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REFUGEES NEGOTIATING ACADEMIC LITERACIES IN FIRST-YEAR COLLEGE:
CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES, AND RESOURCES

by

ELIANA K. HIRANO

Under the Direction of Diane Belcher

ABSTRACT

The growing number of language minority students graduating from a U.S. high school and entering college has motivated many studies. These students are often referred to as *Generation 1.5*, a term that loosely indicates they arrived in this country at an early age and had most of their education in U.S. K-12 settings. The studies that have focused on this population often group refugees with other immigrants. Although refugees may not have arrived in this country at an early age, those coming from war torn countries as teenagers have often had their formal education interrupted in their home countries with the result that schooling in the U.S. comprises most, if not all, of their education.

The purpose of the current study was to investigate how refugee students experience academic literacy practices in their first year of college, the challenges they face in this process, and the resources and strategies they use to cope with postsecondary reading and writing demands. In order to carry out this investigation, a qualitative year-long multiple-case study (Duff, 2008) was conducted. Participants were seven refugee students attending a small liberal arts college. Data collection involved interviews with the focal participants and faculty, class observations, and written documents. Findings revealed that all seven participants were successful completing their first year in college, passing all the classes they registered for. At the same time, the day-to-day struggle to keep up and cope with reading and writing assignments presented these students with several challenges resulting from their still developing English language proficiency, lack of background knowledge, and unfamiliarity with academic genres, to name a few sources of difficulty. These challenges were offset by the motivation showed by the seven participants and their ability in developing coping strategies and drawing upon the resources made available to them. Repeated use of resources and uncritical acceptance of support, however, sometimes yielded undesirable results. The findings indicate that many of the strategies used by the participants involved peers, tutors, and professors who, within the supportive college environment, offered these students the assistance they needed.

INDEX WORDS: Academic literacy, Reading practices, Writing practices, Coping strategies, Refugees, Generation 1.5, First-year college, Linguistic minority, English as a second language (ESL), Qualitative case study

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by

ELIANA K. HIRANO

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2011

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Eliana K. Hirano
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by

ELIANA K. HIRANO

Committee Chair: Diane Belcher

Committee: Linda Harklau

Gayle Nelson

Stephanie Lindemann

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

December 2011

DEDICATION

To Jim and Nina

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The presence of U.S.-educated resident ESL students in U.S. colleges and universities has drawn increasing attention from professionals in Applied Linguistics, TESOL, and Composition in recent years. These students are often referred to as *Generation 1.5*, a term that became popular after the publication of the edited book *Generation 1.5 Meets College Composition: Issues in the Teaching of Writing to U.S.-Educated Learners of ESL* (Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999). This term loosely indicates students who graduate from U.S. high schools and start post-secondary education as English language learners. Generation 1.5 students are often described in opposition to international students, who complete their schooling in their home countries before coming to the U.S. By placing all non-international ESL students under the same category, calling them Generation 1.5 or resident ESL students, important distinctions can be missed. Of particular relevance to this study is the distinction between refugees and voluntary immigrants.

The literature on resident ESL students, especially in higher education, has not focused on refugee students separately from other immigrants. Even when a participant in a study is a refugee, this fact is often not disclosed upfront and the reader only learns about the participant's immigration status in the methodology section (e.g., Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008). McBrien (2005b), however, claims that refugee students are different enough from other immigrants and, therefore, merit separate attention. Likewise, Vásquez (2007) points out the need to examine the experiences of Generation 1.5 refugee students in U.S. universities. Other researchers, on the other hand, argue that refugees vary widely amongst themselves and that immigration status may not be the most useful distinction when researching academic success in college (Bosher & Rowekamp, 1998) or adult English language proficiency (Fennelly & Palasz, 2003).

Even though studies on refugees are still incipient in higher education, other contexts have been more prolific in researching this population. Several studies have investigated literacy development of refugees in K-12 settings (e.g., Pryor, 2001; Roblin, 2008; Roy, 2008; Sarroub, Pernicek, & Sweeney, 2007). Other studies have explored adult literacy (e.g., Hallaj, 2006; Warriner, 2001), while others have looked at family literacy (e.g., Lynch, 2005; Perry, 2007). The scarcity of studies investigating refugee students in college can be a result of the fact that many refugees drop out of school before starting post-secondary education (Duff, 2001; Vásquez, 2007). As Vásquez (2007) points out, the fact that going to college represents such a challenge for this population makes it even more important to conduct case studies of refugee students who manage to pursue higher education while still in the process of learning English. Understanding refugee students' trajectories towards and through college, particularly in relation to how they cope with academic literacy demands, becomes all the more relevant considering that reading and writing are often key in determining college students' success or failure, there is a growing number of language-minority students in U.S. higher education, and, in the current economy, most jobs require at least some postsecondary education (Harklau, 2000, 2001).

1.1 Purpose of the study

This study investigates the experiences refugee students go through in their first year of college with a focus on how they negotiate post-secondary academic literacy practices. More specifically, this study explores the challenges refugee students encounter as they engage in reading and writing practices in their first year of college, and the resources and strategies they use to deal with these literacy challenges. In order to carry out this investigation, a qualitative year-long multiple-case study (Duff, 2008) was conducted.

The research questions that guided the current study are:

1. How do refugee students experience academic literacy in their first year in college?
2. What challenges do refugee students encounter as they engage in first-year college reading and writing practices?
3. What resources and strategies do these students use to cope with these literacy challenges?

1.2 Significance of the study

This study investigates the experiences a group of refugee students go through in their first year of college as far as their academic literacy is concerned. More specifically, it explores the challenges these students face when negotiating postsecondary reading and writing practices as well as the strategies and resources they use to cope with these difficulties. Even though refugee participants have been portrayed in the literature, these cases are few and far between. By focusing exclusively on a group of refugees, I hope to gain insights into their collegiate experience that may inform educators that work with this population, especially at the secondary and postsecondary levels. At the secondary level, this study can likely contribute knowledge that teachers can use to better prepare refugee students for the reading and writing demands of college. At the postsecondary level, findings of this study have the potential to inform both faculty and administration of the specific challenges this population may experience as they deal with tertiary academic literacies and the strategies that may prove useful to cope with these challenges. More importantly, this study contributes knowledge about the resources that these students depend on, which may inform decisions on what types of institutional support are relevant to promote academic success for this population.

This study also aims at contributing knowledge to the Generation 1.5 literature. Even though there has been a growing interest in how Generation 1.5 students fare in college, most of

the focus has been on the writing class. This study aims at expanding this focus by investigating how these students do in the different courses they take in the first year that are more reading and/or writing intensive. Another contribution this study hopes to make concerns a better understanding of how Generation 1.5 students with limited, because often interrupted, L1 literacy, as is typical of the refugee population, experience the development of L2 academic literacy in college.

In summary, and borrowing the metaphor from Volosinov (1973), this study aims to add a link to the chain of scholarly utterances in two different areas: Generation 1.5, with a focus on the refugee population, and academic literacy in higher education.

1.3 Organization of the study

In Chapter 2, I present a review of the relevant literature that helped me frame the current study. After presenting and discussing the three key concepts of Generation 1.5, refugees, and academic literacies, I move on to discuss other studies that have investigated immigrant or refugee students in higher education. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology employed to conduct this investigation. It offers a rationale for choosing a qualitative multiple-case study, followed by a description of the different data collection methods used, and the procedures used to analyze the data. Chapter 4 introduces each of the seven focal participants. These profiles aim at giving the reader enough information about each participant so that the results discussed in the following two chapters can be understood more clearly. Chapters 5 and 6 present the results regarding reading and writing practices, respectively. In each chapter, I start by discussing the challenges faced by the participants in this study, followed by a discussion of the strategies they developed and used and the resources they drew upon in order to cope with the difficulties they had. Finally, in Chapter 7 I discuss the major findings of this study vis-à-vis the research

questions. This concluding chapter also identifies the implications for pedagogy and research, the limitations of this study, as well as directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this section, I review the literature that I consider the most helpful in framing this study. I start by discussing the term Generation 1.5 and then move on to provide a definition of refugee. Next, I discuss what is meant by academic literacies and, finally, I review studies involving English language learners in higher education.

2.1 Generation 1.5 – A discussion of the term

The term *Generation 1.5* was coined by Rumbaut and Ima (1988) to refer to the Southeast Asian refugee youth they investigated. They described this population as belonging neither to the first generation of their parents, who were formed in their home countries, nor to the second generation of children who are born in the U.S. These young people are considered “a distinctive cohort, [in that they] were born in their countries of origin but [...] are completing their education in the U.S. during the key formative periods of adolescence and early adulthood” (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988, p. 22).

In the fields of Applied Linguistics, TESOL, and Composition, the term Generation 1.5 became widespread after the publication of Harklau, et al.’s (1999) edited book. In the ten years following that important landmark, “Generation 1.5” has become “one of the most popular keywords among college TESOL specialists working in the United States” (Matsuda & Matsuda, 2009, p. 50). A review of the literature shows that most research on Generation 1.5 students has investigated U.S.-educated resident ESL college students in ESL writing, basic writing or freshman composition courses (e.g., Chiang & Schmida, 1999; Goen, Porter, Swanson, & Vandommelen, 2002; Holten, 2002; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008; Patthey, Thomas-Spiegel, & Dillon, 2009; Rodby, 1999; Schwartz, 2004). A smaller number of studies have looked at this

population beyond the writing class (e.g., Frodesen, 2002; Leki, 1999; Vásquez, 2007), in the transition between high school and postsecondary education (e.g., Allison, 2009; Harklau, 2000, 2001), and in high school (e.g., Yi, 2007).

Along with the growing popularity of the term Generation 1.5, several researchers have now remarked on how problematic it is. Benesch (2008, 2009) has criticized the ideological stances and discursive practices surrounding the use of the term, arguing that it helps perpetuate a monocultural/monolingual ideology favoring standard English proficiency “at a time of massive migration and linguistic flux” (Benesch, 2009, p. 71). She argues that members of the so-called Generation 1.5 are often multicultural/multilingual, who speak “nonstandard, or emergent, varieties of English” (Benesch, 2008, p. 300). Rather than embracing the complex identities and linguistic repertoires of these students, the discourses around Generation 1.5 usually depict them as “lacking,” or not quite on par with their monolingual English-speaking counterparts.

Most other criticisms of the term address the fact that Generation 1.5 encompasses too diverse of a body of students. Despite its widespread use, there has been no single definition that researchers have agreed on, although, generally speaking, its use signals an increasing interest in immigrant/refugee resident students in contrast to the historically almost exclusive focus on international students in ESL research in higher education (Bosher & Rowekamp, 1998). Among the most fluid definitions of Generation 1.5 is Roberge’s (2002), which in addition to the foreign-born U.S.-educated population includes “U.S. born children of immigrants in linguistic enclave communities” (p. 109), a population that would most typically be considered second generation given their place of birth (Louie, 2009).

In an attempt to be more precise, different researchers have suggested alternative categories to refer to specific subpopulations. Rumbaut (2004) used Generation 1.75, 1.5 and 1.25 to subdivide young immigrants according to their age upon arrival (0 to 5, 6 to 12 and 13 to 17 years old, respectively). Schwartz (2004) used the term cross-over students to refer to U.S. educated language learners who choose to enroll in mainstream college composition classes, instead of in ESL writing classes. Frodesen (2002, 2009) referred to her participant, who moved to the U.S. at the age of 15, as a Generation 1.5 latecomer. These examples illustrate that the term Generation 1.5, by itself, does not specify a population in a manner that is satisfactorily clear. It is, however, a powerful key term (Matsuda & Matsuda, 2009) and useful as heuristic (Roberge, 2009). As Matsuda and Matsuda (2009) claim, for such an imprecise term to be useful, its use needs to be accompanied by a detailed description of the characteristics of the population under consideration.

It is interesting to note that even though Rumbaut and Ima (1988) originally coined the term to refer to refugee teens, later uses of the term have seldom investigated this population separately from voluntary immigrants. This study plans to take the term back to its original conception by focusing on refugee students. A more detailed characterization of the participants in this study will follow in the methodology section. The literature on Generation 1.5 that is more directly relevant to this study will be discussed below in the section entitled Academic Literacy in Higher Education.

2.2 Defining Refugees

Since 1975 the United States has resettled approximately 2.7 million refugees (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). According to the 1951 Geneva Convention

Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, the United Nations defines a refugee as somebody who:

Owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (Convention and Protocol, 1951/2007, p. 16)

The definition used by the United Nations is also adopted by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (2009). Whether the United States applies the definition equally and justly is a matter of contention. As McBrien (2005b) observes, adolescents who fled Central American countries to escape war and violence would be considered refugees under the United Nations definition. However, because the United States did not recognize them as such, they are considered illegal immigrants by the U.S. government. Controversies notwithstanding, those who come to the U.S. under refugee status have generally been forced out of their native countries, often under violent circumstances and often after staying in refugee camps (McBrien, 2005b). In this respect, they are considered to be different from voluntary immigrants who, at least in theory, would have come to the U.S. by choice.

Most of the research done with refugees, unsurprisingly, has followed a psychological approach (e.g., Alayarian, 2007), often exploring the notion of trauma (Pinson & Arnot, 2007; Rutter, 2006). As Rutter (2006) explains, “in exile, refugee children are constructed in an homogeneous manner – and labelled as universally traumatised” (p. 39). This almost exclusive focus on one specific aspect of the refugee experience has had a “major impact on how [refugee

students] are viewed by their teachers” (p. 37), obscuring the complex and diverse experiences refugees go through.

Whether the refugee category is a useful one for research in Applied Linguistics and related fields is an issue that has not been addressed enough in the literature. On the one hand are the scholars who claim that refugee groups can be so different amongst themselves that the distinction between refugees and immigrants may not be helpful. Fennelly and Palasz (2003), for example, found more similarities between Hmong refugees and Mexican immigrants in terms of English language proficiency than between Hmong and Russian refugees. Similarly, Boshier and Rowekamp (1998) suggested that, as far as their academic success in higher education is concerned, refugee students who complete high school in their native countries are more similar to international students than to refugees who have a limited educational background. More specifically, they argue that “refugee/immigrant students who are more ‘at risk’ at the post-secondary level are those who experienced interruption in their L1 education and completed high school in the U.S. They risk having limited academic language proficiency and content knowledge” (p. 37). These authors argue, therefore, that educational background is more useful than immigration status when distinguishing between groups of students. There has recently been growing interest in investigating the experiences of adult and adolescent language learners, whether immigrants or refugees, who are illiterate or present limited print literacy (e.g., Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011; DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2007; Tarone, Bigelow, & Hansen, 2009).

Gunderson (2000) points out working with categories is problematic in nature since they “fail to represent the diversity that exists within groups” (p. 698). He used data from two large scale studies comprising approximately 35,000 immigrant students. He found that the term immigrant was too broad to be useful, so he divided his participants into three categories:

refugees, landed immigrants and entrepreneurs. Within the refugee group, he found that 80% came from poorly educated families, as a result of poverty or living in refugee camps, while about 20% came from families whose parents were professionals in their home countries (e.g., lawyers, doctors, professors). Despite this difference, Gunderson observed that refugee students generally went to schools in lower socio-economic neighborhoods, while the immigrants in the other two categories attended schools in more affluent neighborhoods. In other words, even though not all refugees had the same background in terms of education in their home countries, their lives in North America tended to present some commonalities.

That refugees can vary widely in their characterization and experience seems hardly questionable. However, until more is learned about this population, we cannot tell how relevant their immigration status is for research purposes and educational practice. As Roy (2008) argues, despite the significant number of refugees in the US, few studies have explored the experiences they go through in acclimating to US classrooms, especially from a language and literacy perspective. Moreover, McBrien (2005b) posits that “there is insufficient literature separating the needs of immigrant students in general from the needs of refugee students” (p. 356). According to most estimates (e.g., United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1994), about half of any refugee population consists of children. In the past three decades, then, almost 1.5 million school-age refugees have arrived in the United States and, each year, approximately 30,000 new refugee children arrive in this country. Even though the number of studies investigating literacy development of refugees in K-12 settings has been growing (e.g., Pryor, 2001; Roy, 2008; Sarroub, et al., 2007), research investigating refugees in higher education is sorely missing. This study aims at contributing knowledge to this gap.

2.3 Academic literacies

In a nutshell, academic literacy refers to “the activity of interpretation and production of academic and discipline-based texts” (Leki, 2007, p. 3). Even though this definition seems straightforward, the term literacy is used differently in different disciplines, so a clarification of what the term means in this project is necessary.

At the most elementary level, literacy means knowing how to read and, perhaps, write. Consensus on the meaning of literacy, if there is any, seems to begin and end at this level, confirming Barton’s (2007) claim that “looking for a precise definition of literacy may be an impossible task” (p.18).

According to Street (1984), different approaches to literacy can be divided into two main categories: the “autonomous” and the “social” or “ideological” models. The autonomous model, very simply put, conceptualizes literacy “as an independent variable that can be separated from social context” (Street, 1999, p. 34). The ideological, later renamed social, model sees literacy as social practice, “always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles” (Street, 2001, p. 7).

The autonomous model, also referred to as the traditional view of literacy (Gee, 1996), seems to be prevalent in fields such as Developmental and Educational Psychology, especially in studies that investigate the cognitive processes involved in learning to read, the challenges that accompany such processes, and the effects of learning to read (or not) in brain imaging (e.g., Carreiras, et al., 2009; Easterbrooks, Lederberg, Miller, Bergeron, & Connor, 2008; Kamhi, 2005; Mervis, 2009). These studies often adopt a narrow definition of literacy (Perfetti & Marron, 1998) with a focus on decoding and phonological awareness. Even when broader definitions of literacy are considered (e.g., Perfetti, 2010; Perfetti, Landi, & Oakhill, 2005),

scholars who subscribe to a traditional approach tend to view literacy as a neutral and universal skill, or as Perfetti and Marron (1998) put it, as an ability “that will serve learners in a variety of circumstances” (p. 6). Literacy in this perspective is, moreover, often considered “an attribute of a person (she is literate); or [...] as something that someone has or doesn’t have (he has functional literacy)” (Colombi & Schleppegrell, 2002, p. 1). In this sense, literacy seems to be something that can be acquired once and for all rather than a process that is ever evolving and contingent on specific sociocultural contexts.

