories of cognitive development (Grubb et al., 2011). The cognitive theory focuses first on fluency, and later switches its focus to the correction of errors (Bruner, 1996). Students are allowed to express their ideas and creative style in writing to help develop their personal voice and style. This method of teaching is the modes-based model that involves first getting the student writing, and then addressing grammatical correctness (Prince, 2009).

The national push of college for all has led to the opening of a floodgate of unprepared students enrolling in higher education. However, lawmakers have blamed high schools for not sufficiently preparing students for the challenges of college (Jackson & Kurlaender, 2014). To determine if college readiness had any effect on college completion, administrative data were retrieved by Jackson and Kurlaender from California State University. This data contained files by term of student completion degrees collected over a 6-year period. The data collected for the study included student GPAs, persistence rates from the first year to the second year, student placement scores,

and students' parental educational attainments. The researchers noted that these items had a long term effect on student educational outcomes, and could be used to determine student preparedness.

Jackson and Kurlaender (2014) examined college preparedness by ethnicity, and found that White students were often more prepared than Black, Latino, and Asian students. They were also more likely to complete their degree in 4 years with a higher GPA. Students from low SES households were the least prepared, while women were more unprepared than men. However, women were the most likely to graduate. The study showed that both first generation students and students whose parents had earned a college degree rated themselves in the top 10% in the category of self-confidence on evaluations. Although first generation students rated themselves with high self-confidence levels, they lacked the ability to connect what they learned in high school to college course requirements. Students' inability to make connections caused frustration, which negatively impacted retention and graduation rates.

The number of students who are entering college is increasing; however, the number of students who are graduating from college is not increasing at the same rate (Creed, 2014; Stephens, Destin, & Hamedani, 2014). Several factors affect whether students will complete college, but the two most important predictors are whether their parents have earned a college degree, and the SES level of the household. Students who have one or both predictors that indicate the least likelihood of college completion perform best at colleges and universities that implement strategies to increase the college completion rate.

Hunter and Saxon (2009) listed 10 actions that a college or university could implement to improve student learning in developmental education: (a) the institution should begin with the whole campus making developmental education the main concern; (b) developmental education should become a main concern because 70% of students enrolled in community colleges are taking at least one developmental course; (c) the institution should facilitate students' completion of developmental courses; (d) developmental education programs should require assessment and appropriate placement; (e) the institution should coordinate developmental education activities; (f) the institution should have certified programs and provide comprehensive support services; (g) the institution should encourage faculty to use active learning techniques; (h) the institution should establish educational, developmental learning communities; (i) the institution should give faculty formative evaluation information and ask them to use it; (j) the institution should train adjunct faculty how to teach the subject effectively to unprepared students. This training should be ongoing, not a one-time event (Hunter & Saxon, 2009). The implementation of these strategies could improve student learning and their writing abilities.

In a recent study, Attewell, Heil, and Reisel, (2010) analyzed the writing remediation system of a college to determine weaknesses and strengths. Subsequently, the program was redesigned to add some components to the writing e-learn foundation. The most important element implemented in the redesigned writing program was the support services. Previously, these services were optional for students, but they were

made mandatory. Students were required to attend workshops, consult intervention specialists, and visit their academic advisors.

Choi (2015) used a mixed method research design to determine if a combination of teacher and peer feedback would increase writing skills. He discussed the benefits of using instructor corrective feedback (CF) and peer feedback to improve students' writing. Matusda (2003) researched CF but only focused on its effect on writing quality. Choi expanded the research to encompass the effects of CF on different types of writing errors, and whether this method of instructor feedback corrected errors directly or indirectly. It was determined that CF improved students' accuracy in the revising phase and also in new writing, but the results of the research were inconclusive. Choi could not determine if CF corrected errors directly or indirectly. CF errors were organized into five main groups: verb errors, noun errors, article errors, lexical errors, and sentence errors. Bitchner's study in 2008 showed that CF improved verb errors. Trustscott (2007) sought to determine if CF would improve students' writing. The study revealed that CF was not only ineffective, but was harmful to students. Choi believed the differing results occurred because the researchers used various research designs and methodologies.

Learning communities that incorporated active learning were shown to increase students' writing skills. The purpose of this technique is to require students to be engaged with each other during the learning process. Active learning communities deepen learning by creating an environment for learning (Buchenroth-Martin, Dimartino, & Martin, 2015). Students work in large and small groups, and should be allowed to choose their own groups and not be required to stay in a group if they want to change. The instructor

sets the parameters of student engagement. These guidelines should be given to students before the groups are formed. The guidelines should encompass when students will work together and how much time will be allowed for collaboration.

Buchenroth-Martin, Dimartino, & Martin, (2015) performed a study to document whether learning communities were effective in increasing students' learning. One hundred and eleven students participated in the study. The researcher used social media to track students' interactions. Two groups emerged from the study. One group was called *settlers*, and the second group was called *wanderers*. Settlers were students who had a close relationship with each other. They typically stayed in the same groups, shared a lot, and had the same level of knowledge. Settlers who formed groups together rarely produced new knowledge. Wanderers had loose relations within the groups, and were found to be important to the groups. When wanderers joined groups of settlers, new knowledge, new ideas, and innovative thinking were produced (Buchenroth-Martin, Dimartino, & Martin). The wanderers were considered to be the bridges that linked with settlers and facilitated in-depth knowledge.

Although computers and other technologies are available in most college classrooms, the primary form of instruction is still lecture-based. Brothen and Wambach (2012) suggested that the use of hybrid teaching in developmental education would be beneficial for students. A hybrid class is one in which part of the instruction, quizzes, and other activities are undertaken online, and the other part of the course is face-to-face in a typical classroom (Harrington, 2010; Jesnek, 2012). Some of the benefits of such an

approach include helping students to become self-sufficient and active participants in their learning.

During Brothen and Wambach's (2012) study, 220 poorly performing students enrolled in a Minnesota university were given permission to work on practice tests in a computer lab 3 days a week. Students took the tests Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays for 5 weeks. To be able to continue to use the lab, students had to maintain a certain grade point average. The tests were composed of 10 fill-in-the-blank items based on review questions. The purpose of the research was to determine if giving students' permission to work on tests outside of class time would improve their learning. Thus, students used practice quizzes to remember previously learned material to improve learning and performance. If students did not use the practice quizzes to rehearse course material reviewed in class, they performed poorly on quizzes and writing assignments. Brothen and Wambach found that one-third of all the students who were enrolled in the developmental writing hybrid course and who were allowed extra time outside of the class to complete assignments, did not catch up on their work. Another third of the students continued to do well, and the final third of the students took advantage of the opportunity, changed their behavior, and increased their learning.

Implementing new writing strategies has increased students' writing abilities; however, this growth has only been minimal. Colleges and universities have sought unconventional methods that will lead to even more learning (Huskin, 2016). One of these methods is writing across the curriculum. This method incorporates high-effectual

and active learning strategies that help students take ownership of their learning by creating strategies that work best for them.

The list of strategies includes: backwards papers, mapping, minute papers, philosophical chairs, brainstorming, group presentation activities, and pair sharing. Huskin (2016) executed these strategies in K-12 classrooms and has now implemented them in college classrooms. These strategies allowed students multiple opportunities to practice their writing. Through these strategies students learn to think deeply and critically. Then students are challenged to draw connections and articulate their ideas in a written format.

Weak Writing Skills a Wide Spread Problem

Writing effectively is an important life skill; its importance is not only for college success, but also for work and social situations (McNair & Curry, 2013). It is a valuable skill that can be used to increase learning across disciplines (Kannan, 2016). Many college students' exhibit weak writing skills and this is not an isolated or localized problem (Rochford & Hock, 2010). The need for remediation in college has become such an extensive problem that it is referred to as the 13th year (Patton, 2015).

Oklahoma State University reported an increase in the number of students enrolled in developmental education from 2004-2014. The number of students needing remediation in 2004 was 6.9 %; the number of students needing remediation in 2014 increased by 8% (Keith, 2016). The number of students who required remediation increased. This was a concern because the state had a declining budget that limited the

ability of colleges and universities to provide students with the resources they needed to be successful.

Research performed by the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) showed that 79% of their entering students will enroll in developmental courses (Moss, Kelcey, & Showers, 2014). The researchers who performed the study at CCBC believed that large number of students were placed in developmental courses because they did not enter college immediately after high school. Only 9% of their students enrolled in college after high school. Faculty members at CCBC thought students had simply forgotten what they had learned. Chicago City College reported that students identified as having insufficient skills to enter college are required to enroll in developmental or remedial courses, and 90% of their entering students who enrolled in the 27 colleges would be placed in developmental education courses (Cooper, 2014). Developmental courses do not provide college credit for any degree program. The number of developmental courses a student must take adversely affects whether they will earn a college degree (Conforti et al., 2014).

Faculty members at Mississippi colleges and universities realized its remedial education programs were not effective in leading unprepared students to degree completion and a reform of the remedial program was initiated (Amy, 2014). The purpose of redesigning the program was to move students who did not have severe deficits into college credited courses instead of requiring them to enroll in noncredit college remedial courses. This redesign increased the number of students who took college credited courses and the number of students who graduated by 20%.

In 2016, Bailey and Jaggars reported scholarly research on students' writing inabilities to give credence to the problem and illustrate that it is widespread. They reported that nearly two-thirds of students entering for the first time in community colleges every year have been identified as unprepared for collegiate work. Therefore, some students drop out before they can enter into college-level courses (Conforti et al., 2014).

Researchers from Florida State College collected data and reported that 70% of its first time entering students needed to enroll in remedial courses. Colleges and universities in the state have taken note of the trend, and have become concerned. They believe if this trend continues it could have a negative effect on introductory courses. However, lawmakers have made enrollment into developmental courses optional for students. If students are allowed to decide whether or not they enroll in developmental courses, it could set unprepared students up for failure (Mangan, 2013). If enrollment in developmental courses is optional for students, it will be difficult to determine how great the need is for remediation (Glenn, 2016).

In 2015, a researcher partnered with two community colleges to collaborate, and support the development of various policies and procedures related to developmental courses. Each of the entities investigated current issues and strategies, discussed their own unique experiences within the process and gleaned information from one another. The benefits of this type of partnership are: they are long lasting, address complex questions, and develop trust within the group (Perin, Raufman, & Kalamkarian, 2015).

The building of trust makes it more likely the groups will be able to solve any challenges that may arise.

The focus of the study was to determine if the students who were enrolled in reading and English had collegiate literacy skills (Perin et al, 2015). A mixed method approach was used for the study. College faculty members were interviewed and a quantitative analysis of graded course assessments were the data collected for the study. The graded assessments were aimed toward students' ability to perform persuasive writing, and their ability to summarize written text.

Two hundred and eleven participants were selected from two community colleges; one college was located in an urban area, and the other college was located in a suburban area. The developmental courses used for the study were compressed and accelerated, data were collected over a period of 8 weeks. These courses were redesigned according to a statewide restructuring of the developmental reading, writing, and mathematical programs. The college in the urban area had just introduced the program and implemented it at the time of the study; however, the college in the suburban area had been using this format for several years.

The findings of the study showed that there were no notable differences in the results between the two schools. Many students from the urban area were not ready for collegiate courses, because the participants tested in the lower end of the 12th grade of high school in reading and writing. When students were asked to read an article and select the main idea; they were only able to select it 19% of the time. They exhibited

weaknesses in writing persuasive essays with a mean score of 2.58 (SD=.80) on a 7-point holistic scale (Perin et al., 2015).

The Chancellor's Office of Community Colleges in California collected entering students' test score data and reported that up to 90% of incoming, first-time community college students' test scores fell below college level in math. Over 70% of students scored below the collegiate level in reading and writing (Moore, Shulock, Ceja, & Lang, 2007). The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2008) joined together with 11 California Community Colleges to perform a 3-year study. This study, Strengthening Pre-collegiate Education in Community Colleges (SPECC) was an action research project designed to study and document ways to improve teaching techniques and student learning in pre-collegiate mathematical and English developmental courses. SPECC formed faculty inquiry groups (FIGS); this group of college faculty members were tasked with finding ways to positively affect student learning.

The faculty members in the FIGS discovered basic skills could not be learned in isolation but needed to be integrated into the other courses because basic skills are the foundation on which students will be able to build. Faculty members are able to create assessments that accurately gauge student learning outcomes when they have regular and ongoing professional development (Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching, 2008). Finally, faculty members in FIGS suggested creating a forum that allows college faculty to discuss new knowledge and ideas they have discovered to promote student learning.

SPECC interventions were used on 10 college campuses, five of the campuses yielded the highest results in the third session of the writing courses. The scores showed gains from 4% to 25%. The other five campuses had mixed results, but the reasons could not be determined. Students enrolled in the SPECC-supported courses performed better than students who were in the baseline sections of the courses.

Conducting and analyzing the research may have been difficult because most faculty members lacked the training to decipher the data, or use it for making curricular changes to influence student learning. FIGS required faculty members to make the knowledge and techniques they had used to increase students' learning available to their peers. There was one drawback to this method, faculty members could be scrutinized if they failed to share the knowledge and techniques that they had learned. Faculty who are scrutinized could be less willing to commit fully to the program (Moore et al., 2007). FIGS and other professional development groups are only successful when the whole institution knows the importance of the groups and provides space and time for the groups to meet. FIGS and other professional communities may not be executed effectively, which may cause the groups to be ineffective in making changes in student success.

Hassel and Giordano (2009) designed a qualitative study that focused on the writing skills of entering first-year students who took English Composition. In particular, these students scored high enough on a college entrance exam to be placed in college-level courses. The skills exhibited by these students were above the basic writing skills level, but they still did not have the skill level necessary for college-level writing upon

entrance. These skills were still being developed. Twenty-one entering freshmen were tracked in an English 101 course, and a case study using the writings of three students depicted the struggles the students faced as they progressed. Faculty members within the FIGS redesigned the English Composition 101 course to link a student's current skill level with the skill level necessary for scholarly writing.

Faculty members who taught English Composition 1020 courses developed a rubric to assess students' writing. This rubric identified four areas in writing which caused students' difficulty. Students struggled when given a different type of writing assignment, students were not able to make the appropriate judgments to fit the audience for which the writing was intended. They struggled with the text; they were unable to identify and select the correct information within the text when it was used to defend a view. Students were able to analyze the text as a group. They were able to identify who, what, when, and why, within an article, but struggled to identify the same information when analyzing the text alone. The students did not use newly learned writing techniques when they performed a writing assignment that was unfamiliar to them; they reverted to the inadequate skill level and techniques they used when they first entered the program.

Grubb et al. (2011) disagreed with many of the methods used in remedial education, stating that the instructional quality of courses is not high enough to produce positive results. They refer to the type of instruction in remedial courses as *remedial pedagogy* and note that the term may be used differently depending on the subject area. "Remedial pedagogy is one of the weakest approaches to instruction and impedes progress through skill sequences" (Grubb et al., 2011, p. 4). The definition of remedial

pedagogy is a teacher-centered approach in which the teacher or textbooks give information to students, and the students take on a passive role in their education. This type of pedagogy usually focuses on getting correct answers, not understanding the process that leads to correct answers. Students who take remedial courses need to take an active role in their education, and the presentation of the material should be innovative, requiring both the instructor and the students to take an active role. Grubb referred to this method of instruction as the *balanced approach*. The research for this style of teaching showed positive student learning results.