According to Heath (1999), it was in the 1970s that the traditional view of literacy started to be questioned and the ideological or social approaches to literacy started to emerge. This perspective is also referred to as the sociocultural approach to language and literacy (Gee, 1996). Coming from different disciplines, scholars advocating for this alternative perspective started a new field of study often referred to as “the new literacy studies”. Early proponents of this perspective include Scribner and Cole (1981), from psychology, Street (1984), from anthropology, and Heath (1982) from education. Reporting on field work in very diverse settings (Scribner and Cole in Liberia, Street in North Iran, and Heath in the Carolinas), these scholars presented findings that unveiled complexities around literacy that had not been considered previously. As an example, Scribner and Cole questioned the intrinsic effects of literacy and were able to show that some of the cognitive effects traditionally attributed to literacy (e.g., the ability to understand syllogistic reasoning and perform well on psychological tests) were actually a result of formal schooling and not literacy per se. Scribner and Cole also made the case that different forms of literacy serve different social functions, and it is in fulfilling these functions that specific cognitive skills are developed. For example, only those who were literate in Arabic

and engaged in the study of the Qur'an improved their ability to recall. Scribner and Cole (1981) conclude, therefore, that:

Literacy is not simply knowing how to read and write a particular script but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use. The nature of these practices [...] will determine the kinds of skills [...] associated with literacy. (p. 236)

According to Reder and Davila (2005), it was Scribner and Cole's work that introduced the concept of literacy practices, which Barton and Hamilton (2000) see as "a powerful way of conceptualizing the link between the activities of reading and writing and the social structures in which they are embedded and which they help shape" (p. 7).

One consequence of viewing literacy from a sociocultural perspective is that literacy is seen as multiple. Rather than a neutral concept that remains stable across people, places, and time, "literacies vary with time and place and are embedded in specific cultural practices" (Street, 1999, p. 37). An illustration of multiple literacies in action can be found in Masny and Ghahremani-Ghajar's (1999) ethnographic case study of Somali children in an elementary school in Canada. In their study, they explore the different literacies these children engaged in, including home literacy, school ESL literacy and religious literacy. They also examined "which literacies [were] taken up, by whom and in what context", unveiling relationships of power. Masny and Ghahremani-Ghajar point out that when minority children go to school, they are expected to know standard English since this is the language of school literacy, and they are often stigmatized and at a disadvantage when they don't know it. These authors then propose that literacy education should adopt a pedagogy of difference, in which educators aim at weaving multiple literacies in the classroom, thus valuing the literacies minority students bring to school. Following Freire's (1970, 1994) work, they state that "multiple and competing literacy practices

point to the notion that *becoming literate has more to do with reading the world than reading the word*" (Masny & Ghahremani-Ghajar, 1999, p. 90)

The perspective to literacy adopted in this project follows the social/sociocultural approach (Gee, 1996; Street, 1984). The autonomous model to literacy would not be an adequate framework because it places literacy within the individual and sees its development as a sequence of hierarchical steps in which "it is possible to identify a boundary or developmental milestone between high school and collegiate literacy that entering students either have or have not passed" (Harklau, 2001, p. 35). A consequence of this developmental standpoint is that students who did not pass the purported milestone at the end of high school would not be expected to succeed in college and, therefore, would not be given an opportunity to attend one. This exclusionary stance is a problematic way of looking at literacy, especially considering "at-risk" students, such as refugees with interrupted education, who may not have reached the level of college readiness required by most college admission processes, but who might, given the chance, succeed in postsecondary education (Sternglass, 1999).

The sociocultural perspective to literacy, on the other hand, takes a literacy-as-social-practice approach and highlights "the interactional construction of meaning in particular social and cultural contexts" (Colombi & Schleppegrell, 2002, p. 6). Literacy in this perspective, therefore, is always socially, culturally, and historically situated (Vygotsky, 1987; Wertsch, 1985). As Barton and Hamilton (2000) claim, the activities of reading and writing shape and are shaped by the social structures in which they are embedded. This means that postsecondary literacy is not intrinsically more difficult or sophisticated than high school literacy; rather, the transition from one institutional context to the other can be regarded as a social, cultural and

historical shift in the ways reading and writing practices are understood. Harklau (2001) summarizes this point well:

Although differences in the literacies of high school and college may be viewed as changes in cognitive process within maturing students, the differences must also be considered as a function of the varying institutional cultures and belief systems of high school and college contexts, and of the reading and writing practices considered appropriate and common-place in each context. (p. 37)

2.4 English language learners in Higher Education

Considering the scarcity of studies investigating the experiences of refugee students in higher education, this section expands its scope and incorporates studies that have investigated postsecondary literacy issues of other types of English language learners, including international students and Generation 1.5 students in general.

The adoption of the perspective to literacy as embedded in the context it takes place requires researchers to give detailed descriptions of the students they investigate, as well as of the contexts in which these students experience literacy. Since the 1990s, there have been a growing number of second language academic literacy studies in higher education that have followed qualitative research methodologies in order to carry out in-depth investigations . In the remaining part of this section, I will selectively review this literature, choosing studies to illustrate the wide range of literacy experiences that English language learners can go through in higher education. It is worth noting that a single paragraph or two would never do justice to the rich and well-written reports summarized here.

Spack (1997) reported on a longitudinal, three-year-long case study of an international student from Japan called “Yuko.” Despite her high TOEFL score, Yuko had a lot of difficulty in

her first year of college, failing to complete an introductory course in her intended major and even considering transfer to a university in Japan. By the end of the first year, Yuko believed that her difficulty in understanding readings and lectures should be attributed to her lack of background knowledge, including vocabulary. As a way to cope with the challenges she faced, Yuko developed several strategies. One of them was to read her academic material for gist instead of word-by-word, an approach she learned from reading fiction books in English. Other strategies included skipping reading sections that were too hard to understand, focusing on readings that her professors also mentioned in lectures, and starting early on writing assignments to have time to consult with instructors. Yuko's case is interesting in that after three years, as she reflected on her experience in the first year, she recanted the idea that it was lack of background knowledge that caused her difficulties. She then theorized that it was lack of practice with specific types of academic reading and writing that were the root of her struggles. Spack (1997) uses this example to question the validity of short-term literacy acquisition studies.

While Yuko's story shows an ESL student who was able to overcome an initial period of struggle by developing strategies that allowed her to cope with reading and writing practices in a university setting, Leki's (1999, 2007) case of "Jan" shows a student who pursued a very different way of dealing with the literacy difficulties he faced at the beginning of his college life. Jan immigrated from Poland at the age of 17. Even though he had no English upon arrival, he managed to succeed in high school by relying on two factors: the knowledge he had acquired in Poland and the tests in high school, which he deemed unchallenging. A series of unhappy events, most notably that he came to college too late for orientation and to be advised about what or how many courses to take, resulted in his registering for a total of 17 hours in his first semester, in addition to holding a full-time job. This resulted in a GPA of 0.65 at the end of his first semester.

From then on, with his mind set on improving his GPA to 3.0 so that he could major in Business, Jan found several creative, often unethical, schemes to work around the system. These schemes included getting a copy of the teacher's manual so he would have the key to the exercises the professor assigned, making up information he was supposed to have gotten from interviewing a business leader, and turning in the same homework assignment repeatedly, knowing that the teacher would not check it. Fortunately for Jan, his overall experience in college improved dramatically at the end of his junior year. Leki suggests that this shift was due to the fact that, at that time, Jan managed to improve his socioacademic networks, establishing more positive relationships with other students and faculty. She defines socioacademic relationships as "a category of social interaction with peers and with faculty that proved to be critical to the students' sense of satisfaction with their educational work and sometimes even to the possibility of doing that work" (Leki, 2007, p. 14).

The studies above have focused on literacy development of students who were in college. Even though reports of high school experience are sometimes included, they often depend on retrospective accounts given by the student. Harklau (2000, 2001) and, more recently, Allison (2009) have looked more specifically at the transition immigrant students go through when moving from secondary to tertiary education. Their studies have followed students in their last semester of high school and first semester of college. From an institutional perspective, Harklau (2000) found that the two educational institutions perceived ESL students very differently. In high school, the prevalent image of these students was that they were determined, hardworking, persevering and well-behaved. In the two-year community college where these students were accepted, on the other hand, these same students (as well as other U.S.-educated ESL students) were viewed very negatively. The majority of their classmates had recently arrived in the U.S.

and both the instructors and the curriculum seemed to favor this population. The instructors, for example, often perceived the U.S.-educated students as rude and lacking in cooperation because, unlike their newly arrived counterparts, these students were more autonomous and did not appreciate being treated as novices who needed explicit acculturation guidance.

While Harklau (2000) focused on the teachers' perspectives of ESL students in high school and college, Harklau (2001) used data from the same study to focus on the students' perspective on literacy practices in both settings. Among the reading and writing practices that represented significant challenges in college, Harklau identified note-taking conventions, specifically, and, more generally, the practices that resulted from different cultural values surrounding the use of class time, as well as teacher and student responsibility for learning. In high school, note taking during lectures was a guided activity with some teachers offering premade notes with blanks for students to complete or telling students when it was necessary to take notes. In college, participants found note taking to be a lot more demanding, with some of the participants mentioning that it was difficult to decide what to take notes on. Regarding the use of class time, there are a lot more contact hours between teacher and students in high school, and most literacy practices take place in the classroom. In college, however, class time is very limited and needs to be used as efficiently as possible, which usually translates into teacher-fronted lectures. Reading in high school was mostly done in the classroom, so readings were not so extensive. In college, there is much more reading involved, and reading is considered a key source of knowledge. As Harklau argues, "students in many U.S. secondary education contexts are not held accountable for reading material and acquire textual information in other ways such as through teacher talk" (p. 56). The same cannot be said of college reading. Lastly, regarding teacher and student responsibility for learning, Harklau suggests that, in high school, teachers are

held responsible for students' academic and personal development. For example, teachers keep track of students' learning through frequent tests, quizzes and assignments. When a student does not perform satisfactorily, the teacher often approaches the student and offers help. In college, on the other hand, students are held responsible for their own learning. Deadlines are often non-negotiable and if students are having difficulty, they need to take the initiative to ask for help. While many of the literacy demands were more challenging in college, this was not always the case. For example, the use of multiple choice tests and textbook reading was widespread in both contexts. The amount of required writing was actually smaller in college than in high school. In high school, students had been required to write multiple drafts of essays, and three of the participants had put together a portfolio for writing assessment. In their first year of college, most of the writing they did was related to remediation (e.g., in ESL classes). As Harklau explains, the reduced amount of writing required of these students in their introductory college classes is a direct result of the specific instructors and disciplines they had in that semester. Overall, Harklau concludes that literacy practices in college are not uniformly more challenging for entering students and she calls for "more contextualized portraits of student experience to ascertain exactly what poses new and challenging tasks for students in various contexts" (p. 62).

"More contextualized portraits of student experience" are even more in demand when students are refugees. The few studies so far that have explored the experiences refugee students go through in higher education are reviewed below. When studies involved other participants (usually other immigrant students) the review will focus on the refugee students. Perry (2008) is one of the few that has worked exclusively with refugees who were attending college. Her three participants belonged to the community of orphaned Southern Sudanese youth commonly known as the "Lost Boys of Sudan." They all learned some English before coming to the U.S. and were

literate in at least one other language. The focus of Perry's study, however, was not on her participants' experience in college, but, rather, on how traditional practices of storytelling in Sudan were transformed by these participants as a response to their current circumstances in the U.S. In Sudan, storytelling is an oral tradition that is used to pass Sudanese history and culture to Sudanese children. In contrast, the participants in this study used stories to inform the world about the situation in Sudan and about their experiences as refugees. These transformed stories were often told in both written and oral form. Even though Perry does not explore literacy development in an educational setting, she does recommend that educators give refugee students authentic purposes to engage in literacy practices. As an example, she mentions that one of her participants sent letters to the newspaper editor and wrote pieces for his church bulletin. She argues that "creating authentic literacy learning opportunities can be used as a method of empowering refugee students, helping them to gain or re-gain their own voices after experiencing trauma and tragedy" (p. 353).

While Perry (2008) described three refugees who successfully engaged in literacy practices outside formal educational practices, Ortmeier-Hooper (2008) describes a refugee who felt alienated in his writing class. Part of this alienation could be the result of literacy practices that lacked authenticity. Ortmeier-Hooper presents three case studies of immigrant, first-year students, focusing on how they negotiated their identities as second language writers in mainstream composition classrooms. One of the participants, Sergej, was a refugee from Serbia, who came to the U.S. with his family when he was seventeen. His home language was Serbo-Croatian, and he started learning English at the age of ten. His reading, writing and oral skills in English were considered very good in college. His parents were college educated and, back in their home country, his mother was a professor of Russian while his father was lawyer. Here in

the U.S., however, they were holding lower status jobs, perhaps as result of their low proficiency in English, and were receiving government assistance for housing. Sergej did not want to be identified as an ESL student, since he viewed this designation as indicating that he would need remedial work. In the interviews and in his writings, he often placed himself as an outsider who lacked control over his life circumstances. This applied to his experiences both in Croatia and in the U.S. In the writing class, his sense of being on the margins was reinforced by the fact that he had difficulty understanding the instructor's expectations. In the few times that he wrote about his homeland or family, Sergej said he felt more connected with his writing. Despite this, his estrangement from the course grew deeper and deeper as the semester progressed. Moreover, his belief that the instructor did not care about his personal experiences and that the tasks she assigned were pointless contributed to his unwillingness to invest in that class. His hostility toward the course and the instructor was also fueled by his belief that the traditional schooling in his home country, in which he thrived, was superior to the educational style promoted in the composition class, in which open discussion and student involvement were encouraged. Despite his moments of alienation, Sergej was willing to work hard to succeed in college and ended up earning a top grade in the composition course.

Ortmeier-Hooper's (2008) Sergej gives us an example of a refugee student who was successfully admitted to college and, despite his struggles, managed to adapt to the demands imposed by his mainstream composition class, at least to the extent of earning a good grade. Vásquez (2007), on the other hand, reports on a case study of a refugee student who, despite having graduated from high school with good grades, faced many challenges before being admitted to the local university and, once admitted, in coping with the university courses she took. The participant in Vásquez's case study, Festina, was an Albanian refugee from Kosovo,

who came to the U.S. at the age of thirteen after surviving the war in Kosovo and living in a refugee camp in Macedonia. She arrived in the U.S. with no prior knowledge of English. In Kosovo, she had attended school, but her education did not take place in Albanian, her first language (L1), but in Serbian, due to political reasons. When Festina applied to college, she was only admitted conditionally because her TOEFL score did not reach the minimum required. She took classes in the Intensive English Program (IEP) during a summer semester, and then for a full academic year, after which she still could not meet the TOEFL requirement. Because of her excellent grades in the IEP and satisfactory grades in three non-reading/writing-intensive university courses she was allowed to take, Festina had her conditions removed and became a regular degree-seeking student. Vásquez's focus in this study was to investigate how Festina's advanced oral proficiency and familiarity with the U.S. educational culture enabled her to engage with the instructors of her IEP classes in ways that her peers, all international students, could not. These interactional behaviors, Vásquez argues, positioned this student favorably with faculty, who were unanimous in considering her a good student and giving her good grades, despite their also unanimous assessment that her written work was poor. Even though the study does not follow up on Festina's work in mainstream university classes, we learn that a year after being fully admitted, Festina's GPA was 1.27, she had failed or withdrawn from all the courses she had registered for in the second semester, and was no longer enrolled at that university.

Another account of a refugee student struggling in college is presented by Blanton (2005). One of Blanton's two participants, Tran, was a refugee from Vietnam, who came to the U.S. with his parents and older siblings at the age of 13, after six months in a refugee camp in the Philippines. During this transition, his education was interrupted for about a year. Back in his home country, Tran's mother had been a school teacher and his father had owned a produce

shop. Upon arrival in the U.S., Tran started school in eighth grade. By eleventh grade, he was mainstreamed and did not have to take ESL classes anymore. Once in college, Tran had to take a series of ESL classes, which he coped with well enough to pass, except for the highest level of ESL composition, which he failed three semesters in a row. He needed to complete this class successfully in order to enroll in regular freshman composition. In the meantime, he took several mainstream courses that did not have freshman composition as a prerequisite. In these, he did poorly in some, but very well in others. He soon learned to choose courses he was likely to pass and to drop them when he thought he would not. He earned several A's in engineering courses, his major. Three years after starting college, Tran finally completed his ESL classes and was allowed to register for freshman composition. In the following three years, in a series of registrations, withdrawals, and semesters he did not register for freshman composition classes, Tran had passed the first semester of freshman composition, but not the second. Blanton's other participant, Meseret, was an immigrant who also struggled to complete her ESL courses. After six semesters at the university, she was still taking ESL classes. Both Tran and Meseret had their L1 literacies interrupted at around the age of 11. Blanton makes the case that their L2 literacy practices were never quite able to pick up where their L1 literacy had stopped. In other words, they became adults, with early adolescent literacy. Blanton (1992, 2005) wonders if there is a critical period after which it becomes very difficult to develop full literacy, and, more specifically, how it is that "1.5 students might achieve a degree of reading-writing proficiency in L2 that – due to circumstances beyond their control – they never achieved in L1" (Blanton, 2005, p. 110).

Blanton's question is also raised by other researchers who have investigated students with a strong L1 literacy background. Spack (1997), for example, asks, after discussing Yuko's case:

“if such a privileged, accomplished student could have such a difficult first-year experience, what must it be like for students with fewer advantages?” (p. 51). Similarly, Ortmeier-Hooper (2008) wonders: “if a student as successful as Sergej remained on the margins in his own mind, what is the fate of a student with less confidence and less academic prowess?” (p. 412). As Patthey, et al.(2009) argue, ESL students who start postsecondary education with academic literacy in another language need to retool this literacy in English. “[This] retooling may not be entirely easy, but it may be easier than starting from the beginning and learning [academic literacy] later in life” (p. 146). The difficulties created by an incomplete or interrupted L1 academic literacy are also addressed by Benz (2002) who claims that “possibly more detrimental to Generation 1.5 students’ success in college than their incomplete understanding of English grammar, are their underdeveloped literacy skills [...] often attributable to students’ first language academic literacy experiences” (p. 19).

The studies reviewed above depict experiences of language learners in higher education or in their transition from high school to college. Reading these studies, one learns about the different possible experiences a language learner can go through in college. To summarize, from Spack’s (1997) account of Yuko, we learn about the challenges this student faced with reading and writing in college as well as the strategies she developed to deal with these difficulties. From Leki’s (1999, 2007) case of Jan, we learn of his schemes to raise his low GPA and, more importantly, that he found socioacademic relationships to be key in improving his experience in college. From Harklau’s (2000, 2001) work, we learn that the transition from high school to college involves a shift in institutional cultures, which affects how language learners are perceived by their instructors. We also learn about the similarities and differences in literacy practices in both educational settings. Perry’s (2008) account of three Sudanese men shows how

they engaged in community life by reconfiguring their literacy practices. Ortmeier-Hooper (2008) describes a refugee student from Serbia who felt alienated in a mainstream composition class, mainly because he had trouble understanding the instructor's expectations and he perceived the educational style in his home country as superior. Vásquez's (2007) case of Festina tells the story of a refugee student from Albania who struggled in college despite being considered a good student by her IEP instructors. She managed to pass some non-reading/writing-intensive undergraduate courses but, after a year of being fully admitted, her GPA was at 1.27 and she was no longer a student at that university. Finally, Blanton (2005) tells us the story of Tran, a refugee from Vietnam, who, after six years in college, had not yet fulfilled the freshman composition requirement.

The review of the literature therefore indicates that there are a few detailed descriptions of language learners negotiating academic literacies in higher education or in the transition between high school and college (e.g, Harklau, 2001; Leki, 1999; Spack, 1997). What seems to be lacking in the literature is research that explores the academic literacy experiences of refugee students in tertiary settings. In the very few instances in which refugee students figure as participants, the focus has been on the students' performance in English classes and, even in these cases, a rich description of the context beyond their English classes is often missing. We know, for example, that Blanton's (2005) and Vásquez's (2007) refugee participants struggled in college, but we do not know much about the specific difficulties they faced, the strategies they used (or not), or the resources that they had available (if any) to overcome these challenges. This study aims at addressing this gap by investigating a group of refugee students in first-year college, with a focus on the challenges they face as they negotiate reading and writing practices in this context, as well as the strategies and resources they use to cope with these difficulties.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of first-year undergraduate refugee students as they learn to navigate postsecondary academic literacy practices. More specifically, this investigation aimed at understanding the reading and writing challenges these students faced in their first year of college, as well as the strategies and resources they used to deal with these challenges.

In order to carry out this study, a qualitative year-long multiple-case study (Duff, 2008) was conducted. I believe a qualitative approach was an appropriate methodological choice to investigate the experience of refugees in college because, following Creswell (2003, p. 181 to 183):

- Qualitative research takes place in the natural setting.
- Qualitative research uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic.
- Qualitative research is emergent.
- Qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive.
- The qualitative researcher views social phenomena holistically.
- The qualitative researcher systematically reflects on who he or she is in the inquiry and is sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study.
- The qualitative researcher uses complex reasoning that is multi-faceted, iterative, and simultaneous.

Among the various possible inquiries within a qualitative research framework, I chose to conduct a longitudinal case study because it allowed me to explore the *process* refugee students undertook in dealing with academic literacy practices in college. As Harklau (2008) posits, this

type of research allows us “to look at the full sweep of the journey across time and not just a few snapshots along the way” (p. 26). Moreover, she goes on, case studies also allow us “to carefully document the interaction of individual and context and to document how language learning is mediated by participants’ understanding of and interactions with context over time.” Considering the focus of this study, I extend “language learning” to include academic literacy development.

Lastly, in my effort to elucidate my methodological choice, I explain why I chose to carry out a multiple-case study rather than focus on a single case. Stake (2000), who uses the term collective case study, defines it as an “instrumental study extended to several cases” (p. 437). By instrumental, he means a case study which is conducted primarily in order to provide a deeper understanding of an issue, and this is contrasted with an intrinsic case study, in which the primary interest is the case itself. In a collective case study:

Individual cases in the collection may or may not be known in advance to manifest some common characteristic. They may be similar or dissimilar [...]. They are chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases. (Stake, 2000, p. 437)

As Duff (2008) points out, having more than one focal participant increases “the sense of representativeness of, or variation among, cases” (p. 36) and “can provide compelling evidence of a phenomenon” (p. 113). Likewise, Lea and Street (1998) argue that, even though multiple cases do not represent a sample from which generalizations can be made, they can point to “important theoretical questions and connections that might not otherwise be raised” (p. 160). Additionally, by carrying out a multiple-case study I hoped to minimize the risk that the study be jeopardized by attrition. In longitudinal studies, such as this one, because of the long commitment required from each participant, the possibility of attrition grows. In a single-case

study, the completion of the investigation can become compromised if the sole participant drops out (Duff, 2008; Harklau, 2008). If, on the one hand, a multiple-case study presents advantages over a single-case study, on the other, it requires more resources, including time. According to Duff (2008), “the greater the number of participants, [...] the less possible it is to provide an in-depth description and contextualization [...] of each one, taking fully into account the complexity of interactions, the perspectives of the participants, and so on” (p. 124).

Despite the potential trade-offs, I believe that working with more than a single participant enabled me to elaborate more robust answers to the research questions proposed in the current study. As discussed in the literature review above, refugees can present widely different background experiences in general, and, more specifically, in terms of their previous education and L1 literacy. By including several participants in the study, it is hoped that the findings are more representative of the experience refugee students go through in their first year of college than a single case could be. In this way, I hope to enhance “naturalistic generalization,” which Stake (2000) defines as the possibility of readers learning from vicarious experience. By carrying out a qualitative one-year-long multiple-case study, I hope to be able to “assist readers in the construction of knowledge” (Stake, 2000, p. 442) about the experiences refugee students go through as they navigate academic literacy practices in their first year of college. The different methodological aspects of this multiple-case study will be described below.

3.1 Research context

As Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue, a substantive case report should include “a thorough description of the context or setting within which the inquiry took place and with which the inquiry was concerned” (p. 362). This thick description should provide the readers with enough information so that they can understand the findings, experience the study vicariously, and draw

their own conclusions. In this section, I describe Hope College, where the study took place, the seven focal participants, and the faculty participants. Next, I discuss my role as the researcher, and, by describing my trajectory leading to this study, I hope to offer an account of my own “predispositions and biases toward the problem or setting” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 363). Lastly, I discuss some ethical considerations.

3.1.1 Hope College

This multiple-case study was conducted at a small private liberal arts college with self-described Christian values located in the U.S. Southeast. The college will be referred to as Hope College. Founded in 1902, Hope College is located near the mountains, about an hour away from a major city. Its campus consists of a very beautiful, enormous area of land, with meadows, woods, and streams. Each of the main schools in the college is housed in a different building where faculty offices and the classrooms where they teach are located. In Fall 2009, when this study began, there were almost 2,000 students enrolled at Hope College with around 90% of them at the undergraduate level. Most of the students (about 85%) were from the U.S. Southeast. International students represented 1.7% of the student population and minorities totaled a little over 10%. The college has a very active work-study program, including student-operated enterprises, with more than 95% of the students working at the college at one point during their undergraduate years.

For the 2009-2010 academic year, Hope College admitted seven refugee students under special circumstances. Serendipity played a major role in how these seven refugees ended up at this college. To keep a long story short, one of the students, a high school senior at the time, approached Ms. Laura, a person who had been active in the refugee community for several years, saying that he wanted to go to college and asking whether she could help him in this process.

Word got around that Ms. Laura was helping this student, and five other refugees came to her with the same request. Ms. Laura already knew these six students as well as their families. At other times in the past, she had helped, or at least tried to help, each of these families with different issues they had. As luck would have it, Ms. Laura ended up meeting the president of Hope College, who became interested in these students. The seventh student applied to Hope College independently from the other six, and it was the college that decided to include her in the same group because of her status as a refugee.

Even though these seven students were not considered “college-ready” by traditional measures such as SAT scores, Hope College believed that this group of students would have the necessary motivation to overcome their educational deficiencies. The college was able to offer full scholarships to each of these students, which covered all expenses, including tuition, dorms, meal plans, and allowances for books. In return, the students agreed to work on campus a certain number of hours a year, in line with the value the college places on work experience. The financial aid Hope College offered these students was very generous and, perhaps for some of them, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. This may explain how the students who come from more conservative families were able to convince their parents to let them go to a residential college. One of the female participants, in particular, had a harder time with her parents, who did not want her to leave home. In the end, she was able to convey to them the idea that this was indeed a unique opportunity that she did not want to miss, and her parents let her go. As for Hope College, giving these students such an opportunity was a way of remaining close to their historic mission of providing education to those who could not afford it. This initiative is an example of the point Harklau and Siegal (2009) make that there are “a growing number of colleges [giving] special consideration to applicants for whom English is not a first language” (p. 29).

In order to ease the transition from high school to a postsecondary setting, the college designed a summer Bridge Program specifically for these seven students. As part of this program, they took the same two courses together: Speech and World Religions. The students also met weekly with the Academic Support Director and worked part-time on campus as part of the work experience program. Also, during that summer, the college arranged for the students to share two townhouses on campus – one for the female and another for the male students. As will be described in the next chapter, because of a death in her family, one of the students in the cohort ended up not participating fully in the college activities that summer.

After the completion of the summer semester, the college determined that these students were not Bridge students any longer (in reference to the Bridge Program), but, rather, were to consider themselves Hope students, on par with any other first-year student. In line with that, starting in Fall 2009 each of these students started their own individual paths in college. The only other course they took as a cohort was Introduction to College Writing (ENG 095), a non-credit developmental writing class. In terms of housing, as Fall started, each of these students was assigned to share dormitory rooms with other incoming students.

3.1.2 Student participants

The refugee students that were invited to participate in this study were chosen through purposive sampling (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2000). According to Stake (2000), in order to select a case for qualitative inquiry, it is important to draw a purposive sample, considering balance, variety and, above all, opportunity to learn. To evaluate how much can be learned from a case, he suggests considering issues such as how accessible the case is or how much time the researcher can spend investigating the case. From “a large population of hypothetical cases, a small subpopulation of accessible cases [is identified]” (p. 446). In reference to the current study,

the large population would include all refugees in their first year of college, and the subpopulation would be the group of refugees admitted to Hope College. In the section below, on my role as a researcher, I describe how I came in contact with these students.

Even though a typical multiple-case study in Applied Linguistics usually involves from two to six participants (Duff, 2008), this study had seven focal participants. All seven refugee students admitted to Hope College were invited to participate in this study, and they all accepted. I describe the invitation process below. Given the longitudinal nature of this study, I was prepared for some attrition along the way, but, fortunately, this never happened. As a result, all seven participants completed the study. Table 3.1 briefly introduces each of the participants. In Chapter 4, I present a more detailed profile on each of them.

Table 3.1

The focal participants

Pseudonym	Yar Zar	Arezo	Kayhan	Tabasum	Sabrina	Solange	Musa
Country	Burma	Afghanistan	Afghanistan	Afghanistan	Afghanistan	Rwanda	Liberia
Sex	M	F	M	F	F	F	M
Age	19	19	18	19-21	18	19	20
Years in US	7	6	6	5	4	4	2.5
High school	Private	Public	Public	Public	Public	Public	Private
Starting grade in US	6 th	End of 6 th	7 th	7 th	9 th	9 th	11 th
Grades skipped	None	Most of 6 th	5 th and 6 th	2 nd to 6 th , 8 th	6 th to 8 th	4 th and 5 th	None
SAT verbal	440	330	350	12 (ACT reading)	380	420	410

The information in Table 3.1 regarding age and length of residence in the U.S. was obtained at the beginning of the study. Tabasum's age is given as a range because she does not have a birth certificate, and there is a conflict between her own account and her immigration documents.

Table 3.2 below contains a list of the courses taken by each of the participants in Fall 09 and Spring 10. The courses that are underlined are the ones whose professors participated in this study (see next section). The courses that are in italics were 1-credit hour.

Table 3.2

Courses taken

	Yar Zar	Arezo	Kayhan	Tabasum	Sabrina	Solange	Musa
Fall 2009	<u>ENG 095</u>	<u>ENG 095</u>	<u>ENG 095</u>	<u>ENG 095</u>	<u>ENG 095</u>	<u>ENG 095</u>	<u>ENG 095</u>
	<u>GOV 207</u>	<u>GOV 207</u>	<u>ANT 200</u>	<u>REL 100</u>	<u>GOV 207</u>	<u>ANT 200</u>	<u>ANT 200</u>
	MAT 105	MAT 111	MAT 111	<u>COM 203</u>	MAT 111	CHM 108	MAT 111
	THE 201	MUS 215	GOV 211	<i>MUS 111</i>	SPA 101	FRE 101	THE 201
	<i>BCC 100</i>	<i>BCC 100</i>	<i>BCC 100</i>	<i>BCC 100</i>	<i>BCC 100</i>	<i>BCC 100</i>	<i>BCC 100</i>
	<i>HPE 120</i>	<i>HPE 113</i>	<i>HPE 120</i>	<i>HPE 108</i>	<i>HPE 103</i>		<i>HPE 120</i>
	<i>HPE 221</i>	<i>HPE 221</i>	<i>HPE 221</i>	MAT 111	<i>HPE 113</i>		<i>HPE 132</i>
Spring 2010	<u>ENG101A</u>	<u>ENG101A</u>	<u>ENG101A</u>	<u>ENG101B</u>	<u>ENG101A</u>	<u>ENG101A</u>	<u>ENG101A</u>
	<u>SOC 200</u>	<u>ECO 110</u>	<u>PSY101A</u>	<u>ECO 110</u>	<u>ECO 110</u>	<u>ECO 110</u>	<u>ECO 110</u>
	GOV 211	<u>SOC 200</u>	THE 201	<u>PSY101B</u>	<u>SOC 200</u>	<u>GOV 211</u>	<u>BIO 111</u>
	FRE 101	MAT 145	KIN 380	<i>MUS 111</i>	FRE 101	FRE 102	PSY 103
	MAT 111	FRE 101	<i>KIN 201</i>	<i>HPE 221</i>	<i>HPE 105</i>	<i>HPE 105</i>	MAT 201
				<i>HPE 222</i>	<i>HPE 221</i>	<i>HPE 221</i>	

3.1.3 Faculty participants

In addition to having the refugee students as focal participants, this study also involved some of the faculty who taught the courses these students were enrolled in. In each semester, at least two professors per student were invited to participate in this study. Faculty members were selected following two main criteria: having at least one focal participant in their class and

teaching a 3-credit hour course that was reading and/or writing intensive. When more than two professors met these criteria, priority was given to those whose classes were perceived as more challenging by the focal participants.

In Table 3.2 above, the courses that are underlined indicate those whose professors participated in this study. In total, there were 13 faculty participants. The titles of the courses they taught can be found below.

Table 3.3

Courses taught by faculty participants

Course	Course title
ENG 095	Introduction to college writing
GOV 207	Contemporary world issues
ANT 200	Introduction to cultural anthropology
REL 100	World religions
COM 203	Introduction to speech
ENG 101	First-year seminar in rhetoric and writing
SOC 200	Introduction to sociology
ECO 110	Principles of economics
PSY 101	Introduction to psychology
GOV 211	American national government
BIO 111	Principles of cell biology

3.1.4 Researcher's role

In a case study, such as this one, it is very important that the researcher explicitly lay out his or her involvement in the research process, including his or her connection with the participants, access to the research site, biases, values and personal interests regarding the research topic, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and other ethical issues (Creswell, 2003). In this section, I set out to describe what I believe is relevant personal and professional background to the current study, so the reader can have a better understanding of my stance regarding the education of refugees in the U.S. I then describe issues of access to the focal

participants. Lastly, I consider some ethical issues involved in this study and how I have dealt with them.

3.1.4.1 My trajectory leading to this study

As a native of Brazil, a country where social inequalities are unbearable, I have always believed that academic efforts, such as a PhD dissertation research, should not be carried out solely for scientific purposes, but, rather, with the ultimate goal of having some positive impact on the lives of those that are at a disadvantage and, thus, even if minimally, contribute to a better world. If I were conducting my PhD research in my home town, I can think of several educational sites where my work would be welcome and useful. Being a permanent resident in the U.S. since 2003, however, I feel I still have a lot to learn about the social landscape. When I started thinking about a topic for my research, I realized that most of my life revolved around the university and that, with one exception, I did not have any contact with communities where I could identify an issue that I felt was worth at least two years of my life.

The one exception was a context that I initially considered for my dissertation. The number of undocumented Brazilian immigrants had been growing steadily in the southeastern U.S., and there was very little research on this population. Given my own background, this seemed to be an obvious choice, coupled with the advantage of speaking the same L1 as the potential participants. I visited two high schools at the time, but the Brazilian parent liaisons that I talked to at each of these schools both cautioned me about the fact that government policies on undocumented aliens were becoming more and more stringent and that students were leaving school in the middle of the academic year because parents were being deported, or they were moving to other places where they thought they may not get caught. The high possibility of

participant attrition was very discouraging, and I decided to leave this research idea for some other time.

In my quest for a research topic and site, I visited a Saturday School Program for refugee students at the end of spring 2008. In fall of that year, I went to the school most Saturdays when I volunteered from two to four hours, mostly assisting a teacher, or tutoring refugees and helping them with school homework. As I worked with these students, I learned more about the refugees, their backgrounds and their experiences in the school system. I soon learned that the Saturday School Program had been awarded a significant grant to start a school for refugee teen girls in Fall 2010. I got involved with this project, and I served on the board of directors of this school for nearly two years.

In one of the meetings to discuss issues regarding the opening of the new school, I happened to learn that seven refugee students had been accepted to Hope College with full scholarships. One of the people who actively assisted these students in pursuing their dream of a college education was also a board member at the new school. Through her, I was introduced to the Dean of the School of Education at Hope College, who invited me for a meeting to present my research project to her, the associate provost, and the academic support director. The three of them informally approved my research ideas at that meeting. After that, I pursued formal approval of my project with their Institutional Review Board, as well as Georgia State's Board.

As Duff (2008) very rightly points out, "the challenge of negotiating and gaining entry to the research context and access to the case for any length of time, and particularly for a longitudinal study, cannot be underestimated" (p. 126). I feel very fortunate to have obtained access to the research site I chose and to have gotten approval of the "gatekeepers" (Creswell, 2003, p. 184). More than merely approving my research ideas, the Dean of Education became a

strong advocate for my study. She introduced me to other people at Hope College who gave me more information about my participants' admission process. She also provided me with all the logistical assistance I needed to conduct a study at a site that was new to me: she reserved classrooms in her building where I could meet my participants, and she gave me permission to use her department's photocopier. More than anything else, I perceived her as a friend at the research site, always offering me her support and encouragement.

3.1.4.2 Inviting focal participants

The first meeting I had with all the potential participants was organized by the Dean of Education. She had asked me whether I would like her to do that, and I accepted. I had briefly tutored two of the students in my visits to Saturday School, but had never met the other five. I was afraid (and later difficulty with e-mail communications proved that my fears were well-founded) that students may not respond to an e-mail sent by a researcher they did not know, and I thought this first contact was very important for recruiting the participants. The Dean sent out an e-mail inviting the students to this meeting, booked a room for us and provided us with food. She came to introduce me and then left. I presented the study to the students, read the IRB approved consent form with them (Appendix A) and answered any questions they had. At the end of the meeting, five of the seven students agreed to be participants. The other two students decided to participate within two weeks. As a form of reciprocity and a token of gratitude, I offered these participants a small monetary incentive after each interview that took place after the study was underway.