Skills in developmental courses are usually taught in isolation. Large complex skills are broken down into smaller ones and are taught one skill at a time. Developmental courses should not be taught in isolation, but should be taught across the curriculum, teaching reading and writing together, viewing both as different forms of communication (Bragg & Durham, 2012). Students should know the purpose of learning skills, becoming aware, and understanding how the newly acquired skills can translate into other learning situations.

The City University of New York realized the traditional developmental program was not effective and developed a comprehensive program. The program was called the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) for students who needed to take one or more developmental courses. This program connected academic advising, tutorial services, and a student success component with the developmental course. Students were required to participate in the program for 3 years, at the end of the period the graduation

rate increased from 22% to 40%. Twenty-five percent of the students transferred to a 4-year institution (Bailey & Jaggars, 2016).

Many states have recognized that developmental education is not helping students improve their writing skills, nor is it leading to persistence or graduation. “Legislature from various states, from Florida to Washington, and from Connecticut to Colorado has called for the reform of developmental education” (TYCA, 2015, p. 227). Some institutions excluded faculty members from the previous designs for developmental writing. However, this new reform recognized that faculty members provided valuable information and are an intricate part of the process.

While some states are calling for remediation reform, other states’ policies are calling for the elimination of developmental courses. They believe the courses are ineffective, expensive, and cause students to spend up to a year taking courses that do not yield college credit. Students become discouraged and do not complete the series (Mangan, 2014). These students should be moved into a vocational education program instead of college. According to Cooper (2014), remediation is the major component of decreased retention rates. Less than 10% of students who were enrolled in developmental courses graduate from community colleges in 3 years.

Boylan and Trawick (2015) stated that the negative reports about developmental education programs do not reflect on efficient programs. These negative reports were only to discuss poorly designed programs. Ineffective programs are typically staffed with adjunct faculty who are not trained, nor do they have experience in working with this population (Grubb, 2012). However, there are developmental programs that successfully

equip underprepared students. The Two Year College English Association (TYCA), (2015) identified effective programs as ones that have full-time faculty who receive intensive training and professional development. Research results revealed the relationship between the intensive faculty training and student success.

Assessment of Developmental Programs

The effectiveness of remedial courses and programs has been met with mixed reviews. Some colleges believe and support the use of the courses to help students to develop collegiate level skills. Colleges and universities who consider remedial courses and programs to be ineffective have opted to revise their programs (Rose, 2012). In 2015, Clayton and Rodriguez sought to discover the effectiveness of remedial courses and determine whether students' enrollment in the courses discouraged them, and increased their dropout rate. Data were extracted from six community colleges located in urban areas. This data included students' high school GPAs, and scores from assessments that determined their placement in remedial courses. The scores selected were from students who scored either one point above the cutoff score for placement in developmental courses or one point below the cutoff score. All students were followed for approximately 3 years after their initial assessment. Students who took the placement test but did not enroll in remedial education were also followed for the 3-year period as a comparison to determine the effect of remedial courses (Clayton & Rodriguez, 2015).

The information collected from the proficiency exams provided data documenting students' writing skills had improved enough to ensure success. Also the study reported that the enrollment in remedial courses did not cause discouragement for

the majority of the students. One group of students experienced an 8% discouragement rate. They passed a complex writing assessment but were slightly below the cutoff score. The results showed that students who experienced discouragement were more likely to drop out, because they were embarrassed about being placed in remedial courses. Therefore, they did not readily use the resources provided for them (Martorell & McFarlin, 2011).

There was little evidence that indicated discouragement prevented students from enrolling in the remedial courses. Clayton and Rodriguez (2015) found that remedial education may perform a task other than assisting students in gaining or improving their skills. Remedial education may be used as a signal, or communicate to students about success in college. The study also reported that students who scored just above the cutoff score would have earned a B in a college-level course, but remedial education diverts students from enrolling in credit earning courses. The report of the findings of this study revealed that many students who enroll in remedial education may never enroll in a college course. Students who earn a passing score on the English assessment, and score slightly below the cutoff of the reading assessment, experience discouragement and are the students most likely to drop out. Remediation will remain even if it is ineffective, because it serves another purpose. This purpose is to alert students to their lack of skills and how it will affect their college completion. However, this signal may be too vague for students to make a connection between their weak skills and college success.

Comb (2015) compared the instructional and assessment methods used for English Composition to other college courses such as math and science. Comb stated that

assessing content in other courses is different from assessing English Composition because it is difficult to gauge students' ability to use writing mechanics. Defining college-level writing may be a problematic because the standards differ from state to state, and college English Composition does not have a standard curriculum.

High schools within various states have different writing standards for students entering college. A student could be considered proficient in writing for one state and deficient in another state. This inconsistency was noted and the Common Core State Standard (CCSS) was initiated to create a framework to ensure student learning consistency across the states. These standards are based on current research produced by the Community College Research Committee (Barnett & Fay, 2013). Members were selected yearly from higher education and from the high school to align high school standards with college benchmarks and make changes in the college remedial or developmental program.

The number of students who enrolled in developmental education was increasing, the number of students who successfully complete those courses were decreasing. Wilson, Davis, Dondlinger, Li, and Warren (2010), conducted research to determine the effectiveness of developmental education programs in Colorado. They reported that it is difficult to determine the effectiveness of developmental programs. Hence, these programs use general terms that focus on student behaviors, without any precise measures to show a relationship between the developmental program and the success of students. Students receive only a pass or fail grade instead of receiving a specific letter grade. This type of grading does not provide any evidence indicating the degree to which

students have mastered writing skills. “Since 2001, students enrolled in developmental writing courses have exhibited a lack of success in irregular patterns. The performance indicators revealed many students also exhibited low course retention rates” (Wilson et al., 2010, p. 2). These patterns of student course failure led to redesign of the developmental writing course with four key components:

1. Combining two courses into one, increasing contact hours, while students earned credit for both courses.
2. Technological instruction custom fit to students’ needs. This component was obtained by using ETS’s Criterion Online Writing Evaluation Service based on students’ writing samples, to give feedback to instructors about writing deficiencies.
3. Instructors used e-learn to design a portion of their courses to be available online through the Blackboard Learning System. Houghton Mifflin supplied the content.
4. Students attended study skills workshops, met with intervention specialists, and conferred with advisors. These services were interwoven into the courses to ensure all students would use them. (Wilson et al., 2010, p. 4)

Faculty members of California community colleges analyzed the retention and graduation rate of students who were enrolled in remedial courses. The data revealed that students who were placed in remedial courses were less likely to continue or complete their education. It was termed the *remediation dead end*. The state directed $60 million dollars of its educational budget to redesign the remedial program. The redesign is based

on five objectives: tracking the trajectory of nontraditional students, allowing students to earn college credit before they graduate from high school, providing consistent individualized academic support, designing remedial courses to coincide with the subject specific achievement goals, and providing default programs for students who do not want to commit to remediation (California Community College Redesign Remedial Education, 2015).

Racial and gender gaps in educational attainment were researched by Ross and Kena (2012) for the purpose of developing policies to close the gap. Ross and Kena, (2012) noted a sizable gap in student achievement and degree completion although they had been enrolled in remedial education, a program designed to increase student success. This gap is important because one of the goals of remedial education is to help students to gain lacking skills in order to help them complete their degree. Student success in remediation is determined by the completion of a gateway course and degree completion (Horn & Asmussen, 2014). College gateway courses are entry-level college credited courses that are required to earn admission to a program or to earn a particular degree (Aligning College Gateway Courses, 2015).

Hughes and Scott-Clayton (2015) stated that students are enrolled in developmental courses based on assessments, but it has not been validated whether these courses are, in fact, beneficial. Therefore, they sought to discover the effectiveness of assessments used to identify students placed in developmental education. The purpose of validity scores in the study conducted by Hughes and Scott-Clayton was not to determine if students' abilities improved after completion of developmental courses, because it was

too difficult to determine the relationship between the assessment scores and the program outcomes. Therefore, the validity scores were used to determine the rate of accuracy of assessments used for determining placement in developmental courses. The ACCUPLACER and the Compass Test, were assessed through meta-analysis. The results revealed both assessments had a 60% to 80% accuracy rate of identifying entering students with inadequate skills. Therefore, it was difficult to determine if the developmental program was effective or ineffective because students may not have been properly identified as needing remediation.

A qualitative study was conducted by Schnee (2014) over a 3-year period to better understand students' (n=15) experiences with placement into developmental writing courses. The data were collected through interviews. The findings of the study revealed that all the students were disappointed about their placement in the lowest level of developmental writing, which meant they needed to complete five developmental writing courses before enrolling in English Composition I. Information detailing how students' disappointment concerning their enrollment in developmental courses would affect their college career was lacking from the study. Schnee discussed that the disappointment had an effect on students' learning, because it caused them to be stressed. When students were placed in learning communities, they transferred the stress to the learning community. Students believed their placement in the learning community was due to weak writing skills. Therefore, the peer cohort within the learning community provided minimal support, because of the stress created by their lack of knowledge about the process.

Teaching Writing with Technology

Students seem to be literate in technology because they are able to text and download videos and music on their phones. This type of technology use is not beneficial for academic success (Clay-Buck & Tuberville, 2015). Most students from families with low SES levels have little or no skill in computer literacy (Douglas, Hoekstra, & Wilcox, 2012). Roger State University decided to change the format of the writing program according to Clay-Buck & Tuberville, because most underprepared students do not have access to technology. Instead of students working to overcome a writing deficit, they are also faced with overcoming a technological deficit. The students enrolled in remedial education had a pass rate of 38% because students would not attempt to perform the online discussions. Previously, the remedial writing course used technology heavily, with discussions, quizzes, videos and worksheets. The use of technology was implemented only when it was necessary for instruction. The removal of technology from the classroom allowed students to focus on one deficit. This single minded focus increased students' success in the course (Clay-Buck & Tuberville, 2015).

Teaching with technology can increase the effectiveness of developmental courses. Fidishun (2008) sought to determine the benefits that could be gained by combining technology with developmental education. Fidishun determined that it takes more than introducing a technology-based writing program to increase success in developmental students. Knowles (1970), a researcher of adult education, stated adult learning theory should be used in combination with technology to produce an effective program. Instruction and lessons should be designed to include the learning environment

for adult students. Technology can improve faculty teaching and student learning by following a set of guidelines. According to Ehrmann (2010), the technology selected should be easy to use, and easy to update with instructional materials. It should be chosen based on the latest documented research and help faculty and students be more time efficient. Lastly, it should promote positive student and faculty relationships, and provide authentic assessments.

Technology has changed the way we communicate. Herrington, Hodgson, and Moran (2009) documented that reading and writing are taught differently because of new technology. For example, instead of writing letters, we send emails, and texting is now the common method of daily communication. Texting and other forms of communication use abbreviated wording and symbols that clearly alter recognized writing standards. Incorporating the use of technology in education and employment is a way to compete in the global market (Herrington et al., 2009). The researchers noted that teachers who have observed the change in the field of writing have tried to find ways to synchronize the curriculum. Their methods of teaching writing were to provide students with the use of new technology combined with traditional writing methods.

The depth of literacy skills students need to be prepared for either employment or higher education has changed over the past 20 years (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2012). Previously, most jobs were in manufacturing and industry. Those types of jobs did not demand that employees have in-depth literacy skills. Today, high school students who graduate with weak literacy skills are unprepared for employment and college. Therefore, instructors of high school and college students should utilize and implement various types

of techniques and use technology to improve students' writing skills (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2012).

The purpose of Strain-Moritz's (2016) study was to determine if the use of technology has any effect on students' writing on the secondary level. Students were divided into two groups with 20 in each group. One group worked through Google Docs while in the classroom, and the other group worked through Google Docs outside of the classroom. The students liked using Google Docs because it promoted collaboration and increased learning. Both groups in the study displayed a moderate amount of learning. However, there was no notable difference in the writing scores of the two groups.

Students expressed that technology may be hurting their writing. Since they spelled poorly, they relied on the computer to display any misspelled words in the writing. They used the same process when determining grammatical errors and did not learn the rules for writing. Students also did not realize they needed to revise the documents, because they believed the computer's autocorrect function would make those changes (Strain-Moritz 2016).

The students discussed how the use of technology made it easy for them to plagiarize; it was so convenient that sometimes it was difficult to resist the temptation. Some of the instructors thought that technology made it too easy for students to copy material and claim it as their own. Students did not put much effort or thought in their writing to their full potential. They used technology for shortcuts in the writing process (Strain-Moritz, 2016). Using technology in developmental writing may be beneficial, but it may also contain some drawbacks. Teachers reported that the primary benefit of

technology use is that the program could be utilized in most places unless they experience technological difficulties They stated that using technology based developmental education writing program may not provide the foundation that students need. The support staff struggled to connect the technology used in the class with their tutorial sessions (Herrington, Hodges, & Moran, 2009).

The Cost of Developmental Education

A college degree was once regarded as a good life investment which would reward the recipient with higher wages, but an increase in tuition and student debt has cast a shadow of doubt on the benefits of a college degree (Phelan, 2014). The increased cost of a college education has recently moved to the forefront of societal issues (Romano, 2011). This concern has surfaced because society has recognized the need for a college education as the foundational element required to support a family adequately (Conner & Rabosky, 2011).

The National Governors Association (NGA) has urged states to implement new performance funding systems that tie institutional funding to completion rates rather than initial enrollment figures alone, due to the rising cost of a college education (Humphreys, 2012). The cost of a college education has dramatically risen over the last 2 decades. Between 2002-2003 and 2012–2013, the cost of a college education has increased 39% (NCES, 2015). Pretlow & Wathington (2012) estimated the cost of remedial public education to be about $1 billion dollars annually. According to Lawrence (2012), a decade ago, the total cost of developmental courses in post-secondary education was

between $1 and $2 billion dollars, although developmental courses are usually less expensive than regular collegiate courses.

The growing concern of students, society, and the government to have quality education has led higher education institutions to produce data that demonstrated their abilities to provide students with an education that is attainable, cost efficient, and valuable. Butrymowicz (2017) reported a steady increase in the cost of developmental courses in secondary education. An increase in the number of students who are required to enroll in developmental courses while attending college has increased the cost. In the 1980s, the government saw higher education as a greater good of society and its funding provided as necessary. Regrettably, that is no longer the case. Today, students who enter college are coming from more underprepared sectors. The cost of education increases when students are academically unprepared (Bailey & Jaggars, 2016).

The cost of developmental education was the motivating factor for some states to move those programs from 4-year universities to community colleges. The tuition, and the cost of courses taken at community colleges are less expensive than the cost of attending 4-year colleges and universities. California and Tennessee are two states that have made this mandate related to developmental education (Butrymowicz, 2017). Researchers for the National Council of Teachers of English (2015) also believed that community colleges are better equipped to handle underprepared students. Faculty members of community colleges are resourceful, have expertise in their subject area, and are committed to improving student learning.

The Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) released an initiative to decrease the cost of developmental education (Math and English) through a redesign of the program (TBR, 2009). An estimated $25 million dollars were spent yearly on developmental or remedial education. If a student had taken six hours, equaling two developmental courses, the cost in 2005 was estimated at $1,380, but if a student had taken 18 hours, which equates to six developmental courses, the cost was $4,140 (TBR, 2009, p. 5). The hours of credit taken in these courses do not count toward a degree, so a student could owe as much as $4 thousand dollars without taking any courses that would lead to degree attainment.