3.1.4.3 Ethical considerations

Any research involving human participants necessarily requires careful thought and consideration of ethical issues. This is even more the case when a researcher is conducting a

study that involves refugee participants (Hynes, 2003; Mackey & Gass, 2005; McBrien, 2005a). Hynes (2003) is particularly concerned with studies that interview refugees solely for the sake of academic research and asks that we decide “whether we research *for*, *on*, or *with* refugees” (p. 14). I would like to believe that I did my research *with* refugees and that, in collaborating with me in my endeavor, my participants and I co-constructed the product that became my doctoral dissertation. As I disseminate the findings of my research in different venues, I hope to contribute knowledge that can go beyond academic research circles. By providing a better understanding of the literacy experiences refugee students go through in their first year of college, I hope to offer useful information for college professors and admissions offices, as well as for high school teachers, who are responsible for preparing students for college. At a more local level, I have used knowledge I gained in this study to fulfill my role as a board member in the new refugee teen girl school, particularly focusing my contributions on curriculum and assessment of language and literacy. As for the participants of this study themselves, I believe they benefitted from participating in this project since our interviews served as moments of reflection that helped them think of different coping strategies they could use to deal with the literacy challenges they were facing.

Member checking is sometimes discussed in the data analysis section of research reports, but I chose to include it here because of the collaborative component it entails. After I finished transcribing all the interviews, I emailed each participant asking whether he or she would like to have a copy of their transcripts. Four of the seven participants wanted to see theirs. After I finished writing the results chapters, I emailed them again inviting them individually to meet with me at Hope College so that we could go over the parts of my dissertation in which I discuss their experiences. Three of them met with me for about an hour each. A fourth one mentioned

that he was interested, but, unfortunately, had no time available during the semester. In each of these member checking meetings, I read aloud the profile of the participant I was meeting with to confirm that the information I had there was correct. There was only one discrepancy pointed out by a participant, which I rectified. All three participants wanted to have a copy of their profile, with one of them mentioning that she wanted to have it to show it to her brother. After reading the participant profile, I read parts of chapters five and six, which discuss reading and writing practices, respectively, focusing on sections in which the participant I was meeting with figured more prominently. After I presented my findings, I asked the participants whether he or she had any comments to make. One of the participants wanted to know about the availability of my report, seeming a little worried about Hope College, and perhaps specific professors, reading it. I explained that the dissertation will be available online and that anybody will be able to have access to it. I also explained that pseudonyms were used throughout the report and that, in the more sensitive cases, I tried my best to give as much information about the circumstances as possible, so that the reader can better understand what happened. She seemed reassured by my explanations. By presenting and discussing the results of my analysis with my participants I hoped to bring my interpretation closer to the participants' emic views (Duff, 2008). More importantly, I see member checking as reinforcing the idea that the research is done *with* the students and that the end product is also partly their product.

To safeguard my participants' confidentiality, each student participant chose a pseudonym that is used throughout this report while faculty participants are referred to as "the instructor for [course xxx]." I realize that these measures may not be enough to keep participants anonymous if one is familiar with the context, considering that there is only one instructor for ENG 095, for example, or just one refugee student from Rwanda. I have thus been very careful

when writing the report to make sure that what I write will not be detrimental or too uncomfortable to any participant while, at the same time, I tried to remain as truthful to the data as possible. One measure I have taken each time I discussed what I perceived as a more sensitive incident was to provide as much information about the surrounding circumstances as possible so that neither the incident nor the participants involved would be judged out of context.

Lastly, this research follows the rules for protection of human subjects as dictated by the institutional review boards of my university and Hope College. Appendix A contains the approved informed consent form for the focal participants, Appendix B contains the approved admissions data release form, and Appendix C contains the approved informed consent form for the faculty participants.

3.2 Data Collection

In order to investigate the academic literacy experiences my participants went through in their first year of college, I have used three main forms of data collection: interviews, observations, and written documents. The different sources of data contributed to the process of triangulation, which has as its main goal the investigation of “the research problem from different perspectives in order to provide possibly more complex and ideally more valid insights” (Duff, 2008, p. 144).

3.2.1 Interviews

Interviews were used throughout the current study as a major instrument of data collection. As Denzin and Lincoln (1998) point out, an interview is not a neutral tool; rather, it “produces situated understandings grounded in specific interactional episodes” (p. 36). As such, it may be more accurate to say that interviews are a method of *generating* data, rather than *collecting* data (Mason, 1996). Fontana and Frey (2000) explain that, traditionally, interviews

were seen as a way of accessing (or collecting) “an objective knowledge out there” (p. 663). More currently, however, interviews are seen as “negotiated accomplishments” (Fontana & Frey, 2000) or “a co-construction” (Mann, 2011) of both interviewers and interviewees that are shaped by the contexts in which they take place. Talmy (2010) calls the traditional conceptualization of the interview as “interview as research instrument”, contrasting it with “research interview as social practice.” The view assumed in this study is that interviews are a collaborative endeavor between interviewer and interviewees, a perspective that is close to Talmy’s “interview as social practice.” I am well aware that what my participants shared with me in our interviews was influenced by the fact that they were sharing it with me, and not with a different interviewer who might have established different rapport with them. Because of this epistemological stance, triangulation becomes even more important. Even though interviews were the primary source of data, I have relied on different methods of data collection to add rigor to this investigation.

The seven focal participants were interviewed face-to-face and individually eight times during their first academic year: four times in Fall 2009 and four times in Spring 2010. These interviews were semi-structured (Merriam, 1998). The first interview was slightly different from the others in that it contained background questions, including participants’ previous education in their home countries and in the U.S. It also covered participants’ experiences in the Bridge Program over the summer and their expectations for the first year of college. From the second interview onwards, more specific questions were asked to follow up on previous interviews. In each interview, students were asked to share assignments they had received feedback on as well as assignments they were working on. All the interviews included questions regarding reading and writing practices students encountered in the courses they were taking, the challenges they faced, and the resources and strategies they used to complete assignments (see Appendix D for

the interview guide for students). These interviews lasted an average of 55 minutes, ranging from 30 to 90 minutes.

Faculty participants were interviewed once in the second half of the semester. These interviews were semi-structured and focused on the reading and writing assignments required in their courses as well as on their perceptions of how the focal participants dealt with these requirements (see Appendix E for the interview guide for faculty). Faculty interviews always followed the classroom observations. The only class I observed, but was not able to interview the professor for was Economics 110, and the only faculty member I interviewed more than once was the instructor for ENG 095. I interviewed her twice in Fall 2009, when she taught the ENG 095 course, and once in Spring 2010. I decided to do recurrent interviews with her because, of all faculty, she was the one who had the most contact with all the focal participants. During the summer Bridge Program, as the Academic Support Director, she had weekly meetings with them. In Fall 2009, she taught the ENG 095 course, which all seven participants took. In Spring 2010, she helped several of the participants with editing and proofreading essays. Faculty interviews lasted an average of 50 minutes, ranging from 30 to 97 minutes.

Besides interviews with focal participants and faculty participants, I also interviewed the Director of Admissions and Vice-President for Enrolment at Hope College, both of whom provided me with information regarding the admissions process of the seven participants of this study. I also interviewed the student who was my participants' Religions tutor in the summer and mentor in the fall and spring semesters, as well as "Elizabeth," the writing tutor my participants had in spring.

In total, there were 75 interviews. All the interviews were audio recorded using a small Sony digital recorder, model ICD-SX700. The audio files were then copied to a personal

computer and transcribed in full, using the SoundScriber software. I personally transcribed all the interviews with focal participants whereas the interviews with faculty were transcribed by two other people and revised by me.

3.2.2 Classroom observations

The courses taught by the faculty participants in which the focal participants were students were observed once in the second half of each semester. My role in these events was that of an observer (Adler & Adler, 1998), sitting in an unobtrusive position, taking field notes. As Adler and Adler (1998) point out, observation can be particularly useful when combined with other data collection methods, enhancing triangulation.

My focus in these observations was mainly on instructor's and students' verbal and non-verbal behavior, interaction between instructor and students, and instructor's style of teaching (e.g., teacher fronted-lectures, whole group discussion). I took notes on seating arrangements, and where in the classroom my participants sat. I also paid particular attention to my participants' interactions in class, either speaking to the instructor or to peers. When lectures were given, I took notes as I would as a student, and later compared my notes to the ones taken by my participants.

These classroom observations provided me with a different perspective on my participants' experience in college, enhancing triangulation. Even though I observed only one class for each course, I believe this was enough to give me an overall idea of what classes for each specific course were like. In the interview with faculty after the class observation, I always asked the instructor whether the class I observed could be considered typical, which was often the case. In addition, each time I met with my focal participants after I had observed one of their

classes, they would inevitably bring up the observation, asking if I had noticed whatever aspect of the instructor's behavior they had mentioned to me during our interviews.

3.2.3 Written documents

Throughout the two semesters of data collection, different types of documents related to the various courses were collected. These included course syllabi, writing assignment prompts and guidelines, students' writing samples, tests, and feedback on writing. Some selected readings (articles or textbooks) were also collected including those my participants found particularly challenging, the ones that were covered in lectures when I observed classes, and the ones my participants read for writing assignments. These written documents further contributed to data triangulation. As they were compared with students' interview data, areas of discrepancies generated follow-up interview questions. This was particularly the case when participants received feedback on written assignments that were not consistent with what they were expecting.

Collected documents also include my research journal, wherein I took notes of my "impressions, questions, emerging themes, decision making or any other issues that arise" (Duff, 2008, p. 142). I initially had a spiral notebook which I used to write down classroom observation notes, my impressions, initial analysis, and thoughts, as well as notes on interviews and follow-up questions. As the spring semester started, I bought a laptop computer, which I used for all note-taking, except the classroom observation notes, which I still did in my notebook. For my notes in my computer, I used the Microsoft OneNote software, which allowed me to have a separate folder for each participant and, within each folder, separate pages for each topic.

3.2.4 A note on data collection

As Harklau (2008) rightfully points out, an issue that is rarely discussed in research reports and which is quite pervasive in longitudinal naturalistic research is that of data “messiness.” I feel fortunate that I was able to interview each participant eight times, as planned, but because I basically depended on them to bring me their essays and feedback they got from professors, the type of written documents I was able to collect for each participant varied widely. Some participants were very organized and brought me their exams and several samples of their writing, as requested, while others brought me very little, claiming that they lost their papers or, in moments of frustration, simply threw them away. As Harklau (2008) explains, gaps and irregularities in the data tend to be compensated for by the longitudinal aspect of a case study.

The fact that I was able to keep the interview schedule might make the data collection process seem deceptively simple. Nothing could be farther from the truth. It is worth mentioning that, during the process of data collection, which lasted about nine months, I exchanged over 700 emails with the focal participants and faculty at Hope College, most of them trying to arrange interviews and class observations as well as sending reminders of scheduled meetings. In most of the emails I exchanged with the focal participants, I would remind them of material I would like them to bring to the next interview. Some of the participants were very prompt replying to my emails while others took a long time to respond, or never did. When focal participants did not reply to my emails, I sometimes sent them text messages on their cell phones or messages on Facebook. At other times, and because I was on the Hope campus so often, I would run into them at lunch time in the cafeteria and arrange the next meeting in person. Throughout the data collection period, I was always worried that a participant might drop out of the study, or that they would not bring me enough documents. I must say I felt quite relieved when I finished collecting

data and realized that I had been able to interview each participant eight times, and that I had amassed piles of written documents.

3.3 Data analysis

As is typical of qualitative research, data analysis in this multiple-case study was on-going, recursive, inductive and data driven (Duff, 2008; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Throughout the data collection period, I read my notes and the written documents multiple times. I also listened to each interview several times while preparing follow-up questions or transcribing. In particular, each time I drove the almost hour and a half between my house and Hope College I tried to use the time to listen to the recordings of previous interviews. As Duff (2008) points out, “from the earliest data collection and transcription stages, [...] data analysis is already taking place” (p. 159).

After I had transcribed most of the interviews, I started the coding process. Following Mackey and Gass (2005, p. 241), the data was initially analyzed through a process of “open coding” in which I looked for “anything pertinent to the research question or problem, also bearing in mind that new insights and observations that are not derived from the research question or literature review may be important.” Because I was not sure what would turn out to be relevant for the way my participants’ negotiated literacy practices in college, and because I thought it would take me too much time to decide whether each topic in the interviews might eventually be important or not, I decided to code all the lines of all the interviews. This coding process was extremely time-consuming and quite tedious, but, after it was done, it made the enormous amount of interview data much more manageable and, most importantly, easily searchable. I used the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti to organize my coding. Even though learning to use the software required a significant time investment, it was certainly a very

useful tool for organizing data, coding and storing memos. As Séror (2005) claims, this type of software can “facilitate the mechanical steps in the process of analysis” (p. 323). Even though Atlas.ti has many different possibilities for data analysis, and I did spend some time trying to learn those to see how useful they could be, I ended up deciding not to use these more sophisticated features because I thought the learning curve was not worth it, and I could not really see any added benefits in using them. I essentially used Atlas.ti for coding and memoing. It may be worth mentioning that I did all the coding and memoing myself, just using the software to record and keep track of them. In other words, I did not do any automatic coding, which I thought would not be adequate for the kind of qualitative analysis I was engaged in doing.

Because I used open coding, I ended up with almost 200 codes. Clearly, if it were not for the software, I would not have been able to keep track of these. At the same time, if it were not for the software, I would probably have been more conservative coming up with different codes. I used codes for different purposes. I had several codes that referred to what the speakers were saying. Examples of codes in this category that occurred frequently are:

- anxiety/insecurity/stress/tired
- asking for clarification/help (or not)
- classroom practices
- comments on professor
- confused/unprepared
- explanation for poor performance
- grades
- interactions with professor (or not)
- note taking/highlighting

- professor's feedback
- resorting to others
- study guide
- tests/exams/quizzes
- working with tutor/mentor
- writing assignment
- writing center
- writing process

I had different codes for each of the courses that required a significant amount of reading and writing such as ENG101, ANT200, GOV211 and SOC200. I had a code for each of the participants, which was used each time a participant was mentioned by another participant or by a professor. I also had codes to identify what I was doing in the interviews. Examples of these are: requesting material (which was used 202 times!), researcher clarification, and research procedures. I also had separate codes for the faculty interviews such as faculty: comments on participants, faculty: reading, and faculty: writing.

For each section of an interview, usually more than one code was assigned. For the section reproduced in Figure 3.1, for example, the following codes were assigned:

- ECO 110
- grades: expectations vs actual
- multiple choice
- strengths/self-confidence
- tests/exams/quizzes
- weakness/difficulty

E: Huh. Were you surprised by the grade?

So: Super surprised cause I felt like I did good. But on the essay writing part, I did good, like cause the essay writing part was 14 points and I got 12 in one of them and I got 11. And he said like to get 14 is really difficulty. You have like 12 everything. So, in the writing part I did good, but the problem is,

E: So it was the multiple choice, the essay and what was the other part?

So: Writing short answers.

E: Short answers, okay. And what did you get in that one?

So: I did good, cause that's where my strength is cause I like writing down what I think instead of looking and, I hate multiple choice, I just, I never do good in multiple choice, it's something I have to really work on hard.

E: Especially because all the tests are going to be like that, right?

So: Yeah. And his questions, oh my God, he will twist them around and it's like the same thing, but just, this was ridiculous.

Figure 3.1 Extract of interview

As analysis progressed, I started “examining the data for emergent patterns and themes” (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 241) by recursively going through the data. The search options available in Atlas.ti made the process of revisiting the data somewhat more focused and efficient. For example, when I started to look for patterns in reading challenges, I went back to the interviews searching for all instances of the following codes: reading difficulty, reading load, reading process, and reading to write.

Interviews were a major source of data in this investigation, and they gave me important insights into the participants' perceptions of their literacy experiences (an emic perspective). Other themes, however, emerged mainly through the analysis of the written documents. These themes were often different from the ones voiced by my participants. I believe that by reporting on both types of themes, I can better address the research questions. As Leki (2007) explains:

In analyzing the data, rather than detailing only the research participants' emic perspectives and limiting this report to the themes that were the most salient for them, I elected to also elaborate certain themes that will be, I believe, of most use and interest to writing teacher/researchers. (p. 8)

Each of the seven case studies were first analyzed individually and then a comparative cross-case analysis was done (Duff, 2008). Whereas the individual cases yielded insights into the particular experiences each participant went through, the comparative cross-case analysis pointed to "important theoretical questions and connections" (Lea & Street, 1998) regarding the literacy experiences refugee students go through in their first year of college.

3.4 Trustworthiness

In any research, specific steps need to be taken so that the reader can judge the trustworthiness of the study. As Merriam (1998) claims, in qualitative research, what matters is not whether "outsiders get the same results," but, rather, whether "outsiders [...] concur that, given the data collected, the results make sense – they are consistent and dependable" (p. 206). According to Guba (1981), there are four aspects to trustworthiness in naturalistic inquiry: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Following Guba (1981) the subsequent steps were taken to increase trustworthiness in the current study. Issues of credibility were dealt with by doing triangulation (see data collection section) and member checks (see the ethical considerations section). To enhance transferability, thick descriptions were provided so that other contexts can be compared to the context of this study. In terms of dependability, I used a research journal to leave an audit trail, so that my decision-making process and development of interpretations can be retraced. Lastly, confirmability was sought through triangulation and the practice of reflexivity. Practicing

reflexivity involves acknowledging and recording researcher biases, values, beliefs, preconceptions and misconceptions. In a qualitative study “the personal-self becomes inseparable from the researcher-self” (Creswell, 2003, p. 182). Some aspects of this personal reflection are presented in the researcher’s role section above.

CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPANT PROFILES: MEET SEVEN REMARKABLE PEOPLE

Despite the fact that all seven participants came to the United States as refugees, their life stories vary widely in many ways. The short portraits below aim at introducing each of them individually beyond the demographic information given in the methodology section. The content of each introduction is a summary of what I have learned about them during the year we worked together, and an attempt to bring these participants to life. In each portrait, I will be sharing some information about their lives before coming to the States, their transition to the American educational system, and, most importantly, aspects of their life and personality that I believe make them stand out from the other participants. Needless to say, each portrait is a reflection of the way I personally see them and a result of what they chose to share with me regarding the different aspects of their lives. The descriptions are also influenced by knowledge I have gained about them through informal interviews and conversations I have had with other people who have interacted with them.