After July 1st, 2012, 4-year colleges in Tennessee were no longer permitted to offer developmental or remedial courses; only 2-year colleges could offer these courses in the state of Tennessee (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2010). However, universities developed another plan to support students who needed remediation. A support course was added to the college credit course; students enrolled in the two courses simultaneously. A maximum of 15 students were allowed to enroll in each section of the support courses. The low course enrollment allowed each student maximum individual support. The TBR (2015) piloted the program in 2014, and reported that the new strategy implemented improved students' writing and had a direct correlation to persistence and graduation. If students are able to persist, more graduates will be produced to meet the changing job market.

The U.S. Department of Education (2013) has projected that the fastest growing jobs will require at least some post-secondary education. Therefore, to meet societal needs, higher education must prepare students to fulfill the predicted job demands. The

Public Policy Institute of California has also estimated an increase in jobs by the year 2025, and that there will not be enough people who hold higher education degrees to fill the jobs that will be available (Tierney & Garcia, 2011). This brought about a change in how 4-year universities received governmental monies. However, from 2008-2011, America experienced a recession. During the recession, there was an increase in college enrollment, but the funding for education had decreased because colleges and universities were now being funded based on graduation rates, which were much lower than enrollment rates (Phelan, 2014).

The funding of developmental education has changed in six states (Florida, Virginia, Connecticut, Ohio, North Carolina, and Texas) due to a 3-year initiative funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Barbatis, 2010). The initiative was designed to fund developmental courses that do not usually qualify for state funding because they do not follow the regular sequence of traditional college courses. This funding would allow institutions to use nontraditional methods to help students gain skills. One method developed was to enable students to enroll in the developmental course and the college credit course simultaneously. The state of Tennessee developed their own guidelines for supporting students with weak skills. In Tennessee, 4-year university students enroll in a college credited English Composition course, and students who have been identified with writing deficiencies also enroll in the English Composition course and a support course simultaneously.

Retention and Graduation

The National Association of System Heads (Engle & Lynch, 2009) noted that 2-year institutions opened the gates for students of lower SES and minority students to enter college. Less than one-third of these students receive an associate degree or enters a 4-year institution to complete a bachelor degree. However, many students who enroll in community colleges also enroll in developmental courses. Students who need remediation are less likely to remain in school and graduate (Carter & Harper, 2013; Javed, Juan, & Nazli, 2013).

In the declining economy, higher education has shifted its focus from college access to college completion because of the government's decreasing ability to support education (Bound, Louvenheim, & Turner, 2009). States are relying on the federal government to fund college education because many families do not have the money to pay for a college education (Mitchell & Leachman, 2015). On December 16, 2009, the United States House of Representatives passed H.R. 2847, the Jobs for Mainstreet Act 2010 (H.R. 2847, the Jobs for Main Street Act, 2010). The focus of this legislation was to increase student access and success in college to improve post completion employment. The Jobs for Mainstreet Act required 2-year and 4-year colleges to draft an agreement outlining how students will transition from a 2-year college to a 4-year college. The two entities must also have an agreement concerning developmental and remedial courses. The Jobs for Mainstreet Act contains the American Graduation Initiative (AGI) for community colleges. The AGI has two parts: Part 1 provides money to support faculty development, workforce development, and online instruction; Part 2 is a grant that is

issued from the year 2014 to the year 2020. Each state will have to compete for the grant funding. To be eligible to receive the monies, each state must have the following: a plan to increase persistence and completion in higher education, a statewide data system that includes community colleges, and an agreement between public institutions (Bragg & Durham, 2012).

The government has attached grant money to the institution-produced data. President Barack Obama's administration awarded money for educational reform that will lead to more students being academically prepared for college. States will receive $3 billion dollars in the following percentages: 50% to establish State Innovation Completion Grants, 25% for the College Access and Challenge Grant Program and 25% for Innovation in College Access and Completion National Activities (United States Department of Education, 2009).

President Obama also encouraged businesses to unite with community colleges to help train students, noting that Cisco Networking Academy has already begun to prepare students for technological jobs (Obama, 2013). The government has changed the focus of higher education. It is driven more by the needs of the workforce, and encourages more collaboration between institutions and businesses.

The NCES (2013) noted that a little over 1.5 million first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students pursued an undergraduate degree in 2006 at 4-year institutions. Only 4 in 10 (39%) students actually earned a bachelor degree within 4 years, and 6 in 10 (59.2%) students were able to complete their degrees in 6 years. There has not been a

significant change reported by the NCES, in the number students who have earned degrees in 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities in 30 years.

In 2012, ACT compared the intervention strategies of 2-year colleges and 4-year universities in Missouri. These practices were divided into two categories: The first category identified the most effective retention practices; the second category used data from the institutions to separate campuses with high retention rates from those with low retention rates. The high retention rate practices utilized by 2-year and 4-year institutions were identified as the dividing line between 2-year and 4-year institutions with low retention rates. Two-year colleges that exhibited the highest retention rates implemented the following strategies: a reading center or lab, a comprehensive learning center, tutoring, mandated course placement according to assessment scores, remedial or developmental courses, an increase in the number of advisors, a writing lab, a math lab and a program for first generation college students. Four year universities added to these strategies, including a summer bridge program, supplemental instruction, advising interventions for select students, required on-campus housing for first-year students, and the integration of advising with first-year transition students.

The research of Sheldon and Durdella (2010) focused on the relationship between course length and student success. Studies have documented the correlation between the length of time it takes students to complete a remedial course and its effect on students' persistence and college completion, but there are few studies documenting student performance in compressed courses. The records of 21,165 students were examined with 3,360 students enrolled in compressed remedial courses, while 17,805 enrolled in regular

length remedial courses. The success rates for the courses were determined by the following criteria: students who earned a grade of C or above, students who completed the course, and the withdrawal rate of students who began in the college and did not transfer from another college. Students who enrolled in the 8-9 week course demonstrated the highest student completion and success rates, followed by the students who enrolled in the 5-6 week course. Students enrolled in the 14-16 week course yielded the lowest completion and success rates.

ACT (2012) compiled a list of 94 university programs, curricular offerings, and interventions to determine which of the services had the most influence on student retention in the What Works Report. The services were referred to as practices. These practices were identified as ones that could potentially influence student retention and graduation rates. A survey was mailed to 3,360 colleges and universities and out of that number, 1,104 were returned. Ninety-five of the schools that returned the surveys enrolled fewer than 20 % African American students; the data from those surveys were used for this study. The highest ranking survey items per student rating were the need to have a person specifically designated to student retention, the need for some online undergraduate degree courses, and the need for articulation agreements with other colleges. The survey item students rated to have the least effect on retention and graduation was the course numbering system used by colleges.

Colleges and universities that have a more diverse student population need to have more diverse retention strategies. Some private and public colleges have been successful in increasing the retention rate because they were able to connect theory with

execution by using data to identify areas of weaknesses, develop strategies, and implement them (Ellucian, 2014).

Professors' Perceptions of Student's Writing and Interventions

One hundred and seventy-four college faculty at six higher education institutions in Pennsylvania participated in a study to determine the perceptions of faculty in regards to students who were academically underprepared in the areas of reading and writing (Quick, 2013). This research was guided by the theoretical concept of Shulman's pedagogical content knowledge (Solis, 2009). This theory is grounded in interpretation of the knowledge of subject matter and how an instructor translates the subject matter to students for the purpose of learning. This theory has six key elements: knowledge of representation of subject matter, students' conceptions of the subject matter and the instructional method associated with each particular subject matter, instructional strategies, curriculum knowledge, knowledge of educational context, and the knowledge of the purposes of education. The last three elements are considered the knowledge base for teaching. This theory expresses that faculty members should move beyond knowing the content, but they need to possess the methodology to convey the content to students in an effective manner. The faculty members were selected from northwestern Pennsylvania institutions to complete electronic surveys. The purpose of the study was to determine if there were gaps between what faculty members perceived as their role in educating struggling students, and how prepared they felt implementing instructional strategies to assist students.

The research indicated that faculty had not been properly trained to instruct underprepared students, and needed more training. The research showed that many of the faculty members would implement the strategies to instruct students if they knew which ones to use. An increase in the number of underprepared students should be met with a greater responsibility of the institution to meet the educational needs of these students by providing meaningful faculty development training (Quick, 2013).

Boston University faculty members and administrators noted that each year, entering freshmen students' writing abilities were becoming weaker (Prince, 2009). Even students who had attained higher scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) still struggled with writing papers. During this time (2007), scoring a 12 was a perfect score on the SAT writing section. In 2007, the College Board (owners of SAT) realized the importance of writing and added a written essay component to the test. In 2008, the College Board analyzed the new test and discovered it improved the prediction of grades of entering college students by only .001%. Previously, the SAT accuracy of predicting students earning a C or better in collegiate education was 0.052, and after the improvement to the SAT, the prediction rate increased to only 0.053.

Boston University designed an assessment with the input of the faculty; this assessment was called Boston University Writing Assessment (BUWA). The faculty noted that students still were not proficient in writing, and each year, with newly admitted students, faculty members found that their writing was not improving. The faculty reported that academic writing is different than any other type of writing in that it requires an in-depth and working knowledge of grammatical rules and the knowing of

how, why, and which rule to apply (Behrens & Mercer, 2011). The faculty wanted students to have more practice in writing, and that practice needed to be consistent and connected to literature-based content.

They stated that although students had attained a score high enough on the SAT to bypass remedial writing and enroll in English Composition I, the students still had writing deficits and performed poorly. The faculty collaborated and examined the types of assignments given to students and extracted the types of skills necessary for students to be successful with the task. According to the faculty members' perceptions, to be successful, students should have the ability to comprehend scholarly written material and then be able to form an opinion, analyze, or make an argument based on the reading (Prince, 2009). Faculty perceived that many students lacked grammar skills because little or no time is spent practicing and developing the types of skills needed. These skills are developed through a writing and rewriting process, practicing the skills that were learned. Therefore, a writing program designed by the faculty that was not based on students' SAT scores was developed.

Faculty members believed that taking an English grammar course and learning language mechanics for one semester was not enough for students to learn mechanics and begin to use them effectively, and a second semester would allow the students more time to practice the skills learned in the first semester. (Prince, 2009). In the first semester of the writing program, students were taught reading, and how to analyze the text. During the second semester, students learned research skills that were based on inquiry teaching (Prince, 2009). The findings of the BUWA were that students received higher grades

after they had taken the second-semester writing courses and were better able to think critically, analyze material, and write more effectively and more consistently than students who had taken only one semester of writing. This study is significant because it demonstrates that students' writing improves when they analyze text and use inquiry methods. Research skills taught during an additional semester allowed students to practice and develop their writing skills during the second semester.

Hoppe (2014) noted a missing component in the research concerning the design of developmental or remedial programs. Students needed to be included and involved in the development and redesign of developmental programs. Their views about their individual writing experiences can provide valuable information that could affect how skills are acquired. Inclusion of students in a study concerning writing may allow researchers and faculty members to understand students' struggles with the writing process and gauge their depth of writing knowledge.

Summary and Transition

Since 1990, the number of students who entered college has significantly increased, but college completion data has not documented that growth (Bound et al., 2009). It is estimated that only 32% of high school students are prepared for collegiate courses; African American and Hispanic students are the least prepared for college. In Section 2 of the literature review, several factors were discussed that may affect students' failure to persist to degree completion. These factors included students' limited prior academic knowledge, and students' lack of rigorous courses taken in high school to prepare them for college. Insufficient writing skills may lead students to drop out and

incur debt without obtaining their degree to increase earnings; the students' completion of remedial/developmental writing courses has a direct effect on whether a student will persist and continue until degree completion. A parallel has been made with the amount of money people can earn during their lifetime and their level of education.

Section 3: Research Method

The faculty members at the study site, along with faculty members at many other colleges and universities, have noted that more students are entering higher education institutions unprepared and unable to write at the collegiate level. This deficit in writing has negatively affected retention, persistence, and graduation rates (Colorado Community College System, 2013; Education Week, 2010; Melguizo, Bos, & Prather, 2011). Balduf (2009) studied high school seniors who performed well in writing, but struggled with developmental writing during their first year in college. This study showed that students are not necessarily deficient in writing, but rather, need skills to help them to solve problems and handle challenges. Balduf stated that despite students' deficit in problem solving, they should not be labeled as unprepared, but rather as *underachievers*. The writing abilities of high school students were assumed sufficient for high school. However, the high school curriculum was not sufficiently challenging enough to help students to advance their skill level, and students did not challenge themselves to gain additional problem solving skills.

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative illustrative case study was to examine college instructors' perceptions about students' writing skills, and to identify students' writing strengths and weaknesses. There are five types of qualitative research designs (biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study) that I could have used for this study. Researchers use all of these qualitative research designs to study interactions between people and their environment, and how those interactions influence individual experiences. Through these designs, researchers seek to ascertain meaning from the participants' experiences. A brief summary of the five research designs follows, in which I provided specific reasons for selecting the case study design.

A biographical design is used to study a person's life history or a particular life event, such as a traumatic life event. The type of data collected for a biographical study is personal documents. These documents may include speeches, archived letters, or any other type of written work. Many of the documents used in this type of study are produced before the study, such as during or after a life event (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). My aim in this study was neither to focus on one person, nor follow a life event; therefore, the biographical method was not selected.

A phenomenological design is used when the researcher studies a single phenomenon or emphasizes the meaning of an experience. Phenomenology began in the 20th century with the work of philosophers like Husserl, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013). Questions are the means of collecting data for this design, and the researcher uses them to find a common theme. I did not select a

phenomenological design because the data were not collected over an extensive period with enough in-depth data to meet the requirements of a phenomenological study.

The grounded theory design developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) is a method used to explain an issue in a particular population or group. Data are collected through focus groups and individual interviews. However, for this design, the researcher uses a limited number of participants because the analysis process is tedious. The researcher develops a theory to address the research question by comparing and contrasting all data systematically, which may take an extensive amount of time to complete (Franz, 2011). In this study, I did not seek to develop a theory; therefore, grounded theory was not selected.

Researchers use ethnographic studies to investigate the experiences or practices of a cultural or social group. When using this design, the researcher is immersed in the culture for an extended period. Observations and questions are the methods utilized for data collected for this design (Creswell, 2013). The focus of this study was not to investigate practices of a particular group; therefore, I did not use an ethnographic design.

A case study is an exploration of a single case or multiple cases. A case is a bounded system, one in which the participants have a factor that joins them together. Case studies were initially used for studying medical case phenomenon in combination with a quantitative study (Creswell, 2013; Guest et al., 2013). The basic goal for a case study is to examine various humanistic experiences. Case study researchers put together the bits of collected data to make interpretations about the meaning of the data in order to make visible ordinary daily experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). With this method,

the researcher also obtains data in its natural setting, that is, the setting where the phenomenon occurs. The researcher delves deeply into the details and seeks to examine and understand something that is specific to a particular case. I determined that a case study design was most appropriate for this study.

I selected the qualitative method with an illustrative case study paradigm because it was the most suitable method. In this method the researcher seeks to understand experiences of individuals by using interviews, focus groups, or observations (Guest et al., 2012). I selected a case study design because I sought to investigate a single case in which all persons who participated in the study had experienced the phenomenon, or were in some way connected to the phenomenon. I also studied practices that are experienced by a group; however, I did not seek to explain an issue, but rather I sought out perceptions about a phenomenon. In-depth interviews were the collection method I used to gather the data. One of the purposes of performing interviews in qualitative research is to collect data in the form of insights, understandings, opinions, experiences, behaviors, and predictions (Rowley, 2012). The Wallace Foundation (nd) stated that the process of being heard and the act of a researcher recording a phenomenon from the participant's point of view helps the participants feel a sense of empowerment; this empowerment builds a level of trust within the participant which could provide a higher quality of data.