4.1 Yar Zar

That's what I love to do: networking, connections, like I'm trying to climb as high as I can, that's what I've always been doing, even in high school. (Yar Zar, interview 8)

Yar Zar's description of himself could not be more accurate and indicates he is paving the way to fulfilling his dream of becoming a US ambassador in Burma. As he stated in his admissions essay, "I hope to help restore democracy back in Burma one day. I would like to put a smile on the faces of citizens in Burma. I want them to know that their years of nightmares have come to an end." Most of the other participants have also expressed wishes to help people in their home countries, but Yar Zar's loftier goals seem to set him apart.

From our very first interview, Yar Zar has always interacted with me in a manner that was slightly different from the ways the other participants interacted with me. In fact, as we were starting our first interview, he asked whether he could record our conversations because he thought it would be interesting to listen to them in the future. He was the only one to make such a request throughout the study. In general, instead of simply assuming the role of interviewee, he would sometimes invert the roles and ask me a question or make a remark indicating that he viewed me more as a peer and, our interviews, more as conversations between friends. For example, when I asked him how he thought his previous education affected who he was as an undergraduate student, he prefaced his answer by saying, “Good question. You should get an A plus on it.”

In line with his interest in networking, Yar Zar often showed an awareness of the image he was building for himself. For example, in his first semester at college, the message on his cell phone was very informal and quite teenage-like starting with “Hi, guys, this is Yar Zar, you know the drill”. In Spring 2010, however, he had changed his message to a more impersonal and somewhat mature one. When I asked him about this change, he said he wanted to sound more professional and that he was giving up his high school message. Also, I found it interesting that, out of all the participants, Yar Zar was the only one who showed reluctance before criticizing a professor for fear of eventual repercussions my report could have. He was telling me how he was stressed out with this specific class because he had not done well in an exam. As he was starting to mention how he thought the professor could have been more helpful, he interrupted his train of thought and asked, “Wait, is Hope College gonna see this, the story that you’re gonna write?” I answered affirmatively, but reassured him that I would do my best to ensure anonymity so as not to put anybody in a difficult position. He then said he was fine sharing his views with me.

Yar Zar is the participant who has been in the U.S. the longest time and he is the only one who came directly from his home country to the U.S. His father had already been here for about three years before he came with his mother and siblings at the age of 12. Anticipating their move to the U.S., his parents sent him, their eldest child, to a top private school in Burma for a summer semester and 6th grade. According to Yar Zar, this private school followed a western style, with teachers from different countries like England, Denmark and Turkey. The medium of instruction was English and this was also the language that was used to interact with the foreign students who, as he mentioned, could be the children of an ambassador. After five years getting top grades in public school, Yar Zar said adapting to this new, private school was very hard. From A's and B's, his grades plunged to D's and F's. Still, he managed to learn some English and, in his admissions essay, Yar Zar wrote about the significance of this knowledge in bringing his family to the States.

Out of all four of us, I was the only one who spoke a little broken English. When we left the Burmese Airport, I came to the realization that I must show some initiative and help lead the family to my dad, who was already in the United States. Of course, I was terrified, but I dared not show it. I said to myself that my parents have invested thousands of Kyats (Burmese money) in me to learn English at a private school, and it was time to show my parents that I would not let them down. [...] The journey to America had certainly turned me from a boy who was [...] carefree playing soccer in the street [...] into a mature young man. (Yar Zar, admissions essay)

Yar Zar's parents both have Bachelor's Degrees from Burma and currently hold jobs that, if not totally compatible with their qualifications, at least do not belong to the lower level jobs most refugees end up doing and which Yar Zar's father did when he first arrived in the States.

He still has a grandfather in Burma, who is an engineer and works for the government. This family background seems to indicate that, were it not for political reasons and the need for his family to seek refuge in another country, they might have enjoyed a comfortable life in their home country.

Once in the States, Yar Zar started school in 6th grade. Out of all the participants, he is the only one without, or with a minimal, interruption in education. After three years in a public middle school, he got a scholarship to go to a top private high school. This privileged education certainly helps explain his self-confidence and aspirations. Learning about Yar Zar's life, it is not difficult to understand the emphasis he places on networking and connections, as stated in the opening quotation of this profile. It was through a good connection, Ms. Laura, that he ended up obtaining his high school scholarship, and it was through the same connection that he, and eventually the other six participants, came to be on the radar of the Admissions Office at Hope College. This is not to say that Yar Zar does not have his own merit in these opportunities. Quite the contrary, it is most probably because of his hard work and engaging personality that Ms. Laura went out of her way to help him on these two separate occasions. In his words, "Ms. Laura, [...], you know, she's always a connection."

Having graduated from a top private high school clearly affected the way Yar Zar experienced academic literacy in college, setting him apart from the other participants. In his opinion, college and high school were similar in many ways, with the main difference being that college is "high school, just on a larger scale" (Yar Zar, interview 8). Throughout our interviews, as we discussed literacy practices in college, he mentioned several times how he had engaged in similar practices in high school. For example, when discussing the papers he had to write in college, he said, "I'm so used to writing papers like, throughout high school, we had to write tons

of papers, so like I'm just used to that" (Yar Zar, interview 8). This experience was clearly very different from the other participants'. His confidence in his academic preparedness having graduated from such a challenging high school was such that he attributed his low grade in his first exam at college to the fact that he had underestimated college and had not prepared himself enough for the exam. In his words, "Well, at first I thought [college] was going to be very easy, like you know high school style, [...] and I [...] underestimated the exam, you know, this should be easy, I shouldn't have a problem with it and I went in unprepared." After this event, Yar Zar seemed to have realized he needed to work harder in college and adjusted his study habits accordingly.

In his first year at college, he completed 37 credits, earning several A's and B's in courses such as World Religions, Introduction to Sociology, and First Semester Freshman Composition. Unlike several of the other participants, Yar Zar stated he hates math and had his hardest time and lowest grades in the two math courses he took. In line with his overall career ambition, he declared his major as International Relations. Despite the number of years in American schools, however, Yar Zar claims he is still scared of English grammar, but admits that, at this point, he is more comfortable reading and writing in English than in his native Burmese, which he doesn't have much contact with anymore. He also knows some Chinese, which he learned in high school

Yar Zar's ambition and drive, coupled with a responsible and engaging attitude, did not go unnoticed by Hope College. In Spring 2010, he was invited to become a Presidential Ambassador, representing Hope College and welcoming potential students to their campus. Also in that semester, Yar Zar applied for and got the coveted position of Resident Assistant (RA) to start in his sophomore year. He explains his interest in this position by saying that "it's more

like, you know, leadership type of thing, responsibilities, if I have to compare with what I want to do in the future, it's more related than just working in the alumni office [his job in his first year]" (Yar Zar, interview 5). Besides the alignment with his career interests, Yar Zar repeated a couple of times that the RA position is "the dream job that everyone wants on campus" (Yar Zar, interview 8). It involved status, a private room in the college dormitory, and higher pay. His excitement with the RA position is quite similar to Jan's, one of Leki's (2007) participants. In Jan's case, becoming an RA was one of the turning points in his college career, providing him "with an important step toward social integration" (Leki, 2007, p. 133). Unlike Jan, Yar Zar seemed to fit in college from the very beginning and because he became an RA after this study was over I was not able to track how this new position affected him.

4.2 Arezo

Can't wait to see my mommy this wednesday... going home for a night to see her before she leave to go to pakistan.....plus this essays that i have due on thursday and friday it is killing me.... oh well i have to see my mom i don't care about my papers... (Arezo, Facebook posting, April 27th)

This quote may give the reader the impression that Arezo did not prioritize or work hard on college assignments. This could not be further from the truth. As much as any of the other participants, or perhaps even a tad more, Arezo worked diligently day after day after day to be a successful college student, showing tremendous maturity and integrity. What this quote does, however, is truthfully portray the importance she (as well as Sabrina and Tabasum) give to family life. In most of our interviews, she would mention her family and it was evident that her family was an essential part of her life as much as she was an essential part of her family life. Of

all the participants, she was the one who would come back home more frequently and, since she had a car, she would often drive some of the other participants with her.

The fourth of eight children, Arezo is the first one in her family to attend college. Both her parents are uneducated. When she was about nine years old, the whole family left Afghanistan to go to Pakistan. In this journey, two of her older brothers got separated from the rest of the family and they were reunited only many years later when the family was already in the U.S. As she describes in her admissions essay, life in Pakistan was hard. Besides going to school, she helped her mother with chores such as making bread early in the morning and preparing dough late at night. She would also help hand wash the family clothes on Fridays, when there was no school, and, in the afternoons till late evening, she would sew to help her mother's work. In the straightforward, accepting manner that I learned to appreciate as I got to know Arezo better, she says, simply, "Most of my friends lived the same way as me."

She first started going to school in Afghanistan, but did not complete a full year there. While in Pakistan, she attended school for five years, where she learned to read and write Farsi. She also learned some Urdu and Pashto there. Before coming to the States, she learned English for a brief period of time mainly becoming familiar with the alphabet and some basic English expressions. Once in the States, she started school at the end of 6th grade. She clearly worked hard throughout middle and high school, graduating with a GPA of 3.4. As part of her effort to succeed in school, she attended a Saturday School, where she was able to find tutors to help her with homework. That's where I first met her.

Unlike Yar Zar, Arezo did not receive the same level of academic literacy preparation that a top private high school can provide. For example, when comparing writing in high school and college, she mentions, "I don't know, like college writing is very different from high school

writing. Like in high school, our teacher always make us write a lot of essays, like my English teacher, and all the essays was like 5-paragraph essay and I never learned any other way how to write paper that's longer than 5-paragraph essay" (Arezo, interview 4). Of all my participants, Arezo seems to be the one that more closely fits the description of an "ear" learner (Reid, 1998), that is, an ESL learner that acquired English mostly by listening and taking in oral language with the result that reading skills are weak and writing more closely resembles written oral language. Evidence of this aspect of her language use is the virtual absence of punctuation and capitalization in her writing (as can be seen in the opening extract of this section) and her stated preference for listening rather than reading. When explaining the difficulty she was having understanding the articles for her World Issues class, she says,

I read the article, it's like I read, I don't understand, I can read, but I don't understand what's going on, it's not like, some people can read and understand, just like they are watching a movie or somebody is telling them a story, but, for me, I just read, I don't understand. (Arezo, interview 1)

When talking about the transition from high school to college, it is not surprising that, differently from Yar Zar, who viewed the latter as basically a continuation of the former, Arezo mentions that she did not feel well prepared. Rather, she says, "I was kind of scared like before I go to college I was like I don't know how I'm gonna deal with this stuff, it's gonna be hard, I don't know if I can do it" (Arezo, interview 1). However, after she started college, she realized that college classes were in some ways similar to the more challenging classes she had taken at high school such as her Physics AP class. As a contrast and evidence of self-development in her first year of college, Arezo showed a great deal more of self-confidence in her final interview,

saying, “I think that if anyone else can deal with this college hard work, I can do it too” (Arezo, interview 8).

Such a stark difference in self-perception undoubtedly came as a result of very hard work in this first year of college. Being as cooperative and generous as I could ever wish a research participant to be, Arezo would bring me drafts and drafts of her written work. For one of her Freshman Composition essays, I gathered seven different drafts, each of them with written feedback from a tutor, the instructor, or her former ENG 095 instructor. Of all the participants, Arezo is the one who got the most assistance from her ENG 095 instructor, who also happened to be one of her bosses. The physical proximity and the fact that she was often not too busy in her work allowed her to take full advantage of the offer for help that the ENG 095 instructor had extended to all the participants.

Throughout her first year in college, Arezo completed 38 credits, earning several A’s and B’s in courses such as Applied Calculus, Speech, and First Semester Freshman Composition. In many ways, Yar Zar and Arezo had opposite strengths and weaknesses. Yar Zar hated and struggled with math while Arezo enjoyed and thrived in her math classes. On the other hand, Yar Zar loved writing while Arezo did not enjoy it. Before going to college, Arezo thought she would like to follow a career in medicine. She says, “Since I was little, I just wanted to work in a hospital and I wanted to help sick people.” After starting college, however, she realized how much work and money was involved in becoming a doctor, and she started considering a major in nursing. At that time, her advisor pointed out to her how much she was good at and enjoyed math, and suggested she considered a major in accounting, which she ended up settling for, with a double major in finance.

Throughout the data collection period, Arezo was a wonderful research participant. She is, by far, the one who has given me the most written material and she could always be trusted to respond to emails promptly. She also seems to have enjoyed the research process the most, mentioning a couple of times that she enjoyed talking to me. I never felt like our interviews were a disruption to her busy life, a sensation I sometimes had with the other participants. In our informal conversations, I always felt at ease asking her questions about being a refugee, or about her culture. She was always straightforward in her answers and did not seem to mind my curiosity at all. I often had lunch with her in the college cafeteria and, in most of these occasions, Solange would join us. After the study was over, we have kept in touch, seeing each other at least once a semester. I have been invited to her house more than once and, on these occasions, I have met different members of her family and have had the privilege of learning more about the Afghan culture. Each time we meet, she gives me an update on her progress at Hope College and a brief update on the other participants. Even though the seven members of the initial cohort do not meet frequently as a group anymore, they seem to get together every now and then to go for a walk on campus or enjoy a movie together.

4.3 Kayhan

I feel like I'm the man, totally, like you just feel like comfort zone, people were like saying "college is hard and stuff", look at me right now, I'm a freaking college student. I can do anything I want. I can go back to my high school and like show off, show myself off.

(Kayhan, interview 8)

Kayhan has always been a little bit of an enigma to me, and I feel I never really got to know him. At times, he would seem quiet, stressed out, somewhat withdrawn, and, at other times, sometimes during the same interview, he displayed a level of self-confidence that seemed

overrated and incongruent with the perception I had of him. The quote above is one such example. I attribute these inconsistencies much to his own struggles to construct a new identity as a college student. Among the male participants, Kayhan happened to be not as socially successful as Yar Zar or Musa. Hard, or unfair, as it is, I don't think he, or the other people that have raised the issue with me, could avoid the comparison. Yar Zar and Musa were tall, athletic, outgoing, popular with girls, and often surrounded by friends. Kayhan was not quite like that. He would tell me he liked "hanging out" with just about anyone, and that he was always with Musa and Yar Zar, but I always saw him by himself around campus.

In different parts of our last interview, I was able to have a better idea of the types of social troubles Kayhan was facing in college. The extract below is quite telling. My question was related to the issue of cultural identity and whether he felt that a year in college had affected the way he viewed himself. He started disparaging the United States, saying that, before coming here, his parents had a dream that this would be the "greatest country ever", and that they "didn't know it was going to be trash place." He then moved on to criticize American college students, whom he considered to be immature.

K: It's just immature level, they don't even know how to talk to people. I mean, and then they look at you when you tuck in your shirt like "are you a nerd or something?"
like...

E: They say that?

K: Oh, they do.

E: Wow.

K: So, (?) right now, I'm not tucking in my shirt anymore. I'm just laid back dude, you know. (Kayhan, interview 8)

The extract above shows that even though he perceives his peers' attitude as immature, he feels under pressure to conform, which he does in this case. In other situations, however, he chose to stick with his beliefs, even though he realized this may be costing him friendships. He mentioned specifically that his not drinking affected how others viewed him. In his mind, people would not want to befriend him and say, "he doesn't drink, he's a nerd, he's another dude, lame dude, just sitting down, always studying, no, he's boring." He mentioned the other refugee students were more understanding, "They know that I do not drink and they understand it, and they are still friends saying, 'hey, we're all the same, we're on the same page, dude, you don't drink as me, but we can be friends. Because you don't drink, that's not a big deal. You don't drink, you don't drink, who cares?'"

It is plausible that, at least among the members of the cohort, Kayhan tried to make up for his social awkwardness by constructing an image of a more self-reliant student, who was less dependent on tutors and peers to proofread his writing. The fact that he resorted to others less often did seem to make an impression on the other participants, who, at least according to Kayhan, started asking him to proofread their papers. He says, "I was reading all their papers the whole time cause they were like 'hey, Kayhan, you don't need anybody's help on the papers and you get good grades, why don't you go proofread my paper?'"

While it was true that his grades were fine, they were often not as good as the other participants', a fact that did not seem to bother him. While the other participants were doing their best to get A's in the essays for Freshman Composition, for example, Kayhan seemed satisfied with his low B's or an eventual C. Even though he acknowledged he had problems with grammar, he was not concerned about turning in a paper that had language problems, especially

because he would often get good, or at least passing, grades. The exchange below illustrates this point.

E: And did you get any help to do this essay [for the Psychology class]?

K: No. He doesn't really care about grammar, he's like "I couldn't care less, it's not an English class, I just want you, the information I want to see" and I did pretty good in my last one, so, I can do it. He just cares about the examples, that kind of thing.

E: Okay, so you didn't ask anybody to proofread or anything?

K: No, he doesn't really care. The last one, I got a good grade on it, and I didn't even edit my paper. (Kayhan, interview 8)

From the beginning of our interviews, Kayhan would always talk about what professors wanted or expected from students. He would always say things like "that's what the professor wants" or "the professor wants to see this", and, as much as possible, he worked towards meeting those expectations. Improving his language can therefore be understood as being beyond what most content area professors expected and, thus, not worth his time or effort.

The eldest of four sons, Kayhan is the first in his family to go to college. His parents are both high school graduates. The family left Afghanistan to go to Pakistan when Kayhan was about one year old. He attended school in Pakistan for four years, where he learned to read and write in Farsi as well as some basic English. Kayhan also learned Urdu while living there. After 4th grade, his family moved and stayed briefly in Iran before relocating to Azerbaijan, where an uncle was already living. They stayed there for almost two years, during which Kayhan did not go to school. Upon arrival in the U.S., Kayhan resumed his education in 7th grade. Of his interrupted education, he says, "I skipped two grades, but er I was er it's obviously hard when you don't have an education for almost two years, it's really hard because er, I mean, you forget

everything you knew back, I mean, I forgot a lot of things I knew in Pakistan” (Kayhan, interview 4).

In his first year of college, Kayhan completed 34 credits and declared his major as Exercise Science. He seemed quite sure about his decision and always sounded very enthusiastic when he talked about the potential jobs he could have with this major. I was therefore surprised when he emailed me in Spring 2011 letting me know he had changed his major to Psychology, unfortunately without explaining the reasons behind such a change. He has earned several A’s and B’s in his first year, in courses such as Nutrition, Speech and Cultural Anthropology.