This research involved my use of semistructured in-depth interviews of university instructional faculty members to gather data regarding their experiences with and perceptions of students' writing. These faculty members were valid resources because

they provided instruction for students and encountered written samples over an extended period. I used in-depth questioning to bring out personal experiences from those who had observed the problem (see Guest et. al., 2013). I also asked the instructors to offer possible solutions to address students' identified writing deficits. In Section 5, I combine the ideas presented by faculty members with research-based best practices to offer recommendations.

Research Questions

There have been several research studies about students and collegiate writing skills. However, few researchers have focused on the perceptions of the faculty members who provide instruction to students. Faculty members may have pertinent information about students' writing. I designed the following research questions to investigate the problem of this study:

1. What are faculty members' perceptions of students' writing skills at the local university?
2. What interventions do faculty members believe are needed to improve the writing skills of students at the local university?

Context

I conducted this study at an open admission public university located in Tennessee. The university enrolls about 2,000 first-time entering college students each fall. In 2013, 87% of the entering freshman took the ACT to gain admission into the university. Fifty-one percent of the students' composite scores ranged from 12-17; while 41% of the students' scores ranged from 18-22, and 8% of the students' scores ranged

from 23-29. The university's eight colleges and schools have 45 bachelor degree programs with 77 majors. Some of the majors have programs that are traditional in length, while other programs are accelerated. The accelerated programs are designed for students who are 25 years of age or older and have some prior college credits.

In 2011, more than 6,500 undergraduates and 1,500 graduates were enrolled at the university. Three hundred-fifty full-time faculty are employed at the university, with 72.7% of those faculty members having terminal degrees. The student-to-faculty ratio is 16:1. The degrees awarded at the university are associate, baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral.

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative research is interpretative, and the researcher is the interpreter (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, I was the interpreter of the data for the study. I recorded the interviews and coded the interview data to find emerging themes. Finally, I interpreted the data, and reported the findings. I am currently employed at the study site, and may have worked with some of the selected participants from 2009-2014. My employment at the university may have brought a level of comfort for some participants, while at the same time creating bias.

The bias of which I was most aware stems from my familiarity with some of the faculty employed by the university. These relationships could have led participants to sway their responses to the questions in one particular way. Therefore, following the guidelines of Pratt (2009), I took care not to ask questions, use body gestures, or make facial expressions that would lead the participants to sway their answers or suggest

possible outcomes. It is important to use open-ended questioning along with probing questions to deepen knowledge about the phenomenon according to participants' previous responses (Guest et al., 2013).

Ethical Procedures

The validity and reliability of a study are heavily based upon the researcher's use of ethical procedures (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). The American Educational Research Association (AERA) Ethical Standards committee has developed guidelines for researchers (AERA, 2012). I followed the guidelines of the AERA by providing the rationale for the study and a description of the purpose listed on the informational letter sent to the participating university. Both the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and university consent form were filed and approved before any data were collected. This study was approved through the IRB approval process by Walden University (approval #12-12-14-0050001) and the University study site (approval #HS 2014-3530. The study site, a public university in Tennessee, provided signed approval to allow data collection; the document is filed at Walden University.

Criteria for Participant Selection

Creswell (2013) stated that careful attention should be paid to the selection of participants for a study because it is as important to the study as the data collected. In this illustrative qualitative case study, I employed purposive intensity sampling, a method used to select participants who have knowledge about a phenomenon (Guest et al., 2013).

Merriam and Tisdell (2014) suggested that a researcher should select participants who are able to provide rich, thick descriptions to help to ensure external validity. These

rich, thick data are also necessary because the sample size is relatively small. The small sample size requires a much more intense interview with each of the participants (Creswell, 2003). Although the sample size seems small; it is adequate for the study. Creswell and Clark-Plano (2006) explained an illustrative case study may be smaller in comparison to other qualitative paradigms. Mason (2010) provided a list of reasons for the smaller sample size, noting that increasing the volume of data does not lead to more information, and analyzing large quantities of data takes a lot of time and is not practical. The intent of qualitative researchers is to find meaning from a situation, rather than validating or finding a hypothesis.

Participants selected for the research met the following criteria: provided instruction to students at the study site for a minimum of 5 years and require students to submit written assignments that are graded. Specifically, the university faculty participants required students to complete at least two written assignments per course each semester. The types of written assignments submitted by students were either two essays, two term papers, or two research papers, or any combination during their courses. When access was provided to the faculty members, I began my initial search for participants for the study. I strategically selected participants who had the most experience with students' writing during the freshman, sophomore, junior and senior years. I believed this type of selection would provide the best overall view of students' writing and faculty perceptions of students' writing in each level. The research site previously designed English Composition and General Education History courses to be writing intensive; therefore, 14 participation letters were placed in faculty members'

mailboxes who taught those courses. The remaining letters were randomly placed in mailboxes of two faculty members from each college who specifically provided instruction for those who were juniors and seniors. A total of 26 participation letters were placed in 26 full-time faculty member's mailboxes on campus. The participation letter detailed the purpose of the study, the criteria to participate, and included an attached consent form for participation. The package contained an addressed return envelope so the consent form could be returned to me. From that point forward, I contacted participants by email and phone to determine if they met the participation criteria. If they met the criteria, a time and location was determined.

During the initial recruitment, four participants accepted the invitation. After a 4-month waiting period, the minimum number of 12 participants had not been reached to begin the study. A follow-up letter was sent to an additional 24 faculty members in an effort to obtain enough participants for the study. To provide a campus-wide view of students' writing skills, invitations were sent to faculty members from the various colleges within the university: Arts and Sciences, Business, and Health Sciences. Eight participants accepted the invitation from the second search for participants.

A total of 50 letters were distributed to faculty campus mailboxes soliciting participation, and 12 participants (the initial target number) offered to participate in the study and the recruitment process was stopped. The participants were screened by either phone or email depending on the method they used to contact me indicating their interest in participating in the study. I reviewed the purpose and nature of the study with them during the screening. I explained that they would remain anonymous, they could

withdraw from the study at any point, and they would also be provided an opportunity to review their transcribed interview for accuracy.

The participants were asked to confirm their eligibility to participate in the study by answering "yes" to the following questions.

- Have you provided instruction to college students at the university for at least 5 years?
- Do you require students to submit at least two written assignments per semester that are graded?

The participants were from various colleges within the university; five participants were male and seven were female. Two participants were from the College of Education, two were from the College of Health Sciences and one participant was from the College of Agriculture. Six participants were from the College of Liberal Arts, three from the History Department, and five were in the English Department.

Data Collection

Interviewing participants was the method of data collection for the study. There is one main benefit for using this method, its flexibility for collecting data. This method utilizes open-ended questions and gives the researcher the opportunity to ask clarifying questions to obtain more information (Woods, 2007). An interview protocol was utilized to guide the interviews, but follow-up questions were asked to seek additional data or for clarification (see Appendix B). A disadvantage of using interviews for data collection is that this method usually involves fewer participants in comparison to the use of questionnaires. When using questionnaires, a larger number of participants can be polled,

responses from the participants are easy to obtain, and data are acquired relatively quickly. In order for interviews to be valid, the interviewees must be carefully chosen and have first hand experience with the prescribed behavior (Rowley, 2012). This is the process that I have used for my case study.

The purpose of this qualitative illustrative case study was to show the perceptions college faculty members had about their students' writing abilities. College faculty members have a unique perspective in which they have continual contact with students and have first hand knowledge of students' abilities. The 12 faculty members who met the participation criteria were interviewed. Each participant signed a consent form prior to his or her interview. The empirical data for this study were gathered by audio recorded in-depth interviews, in a natural setting, to discover the details unique to this case. Each interview was transcribed within 3 days, and the transcribed interview was sent back to the participant to check for accuracy of the transcription. All data obtained for the study, hard copies, and electronic data stored on a USB drive, will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home for a minimum of 5 years. After the data have been kept for the prescribed time, all hard copy data will be shredded and data stored on the USB drive will be erased.

Instruments

Semistructured, face-to-face interviews with open-ended questioning were used to allow participants to answer questions and discuss their personal experiences with students in their own words. The interview questions and protocol are located in Appendix B. All audiotaped interviews lasted about 60 minutes and were later

transcribed for data analysis. In addition, I took notes during the interviews, which I could use to create various follow-up questions. More details about how the data were organized will be presented in the following section. Each participant was identified by the same pseudonyms in the notes and the interview to maintain confidentiality, as well as to keep the notes and interviews together.

A screening log was used to document and track the invitation letters, responses to the letters, and potential participant eligibility to take part in the study, as well as the date and time of interviews. The reflective journal documented the entire data collection and analysis process. The journal contains the date interviews were completed, and the date interviews were transcribed. The date the interviews were coded is included in the journal and notes that were taken during the interview are also included. The data tracking log contains the date transcribed interviews were sent to participants to check for accuracy, the date participants opened the email, and their responses to the transcription. My thoughts and understandings during the process were also documented.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the computer software Ethnograph 6.0 (Seidel, 1998). This software facilitates the analysis of text-based qualitative data such as interviews, field notes, and open-ended surveys. Ethnograph software learns the researcher's trends toward coding, and assists with managing unstructured data as well as with the process of coding interviews. This data analysis software system does not create themes or categories; rather it allows the data itself to bring to light the themes that are emerging from the data (Janesick, 2015).

I transcribed the audio-recorded interviews into written text. Transcriptions of the recorded interviews were reviewed and compared to the audiotape to ensure accuracy. The participants were emailed a copy of their transcribed interview (Appendix F) to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the transcription and provided the opportunity to clarify any of their comments. If a participant noted discrepancies or inaccuracies, corrections were made, and the transcript was resubmitted to the participant for approval. The participants had the opportunity to remove any comments they did not wish to be included in the study; only one-participant removed comments from the transcribed interview. The participants were contacted by phone 2 days after they received the transcribed interview and were asked if they had read the interview transcription. If they had not read the transcribed interview, they were given 2 additional days to respond. After 4 days, the interview stood as transcribed. Both the original and revised transcripts were dated and stored in a locked file cabinet.

The data were organized first into source identifications, data labels, and finally into file names (Janesick, 2015). Participants were referred to as P-1 through P-12; this identifier was placed on the audio interview, transcribed interview, and any other information that required identification, such as field notes (Appendix F), and the appointment log. The participant numerical identification was created to keep track of participants' interviews and also to avoid the use of participants' names and maintain confidentiality (Guest et al., 2013). The signed consent forms will always be kept separate in a locked file.

No predetermined themes were developed before the data collection because it was important that I did not assume what themes would be derived from the data. I allowed the themes to emerge from the faculty interview data. These data were first organized into sections, according to phrases and words, which were used by the participants. Common words were counted and put into a frequency chart (Appendix D) according to the number of times they were stated by participants. Themes emerged from the organized sections and word frequency to form categories (Creswell, 2003). Finally, the categories were analyzed, organized, enumerated, and reviewed for relationships. The findings were summarized and written in a rich descriptive narrative, and discrepant cases were noted for possible follow-up study or further examination (Glaser & Laudel, 2013).

Member checking has been heralded as a way to ensure that a researcher has represented participant views correctly (Harvey, 2015); therefore, it was implemented in this study to ensure credibility. Findings of the study were given to all participants to get their feedback and allow them to determine accuracy. The findings of this study are presented in Section 4, providing the key themes that emerged from the data analysis and key statements from the participants to support the themes and answers to the research questions.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Creswell (2005) presented a list of suggested strategies to alleviate or reduce the threats to validity. The strategies chosen for this study are *rich, thick descriptions*, *clarifying the bias*, and using *peer debriefing.* The use of these strategies lends more

credibility to the study. The purpose of the thick, rich descriptions is to allow the reader to imagine themselves in the setting in which the study has taken place and to be able to have an authentic discussion about the experiences (Guest et al., 2013). I eliminated biases by refraining from asking leading questions, or gesturing to lead toward a particular response.

A peer who was unrelated to the study read over final transcripts, the final report, and the methodology section to offer feedback. The peer debriefer documented areas of over or under emphasized points, vague descriptions, general errors in the data, or biased assumptions that I made. Discrepancies in statements given by participants or differing points of view were recorded, coded, and presented with the findings in Section 4 and Section 5.

Summary and Transition

This section has addressed the design of the study with a justification for the chosen method. The method for selecting participants and criteria used for the selection were described. A discussion of how the data were collected and analyzed was presented in this section. This includes the procedures used to protect participants, data collection, analysis, and methods used to ensure the credibility of the study.

Section 4 contains the findings of the transcribed and coded interviews. The coded interviews were further reduced into themes; each theme is discussed in-depth. The section offers suggestions concerning the best methods to help students improve their writing. It also contains ways in which this study may influence social change in higher education.

Section 4: Results

College students' writing skills seem to be declining, with fewer students able to write effectively. This decline has recently been brought to the forefront by colleges, universities, and governing agents of higher education (Diaz, 2010; Fair Testing, 2009). VanNest, (2016) stated that students' writing is at an all-time low because elementary schools are no longer teaching cursive writing, and high school students graduate without the ability to effectively write a five sentence paragraph. Carter and Harper (2013) also discussed that the number of students exhibiting insufficient writing skills is increasing, which is a concern to colleges and universities. They also stated that research performed over the past 30 years has documented the decline. These studies, and others like them, have placed a spotlight on the preparedness of students enrolling in colleges and universities. This spotlight has caused some states to remove developmental courses from university course offerings, only allowing community colleges to offer these courses (Adams, 2010). Many universities have responded to this change by adding instructional support in conjunction with the college courses, thus removing the need for developmental courses. This change may not be enough to assist students in gaining adequate writing skills.

In order to begin the process of evaluating how students with inadequate writing skills acquire or increase their abilities, I sought to determine the perceptions of college faculty members regarding students' writing. In this section, I present empirical data concerning the perceptions of faculty members located at a particular study site, and summarize and discuss the findings in detail.

Findings

I coded the transcribed interviews using a software program called Ethnograph 6.0 (Seidel, 1998). I examined the transcribed interviews, line by line, and then organized the initial codes into broad categories. The categories were then organized into subcategories by collecting and grouping repetitive concepts. I identified six themes during the analysis process, which I discuss in detail in the following subsections (see Appendix E).

Faculty Perceptions

The themes that emerged from the transcribed faculty interviews were as follows:

- students lack basic writing skills.
- technological advances.
- informal communication and code switching.
- point of view.
- transference of skills.
- students need to take the initiative for their own learning.

RQ 1 Findings:

Faculty members discussed issues that students faced while trying to perform collegiate writing. I have broken their responses into the five themes in the following sections.

Students lack basic writing skills. All participants reported that the writing skills that students exhibited were weak. Brockman, Taylor, Crawford, and Kreth (2010) described basic writing skills as good grammar and mechanics, effective organization,

clarity, and the ability to support views. When participants were asked to explain what they considered to be basic writing skills, P-2 stated:

> Students are fresh out of high school, and they come to the class with less skills than you would expect them to have upon graduating from high school—spelling, grammar. And a lot of those students are taking learning support courses.

P-1 stated, "They have difficulty with spelling and punctuation," while P-2, P-3, P-5, and P-6 described the lack of basic skills as poor sentence structure, with grammatical and spelling errors. P-5 provided this example,

> They had done everything I had said not to do. There was not one sentence on the whole page. It was just fragmented sort of words. Students think that they can throw words on a piece of paper, and it will be worthwhile.

P-7, P-8, P-9, and P-10 added to the basic skills list, "Students are not using any capitalization, nor do they know subject-verb agreement." P-7 stated,

> There are different ways to use commas, and it is okay to be a little confused about that, but no punctuation at all? Like none. No capitalization to separate where one sentence ends and another one begins. Things that you and other people would probably consider extremely basic. Also, students were not able to format papers appropriately even when given a step-by-step guide.

P-2 said that in one instance, one paragraph had 10 sentences, and they were all run-on sentences. P-5 stated, "If you tell them to use MLA format for their papers, and give them the format, one inch margins with indented paragraphs and doubled spaced, I have gotten papers that were centered down the middle of the page." P-6 added,

"Students know nothing about formatting; even the students who say they know MLA formatting are not doing it correctly." When I asked how many students did they think lacked basic writing skills, there was no consensus among the participants. P-4 and P-6 believed that 85%-90% of students lacked basic writing skills. The remaining participants thought that 50% to 60% of students lacked the necessary writing skills.

Technological advances. New technologies have aided the ability to transfer information quickly; however, this technology has also brought about some unexpected changes in the way people communicate with one another. Young adults are constantly on their phones, sending instant messages, texting, tweeting, and snapchatting with their friends. The format and language used in these types of written messages are not what should be used in collegiate writing. It was noted by all of the interviewed participants that this is a problem. P-8 stated, "Students tend to use the lowercase *i* and *u* and other such abbreviations as if they were sending a text to someone." P-10 stated:

> It is now difficult to distinguish a native English speaking student from a student in which English is their second language. Previously, students who used English as their second language had some identifiable markers in their writing. They misused *a, an,* and *the* in their sentences, and they had difficulty with prepositional phrases. Currently, native English speaking students are displaying the same types of errors as nonnative English speaking students in their writing.

P-7 indicated that students write all the time, just not the conventional writing we are expecting, and so they turn in papers with the lower case *u* for the word you, noting, "This is a college classroom! This is not a proof-reading thing; it is a thinking thing". P-7

through P-12 indicated that this type of writing has been brought about because of students' use of cell phones. P-11 discussed how the use of shortcut writing used in texting had influenced students' writing, referring to that type of writing as "tech speech, it just flows into their formal writing, and it should not." P-12 stated that "texting has not been good for anybody; I remember when people wrote letters. The practice of writing letters increases students' writing skills, and we did not see students with this type of deficit before texting." The remaining participants thought students' use of cell phones may contribute to the problem, but it is not the sole reason for students' lack of skills.

Informal communication and code switching. It was a consensus amongst faculty members that students do not know the audience to whom they are writing. The inability to switch codes is evidenced in their writing. Code switching is the ability to change language contexts based on the situations and settings (Rose-Woodard, 2001). Students seem not to know when, or how, to address the audience to whom they are presenting a message, or, in other words, when to use formal and informal writing.

P-8 stated that a student would send her an email and say, "Yo, what did I miss in class yesterday?" She responded to the student by saying that she would not answer the student's email until it was written correctly. A correctly written or formal email would use standard English, address the person by name, have a clear, concise message using correct grammar, and end with a signature from the person who is sending the email. She informs her students that an email sent to any faculty member or employer is a formal communication document and should be written as such. Students should, at the very least, read their emails before pressing the send button.

P-2 and P-7 through P-10 discussed the ways that they have tried to convey to students the difference between speaking with their friends, and speaking with their employer or professor. Each semester, time is allotted at the beginning of each class explaining how to address the teacher and other faculty members. P-7 believed that students struggle with this because of the number of hours that they spend sending abbreviated messages to their friends, and the little time they spend practicing formal writing. P-2 discussed, "Students continue to struggle and have not learned when to change the way they communicate according to the person or situation."

P-9 stated that a previous student had written an email to a prospective employer concerning a potential job opportunity. The prospective employer contacted the faculty member and forwarded to her the email the student had sent. The faculty member stated she was never so embarrassed, "It was horrible, just atrocious writing! The letter was written as if no thought had been given to who would be reading it."

Point of view. According to P-8, when students are allowed to respond to a question from their point of view, they will do pretty well with the writing. They are able to use quotes from the writing to support their views. P-10 indicated, "When students are asked to use the view of someone else, they have a difficult time with it." P-10 continued,

> It is because we live in a narcissistic society. We believe that everything is about us; we are so important that we take pictures of the places we go, the food we eat, and post them so that everyone can see them. We take numerous *selfies* and post them for others to view. Therefore, students do not practice the skill of viewing something from someone else's perspective.

In addition, P-7 stated,

> Most of the students are able to do this writing while participating during a class discussion. When performing the task alone, students are not able to look through the lens of another person's eye and discuss how they are feeling about a situation and why. The students who are able to view situations from someone else's perspective are not able to support the view with documented evidence within the article, or story.

Students are still thinking and writing as if they are in high school, responding to questions from their point of view or approaching collegiate writing by just providing answers. P-5 added,

> A student was much taken aback with the fact that he had a do-over because this was unacceptable, an *F*. The student responded by saying, 'Well, my teacher in high school would have given me an *A* for that paper.' The professor responded, 'You are no longer in high school!'

P-4 contributed to the discussion by stating students are too primed from high school, especially in History where they answer questions on worksheets. P-4 stated students would say, "Where is the answer? I will find it and give it to you." P-12 stated, "Students are able to write a response to an article; however, they have difficulty when writing research papers or taking on another person's viewpoint."

Transference of skills. Students do not understand that each course builds upon a previous course. They memorize or perform whatever is necessary for one class, but do not carry those skills into the next course. P-7 suggested, "Students do not realize there is

a connection, even though they have been informed that there is a connection. They need to use what they learned in one class and carry it over to the next class. I still don't think they get the connection."

P-4 stated that there is some improvement in students' writing since the university requires students to complete English 1010 and 1020 before they can enroll in History courses; however, the writing is still not on the collegiate level. "I reference it by saying; don't forget everything you learned in English 1020: paragraphs, topic, sentences connections, and grammatical things."

P-10 shared information concerning an email sent by a previous student. The student reminded the faculty member that the course is not an English course and that her paper should not be marked for grammatical errors. It should only be graded according to the content of paper. According to P-12, students would submit one-page summary papers and research papers and it was impossible to make any sense from it. She wondered what skills the students learned in English 1010 and 1020. P-6 referred to one of the courses she teaches:

> It has a writing component in it because, in that particular major, students will be required to write well. They assess the students' writing skills to determine which skill they should begin teaching, and it is usually from the very beginning. Students can only enroll they have successfully completed English 1010 and 1020. They have forgotten adverbs and adjectives and just how to write a good sentence. Right now I am teaching two 3000-level courses, and there are some

students I had in the 2011 class that are in the 3000-level class. I find myself having to write on their papers "recall from 2011."

P-8 informed me that students' writing is so poor, that she wonders how they were able to receive passing scores in the previous English courses. One of the courses requires students to write a paper each week. She stated, she is so busy cutting and pasting the original sentence and the revised sentence pasted below it. She revises the sentences because she wants students to see what a correctly written sentence with the same ideas looks like. She continued, "Many improve, but Lord have mercy! I am still trying to figure out how they made it out of English 1010 and 1020."

RQ 2 Findings

Three themes were identified for this research question, taking the initiative for learning, mandatory attendance, and intensive writing across the curriculum. These themes will be presented and discussed in the following section. Interventions to improve student's writing, identified by two or fewer participants, will be discussed as discrepant cases.

Take the initiative for learning. There are many resources at the university to assist students in improving their writing. All participants believe the current resources are enough to guide and support students as they improve their skills. They have advised and referred students in their classes to seek the services of the Writing Center, but few students have gone to seek help with writing. P-8 stated, "Students say they do not have the time, or they have to go to work". Participants 1, 2, 4, 8, and 10, agreed that "students who seek assistance at the Success Center usually have a notable improvement in their

writing." P-1 replied that "students who sought help on a regular basis from the Writing Center would usually exhibit improvements in their writing by the end of the semester". Some students would consult with P-1 and let her know that they would be graduating during the current semester and imply that they needed a passing grade in the class. She responded, "What do you want from me? I have advised you to go to the Writing Center, but you will not go."

Some participants reviewed student papers before they were due and offered suggestions for improvement. The only problem was the students waited until almost the due date before seeking help. P-7 said, "They come to me and say, 'Would you please look at this?' I said, 'It is due tomorrow.'" The frustration of the faculty members comes from how to get students to seek help long before the due dates of the assignments. The students wanted the help, but they waited too close to the assignment's due date. The professors wanted the students to get help a long time before the assignment was due, maybe 3-4 weeks prior to the due date. One instructor said she told her students, "The more you rewrite it, the quality of the work increases. You can't turn it in the day before it is due. I mean, write it the day before it is due; it won't be very good. I don't care how smart you are." The discussion continued as the participant described a student's response to an error in the paper. P-7 stated, "When I showed a student a mistake they had made and they said okay, but they repeat that mistake over and over again. And at some point you think, I don't know how else to say this. I don't want to be that ogre who is just going to be a butthole about it, but I can't let this slide. If I do, then I am not doing my job. So it gets pretty frustrating." Students are not willing to seek help, or try

something on their own. They want everything handed to them and quickly. P-7 continued, “They don’t want to use the dictionary to look up words with which they are not familiar. They really expect you to give them everything they need without trying to find or learn things on their own.”

P-1 shared frustration with getting students to go to the Writing Center for help with their writing and responded, “When my students turn in the first writing assignment, I make a note of all of the students who would benefit from the assistance from the Writing Center. Then, I refer them to the Writing Center. The majority of them will not go. They just will not go.” P-5 stated,

> Maybe they don’t think they need the help. They may be like that little boy who told me that his teacher would have given him an *A*. I couldn’t get him to go to the Writing Center either. We make written referrals; I made a written referral for that child, and he never went. I guess maybe he got an *A* from another instructor, but he did not get one with me.

P-4 noted that students’ writing does improve if the instructor can get them to go to the Writing Center. That first step seems to be so difficult for them. Maybe they do not think they need any assistance with writing, or maybe they are embarrassed about their poor skills. P-9 through P-12 also agreed that students who were referred to the Writing Center would not go. P-10 furthered the discussion by stating, “Because the students who needed assistance with writing are juniors and seniors, they do not want to be associated with the lower classmen. It is embarrassing for them to go there.”

Mandatory attendance. It was stated by 9 of the 12 participants that if a student attended the Writing Center, their writing showed improvement; thus, if students would attend the Writing Center and get assistance they would benefit from the current resources. P-3 stated, "We have a Writing Center, and we refer students to the Writing Center, however, we don't have a way to make it mandatory, even though we really want them to attend." P-1 added,

> We had one young man, when he enrolled, he could not write one sentence. He went to the Writing Center and later he was able to write proficiently. He completed the master's Comprehensive Exam and later was accepted into the doctoral program.

P-6 believed that it should be mandatory for freshmen and sophomores to attend the Writing Center regularly, but juniors and seniors should have an option regarding attendance. P-12 wanted to make it mandatory for students to go to the Writing Center, especially if they had already exhibited any of the issues in writing, such as grammar, sentence structure, or punctuation. P-12 suggested,

> Maybe we need to implement some type of mandatory Writing Center. The one we have will probably work if we could get students to use it. But I think that there is a very low percentage of students who use the Writing Center. I guess we ought to have some type of mandatory Writing Center in conjunction with a class.

Intensive writing across the curriculum. Many faculty members who were interviewed taught sophomores, juniors, and seniors. They agreed in substance with P-12, who stated: "I don't know how they made it out of the English Composition courses

because their writing is so poor." Faculty who taught the English Composition courses indicated students were able to write effectively when they completed their course. Therefore, some of the interviewed participants stated one way to improve students' writing is for every course to be writing intensive.

P-3 suggested that writing should not be just for the English Composition courses. It should be incorporated into every course. It would help students to remember the rules of writing. If writing is not performed often, students tend to forget some of it. Writing across the curriculum should be put in place and used as an intervention. P-5 added to the conversation saying, "I would like to see writing across the curriculum implemented, because if there was writing in mathematics or in science, or other fields, then it would make writing more important, I think." In addition, "If students saw that they could use this writing to enhance the other parts of their studies, I think they would be receptive."

P-11 stated,

> Writing should be performed across the curriculum, and it should be content-area specific. The writing for someone who majors in Science is different from someone who majors in Liberal Arts, or even Education. I think it should be required for all students. Once a student declares a major, there should be a writing course in the first year in that major which focuses on writing in that particular field.

P-10 believed that every course should be writing intensive because frequent and continuously required writing would help students to learn to use formal writing effectively. The incorporation and continuity of intensive writing in all courses across the

campus would provide students with a new campus attitude. P-10 also stated that the difference between a trade school and a university is the expectation of writing. P-10 added that students are not just learning one skill to perform a job. College students should know a variety of things, especially how to write effectively. P-10 continued,

> If every course, regardless of the discipline, was designed this way it would eventually help students' writing to improve. First, every student will know what is expected of them when it came to writing. Second, no one on the campus would accept any poorly written correspondence from students, and that goes for housing submissions, financial aid, or even housekeeping. Students would hate it, but they would get the message that we are serious about writing.

Discrepant Cases

All of the participants in the study believed students lacked basic writing skills; however, the skills that were identified varied. P-1, P-2, and P-3 discussed students' inability to spell sufficiently, and their reluctance to use the spell checker feature on the computer. In addition, P-1 thought that texting only affected students' spelling, but was not the cause of poor writing. P-2 through P-6 believed that texting had little to no influence on students' writing. P-7 added students' lack of knowledge about the parts of speech to the basic skills list.

P-4 believed that students did not write well because they were poor readers, and they were not able to pull out important information from the text. Therefore, they have difficulty writing a clear thesis statement and writing effectively. P-7 stated, "Believe it or not, students don't read well." Students who do not read well cannot respond to written

assignments, articles, or engage in ideas at the expected collegiate level. P-7 added, "It is not that students are incapable of reading, they just do not see the value in it".

The largest discrepancy in the study was the participants' reports of the number of students who displayed inadequate writing abilities. Seventy percent of the participants thought that the number of students with insufficient skills was about 50%, while 20% thought the percentage was much higher, rating students with deficient skills at 85%-90%. The remaining 10% of the participants stated that students who lacked adequate writing skills were about 50%, but they voiced that they were being very conservative with the percentage. Although the participants had varying views about what skills students lacked, they agreed that this is a problem.

There was no consensus when participants discussed what they believed would improve student's writing. P-1 discussed giving students a writing assessment when they entered the university to identify their strengths and weaknesses. P-2 suggested that the students needed face-to-face tutoring rather than online. P-3 stated, "I am not sure how the problem could be eliminated or decreased especially since they are coming from high school with these deficits". P-4 thought that requiring students to write more than one draft would improve their writing skills.