As a research participant, Kayhan was not easy to work with. To start, I often found him difficult to understand because of his stutters and fast speech. Not wanting to interrupt him each time I got a little lost, I would often let him talk, hoping to make sense of his speech as he continued. As a result, his interview transcripts have several question marks signaling the words I could not make out. Other times, I was not able to follow his thought because he would jump from one topic or referent to another without my noticing it. There are numerous instances in our interviews when I had to check what he was talking about. Lastly, our interaction was often stalled because he would not understand what I was saying, or would not respond appropriately. The exchange below is an illustration of such an interaction.

E: And [the professor] also leaves past papers in the reserves at the library.

K: Yes. She does. I think we just have one.

E: Have you looked at these papers at all?

K: The e-reserves? Yes. That’s where we look (?) one of my friends I think (?) the Bridge students, they went to e-reserves and I basically started reading with those guys, so.

E: Yeah, but I think, I'm not sure if her past papers are on e-reserves, I think they are just on reserve, they are not, you cannot access them through the computer, you have to go to the library to look at them.

K: Yeah.

E: Have you done that?

K: Erm... sort of, but then I had the exam, this one, that thing er one of my friends kind of printed out, the paper out, so I just read it from there.

E: Do you remember for which essay it was, if it was for the leisure essay or for the applying...

K: Erm, it was basically something from the book, we were just discussing something and she just said "okay, this article, I have on e-reserves, you should read that and tomorrow we'll discuss it." [...]

E: Oh, no, but I'm talking about something different. Do you know that [the professor] leaves past essays, these types of essays in the library for you to look at as an example?

K: Hm, I don't think so.

E: No, I'm telling you for sure. She does. It's on her syllabus.

K: Yes? (Kayhan, interview 3)

After 14 turns, I seem to be able to get his attention to focus on what I was trying to tell him – that the professor had left past papers on reserve at the library. Even then, I am not quite sure he understood what I was telling him. In the material I have collected from him, there were a few instances in which he seems to have misunderstood guidelines (an illustration of this can be found below, when I discuss reading challenges). This could potentially point to a problem

with language comprehension. However, these misunderstandings were occasional and, even if more frequent than one would expect, still certainly not the norm, which led me to believe they were more probably a result of lack of attention and focus.

Another difficulty that I had with Kayhan was his lack of organization. During the first semester of data collection, he kept forgetting to bring writing samples, despite my constant requests and reminders. In our first interview in the Spring semester, he told me that he had left all the Fall material he was going to give to me in a box in his dormitory room. According to his account, when he came back from winter break, he found that the box was gone – his roommate had allegedly thrown the box away, saying that “it was making the room messy” (Kayhan, interview 5). As a result, I do not have any writing sample from his first semester. At first, I believed his story about the roommate, but, as the spring semester progressed and I noticed other instances of his disorganization, I started to doubt him. Among other things, he forgot to take a few of the psychology quizzes online, he forgot to write and turn in one of the psychology papers, and he lost one of the graded essays for ENG 101, which he was supposed to turn in with the other essays in a portfolio at the end of the semester.

4.4 Tabasum

I try hard like whenever I have English paper I don't sleep like for a week and I work on that. [...] I go to like 20 times or 10 times to writing center because I want to learn and I want my paper to be good. (Tabasum, interview 7)

This is Tabasum. A true inspiration and an extraordinary example of resilience and hard work. Among the seven participants, Tabasum is certainly the one that has had the most challenging story of literacy development. The fact that she has made it to college and is passing her classes is remarkable and evidence that, within a generally supportive environment, it is

possible to make up for significant gaps in one's education if one is determined to do so. And, in Tabasum's case, as I hope will become evident in this portrait, it has taken a lot of determination. In an email to me, referring to the progress Tabasum had shown in his World Religions class, the professor wrote, "Hers is one of the most impressive stories in my seven years of teaching World Religions at Hope College". And this is the impression she often makes on the people that she comes in contact with.

Born in Afghanistan to uneducated parents, she attended school for a year before conflicts with the Taliban started. After her father was killed, she and her family took a bus that would take them to Pakistan. During the journey, the bus was intercepted by the Taliban and one of her brothers was taken. This brother's whereabouts were unknown for almost ten years, when he was finally able to reunite with the family here in the U.S. In the six years that Tabasum lived in Pakistan, she was not able to attend school. She spent her days weaving carpets to help her mother's work. Upon arriving in the States, and despite having only one year of formal education, Tabasum was placed in 7th grade. If this were not already hard enough, Tabasum's education here was complicated by the fact that her year of birth was incorrect in her American document, making her older than she says she is. Because she did not have a birth certificate to show to the immigration office, a birth date was given to her arbitrarily. Just as an aside, it is worth pointing out that this is not uncommon among refugees. In Arezo's case, for example, the whole family was given December 31st as their birthday in their American papers. In Tabasum's situation, an older age meant that she would likely not be able to graduate from a public high school, which limits the age of its students to 21. Fearing that this would happen, Tabasum skipped 8th grade and went directly to high school. In summary, after one year of schooling in Afghanistan and five years in the U.S., Tabasum graduated from high school and started college.

With such an educational background, Tabasum's experience in college was expected to be challenging. Another incident, however, made her beginning college life even harder than anyone could have imagined. A few days after the summer semester started, when all the participants were taking two courses as a cohort, Tabasum received news that one of her brothers had been found dead in the swimming pool of their house. As a consequence, she dropped out of her classes in the summer and, unfortunately, missed out on the opportunity of experiencing those first two courses with the other members of the cohort. Her brother's death undoubtedly added to the hardship of being a first-year college student without much preparation and, as a result, Tabasum did suffer from depression in her fall semester.

Always speaking softly and slowly, Tabasum would candidly tell me about her struggles in college. She was also generous sharing her course work. Many times she would arrive late or would have to leave our interview early to meet a tutor or go to a review session with a professor, and I was left with a feeling of frustration, wanting to talk to her longer to learn more about her experience, but understanding that the time we spent together was already probably interfering with her busy schedule.

In her first year of college, she completed 24 credits, reflecting a load that was smaller than the other participants'. She explained to me that 12 hours a semester was the minimum she had to take and an amount of course work she felt comfortable with. The idea of registering for more hours was daunting as her comment shows, "Next semester it's gonna be more [than 12 hours] and I don't know what I'm gonna do" (Tabasum, interview 8). In her first two semesters, she received some A's in 1-credit classes such as Choir and Mountain Biking, and mostly B's and C's in 3-credit classes such as Speech, World Religions and Introduction to Psychology. To earn these grades, Tabasum needed a lot of support and, especially for each writing assignment,

she resorted many times to the writing center, writing tutor, and peers, as she states in the opening quote to this portrait. She also received assistance from most of her professors, who would give her extended deadlines, or substitute essays for written exams. Not all her professors were willing to accommodate her, though, and her conflict with the Freshman Composition professor, in particular, was somewhat unpleasant. This will be discussed in chapter 6. All through the data collection period, Tabasum was firm in her plan to work toward a major in nursing, which would be possible through a partnership between Hope College and another private university. When we talked at the end of Fall 2010, however, she told me, with sadness, that she was changing majors. That semester, she had registered for a Biology class, which she ended up dropping because it was too difficult. On top of that, she also found out that to be eligible to go to the university where she would actually take the nursing classes she was required to have a minimum GPA which she did not think she would be able to.

When I asked her how she felt as a college student, she was candid in explaining how differently she felt in college as compared to high school.

In high school, I participated a lot, I was very active, I was like always in class discussion, I was involved, but now I feel like I shouldn't be here, because I feel like I'm in the wrong place because I want to like participate like other students and I want to be involved and everything, but I don't know and lots of times I'm shy because when I start speaking, people look at me and I don't, you know, I have accent and I don't speak like formal English, so I don't feel like speaking. (Tabasum, interview 4)

A semester later, in our last interview, she still felt the same and said, "I'm not a regular college student because, in the classroom, I want to participate like other students, but I'm not prepared for it, and I'm not confident" (Tabasum, interview 8). This lack of confidence also

showed when I asked her how she thought her previous education, with significant interruption, affected her performance as a college student. She said, “it affects because er you know like my self esteem is very low because I’m so, I’m not confident in anything because I know that I don’t know and I’m shy and I always feel bad” (Tabasum, interview 4). Whenever I observed her in a class, her shyness was evident, as she never participated in classroom discussions, even when in small groups. Besides her silence, her low self-esteem also showed in her always sitting at the back of the classroom. In one of her essays for ENG 095, she explains:

In high school, I always made sure to get a seat in the front of the classroom so that I would not get distracted [...] Now I prefer to sit in the very last seat in the classroom. I’m afraid to sit in a front seat because the professor might expect me to participate more and I do not have confidence that I can respond adequately without more time to think. I feel safe in the back seat. (Tabasum, ENG 095 essay)

It is remarkable that, despite all her struggles, Tabasum loves reading and writing. Granted, not the academic reading and writing required in college, but, as she says about writing, “I really want to write from my heart” (Tabasum, interview 8). In our last interview, when I asked her how she felt in terms of cultural identity, she answered my question by sharing a poem she had written.

They

They want me to be their American teenage girl,

but I am me.

They want me to be demonstrative,

but I am restrained.

They want me to be confident,
but I am careful.

Two girls inside me,
and they fight!

It is hard to be both,
It is hard to choose one,
but which one?

I am an Afghani girl.

I am an American girl.

I am happy to be a hybrid.

I am happy with who I am.

4.5 Sabrina

Well, you can't really understand what [the Sociology professor] is talking about in class, [...] because like okay, she talks about something but you, she keeps jumping from one thing to another, almost like [the Government professor] does, but his was like, even though it was still about government, you know, but like hers is, I don't know, maybe it's just, I can't really explain it, it's just like she talks about something, but like then she jumps to another thing and then she never comes back to what she finished, just like [the English instructor] used to do, so, yeah, and that confuses me. (Sabrina, interview 5)

Outgoing, chatty, with beautiful, bright eyes, and a sweet smile, Sabrina would sometimes take long turns answering my interview questions, and you could almost see her ideas flowing rapidly through her mind, resulting in a number of false starts and incomplete thoughts. I often had to strain to follow what she was trying to say. In her written work, she seemed to follow the same pattern in her initial drafts, producing a long text that would eventually be shortened as it became more concise and coherent. In the extract below, she illustrates this point when she talks about her revision work for an ENG 101 essay:

My papers [are initially] a lot longer, but then if I go back, I feel like I'm repeating myself, so like, you know, I try to, like that's what [the writing tutor] helps me too, to try to make it shorter. Cause the second paper that I turned in was like almost four and a half pages, but then when I finished it's like three pages. (Sabrina, interview 2)

Unfortunately, Sabrina never shared drafts of her papers, so, except for her own account, I was not able to document her writing process. Throughout the study, Sabrina was always very friendly, but, somehow, this did not translate into her being a cooperative participant. Between forgetting to bring the requested materials and losing a folder that contained several of these materials, she shared very little of her college work with me.

The opening quotation also exemplifies a constant in Sabrina's interviews: she often found professors, their lectures, and their assignments confusing. Except for foreign language or math classes, she reported being confused in all the other three-credit courses she took in her first year. She also frequently seemed to be anxious about upcoming assignments or exams. She would often say that she was "freaking out." It is interesting that, despite often feeling confused and anxious, she rarely sought her professors' help, unlike all the other participants. When asked about this, she would either say that she was so confused she did not know what to ask, or that

her schedule was such that when she was available, the professors were not. It is plausible, also, that her confusion and anxiety was somewhat of an exaggeration, influenced by a rather dramatic way of expressing herself and an eagerness to always get top grades. She completed 37 credits in her first year, earning A's and B's in courses such as Speech, Freshman Composition and Statistics, which does not seem the likely outcome for a student who reported being so confused in her classes.

Another interesting pattern of how Sabrina viewed academic literacy practices in college is the fact that she often regarded its outcomes (i.e. grades) as being out of her control, a matter of luck, or just guessing right. For example, when talking about the usefulness of her notes when preparing for an exam, she says, "I do take notes, helpful sometimes, but I just get lucky when I take good notes or when I take bad notes" (Sabrina, interview 1). She also mentioned that what she studied was often not on the test, "it always happens to me, I study something, but on the test it's a different thing" (Sabrina, interview 1). Alternatively, she would say that what was on the test was different, or harder, than what had been covered in class, so she would just guess the answers in the exam:

During the class, [the ENG 095 instructor] gives us like easy sentences and they are easy to understand and we know where to put the commas or where not to put the commas or something, and during the tests and quizzes, she always has these difficult sentences and they are really confusing, so I'm like, can you like, you know, she should have like taught us, like given us examples that are like hard, instead of giving us easy stuff and then giving us a hard test. So it just like mostly guessing and stuff. (Sabrina, interview 3)

Compared to the other Afghan participants, Sabrina's life before coming to the States is quite distinct. The major point that sets her apart is that, unlike Arezo, Kayhan, and Tabasum,

Sabrina did not move to Pakistan when the conflicts started. Rather, her family fled to Iran, where they stayed for a year, then briefly to Russia, and, finally, to Belarus, where they stayed for seven years. Born to college educated parents, Sabrina is the eldest of five children. She first started school in Iran, but her education in Persian lasted for only about six months. When they arrived in Belarus, Sabrina did not know the language at all and started attending school in kindergarten, despite being somewhat older than the local students. Of this experience, she says:

It wasn't hard for us to learn Russian because like we started at the same level as other kids, even though they spoke Russian, but like the grammar and how to write and read and like do math, we all started in the same level [...] cause they were learning the alphabet so it was the same thing, they are learning and we are learning so it wasn't hard.
(Sabrina, interview 1)

Sabrina completed 5th grade in Belarus before moving to the States. On arrival, she was placed in 9th grade because she was 15 at the time, even though she didn't even know the alphabet. Essentially, she skipped Middle School. Unsurprisingly, she failed a few of the courses in her first year in high school, but still managed to graduate in four years. In her admissions essay, she writes about this difficult beginning and says, "I realized that I needed to work harder. Even though I was learning my third language, I was not going to let that be an excuse for not being successful at school."

Apart from the challenge caused by not knowing the language, Sabrina seems to have benefitted from the fact that, at least in her regard, she came from an academically stronger educational system. Of the transition between schooling in Belarus and in the States, she says:

I think like United States, their like educational system is not hard, even though it's so hard for me right now, but it's not hard, like it's not strict and like hard as it's in

Afghanistan [...] and like Belarus and Russia, like the things that I learned in my 5th grade helped me in my 10th grade. (Sabrina, interview 8)

In a follow-up question, I asked her for examples of things she had learned in Belarus that helped her when she got here. She explained that knowing Russian grammar, such as what verbs, nouns, and adjectives were, helped her with English, and that her math classes in Belarus were much harder than they were when she started high school in the U.S.

Like several of the other participants, Sabrina also dreamed of becoming a doctor to help people in her home country. In her admissions essay, she writes, “After I obtain my [medical] degree, I plan to go back to my country to help the people who were not as fortunate as I. I feel propelled to bring hope back to the country that I called home for the first seven years of life.” Once in college, however, also like most of the other participants who dreamed of pursuing a medical career, she realized the difficulties involved and, after considering alternative majors, ended up deciding for accounting.

4.6 Solange

I cannot change the fact that I lost my father at the age of six. I cannot change the fact that I do not know if my mother survived the war in Burundi. I cannot change the fact that the woman who raised me, my grandmother, is no longer with me. And I cannot change the fact that I am a refugee. Through it all, I have never used my life as an excuse. I have never once complained about the life I have lived. I have only used my past to make myself stronger. I can and will achieve everything I want, including a college education. (Solange, admissions essay)

This is Solange, a true survivor. Showing a maturity level way above her years, she always impressed me with her insightful comments and perspective on life. Musa describes her

well, saying “She is direct, she doesn’t hide anything. That’s why we all like her very much. She fix things, when it’s not good among the girls, she’s the one there to set the things up” (Musa, interview 4). Solange could always be relied to give a wise, pondered view on any issue being discussed. I truly admire her. Several times, she told me she was “kind of anti-social”, and, after I got to know her better, I understood that to mean that she just did not seem to enjoy engaging in easy, sometimes shallow, interactions that teenagers often do, and which tend to bring popularity along. She now seems to regret it, though, when she says that “the best way to learn a language is when you are socializing, making new friends, so that’s one thing I wish I had done differently, so if I’d done that I wouldn’t be having, like, I would be speaking more English now, I believe” (Solange, interview 1). Learning has always been Solange’s ultimate goal. And this emphasis on learning went beyond her academic work, as can be seen in the excerpt below.

College makes me feel like I can do more, and I wanna do more and that’s the reason why I wanna change my job, cause I feel like it’s very easy for me. People tell me like I should keep it cause it’s easy, it helps me do the class, but at the same time I feel like I’m not learning anything. It’s supposed to be all about learning and giving you the experience to take you to the real world. (Solange, interview 8)

Like Tabasum, Solange displayed an acute awareness of being different, of not belonging. While Tabasum, however, placed the origin of her feelings on the fact that she viewed herself as being academically behind, Solange’s feelings seemed to be spurred by social or racial, but not academic, differences. She said, for example, that in high school she had a hard time making friends because “I felt like I didn’t belong there, you know, [...] I felt like I was different because [...] these American kids [...] we had nothing in common, so it was so hard to make friends” (Solange, interview 1). She also mentions that she was teased in school because she was

African. In her first semester at college, she also had trouble fitting in, a fact that made her more reclusive. She only disclosed this difficulty to me a semester later. In her last interview, she said:

I don't know if you noticed, but a lot of kids in this school, they are like from rich families, not real rich, but their family have money [...]. That's my other thing I felt like I didn't belong here last semester too, cause I don't know I just felt like it wasn't in my class to be. (Solange, interview 8)

What is most remarkable about this fact is the way she dealt with this feeling of not belonging. She finishes the thought above, by saying, "But I just realized, you know, you can belong anywhere you want, you wanna be in this country, that's one thing I love it" (Solange, interview 8). And this is the type of attitude that was so typical of Solange throughout the study.

She was born in Burundi, to a Burundian mother and a Rwandan father. When the conflicts in Burundi got worse, the family decided to go to Rwanda, where the genocide had just ended. She was about four at the time. In this journey, the parents got separated and she never saw her mother again – a fact she alludes to in the opening quotation. Her father passed away a couple of years later and Solange was raised mostly by her grandmother. She lived in Rwanda for six years and then moved to Uganda, where she lived for 5 years, before coming to the U.S. with her grandmother, an uncle and his family. As a result of living in so many countries, Solange can speak, read and write several languages: Kinyarwanda, Luganda, Swahili, English, and some basic French. For different reasons, including the post-genocide disrupted educational system in Rwanda and lack of money in Uganda, Solange's education before coming to the States was very spotty. She claimed attending almost three years of school in Rwanda, and then missing school for about two years after she moved to Uganda. She resumed her education in 6th grade when an uncle, who had been living in the States for a long time, started paying for her

fees at a small private school in Uganda. She remained in this school for two years. At that point, the family learned that they would be relocated to the States and, much like Yar Zar, Solange was given the opportunity to attend a top private school for about a semester, sponsored by the same uncle. Of that experience, she says:

I remember when I went to that school they were teaching me stuff that I had never seen before, cause it was a really top school in the country, so it was kind of learning like, started taking Biology, Chemistry, Physics, [...] I was performing very very poor.

(Solange, interview 1)

When she started her education in the U.S., she was placed in a high school which she considers one of the worst schools in the state. It did not offer several courses that she thinks would have prepared her better for college such as SAT preparation or many AP classes. But, once again, in a matter-of-fact, forward looking manner, she says “I don’t want to make it an excuse like ‘oh, I didn’t do good because I didn’t go to a good school’. It’s really, it’s funny cause my way [...] it’s always like just your past doesn’t determine your future, that’s the thing” (Solange, interview 4).

In Solange’s case, having attended a poor high school really does not seem to be affecting her performance in college. She is very appreciative of the opportunity she has been given to attend Hope College and says that the day she learned about her scholarship was the happiest day of her life. She is certainly proving to be worthy of the opportunity she was given. In her first year, she completed 36 credits, having earned almost exclusively A’s and B’s. Her two lower grades, both of them a C plus, were in Chemistry I and Economics. When she came to college, she seemed quite sure about wanting to follow a career in Pharmacy, which she told me had always been her dream. However, she now felt it would be selfish of her to go to graduate school

and keep studying instead of soon starting to help support her family. She mentioned a conversation she had had with her sister, who lives in Rwanda, who told her that one of her children was not attending school because she could not afford it. Solange felt it was her responsibility to step up to the plate and start contributing financially to her family as soon as possible. Even though she would still love to major in Pharmacy, she decided to do Accounting, a degree which she believes will enable her to get a job soon after she graduates from college. She said, simply, “I don’t have that choice, you know” (Solange, interview 2).

Solange always seemed very aware of her strengths and weaknesses, and spoke about them in a matter-of-fact way. Of her weaknesses, most of them related to writing, she would say things like “I’m really poor in writing [...] I really struggle with English” (Solange, interview 3), or “writing the introduction, I don’t know how. I just can’t do it” (Solange, interview 6). Likewise, she acknowledged her strengths by saying “I’m a good notetaker, I take really good notes, so if I read through my notes, I get everything” (Solange, interview 2) or “for some reason I know which is going to be like the main points [...] I always know [what’s] gonna be on the test” (Solange, interview 2). What I find particularly remarkable in Solange is that receiving low grades did not seem to affect her perception of how good she was at a certain topic. This reflected a level of confidence that I found striking. For example, even though she (and the other participants in that class) was getting low grades in the Economics exams, she told me, “I’m good at Econ, it’s just the way the teacher formats his questions, it’s just confusing” (Solange, interview 8).

Even though Solange mentioned her troubles with English throughout our interviews, her progress and higher self-confidence with writing become evident in her last interview. She says:

For writing, I kind of, before I came to college, I felt like I can run from it, like hide from it, or find classes that I won't have to write, cause that's how I felt like I wasn't sure about my writing, cause I know I sucked in it, cause I hated writing so much, but now, it's like I want to do it, actually, I don't even mind doing it. Like if I have a paper due, I don't even feel like "oof, I have something on my back that will make me fall", so, I kind of like it. (Solange, interview 8)

4.7 Musa

I want to be somebody. It may sound funny to you but this, from what I have experienced, this [...] means a lot to me. I want to be that somebody who will look at his past experiences as a motivation to work harder and make a change all around the world, but most especially my home town so that, in the future, kids would not go through what I have been through. (Musa, BCC 100, mission statement)

Musa is the participant that has arrived in the States more recently. He had only been here for two and a half years when he started college. Very reserved, Musa did not want to speak about his past, or anything personal. I always respected his position and, after he made that clear to me in our first interview, I was careful not to ask him anything about his life before coming here. Still, I would often feel frustrated because I wanted to learn more, I wanted to know him better. I especially wanted to learn more about his previous education in an attempt to understand how it is that he became such a bright, remarkable student. Throughout our work together, however, I learned to be at peace with whatever he felt comfortable sharing with me. And, most of what I know about his past, I have learned from reading his essays.

Among all the participants, Musa's experience with the war and displacement, if not the most tragic, is definitely the most recent. Another distinct feature in Musa's story is that, being

an orphan, he came to the U.S. with his siblings only. Solange, also with no parents, at least had a grandmother and an uncle who took care of her. Musa was born in Liberia and, after his father died, he and his family fled the civil war and went to Guinea. He was nine at the time. Life was very difficult for refugees in Guinea, and Musa had to work to help bring money home. Also, as a refugee, Musa was not allowed to attend public school. In his admissions essay, he explains how he first had access to education:

I made friends with some boys who were going to school so that at the end of each day I could find out what they learned in school. I wanted to learn. [...] My friends continued to teach me every evening until one of their fathers talked to some people within the private school and I was able to be enrolled. (Musa, admissions essay)

Musa attended school for several years and was on his way to completing high school. However, life conditions in Guinea did not improve, and the family was forced to relocate again.

Tragically, Musa's mother passed away just before they were to leave Guinea and her five children had to move to the U.S. by themselves.

Once in the States, touched by the story of these five orphans, different people helped them settle down. Among them was Ms. Laura, the same person who had assisted Yar Zar in earning a scholarship to go to a private high school. In a similar fashion, Ms. Laura made the necessary connections that landed the four school age siblings a scholarship to another private high school. It is quite remarkable that the three older ones graduated in the time expected and are now attending college. The younger one is still in high school. One of the factors that may have played a role in their academic success is the fact that they had all achieved a relatively advanced level of academic literacy in French, and were, thus, close to "the optimal situation" described by Blanton (2005, p. 109), in which literacy development in a new language follows

fully-developed academic skills in the native language, or, in Musa's case, in the only language he was literate in. Another facilitative factor was that their mother tongue was Liberian Creole, a variety of English. Even though Musa was not literate in English, being able to speak Creole, among several other African languages, certainly made communication easier in the U.S. Lastly, both their parents were educated: their father had a college degree and their mother was a high school graduate.

In his first year of college, Musa completed 38 credits, earning only A's and B's, except for two classes in the spring semester, Biology and Economics, for which he got C's. When we met for our last interview, even though he still did not know his final grades, he was quite depressed because he knew he hadn't done well in some courses, especially in Economics, and he mentioned this was the first time he was getting grades this low. He said he got very upset with how he did in the Economics final exam and ended up throwing away all the material for that class, with the result that I never got to see his exams to try to understand where his difficulties lay. He says, "So, after the [Economics] exam I was feeling bad and didn't really care. I just threw everything away. It was awful" (Musa, interview 8). Up until the spring semester, Musa had done remarkably well in all his classes, earning only A's and B's and making the Dean's List of Honor after fall 2009. Despite his struggles in spring, Musa seems to have enjoyed the challenge. In his words:

My first semester was actually less difficult than my high school. [...] I was like "really?" and then second semester really hit me hard and then it became like "No, high school cannot be compared to college", so it started getting really hard but, I mean, I'm all for it, I like challenges, anyway, so, when it started getting hard I was like, some of my friends were like "Are you taking Biology? Man, that class is bad. Wanna drop out?" I was like

“No”, even though I have bad grades on the first two exams, I’m not dropping out. I’m gonna fight it. (Musa, interview 8)

Of the several participants who came to college wanting to pursue a pre-medical major, Musa is the only one still firm in his decision, having declared Biology as his major. It is amazing that, on top of working very hard for his classes, he also played intermural soccer and had time to be involved in other activities. Soccer practice, in particular, was very time consuming, but Musa was serious about it and ended up making the college team in fall 2010. I once asked him why he took soccer so seriously when his time was already so short between courses and work. He explained that through soccer he could make friends and these friends “look out for you [...] when you are in a problem” (Musa, interview 3). Reading the essay on extracurricular activities that he submitted with his admissions material, I was able to have a better understanding of what soccer meant to him. He wrote that, when he moved to the States, he found a place to play soccer, and that:

The team is a beautiful mix of players from every corner of the globe. I was able to fit in the very first day that I joined them. We were all different, but once we were on the field, we put our differences aside and played as a loving family. It reminded me of home.

(Musa, admissions essay)

I suspect a similar feeling still pervades his soccer practice in college.

Because of his several commitments, I always had a hard time getting in touch with him to arrange our interviews. The extract below is an example of his busy schedule.

I tried a little bit working with [the writing tutor] last night, but, oh God, there was too much going on. Last night, I had soccer practice from 7 till 9:30 and then I had Dancing with the Staff, which is like they have, I think it’s, not a program, it’s like a show, but it’s

for charity, I guess, so I'm volunteering to dance with the staff. So, I went to that, from there I met at the library at 11 o'clock and then we worked a little bit until 12. Then I went home and started my calculus exam, homework. (Musa, interview 6)

Each time I wanted to schedule an interview, I would send him emails, leave messages on his phone, or send him text messages, before I would finally hear from him, or run into him on campus. Musa was the participant I often feared would drop out of the study. Each time I did not hear back from him, I imagined he did not want to be in the study anymore, or simply did not want to talk to me. However, each time we finally met, he was always very friendly and apologetic for being so busy and not getting in touch with me sooner. We still keep in touch and, every time I see him, I learn a little bit more about this remarkable young man.

One of the reasons it was difficult to contact Musa during the study was the fact that he did not use emails as frequently as I had assumed any undergraduate student would nowadays. At first, I thought he was just ignoring my emails, but as I got to know him better, I realized that, indeed, he did not check emails or his Facebook page very frequently. This becomes clear in the extract below.

E: Can I send you, if I send you an email, you never check emails, Musa, do you?

M: I'm terrible with computers as I don't play around them a lot. I don't check my emails, seriously.

E: What if a professor sends you an email?

M: I don't know. ((laughs))

E: Really?

M: I'd tell him I didn't see it, I didn't check my email.

E: But you don't email your friends, for example?

M: I think everything's done with text messages these days or writing letters, but, I mean I'm trying to get on the email base and stuff. (Musa, interview 2)

Musa was known by the other participants for not checking his computer messages. Sometimes when I was at interview with another participant, I would mention that I was having trouble contacting Musa and they would invariably confirm that he did not check his emails. One such example is this conversation with Sabrina.

E: Musa never seems to check his email.

Sa: He doesn't.

E: Why is that?

Sa: I don't know. I think he texts a lot. That's why he doesn't email. I never send him email like if I say something to him on Facebook, he'll come up to me after a month and be like "Oh, Sabrina, did you need something?" and I'm like "Not anymore, don't worry about it." I know he doesn't check his Facebook, but I don't know if he checks his emails at all.

Another particularity of Musa's, which I had trouble understanding, was his refusal to check his grades online. I first learned about this when, in our very first interview, I asked him what grades he had gotten in the two courses over the summer, and he said he had not checked. Over and over again, whenever this subject came up, I would remind him that it was important to check his grades if anything to make sure a professor had not made a mistake when entering grades in the system. Musa would reply saying something like:

I just think grades, I mean, grades make you feel better, but for me, it's not something I am looking forward, I'm just looking to learn, the grade is important to pass the class, but

I look more at what I've learned in the class than what grades I made in the class, so.

(Musa, interview 5)

Incidentally, this is how I learned he had been included in the Dean's List of Honor. In our first interview in Spring 2010, we had the following exchange:

E: So, how did you do in the fall in the end? Did you check your grades? Or you didn't?

M: I didn't.

E: So you have no idea how you did?

M: I mean, I know I did great cause I made the Dean's List of Honor. (Musa, interview 5)

Of all the participants, Musa is the only one that reported using a different language to help with his writing. He said this did not happen frequently, but that when he was working on a piece of writing that he found particularly difficult, it helped him if he started in French. He was, however, very aware that he needed help with the language only, and not with the development of ideas, a point he makes clear below:

M: I wrote the entire paper and then er ask friends to read it and one thing that I'm not good at is grammar, so they'll check it, I didn't really get to the writing center.

E: What friends did you ask?

M: Just classmates, people that I trust, so they read it and, you know, do the grammar stuff for me

E: Okay, but for the development of ideas...

M: No. I basically write the entire thing cause I want my own opinion to be seen on my paper. (Musa, interview 1)

Except for help with proofreading, Musa was generally self-reliant and did not like asking for assistance. He says, "I like to do things by myself, like trying to figure out how to do this

problem or how to read this thing, understand it, except I know there's no way I can get it then I'll ask for help" (Musa, interview 1).

Besides proofreading, the only other difficulty Musa reported throughout the study regarded the time he took to complete assignments. He would say things like "I'm very slow understanding things that's why I take enough time [...] I'm a really slow writer and slow reader and I think that affects what I'm doing especially when it's a test that I have to do and I run out of time" (Musa, interview 1). I believe his slower pace can be partially attributed to the fact that he had only started his literacy development in English two years before college, but also to his own personal preference and way of being. Musa always spoke slowly, in a paused manner, almost as if he were giving a speech. And I don't think this was the result of his proficiency in English, although I have not heard him speak French to be sure.

Like Solange, Musa always showed a level of maturity and thoughtfulness that I found remarkable. I was particularly impressed when he explained to me why he had decided not to apply for the popular Residence Assistant position. He said:

Yar Zar and I was like "let's go for RA, let's be RA and then we'll get the same hall and stuff," but I don't think I can handle it, cause some of thing, complaint that people might bring up, I'd just be like "really? Are you joking? Is that what you are upset or stressed about?" you know, [...] so, I don't want to offend people like that, so I was like "I don't think I can do it, so let me just forget about it." (Musa, interview 8)

4.8 Seven remarkable people beating the odds

The seven participants described in this chapter were not deemed college-ready by the traditional measurements used by most college and university admissions offices. Still, all of them completed their first year at college successfully. In the process of becoming academically

successful college students, they faced several challenges related to their developing literacy. In chapter five, I address those concerning reading practices and, in chapter six, those concerning writing practices. In both chapters, I first discuss the challenges they faced, and then present the resources and strategies they used to cope with these difficulties. Some of these challenges are quite typical of first-year undergraduate students as they transition from secondary to tertiary education. Others, however, may be more a result of my participants' discontinued education as they straddled different languages, cultures, and educational systems. Now that the first year is over, and we know that they succeeded in their classes, it is quite clear that no academic challenge was so debilitating that these students could not find resources or develop strategies to tackle them successfully in their first year. Only time will tell if this is an indication that the four years in college will be as successful.

CHAPTER 5

READING PRACTICES: CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES, AND RESOURCES

In this chapter, I start addressing the research questions by focusing on reading practices. I will present the reading challenges my participants faced in their first year of college, and then I move on to discuss the strategies they developed to cope with these challenges and the resources they used. In each section, I will include quotes extracted from interviews with the participants. Each time a participant has mentioned the challenge, strategy, or resource at issue, I have tried to select a quote that would be representative of that participant's views and experience. For the sake of clarity, each time I include quotes from two or more participants on the same issue, I have organized the quotes into a table. It is important to note that when a participant's voice does not appear on a table, it does not necessarily mean that that particular participant has not experienced that challenge or used that strategy or resource, but rather, that the participant did not mention it, or I could not find a quote that would succinctly represent the participant's point of view. In the latter case, I have included the participant's experience in the discussion following the table. In general, the challenges, strategies, and resources I discuss below were experienced by several of the participants. There will occasionally be instances, however, when only one participant mentioned a specific challenge, strategy, and/or resource, but I deemed the experience significant enough for that single participant that it was worth discussing it. Whenever this is the case, I will mention it in the text. This single-case experience usually happened when the participant was the only one taking a specific course, such as Solange taking a specific section of the American Government class, or when one participant struggled more than the others, as was often the case with Tabasum.

The reading practices my participants engaged in in their first year of college were motivated almost exclusively by required course readings. Most of the readings assigned to them came from textbooks, a few from compilations of primary source material, and a few from journal articles. In a few courses, participants were also required to read whole books such as ethnographic accounts or biographies. Very rarely were my participants asked to do any research or were given a choice of readings. Despite the different materials they were asked to read, for the most part, my participants seem to regard reading as a single skill. During my analysis, I noticed that primary source material tended to present more challenges than textbooks, for example, but not once did a participant make reference to the fact that reading difficulty varied according to the type of reading they were asked to do. They would usually simply say that the readings for a specific course were very difficult.

5.1 Reading challenges

In analyzing the data with a magnifying glass on the reading challenges, it was often difficult to determine what exactly was behind the difficulty mentioned by a participant. Sometimes the participant would say he or she was stressed out because there was too much reading to do that week, but as the interview continued, or I checked against the syllabus, I could verify that the amount of reading, properly speaking, was probably not the major issue, but some other reading difficulty such as lack of background knowledge, language difficulty, or being a slow reader. Understandably, if one is having difficulty with the language used in a text, a single page of such reading can be regarded as being too much. The categories that I use below to distill the different reading challenges are thus often overlapping. In determining which participant mentioned which reading challenge, I have tried to remain truthful to what my participants stated, so, if one of them said there was too much reading, for example, I have listed this person

under the “amount of required reading” challenge, even if, from my own experience with undergraduate courses, I would not have considered the assigned reading excessive.

5.1.1 College reading is different from high school reading

As first year students, the difficulties with reading often stemmed not from the readings themselves, but from the very different ways reading is dealt with in high school and college. This was particularly clear in my first interview with all the participants, as we talked about the courses they had taken in the summer, when the transition from high school to college was the most evident. This difference in literacy practices resulting from different institutional cultures was discussed in Harklau (2001). She makes the point that as her participants transitioned from high school to college, the challenges they faced could be better understood “as a cultural shift between the differing assumptions and values held about reading and writing in secondary and post-secondary institutions” (p. 34), rather than as a result of college literacy practices merely being cognitively more difficult.

The table below shows some of the differences perceived by Yar Zar, Arezo, Kayhan and Solange.