P-5 purported that students needed a grammar review because they do not offer that in high school anymore. P-5 noted,

> They like to use the past participle without the auxiliary verb. So instead of saying 'I saw somebody do something; they say I seen somebody do something.' I try to

explain the reason for doing this, but they say, 'I don't know that rule. It doesn't sound right; I don't know that rule.'

P-5 suggested incorporating an embedded librarian into the courses, so that students would have some assistance with research and writing.

P-6 discussed an obstacle for the Writing Center. The Center could not help everyone because there are too many students with writing deficits. Therefore, P-6 suggested buying software that would be made available to students. This software could help more students and protect their dignity because they would not be embarrassed to use it.

P-7 believed conducting workshops every 2 or 3 weeks with specified topics about the writing process would help. Students could go to the workshops and get the help they needed. Workshops would be conducted on both campuses, with rotating topics during the semester. Students would not be required to attend the workshops, but P-7 was confident that they would, because it would be beneficial.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings of this study may provide the university and other higher education institutions with data to make informed decisions about helping students to increase their writing abilities. Several participants believed that texting had greatly influenced the quality of writing that college students exhibited. Students spent more time writing, but it is not the standard type of writing expected of college students. Shafie, Darus, and Osman (2010) stated that the written language is consistent and has little variation, unlike

the short message system (SMS) referred to as texting. Using written language requires a student to learn the rules and use them to construct written messages.

When SMS is used, it is a system in which more focus is placed on the content of the message, and little to no focus is placed on using correct spelling, grammar rules, or formatting. This type of message system omits many of the vowels that are actually in a word. This is the complete opposite of writing a formal document (Aziz, Shammin, Faisal, & Avais, 2013). Students will fail when they bring that same mind-set into the college classroom, and want college faculty to convert to their way of writing (Shafie, et.al, 2010). Students fail to understand the importance of writing well, or the use of formal writing and believe the professional world should exchange their formal method communication for an informal method.

Faculty members in the College of Health Sciences, at the study site, noted students with the major lacked the writing skills necessary to produce formal writing, and collaborated to design an Introduction to Health Science course. All students who declared Health Science as their major were required to enroll in this course and pass with a grade of C or higher before they could enroll in any 3000 or 4000-level course. The purpose of the course was to set the expectations for the writing in the Health Science programs. The course allowed students the time to practice and develop the skills needed for the programs.

The faculty members in this particular College may be the first to notice that students' collegiate writing was reflective of the type of informal written communication they used daily. This type of communication was sufficient when talking to friends, but is

unacceptable, and should not be used in the professional world. Several participants in the study discussed that students used the SMS informal style of writing when they submitted written assignments. Participants also discussed that students did not understand the significance of using formal writing. Hope (2014) purported that many high school teachers provide instruction to students, according to whether they believe the student has plans to attend college. Sometimes students who had not planned to attend college, while in high school, decide later to attend college. Therefore, it would be beneficial, to both colleges and students, for students to be prepared for college. If they decide not to attend college, they will have better skills for employment because the skills needed for college are also some of the same skills needed for the workforce. Employers need employees who are able to communicate well and professionally (ACT, 2016).

All of the participants believed that the students were not prepared to enter college from high school. There are more than 6,000 minority students enrolled at the study site, and about 4,800 are from low SES households. Some students included within these numbers are first generation college students, which means they are the first members in their family to attend college. Students from low SES households and first generation students are generally less prepared than students from families who earn higher incomes, and have their own set of challenges (Brock, 2010). Gershenfeld and Zhan (2016) reported that this population experiences financial issues, and many must work 20 hours a week or more while attending college; they have lower high school GPAs and have lower scores on the ACT or Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT). The ACT

and SAT are assessments used by most colleges to determine if a student is prepared for college and the scores are used to predict their success.

Duncan and Murnane (2011) reported that there was a sharp distinction between students who attended schools in urban areas, compared to students who attended schools in suburban areas. Schools in urban areas typically received fewer resources, but were required to meet the same standards set by the local districts. High schools in urban areas did not anticipate that their students would attend college. Therefore, teachers in urban areas discussed college preparation with individual students who they thought would attend college, rather than discussing it with all students. Schools in suburban areas had lots of resources for students. The teachers perceived that all students would attend college, therefore they prepared them. There was a distinction between the type and depth of instruction the students received in each of the different locations.

There was one major difference between writing instructions provided to students in urban college when compared to suburban colleges. Students enrolled in suburban area colleges were introduced to formal writing concepts much earlier than students in urban areas (Duncan & Mudane, 2011). Typically, formal writing was introduced to students in suburban areas during their freshman year. Students had the opportunity to practice these skills throughout their high school experience to gain mastery (Perin, et al, 2015). However, students who attended high school in urban areas usually were not introduced to formal writing concepts until the end of their senior year, and sometimes not at all, which caused them to exhibit the most writing deficits.

The minority students and students from SES households had other life obligations that affected their ability to attend the Writing Center. Students reported that they did not have the time to go to the Writing Center, because the operational hours of the Writing Center were in the evening. It was the time that students needed to go to work, pick up their children from daycare, or needed to meet other family obligations. Many of today's students must balance their pursuit of a higher education degree with work and taking care of families. Students from lower SES households sometimes must continue to support their families. Jones (2014) indicated that the new college student differs from the ones in previous years. The number of students who enroll and live in residential college housing is decreasing, while the number of students who must work to support their families is steadily increasing.

There was a correlation between student employment, GPA and students' use of resources. Students of families with low SES are least likely to get grants (Jones, 2014). The financial burden is compounded by students' lack of experience with the college culture, not taking rigorous courses in high schools, limited academic resources, and little guidance about higher education from their families. A study performed by Darolia (2014) determined the effects of the number of hours worked on students' grades. The study examined the number of hours a student worked per week, the number of credits taken each semester, the number of hours students studied, and how often they used the resources available to them. The findings revealed that working 20 hours or less had a positive effect on students' grades. The employment seemed to motivate students to study and use resources. However, students who worked more than 20 hours a week

experienced a negative effect. They had lower grades because the work hours interfered with the study hours and students' ability to use resources.

Seven of the 12 participants believed that students lacked confidence in their writing abilities. The faculty also felt it was their responsibility to assist students build self-esteem, or self-efficacy, and if they did not, they believed they had failed the students. Bailey and Jaggars (2016) reported that instructors played a significant role in the improvement of students' writing skills. Students relied on their instructors to provide support. When instructors believed in the students' ability to write effectively, students saw themselves as capable, and believed in their own abilities.

Bandura (1993), a social learning theorist, described self-efficacy as a person's assessment and evaluation about their own competency to complete a task. Students with low academic self-efficacy are less motivated to study, or attend any type of instructional support. Low self-efficacy does not, in itself, indicate whether a student will be successful, but rather points to their persistence rate (Schunk, 1991). This research provides an explanation for participants' perceptions of students' low confidence levels. The students at the university exhibited limited belief in their ability to write effectively. The lack of confidence affected their use of resources. Three participants discussed that students would not seek assistance because they were embarrassed by their weak writing skills. The persistence rate should be examined to determine if students' weak writing skills have an effect on it.

The current writing resources that are available at the university for students were deemed appropriate and sufficient. Faculty members stated students will not use the

resources for a variety of reasons and listed some the students had given them. Students stated they did not have the time to go to the Writing Center; they had to care for their children after class, they had to go work, or they did not seek assistance with their writing because they were embarrassed about their limited writing skills.

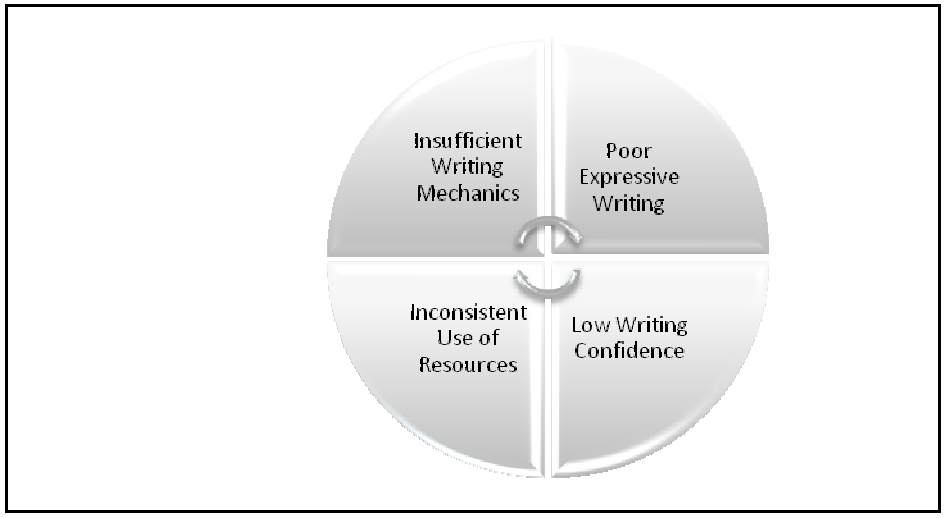

Figure 1. Students' weak writing skill cycle.

Figure 1 represents the writing cycle for students' weak writing skills. The interviews collected from the college faculty members were analyzed and narrowed into six perceptions, and the frequency chart created from the coded interviews were further evaluated. The second in-depth investigation of the data revealed more commonalities than the initial evaluation. During the first investigation, each of the student writing behaviors identified by college faculty was thought to be unrelated. However, when the data were further coded, the identified behaviors could be reduced into four categories, or commonalities. The four commonalities are depicted above in Figure 1. All of the commonalities are interrelated, and together, they form a cycle. Student's low confidence and inconsistent use of resources compounds and increases the chance of the continuation

of the cycle. This cycle was discussed by Hassel and Giordano (2009), when data retrieved from the Carnegie Foundation in 2006 was used to explain why so few students in community college failed to obtain a bachelor degree. They offered an explanation for the students' weak writing cycle. They reported that students' weak skills also exhibited low confidence levels in their writing, and their low confidence level prevented them from seeking out, or using the resources that were provided for them. Students performed satisfactorily when they were familiar with a writing task, but when they performed unfamiliar writing tasks, they reverted to using poor writing skills. Students enrolled in the English Composition course performed satisfactorily, leading faculty to believe students had acquired new writing skills. When they enrolled in other collegiate courses that required written assignments, they forgot what they had learned and reverted to using their previous inadequate writing skills. According to Grubb et al., (2011), this cycle occurs when the instructional quality is not high enough to improve students' writing skills.

The Writing Center and the WRITE (Write, Reflect, Integrate, Transfer and Excel) Program at the study site have two separate roles. The Writing Center's aim is to assist students with basic writing such as grammar, formatting, and subject-verb agreement. The WRITE Program is also a type of Writing Center, but the significant difference between the two centers is that the WRITE Program focuses on discipline-specific writing. It focuses on juniors and seniors who are performing writing tasks specific to their disciplines. The majority of students who seek assistance in the Writing Center are freshmen and sophomores.

The Writing Center and the WRITE program requires students to have a written product before getting assistance. Some students with poor skills are embarrassed to let anyone know their writing skill level is low, and therefore, may have difficulty starting their writing. Students who seek support later rather than earlier in the writing process usually results in the submission of poorly written papers. This cycle needs to be broken. If students are able to see the relationship between attending the Writing Center or the WRITE Program and improved writing, it will affect their writing confidence (Jones, 2014).

The six themes identified in this study correspond to some of the research results noted in the literature review for this study. Five of the themes related to the literature review are students' weak writing skills, technological advances, point of view, transference of skills and students need to take initiative for their learning. These themes are discussed below and in relation to the literature review. A theme from this study that is unrelated to the literature review, informal communication and code switching, is also examined.

Researchers Bailey and Jaggars (2016) and the Carnegie Foundation (2008) discussed an increase in the number of students with weak writing skills. Their study found that combining academic advising and tutorial support to students helped them improve their writing skills. Therefore, if the study site combined academic advising and tutorial support, students' writing skills may improve. It should be noted that students must be required to maintain their involvement in these services, even after they have completed the developmental courses, for a minimum of 3 years. In Bailey and Jaggers'

study, the length of time involved in the support services had a direct relationship to student success which led to completion.

Technological tutorials to assist students with acquiring writing skills were implemented in research supported by the Carnegie Foundation (2008). Students in this study showed improvement through this type of intervention, and believed that technological advances should be implemented into the learning process. However, the faculty members in this study suggested tutorial services should be changed from online to face-to-face services. Faculty may believe this type of service will allow the students to gain better insight about the writing process, and an appreciation of it. Faculty may also believe that if students gain an appreciation of writing, this new fondness could also boost their writing skills and their confidence levels, thereby, possibly breaking the weak writing cycle.

College students, whose assessment scores placed them in the lower level of the 12th grade in high school, have a difficult time writing from various perspectives (Bailey & Jaggars, 2016). Students performed fairly well when they were asked to summarize articles, and carry out familiar writing tasks. However, they experienced difficulty when asked to identify the main idea of an article, and when they attempted to write a persuasive paper. When students were asked to perform an unfamiliar assignment, or if they lacked clarity about an assignment, their writing skills were poor (Perin, 2013). They had forgotten to incorporate their new learning into unfamiliar writing assignments. When students were asked to write from a point of view other than their own, they were unable to effectively convey those experiences, in a written format, to an audience.

Students who exhibited poor writing skills also displayed signs of anxiety. The students who displayed the highest levels of anxiety had the most severe writing deficits. The students' anxiety levels were not reported by any participants in this study. Although it is assumed that students experienced anxiety, more research should be performed to determine the anxiety levels, and the effect it may have on students.

Hoppe (2014) noted there were two factors that increased students' anxiety levels. The first factor occurred when students did not know the expectations of the faculty members in the course. Secondly, the high expectation of English Composition courses increased their anxiety levels. This is significant because the increased anxiety levels were connected to students' self-efficacy, and students' ability to take the initiative for their learning. Students who exhibited high levels of anxiety also had decreased self-efficacy and initiative. According to Perin et al., (2015), students who did not take the initiative for their own learning, lacked contextual skills and awareness, which is a component of developmental education. Those students procrastinated, especially if they did not have the skills to complete the task. They were resistant to seeking assistance, and do not understand the importance of writing. However, when faculty members were an intricate part of their support system, which also included peer tutoring, students' self-efficacy and writing abilities increased. Students sought assistance when they needed it. They were also less resistant to tutorial assistance or attending the Writing Center when it was suggested by their instructor. Interdisciplinary approaches to resources are not implemented at the study site. The faculty members assist students in the classroom, and

suggest they attend the Writing Center. The Writing Center acts independently of faculty members, tutors and other resources.

According to the participants in the study, most of the students are employed and stated they did not have the time to attend tutorials. More adults are returning to college to get either a pay raise or change careers (Lumina Foundation, 2013). Some adult students and traditional students will need to use tutorial services. Currently, the tutorial schedule only offers support services during the evening hours. This time schedule is not convenient for students with other life obligations. Offering tutorial times during the day, before students go to work or need to pick up their children, may increase students' use of these services. A varied schedule should be implemented to accommodate the schedules of the students (Jaggars &West, 2014). Offering a varied schedule of services may not be enough. Students still refuse to use resources even when institutions arrange resource availability according to students' needs. Stephens, Destin, and Hamedani (2014) discussed the need for psychological resources by first generation students and students from low SES households. Students need to have an understanding of how their background affects the journey through higher education. They need to know that there have been other students, with the same background as their own, who have earned a higher education degree. They need to understand the college culture, and the importance of the resources provided. First generation students and students from low SES households with senior status should lead a discussion with entering freshmen and convey to them how they overcame obstacles and succeeded. This information is relevant because the majority of students who are enrolled at the study site are first generation

students, and also come from low SES households. The organization of such a group of senior students at the university may lead to incoming students gaining more insight about learning and earning their higher education degree.

Informal communication and code switching were two topics that were not reported in the literature reviewed for this study. However, researcher Strain-Moritz (2016) looked favorably on technology and did not discuss any negative implications of its use. Researchers Calkins and Ehrenworth, (2012), Douglas, et al., (2009) and Ehrmann (2010) may have believed that informal communication, code switching, and transference of skills were related to SMS, and therefore, did not address these categories specifically. The participants in this study addressed each of the categories. They had been providing instructions to students for many years, and began teaching before the increased use in technology, especially the use of SMS. Therefore, they were able to notice when students' writing became increasingly informal. This may have also given rise to the students' thinking that formal writing should only be performed in English Composition class.

The faculty members believed that students needed intensive writing. This would mean that every course would require students to perform writing assignments, and these assignments would hold students to the same standards for writing in each course. These writing assignments would require students to proofread, receive feedback from their peers, and revise. This method would necessitate that all faculty members would be involved in the writing process. If every course was writing intensive, students would know what is expected from all faculty members and rise to that expectation.

Overall, the participants in this study believed that students lacked sufficient writing skills. The faculty members perceived students' anxiety was produced from unknown expectations, and writing demands decreased students' self-efficacy. Students' self-efficacy was affected by their weak writing skills, and influenced students' ability to seek out assistance. The lack of skills created a cycle that prevented students from improving their writing.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is important to establish in any research, especially in qualitative research, because this type of research does not use instruments with established metrics for credibility like quantitative research (Farrelly, 2013). The quality of the study was maintained through a variety of checks. Evidence of quality was demonstrated through the rich and thick descriptions contained in the audit trail. A participant screening log (Appendix C) was used to record the entire participant selection process through to the scheduling of the interview and any notes related to this process. A data log (Appendix B) was created to document the progress of the case study, beginning with the date the interviews were scheduled to the date that the interview transcriptions were returned to me. The log also tracked the date the interviews were coded. A copy of the findings was also sent to each participant for member checking. The use of verbatim participant statements along with presentation of discrepant cases helped to authenticate the quality of the study.

As part of the member checking process, the transcribed interviews were sent to participants to review for accuracy. One participant removed data from a transcript, and

this change was accepted and documented. A peer debriefer examined the transcribed interviews, field notes, and data that were coded and analyzed. The debriefer made suggestions about word choices I used when discussing participants' descriptions of students' writing. In one instance, the peer debriefer discussed my usage of the word *only* and suggested that I refrain from using it. I used the term often; it was not a good word choice because the noted incident occurred several times within the analyzed data.

Summary and Transition

This section contains information detailing the recruitment of participants, the data collection process, the development of themes, and how the data were stored. The findings in this study revealed that faculty members perceived that students lack basic writing skills. Students were using informal language techniques and technological speech in formal writing. No method was identified to assist students as they make the transition from SMS language to formal writing. It was determined that the resources needed to improve student writing are already in effect. Those resources that are available at the Writing Center, do, in fact, improve students' writing, but it is difficult to convince students to use these services. Recommendations for further study will be presented in Section 5.

Section 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

I designed this study to understand the perceptions of faculty members regarding students' writing abilities. Twelve faculty members from various colleges and programs across the university signed consent forms to participate in the study. As part of the consent, faculty members agreed to participate in audio-recorded interviews, review their transcripts for accuracy (member checking), and read the summary of findings of the study for the precision of the reported empirical data. The interviews were designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are faculty members' perceptions of students' writing skills at the local research setting?
2. What interventions do faculty members believe are needed to improve the writing skills of students at the local research setting?

The findings of the study showed that participants believed students did not exhibit basic writing skills, although the skills that were identified as basic differed from participant to participant. Some defined basic writing skills only to include grammar, while others believed it should be grammar and sentence structure; the list was broadened with the inclusion of spelling. Some participants believed the use of texting weakened students' writing skills. All of the participants agreed that an improvement was noted when students utilized the current resources available to assist them with writing.

Participants reported that students did not take ownership for their learning. They did not readily seek assistance or support for their writing until it was near the end of the semester, if they sought help at all. Participants also discussed that when students in their

class exhibited deficits in their writing, they were referred to the Writing Center after the submission of the first writing assignment. The students who needed the support the least were the ones who sought assistance in the center. The students who displayed the most severe deficits in writing were the least likely to seek support in the Writing Center.

The conceptual framework, literature review, and the results of the study have a common thread: the constructivist model. Although none of the participants named this particular theory, the ideas they discussed are intricate parts of it. The foundation of the theory moves the responsibility for learning from the instructor to the student (Bahr, 2012). The instructor becomes the organizer of learning, making the environment conducive for learning, and students take a more active role in the learning process (Bragg & Durham, 2012).

Hunter and Saxon (2009) listed active learning and the use of learning communities as two of the 10 most effective strategies to improve writing. Carter and Harper (2013) found that students who had the weakest writing skills took the least responsibility for developing their writing. Similarly, the faculty members interviewed in this study reported that students with the weakest writing abilities were the least likely to seek assistance, even when they were referred to the Writing Center. These students were also least likely to attend writing tutorials or use any support services. Participants agreed that students could improve their writing if they realized the importance of communicating well through writing, and took responsibility for their learning by using the resources provided to them.

The learning community, as I discussed in the conceptual framework and the literature review, is an area which none of the participants discussed as a strategy to help increase students' learning. Learning communities are used to provide support to students while they develop or increase their writing skills. Students learn from each other while they are engaged in the same type of learning. In learning communities, learning increases dramatically when students spend more time together, collaborating and discussing thoughts about assignments related to real life (Cooper, 2013). Creating learning communities may be the next layer of support that the university may want or need to institute to assist students as they increase their writing skills.

The results of this study correspond with those in current research concerning the writing skills of entering students with respect to the weaknesses of students' basic skill level. Leal (2013) reported that nearly three-quarters of students, who had taken the national writing assessment, scored below average in the area of written communication. Students performed poorly, even when they were allowed to use technological writing tools. VanNest (2016) stated, "It is a dark time for the written word, writing scores have decreased an average of five points since 2011." Since the beginning of the use of texting, student writing has steadily declined (Bronowicki, 2014). Social media has a negative effect on students' ability to be competent in grammar, style usage, and syntax (Strain-Moritz, 2016).

Implications for Social Change

The number of unprepared students has been steadily increasing, and the higher education community must develop a plan to meet this societal need and stop playing the

blame game (Rickert, 2011). Blaming one another has not led to a solution. Persistence and degree attainment rates reported by the U. S. Department of Education (2012) indicated that most students who entered a community college with a plan to get a college degree or transfer to a 4-year university, did not earn a degree within 6 years (Cooper, 2013).

According to the Lumina Foundation (2013), 37 million adult students have begun college, but only 25% have completed, marking this as the first time that the previous generation is more educated than the current generation. Conner and Rabosky (2011) found that between the years 2003 and 2008, $9 billion was spent on students who attended college for only one year and dropped out. If this trend continues, it will be the first time in history that America will not have more students graduating from college than other countries. To turn around the low completion rate, institutions must begin to study the reasons that prevent students from completing college, and allow the data to drive the decisions and necessary changes.

This study may not add new information concerning how faculty members view students' writing. Incorporating their views into the study, and allowing them to voice their concerns, may lead to their cooperation in designing and implementing innovative ways to improve students' writing. Faculty could play an important role in the identification of students who may have writing deficits, because they are the first to require students to perform formal collegiate writing. If students' writing weaknesses could be identified early in their first semester, their writing could improve sooner, and may have a significant effect on persistence and graduation.

Legislatures have begun to examine how much money is spent to earn a higher education degree, and have decreased the money awarded to students, colleges, and universities (Jones, 2014; Phelan, 2012). Early detection of poor writing skills could decrease the college dropout rate and reduce the length of time to earn a degree, thereby, reducing the amount of money spent to acquire a higher education degree and overall student debt (Sacher, 2016).

Recommendation for Action

I conducted this study to determine faculty members' perceptions about students' writing and gain insight about their writing from faculty members' points of view. The findings of the study indicated that faculty members feel that many students displayed inadequate collegiate writing skills. The participants discussed in detail the skills that students most often lacked. Some of the identified skill deficits were incorrect grammar, poor sentence structure, and the lack of proper punctuation.

College High School Partnership

All interviewed participants in the study discussed the weak writing skills of high school students entering college. Therefore, a partnership between the high schools and colleges could help high school students to be more prepared for collegiate writing. The two groups could compare the differences in the writing expectations and collaborate to devise a plan to address these gaps to help high school students' transition to college-level writing. This plan needs to be twofold; it could help students to understand collegiate expectations and prepare them for writing by allowing high school students to practice meeting the higher writing standards of college before they enter.

Intensive Writing Across the Disciplines

Participants in the study believed that if intensive writing was instituted at the university, it would decrease the number of students with writing deficits. Currently, some courses at the university do not require students to perform any type of writing. Therefore, students who have weak skills may not have the opportunity to improve their writing through practice. Some students may think that instructors are harsh because they require collegiate writing, and it is not really important. Intensive writing across the disciplines could convey the message to students that writing is important and it must be done well.

Develop an Intricate Support System

The university should develop a support system that encompasses all aspects of learning, including the admissions office, students, faculty members, and tutors. The admissions office has the first introduction to the student, and may identify students' writing weaknesses. Students with writing weaknesses will be introduced to the supportive writing system immediately after they enter the institution. It is important that students are introduced to the Writing Center and tutors before they start exhibiting a problem. Students with minor writing weaknesses could be paired with another student in the class as a peer tutor.

Faculty members could develop a mini learning community within the classroom. Students within the English Composition courses should be encouraged to work with other students. Students with stronger writing skills might serve as the peer tutors. They could review other students' papers, provide feedback, and suggestions for improvement.

Students are sometimes less intimidated when discussing their problems with their peers, and are willing to accept their suggestions. Instituting learning communities within the classrooms may motivate students to take an active role in their learning.

Faculty members should continue to assist students by offering to review students' papers and provide feedback, but most of all, faculty members need to develop rapport with students. Building rapport with students can help increase their self-efficacy which, in turn, may lead students to take more initiative for their learning, and seek out assistance when they need it. The students who exhibit the most severe deficits in writing skills should be referred to the Writing Center.

Tutors within the Writing Center should be trained, so they will know the expectations of the courses. They should work with faculty members to determine the most effective strategies to work with students. Students who exhibit some of the same deficiencies could go to the Writing Center together as a group for more in-depth assistance. Everyone should work toward one common goal, and that is, to decrease deficits and increase students' writing abilities.

Face-to-Face Tutorial Services

Faculty members reported that students with the weakest skills needed face-to-face tutorial sessions. Before I began this study, while working at a different institution, students who enrolled in a technologically-based developmental writing course did not demonstrate writing improvements. They could select the correct answer to multiple-choice questions by the method of elimination, but students with weak skills need to

know more than the correct answer. They need to know when to choose a certain technique and understand why it should be used.

These tutorial services should be offered on a varied schedule, which would offer students with other life obligations more times to get the support that they need. As noted by the Lumina Foundation (2013), several initiatives are underway to increase the number of adults with college degrees, and the university has already begun to experience the influx of students. This influx will increase the demand for student support services. Adult students have life schedules that are unlike traditional students, and they would benefit from a schedule of support services that better fit their lifestyles.

I conducted this study in a higher education institution that provides services to a large population of first-generation college students, underserved populations, and students from low SES environments. Consequently, this study may provide valuable information to community colleges and universities that enroll a high population of first-generation and underserved students. Research has indicated that these populations are less prepared for college (Stephens, Destin, & Hamedani, 2014). In 2013, the SAT had the largest number of minorities sit for the assessment; however, more than half were not prepared according to the SAT standard of readiness (Abdul-Alim, 2013).

This study will be disseminated in a publication format to the participants of the study, as a presentation to my colleagues and other interested individuals, and possibly to other higher education institutions. This study could be the beginning of informed discussions among the faculty across the university about students' writing. These

discussions and the sharing of ideas may lead to the implementation of innovative strategies and additional resources for students.

Recommendation for Further Study

The number of entering college students exhibiting inadequate writing skills has increased since colleges and universities have initiated the open door admission policy. This policy has allowed more unprepared students to enroll. More research is needed to determine if exiting high school writing requirements are incongruent with entering college writing requirements. Further study is needed to explore the degree to which students are proactive and take ownership for learning. If the findings determine that students are not proactive, then further study would be needed to determine why they are not proactive. Action to assist those students to take ownership of their learning could then be initiated. In the interviews conducted for this study, participants discussed students' reluctance to seek assistance or use the resources that were available. They also noted that students who had the weakest skills were the most reluctant. This phenomenon should be explored further to determine why students who exhibit the weakest writing skills are the most reluctant to seek assistance to improve their writing skills. Most importantly, students' views should be included in a study to provide information about changes that may need to be implemented to support students as they improve their writing skills.

Researcher's Experience

Prior to data collection, I attempted to discard any preconceived notions about students' writing, because I wanted the data to reflect the perceptions of the faculty

members. To collect data at the study site, I was required to have a faculty advisor. The faculty advisor would ensure that I followed all procedures according to the study site's guidelines. My advisor offered suggestions during the data collection process. Having an advisor provided me the opportunity to discuss the study and any concerns I had during data analysis. Great care was taken not to discuss or disclose any participant's names to ensure confidentiality.

Before interviewing the participants, I thought it would be easy to remove myself from the interviewing process. The first interview was the most challenging; I found it difficult just to listen and not turn the interview into a conversation. It was a challenge to refrain from sounding surprised sometimes and not asking leading questions. To get the most information, I had to focus on listening intently and asking proper follow-up questions that would provide as much data as possible.

During the first interview, I realized conducting the interviews would not be as easy as I had previously thought. Although the interviews were audio-recorded, I began journaling during the interviews. Journaling helped me to listen intently and prevented me from changing the interview into a conversation. It also kept me focused on the participant's answers, and helped me to control my thoughts and emotions during the interview. The writing helped me refrain from swaying participants with facial, body, or verbal expressions, thereby reducing bias. I documented each participant's overall demeanor during the interview. The main thing noted were the participants' emotional states. I documented whether they appeared calm or nervous when the interview began and any changes that occurred—if they seemed distracted or displayed any form of stress.

Two of the participants were nervous during their interview. They showed their anxiousness by repeatedly asking me to restate the question, or asking if what they had said answered the question. One participant said, “Okay, let me focus.” I reassured participants by asking the question again, not showing any annoyance when repeating the question, and assuring them they were answering the questions that were asked. Some of the participants were very enthusiastic about the study, to the extent that they would send me emails if they thought of anything else they needed to add to their interview.

I continued to journal while coding the data; this was important because it allowed me to accept my own struggles with writing and examine whether I seek out resources to improve my writing. I realized it is not a person’s writing deficit that holds them back, but rather the lack of initiative to seek out or utilize the resources to improve their skills.

Conclusion

Participants addressed each of the research questions during the interviews. Faculty members concluded that students’ writing skills at the study site were weak and needed improvement. They also reported that students entered the university with writing deficits. The participants provided in-depth examples of students’ writing deficits. The participants discussed students’ writing deficits, but they remained confident that students could exhibit better writing skills.

Faculty members believed that an intensive writing program should be incorporated into every course and discipline combined with the right resources could help students improve their writing skills. The perceptions of the faculty members are in

line with Complete College America (2012), whose purpose is to produce more college graduates by redesigning poorly designed courses and supporting students with the greatest writing deficits while they are in college-level courses. It is important that colleges and universities provide all students with the necessary resources and support to be successful. Providing students with proper resources may increase the number of college graduates, thereby helping to meet the goals of Complete College America and the changing demands of the job market.

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Appendix A:

Interview Protocol

1. What problems with your students' writing skills have you observed at this university?

   Possible clarifying questions will ask participants to describe who is affected by this problem the most and to what degree.

2. What writing skills have students mastered based on your observations?

   Active listening will be a key part of ensuring that I understand what participants have stated. I will ask questions such as: Did I hear you say that…, Is what you said was…. did I say that correctly?

3. What is currently being done to improve the writing skills of students at the university? You said that the university uses_____ to improve students writing.

4. Based on your experience and knowledge, what additional interventions need to be implemented to improve the writing skills of students at the university?

   Possible follow-up questions will be asked to provide justification for why a possible solution is being recommended or more specific detail. How will the possible changes affect students writing? How much do you think the changes will affect student writing? In what areas will the changes impact student writing?

5. Is there anything else you would like to add about improving students' writing skills at this university or problems associated with writing?

Appendix B:

Data Tracking Log

P#	Interview Date (2015)	Audio tape trans.	Trans sent to P	Trans back from P	Trans into Ethnograph	Coding began	Coding ended	Data sent to Ps	Comments from Ps
P-1	1/30	2/6	2/6	2/8	3/9	3/9	3/12	5/29	
P-2	2/18	2/26	2/26	2/27	3/9	3/9	3/12	5/29	
P-3	2/6	2/10	2/11	2/13	3/17	3/17	3/18	5/29	
P-4	2/19	2/23	2/24	2/27	3/20	3/20	3/21	5/29	
P-5	2/13	2/17	2/18	2/19	3/20	3/20	3/22	5/29	
P-6	5/7	5/11	5/13	5/13	5/15	5/16	5/17	5/29	I did not realize that others were experiencing similar things.

Appendix C:

Participant Screening Log

P#	Letter Sent	P Return	Inter view	Location *	Meets Criteria	Consent Signed	Reason not Qualified
P-1	1/28	1/30	1/30	MLT 332	X	X	
P-2	1/28	2/13	2/18	SCH	X	X	
P-3	1/28	2/3	2/6	MLT 332	X	X	
P-4	1/28	2/18	2/19	MLT 445	X	X	
P-5	1/28	2/10	2/13	MLT 445	X	X	
P-6	4/28	5/1	5/7	MLT 445	X	X	
P-7	1/29	2/4	2/25	MLT332	X	X	
P-8	1/29	2/3	4/16	MLT 332	X	X	
P-9	1/29	2/26	3/17	SCH 344	X	X	
P-10	4/28	4/28	4/29	SCH 344	X	X	
P-11	1/29 4/28	5/4	5/8	MLT 332	X	X	
P-12	4/28	5/1	5/5	MLT 332	X	X	
P-13	1/29 4/28	4/29			O		Employed less than 5 years
P-14	1/29 4/28	4/29			O		Employed less than 5 years / no writing assignment requirement

*Locations are not actual spaces at the study site.

Appendix D:

Writing Discrepancy Frequency Chart

Writing Discrepancy	**Frequency**
Grammatical error	78
Using texting symbols in formal writing	75
Students do not use available resources	72
Punctuation	70
Refer students to the Writing Center	60
Unable to make a complete sentence	60
Format (MLA or other paper formats	60
Run-on sentences	58
Learning support	58
Capitalization	55
Unable to transfer learning to new situations	52
Making paragraphs	48
Students use informal writing	48
Unable to write to the audience	45
Make referral mandatory to Writing Center	42
Spelling	37
Unable to make connections when writing	35
Participant discuss writing	34
Do not know the basic format of a paper	30
Students do not understand why it is important to write well	30
Improper use of nouns and pronouns	30
Answer the questions asked in written form	26
Address the topic	25
They do not read well	25
Students enter college without writing skills	25
Want last minute help	25
Students make the same mistakes	24
Reading has no value	15
Someone to help students with formatting, use an embedded librarian	15
Explain with written details	13
Need face-t-face tutorial services	10
Students writing improves by the end of semester	5
Do not want to learn own their own	5
Students know faulty cares for them	5
Incorporate more writing in class	3
Uses lots of soft words or unnecessary words	3

Appendix E:

Field Note Summary

P-1

Location: MLT

January 30, 2015

There was a small table in the room, and the participant sat across from me. We greeted one another, and I discussed the purpose of the study and interview. The participant read and signed the consent form. The participant was reminded that the interview could be stopped at any time for any reason.

The first thing the participant discussed was students' handwriting. I was surprised that handwriting was mentioned because I never considered it a part of writing since most documents are written on a computer and printed. The students' poor handwriting seemed important to the participant because it was mentioned three times during the interview.

The participant seemed excited to discuss students' writing, especially when conveying the progress of a specific student who was in the class. Upon entering the university, the student could barely write a complete sentence. The student used the resources provided and the writing skills improved. This experience seemed to have a positive influence on the student and the participant. Therefore, the participant had the overall feeling that students with the weakest writing could improve. They should be identified early through testing using "writing exams." Once students' writing skills have been determined as weak or insufficient, they should receive writing support early.

The university offers faculty training and workshops each semester. These sessions provide information concerning student access and resource availability. However, all faculty members are not aware of the support systems that the university has in place to assist students.

When asked if there was anything I did not ask and needed to be included, the participant added, “I don’t think that the university tests students like they once did, and I wish more professors would help students and become more knowledgeable.” I told the participant to expect the transcribed interview in 2 days and I reminded the participant that any information which he or she wanted to omit could be removed from the transcript. The participant was thanked for the interview.

Appendix F:

Sample Transcribed Interview

DB: First, I would like to thank you for consenting to participate in the study.

P-7: You are welcome. Do you think this will help to improve their writing? Students come to me after they have already passed both of the English Composition courses, and the majority of them still have problems with basic grammar.

DB: Well, I don't know, but I hope it starts the conversation about their writing. I really want to know what faculty think about their writing. Are you ready to get started?

P-7: Yes

DB: I will be recording the interview, and taking notes while you are talking, so there may be times I will not always be looking at you while you are speaking.

P-7: Okay

DB: What problems have you noticed that students have with writing?

P-7: How I will handle this is I will focus on the more pressing; there are lots of things we can work on. Believe it or not, they don't read very well in the first place. We ask students to respond to things that are written because we want to see if they can engage ideas at that level and also that they can learn from models of writing. If they don't read it in the first place no matter what they say from that point forward, it doesn't have a good foundation. It isn't that they are incapable of reading. It is that they do not see the value in it. So part of what I am trying to figure out is how I can get them to understand the value in reading the first place. To be critical in the first place in what they read before they try to respond. I don't know if that is a good answer or not. Something else

mechanical things, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and not even the tough stuff like commas, we all struggle with commas, it just basics; like what a sentence is supposed to do.

DB: What do you mean by basics?

P-7: There are so many different ways that commas are used; it is okay to be a little confused about that, but no punctuation at all? Like, none. No capitalization to separate where one sentence ends and another one begins. Things that you and other people would probably think are extremely basic. I am trying to help them to write.

DB: Do you mean elementary school?

P-7: Second or third grade, <pause> okay, let's say that, maybe kindergarten.

They write all the time, but they write on their phones. That means they are texting. They write all the time. They communicate all the time, but they don't follow the convention writing methods or the standard things we expect them to do in the classroom. They are used to writing on their phones, and when we ask them to write something on the paper, they turned in the paper where they wrote the word "you," but they spelled it with the letter "u". This is a college classroom; this is not a proofreading thing; it is a thinking thing. When you try to draw their attention to it, they say they don't see anything much wrong with that. I don't care about it, but what about the next teacher, and the next teacher.

I say that is cool with me, but the next teacher is not going to like it.

You have to be ready to present not just quality ideas, but quality ideas that articulate and express it well. Whatever they wanted to know or focus on you never get to; because of

<pause> I am trying to get them to understand that if they do those kinds of things, it draws attention to the wrong thing. If they need help, they need to figure out how to reach that audience. It comes down to audience, purpose, genre, and those kinds of external tools. I am trying to help equip them to have the tools they need not to just be good students; but to be successful in the business world, to be successful teachers or be whatever. You will be a better spouse if you know how to communicate better. So that is a lot of stuff I just threw out there. Maybe that was too much.

DB: No, that was not too much.

P-7: Okay, the basic shape of the academic paper: you know it, the introduction, the body, and the conclusion. I tell them what those things are; I also show them examples of that, and I discuss it in class. They are giving good answers, but when it is time for them to perform the writing, they seem lost. I feel like I have given them a model, maybe multiple models. I am not asking you to make it up I am asking you to follow the MLA format. You probably use APA.

DB: Yes, I use the APA format.

P-7: They are both pains, but doesn't matter. There is a list of how to do something, but they won't do it. I will say that is not MLA, and they will say what does that matter? In the first place, I asked you to do it; and in the second place, you are going to have teachers who will not take the work. Then you get out to the business world, and they ask you to write Chicago Style. If you don't know what that means, you are going to lose your job. So I have not figured out how to convince them that this is not just school, this will help them to be successful in every other thing they will do that will require them to

communicate. Which is everything! I would say that is everything; there is not a job where you will not have to communicate. I get a mid-term exam without a name. The person did pretty well on the mid-term; they got a "B." Then, I am trying to figure…but I don't know who you are. It is frustrating. When you show a student a mistake they have made, and they say okay, but they repeat that mistake over and over again. And at some point you think—I don't know how else to say this. I don't want to be that ogre just going to be a butthole about it, but I can't let this slide. Because, then I am not doing my job. So it gets pretty frustrating. I love my students, but right now it is pretty frustrating. They come to me and say would you please look at this, and I say, "It is due tomorrow." Why didn't you bring, <pause> they want the help, but they want it too close to the time the assignment is due. What I want them to do is to get help a month before it is due, or three weeks. You are supposed to write things multiple times because the grades go up; the quality of the work gets better. You can't turn it in the day before it is due. I mean, write it the day before it is due; it won't be very good. I don't care how smart you are. You can't write a 30-page paper in grad school the night before it is due. I don't care; you can't do it. So, undergrads think they can get away with it.

DB: What skills do you think students have mastered?

P-7: That is a good question. When you ask them to give their opinion, they do a pretty good job of that. If you ask them to make a connection with their opinions and the evidence; they do a pretty good job with that. When you ask them only to discuss other people's opinion, they don't do too well with that. If they are allowed to put themselves in whatever the assignment is, they respond pretty well. And, I like that. I think lots of us

like it when we can connect to an assignment. If it is a boring assignment, we are not going to do our best work. If they are interested in it, I think they respond pretty well when they are allowed to put themselves in it. If they can use their own experiences, they do well, if it is a research paper, they don't do so well. That tells me that they are capable, but they are just not motivated.

DB: Do you think it is difficult if they can't put themselves in it because they are trying to look at something, but not through their own eyes?

P-7: Right. It is from the outside. I think that is right; I think it is both. It is difficult in the first place, and when you are not motivated, you are going to wait as long as possible. I agree with that. Let see, what else they do pretty well. When you give them good feedback, they actually listen. They do the things you ask them to do. They really do those things. It is getting to that point where they listen. For example, if I say you need to get a good title; and you don't use a good title, and you get a "B" on that paper. Then, you turn in a paper with a good title, and you get an "A". Oh, my goodness titles matter. That student will recognize the importance, and from that point on the student will see the value. I don't know if I can get them to see the value quickly enough. A semester of 14 weeks is not that long. This semester is almost over, and I feel like it just started. These are good questions, but I don't know if I am giving good answers.

DB: You are giving good answers.

P-7: Okay

DB: What is currently being done to improve students writing skills?

P-7: Are you talking about in my class?

DB: You can tell me about your class?

P-7: We are trying to do <pause> what was done at the University this past year is a really good example, by tailoring the, not the materials, but the methods to specific groups. It is going to help them, and then they are going to say, hey, wait a second they care about me. I am going to stay at this university, and I am going to get my degree. Then, they are going to tell their friends; so I think that is a good thing. I think switching to the electronic books was a good idea. It is not working very well, but I believe if we stick with it, maybe it will. So, I hope that is going to help.

DB: What are the issues with the electronic books?

P-7: They don't work very well. Some students aren't able to access them, and they don't work on IPads but on androids. Some students are trying to read biology books on phones. They are trying to read charts like the human body and that's difficult. I would love to see more of what you set up, I would love to see more workshops. I know we have a learning center, and they do a really good job, but they can only do so much. I would love to see workshops every 2 to 3 weeks, not anything that we make people to attend. If they come, they get help, and they would come the next time. You pick one thing, like titles, or MLA, and you only focus on that one thing so that people don't feel overwhelmed. Give them one clear hand-out they could take with them. Then, they will feel like it was worth coming; that would be great. I don't see why the universities won't do that. It would be great to do that at the [redacted] Campus because some people can't get to the main campus which is why they are here in the first place. When I am done with my dissertation I will look into that; right now I don't have the time. In the

near future, I would love to set something like that up. That may not be what you asked but…

DB: It was what I asked.

P-7: Okay

DB: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about students' writing skills?

P-7: I don't question a student's intelligence, I build their confidence up all the time; I know they are capable. I think when teachers <pause> I don't think they mean too, but they knock students' confidence down without meaning to with some of the things they say.

DB: Can you give me an example?

P-7: I am trying to look for a really good one. I had a student who came into my office last year, and she was crying; she was not my student. Another teacher had accused her of plagiarism, but the teacher had no evidence. The teacher told her that she was not smart enough to have written this. In the first place, you can't do that. That is why you had that look on your face. I told her to sit down and talk with me a minute and she told me everything that was in the paper. Oh, I am going to cry. It was about her little sister who had cancer. She had written that, and that is why she was so hurt. She said, how could she tell me this without evidence? I said they can't. I am sorry I got emotional and forgot what you asked me.

DB: Is there anything else?

P-7: Okay, I know, you can't be like that. It is okay to tell a student that this isn't good enough. It is okay to be honest with them; you have to be. But you just can't have a gut

feeling and say I don't think you did this. Students are smart. They don't need that kind of negativity; they need positivity delivered in an honest, useful way. Don't lie to them and tell them it is good when it is not. You should build them up by saying this is what is good using the compliment sandwich—something good, something to work on, and something good. That way they don't feel beaten up and attacked. This poor girl, she was torn up. In my 1020 course this semester, guess who was on the front row. She had dropped the other course because she was hurt so much, and she is getting a "B" in my class. I am not trying to make this about me. I recognize you can't do that to students. I would have been heartbroken if someone had done that to me. I believe in their abilities. I try to find a way to challenge them that will keep them from being bored. If you get "B" in my class, it better mean something. If you get an "A" in my class, you better know what you are doing, not that you showed up for class, or I like you. I am hoping and trying to be that teacher. I think that our students are as intelligent as the students at [redacted] or [redacted]; it is just their attitude about themselves. We haven't done a good job helping them to build that attitude.