Table 5.1

Reading in high school vs. reading in college

Participant	Comments
Yar Zar	In high school, you know, how you can just like get by and the next day you just sit there and take notes, it's not like that here [in college]. You actually have to read here. (interview 1)
Arezo	College is like you're on your own, you have to be independent, [...] you have to be responsible to do like the homework without anybody telling you what to do or like the homeworks that's on the syllabus, the teachers won't remind you most of the time. (interview 1)
Kayhan	In high school, the way we learn, basically they give you a book, they'll tell you to read how many pages. If you don't read it they still give you a chance "okay, you can go ahead and read it here [in the classroom], hey let's look at the book,

	what does it say?" In college, if you didn't read it, no one really cares. (interview 1)
Solange	In high school they don't assign that much reading and, most of the time, you do the reading in class like that's what we used to do in class, [...] not as homework, we just read, like read this paragraph, the teacher picks someone to read, but in college, it's like you're on your own, go back, wherever you go and read it. (interview 1)

Different aspects of reading practice are mentioned in the quotes above, and they resonate with Harklau's (2001) findings. In high school, reading is often done in the classroom and, even when it is assigned as homework, students seem to understand the assignment more as a suggestion. As Kayhan puts it, teachers "still give you a chance" if you haven't done your reading and let you do it in the classroom. Or, as Yar Zar explains, even if you haven't done the reading, if you just listen to the lecture on the following day and take notes you can "get by." His remark was particularly interesting considering he came from a very challenging high school. Harklau's (2001) participants, likewise, "asserted that they had infrequently done the reading they were assigned in high school at all" (p. 56). In college, on the other hand, participants in this study learned that if they have reading assigned for a specific day, they are expected to do it. As Solange and Arezo both say, in college, "you're on your own," it is the student's responsibility to make sure they complete the readings (and any other assignments) as required by the professor and stated on the syllabus. And, if you don't, as Kayhan cynically explains, "nobody really cares." Many of the professors I interviewed, however, do seem to care and expect students to complete the assigned readings before coming to class. Some quotes regarding expectations of student reading were taken from interviews with professors and reproduced on the table below.

Table 5.2

Professors' expectations of student reading

Professor	Comments
ANT 200	I expect them to know the concepts [from the readings] that we focused on in class and they need to know ethnographic examples [...] sometimes I don't mention [the] examples as much in class, but I expect that they will have read them.
BIO 111	If somebody were to sit in lecture and not read the book at all, they may be in trouble, but they would know at least the areas that they should be familiar with if they simply paid attention to what I was talking about from the PowerPoints.
ENG 095	That's something hard that you have to, that college students have to learn, is that readings in college are supplemental to lecture, for the most part.
GOV 207	Sometimes the student reading the article is entering into a particular area in a Latin expression <i>in medias res</i> , in the middle of things, because the person who is writing is writing what is happening now, which brings you to the role of the instructor, and so you provide the background. [...] If you're reading material and doing whatever else is being asked of you, the chances of getting a good grade, you know, are quite good.
GOV 211	There's going to be assignments in this course that are going to assume you have done the readings and are going to build upon readings you are supposed to have undertaken, you know, by yourself. [But] there's also nothing wrong though with skimming the material, especially if you're having a hard time understanding it. Coming to class, going through with me, but then reading it again after class and seeing if you can see what I was telling you about in the text. I'm actually okay with that.
PSY 101A	In every chapter, there's an outline which has all the major concepts and the terms are in bold, things they should know. And those things dovetail with the study guides. So, you know, that gives me some leverage. I don't have to cover everything in class. But I would never ask them things that are just in the reading that I didn't tell them to have a look at.
SOC 200	To do a very good job on the test, you have to have read the material; I try to make it so that coming to class and being a good listener and being a great note taker is good, but it's not enough. [...] I'm not viewing my role as one whose job it is just to echo what is in the book. I try to add to, complement, so they have to do more, than just come listen and take great notes.

Without a question, all the professors I interviewed expected students to do the assigned readings. However, from the quotes above, it seems that students can actually “get by”, as Yar Zar said one could in high school, without actually doing the reading, and simply attending

classes and taking notes. All the professors seem to cover at least most of the key points in classroom lectures, which would be sufficient for students to get passing grades, but not enough “to do a very good job on the test”, as the Sociology professor pointed out. All the professors seem to agree that, to excel in their classes, reading the assigned texts, and reading them well and critically, was a necessary step.

Both Government courses were slightly different from other courses in their expectations of reading, though, with both professors acknowledging that students may not be able to do the assigned reading well before class because they often lack background knowledge to understand the text by themselves. In this case, as the GOV 211 professor put it, making “a good faith effort to get through” the text before class was acceptable, if followed by a thorough reading of the text after class discussion. Similarly, the GOV 207 professor said: “I encourage them to read it twice, because the first time around they may not pick up everything. [...] Then after they’ve been provided that background, and after we’ve gone over that article in depth, [...] then if they were to go back and read that article, their understanding should be much deeper.” The difficulty presented by the Government readings can be attributed to the fact that, in both classes, the texts were mostly primary source material and not textbooks, as was the case in most of the other courses.

Another key difference between high school and college reading practices regards what students are expected to do with what they read, especially in exams. Kayhan’s unsuccessful experience in his first exam in college, and his reflections on why he did so poorly, illustrates the difference quite well. I have reproduced quite a long extract of that conversation for the sake of clarity.

K: World Religion, my first test, I wasn't good because it was my first test in college, it was kind of different cause I didn't know what to study for, how to study for it, but my second test I got a B and then I got good grades because I know how to study for it, I know how to prepare for it, I knew what was expected of me for the test.

E: What was it about the first test that you didn't know?

K: Basically, it was going to be like the terms, we studied all the terms, but the terms are basically not the big idea, the big idea is like the big picture, how you are supposed to put this all together and how were the similarities of World Religions, [...] I just take the term basically the way I did in high school so I didn't really prepare for this and I didn't know what was expected from me.

E: Oh, so you studied the terms, you kind of memorized the terms, but you didn't see how they connected with everything else.

K: Yeah, the connection, I mean, (?) I just answered them and [...] I didn't focus on the big picture. [...] In high school, is more basically, okay, they give you questions, answer it, it's more like find in the book, right, in college it's more of critical thinking. Think outside, think similarities, compare, contrast, they want you to know not the basic answer, but to apply that answer, and how you use it basically. In high school, basically, okay this is the question, the answer right there, write down, it's not like that in college. [...] In college, you have to focus on the big picture, you just can't read the book and here's the answer. (Kayhan, interview 1)

Yar Zar, similarly, failed his first exam for World Religions and he attributes the low score to him having studied like he did for high school. He says:

I definitely bombed the first exam, well, I got a 69 on the first exam, cause I didn't know the structure and anything but then the second exam I got eighty something, 89, I think, so I started picking it up. [...] At first, I thought it was going to be very easy, like you know high school style, here's the information, give me the answer. (Yar Zar, interview 1)

And, as discussed in his profile, confident as he was in his high school preparation, he claimed he underestimated the exam and did not prepare enough for it.

Kayhan and Yar Zar were not the only participants who did poorly in that first exam, which is not particularly surprising considering it was their first exam in college. They were the only two, however, to place their initial difficulty so clearly on the transition between high school and college. As can be seen in both Kayhan's and Yar Zar's extracts, they were able to identify their weakness and adjust their study skills fairly quickly, so that from the second exam onwards they were both getting passing grades in that class. This remarkable ability to adjust to new demands and expectations became a clear pattern not only in Kayhan's and Yar Zar's experience in college, but in the way the seven participants dealt with most of the challenges they faced in their first year.

It was most fortunate that all the participants showed great flexibility in developing strategies and using resources to help them do better in exams, since the concessions made in high school to increase low scores was most often not available in college. As Sabrina explains, "in high school, if you did bad in your test, there was this thing you could retake it, a different test, but you still could retake it, or like they would give an extra credit that you could make up and that would add points and here you can't get that at all. [...] Yeah, so it's really hard" (Sabrina, interview 1). There were, however, some exceptions to this tendency of college

professors being more stringent as far as grading goes, and this will be discussed below, under resources.

5.1.2 Amount of required reading

Participants were unanimous in saying that the amount of reading they were expected to do for some of their classes was beyond what they could handle comfortably and was often a cause for stress. Some of their comments regarding their reading load can be found in the table below.

Table 5.3

Amount of required reading

Participant	Comments
Yar Zar	The articles are really long. (interview 1)
Arezo	I couldn't keep up with the reading so like when they were talking in class I would be lost because I didn't go through all the way. (interview 1)
Kayhan	Anthropology, you have to read a lot. (interview 1)
Tabasum	Whenever I have time, I do my reading, like my English class and my Psychology, but there's not enough time to read for all of them. (interview 6)
Sabrina	We do a lot of reading, a lot. (interview 1)
Solange	Oh my God. The readings for this semester is too much, especially government. I spend like a lot of time reading. (interview 6)
Musa	Oh, God, a lot, a lot of reading, like a crazy lot of reading. (interview 5)

In some cases, the comment about having been assigned a heavy reading load seems to be indeed warranted. For example, for Anthropology, at one point, Kayhan, Solange and Musa were asked to read 120 pages of an ethnographic book in one week. Or, similarly, Tabasum was asked to read 120 pages of the textbook for her World Religions class. In both classes, even though there were weeks that did not require this much reading, these specific examples were not the only time such a number of pages were required in a week. Considering the other classes they were taking and the fact that they were all working an average of 15 hours a week, it is not

difficult to see how they felt under pressure trying to complete these readings. In other cases, however, as mentioned above, it seems that the feelings the participants had of having been assigned too much reading was confounded with other reading challenges such as insufficient background knowledge. Also, for some of the classes, while some weeks seemed to be more reading-heavy, others were less so, and, as a consequence, the timing of the interview affected how much participants would complain about their reading load.

One example of a participant changing her perception of how much reading was involved in a course is Solange in her American Government class (GOV 211). As can be seen in Table 5.3, in interview 6, the second of spring semester, she was quite overwhelmed by the amount of reading required in that class. In that interview, I asked her whether the readings were difficult, or if it was simply too much reading. She said: “It’s just a lot. And, for me, when the reading is a lot, I end up not understanding what I’m reading, it’s like I’m reading just to read” (Solange, interview 6). A month later, however, when I asked her about her readings for the government class, she said: “We don’t have much reading in government” (Solange, interview 7). I was quite surprised to realize that her perception had changed so dramatically, especially because Solange typically did not say anything lightly or without pondering. It’s possible that the amount of reading per week had decreased somewhat by then, although I doubt it would have gone from “too much” to “not much”. This is difficult to verify since, as will become clear below, this particular professor did not follow the syllabus closely and this is the document I often used to know what the assigned reading was for a certain class. However, it seems that a better understanding of Solange’s changing perception can be obtained by looking at the knowledge she had gained in that month regarding the professor and his dynamics. She says: “I like [the Government professor] because you know how other teachers, they are always rushing, he

explains like, I like the way he explains, he spends more time in one topic, like he makes sure you understand it before he move on to the next one” (Solange, interview 7). That the professor respected the students’ pace, including hers, seems to have somewhat relieved her from the pressure she felt at the beginning of the semester. In our interview, the professor also confirmed he was very flexible with the amount of content he was able to cover in his course. He says:

[GOV 211] is an overly ambitious class. The syllabus for it is absurd. I tell the students from the get-go we will not cover probably half of the stuff on the syllabus but this is my dream syllabus. If I had all the time given to me that I’d like to teach you everything you need to know to be well versed as a citizen in American politics. [...] And then we will confront the reality that I don’t have the time to teach you all of that. So we will get through what we can get through.

Another important event that had happened between the two interviews is that Solange had taken the midterm and had received it back. She got a B on it, which the professor clarified was slightly above class average and “an outstanding score”. In taking that exam, Solange learned that the readings were not the main source of content, and I imagine this also must have taken the pressure off of the required readings. She explains: “the exam, it doesn’t come, everything comes from what he teaches in class, so that’s why we have to pay attention. Nothing comes from the reading. The reading is just to help you understand more, but, cause he talks everything” (Solange, interview 7). Solange’s change in perspective regarding her GOV 211 readings illustrate the point that Carson, Chase, Gibson, & Hargrove (1992) make that “how and what students read is determined by [what] they will have to do to demonstrate control of course content” (p. 33).

Clearly, then, the amount of reading alone may not be as much of a challenge as what the students are asked to do based on the reading, the language used, and its content. In other words, participants' perception of what is "too much reading" is affected by how much they believe they have to understand from reading the text independently, the difficulty of the language in the text and the complexity of the content. All of these seem to be susceptible to the professor's mediation, especially through class lectures, as became evident in Solange's experience in her Government class.

5.1.3 Language issues

All seven participants learned English as their second or third written language. And, even though they are in college, taking content classes, most of them still are, in many ways, developing their English literacy. It is therefore unsurprising that, at times, they would get frustrated with the difficulties they faced in understanding what they were reading. Analysis of the data suggests there were two main factors underlying their difficulty with reading comprehension. The first, and more frequent, factor was the language used in the texts they were assigned to read. More often than not, participants mentioned unknown vocabulary as a main source of language difficulty. This is the focus of this section. The second factor was lack of, or insufficient, background knowledge. This will be the focus of the next section. These issues are not clearly distinct from each other, but they will be discussed separately in accordance with comments participants made.

Table 5.4

Language affecting reading

Participant	Comments
Yar Zar	When I'm reading [...] like in Theatre, it's like really hard, what I would do is I'd just keep reading and then I'll try to make sense out of it, you know, you know how sometimes you just skip it and if you keep reading it starts making sense, you pick it up, so that's what I'll do every now and then (interview 1)
Arezo	For my government, we had to read a lot of articles. If I was born here, if I read that article, I'm sure I'll get it, but since it's hard to read it like you read it slowly, and sometimes you can't even say a word, you're like "Okay, how do I pronounce that?" [...] but sometimes you don't even know what you are reading, like you're just reading for the sake of reading. (interview 4)
Kayhan	The federalist papers are basically, they are part of the constitution, and they are hard because they are 18 th century English and they are very difficult to understand, [...] if you try to read on your own, it's really hard to understand, it's just basically new words, very different from what we speak now. (Kayhan 3)
Tabasum	If I have time and I have to read and read again and again and again until I understand like I have to find the words from dictionary that I don't understand, [...] if I don't use dictionary then I don't understand (interview 2)
Sabrina	It's hard for me to understand some of the vocabulary words that they use, like in Government, I always have to go back and to look it up and stuff [...] you know, and so like it's really hard, like, not knowing like these hard vocabulary words that you should know, that will help you for college a lot (interview 4)
Solange	When I'm reading, I usually sit next to my computer cause I don't have a dictionary, so I type in dictionary.com so that's when I define most of the words. And sometimes like even still I'm not understanding the word, I ask [the professor] the next morning. (interview 1)
Musa	I have problems finishing books, so it takes me a long period of time cause I think it's because of the language because I need to have a dictionary by my side when I'm reading so I can be able to translate and I have a French and English dictionary I look up the words. (interview 1)

Looking at the quotes above, and at the data more generally, whenever a participant mentioned difficulty understanding a text, if they could pinpoint a problem, they pointed at vocabulary as the main culprit. This does not seem surprising, especially considering that in their first year of college, they were all taking mostly General Education classes, with the result that, from course to course, the set of core vocabulary changed. Yet, there were a few specific courses

that presented participants with more reading challenges originating from language than others. Three such courses were Theatre Appreciation, American Government (GOV 211) and World Issues (GOV 207).

Reading for Theatre Appreciation was particularly difficult at the beginning of the semester, when students were required to read plays written in what Kayhan described as “old English” (Kayhan, interview 5). As the semester progressed and the course veered from Shakespeare to more contemporary plays, mention of reading difficulty in this class disappeared. Readings for American Government and World Issues, on the other hand, were perceived as being difficult from beginning to end, as Arezo’s and Sabrina’s comments in their last interview, shown on Table 5.4 above, illustrate. In both of these classes, insufficient background knowledge certainly played a major role in preventing students from fully understanding the readings, and this issue will be discussed below. Other times, however, the difficulty stemmed from unknown vocabulary, especially when, like in the Theatre class, students were required to read texts written centuries ago. When I asked the GOV 211 professor about the reading difficulties students usually mention, he clarified this point saying that students often claim they don’t understand what the words mean. He adds: “Obviously most of this relates to the 19th century and 18th century materials.” As mentioned above, both Government classes used primary source material, which are obviously much more challenging to read than textbooks that often tone down language to the undergraduate level. Incidentally, none of the participants ever complained that a textbook was difficult to read. Kayhan’s section of GOV 211 actually did use a textbook as the main reading source, but the times he complained about difficult vocabulary, he was referring to primary source material.

When I asked the professors if they thought these participants (or other ESL students) had more difficulty with the readings than the average first-year student, some of them pointed out that reading comprehension can sometimes be problematic. Professors were always careful, however, to make the point that there is a wide range of abilities among ESL students in general, and within the participants in this study. What I thought was particularly interesting is that a few of the professors mentioned that one of the difference between refugee (or other ESL) students and others is that refugee students can usually be relied to have read the material. So, when one of the participants, or another ESL student, did not understand a text well, professors tended to assume that the student had attempted to read it, but had failed at comprehension. To illustrate, the ANT 200 professor claims that the participants in her class “might have a little more difficulty with comprehension [but] I think that they are diligent about the reading.” Similarly, the GOV 211 professor believes that ESL students generally put “a more good faith effort [in reading] than some of the native speakers.”

5.1.4 Insufficient background knowledge

As discussed above, the role of insufficient background knowledge affecting reading comprehension became the most evident in the two Government classes. In particular, it affected Solange in the American Government class (GOV 211), and Sabrina and Arezo in the World Issues class (GOV 207). I start by discussing the American Government class.

Even though Kayhan and Yar Zar also took the GOV 211 class, they took it with a different professor who was not involved in this study. Unlike Solange, neither mentioned the readings as being particularly difficult, except for Kayhan’s comment about the language used in the 18th century Federalist Papers (see Table 4.4). Comparing the syllabus for the two professors, a noticeable difference regards the types of readings that were being required. While Solange’s

professor relied mostly on primary source material, Yar Zar and Kayhan's professor followed a textbook, occasionally supplemented by original texts, such as the Federalist Papers. Textbooks, in general, attempt to supply the necessary background information to turn the presentation of the different topics into a coherent whole, and this may have made the GOV 211 readings easier for Yar Zar and Kayhan. In Solange's section of the course, the syllabus also listed a textbook, which played an ancillary role and was clearly not the main source of information, as the professor explains below:

There is a textbook that I do not teach out of, but I do recommend to the students who may be coming from a non-American background, or for students who just never did very well in American government, to provide them some of that contextual background for the different sections of the course. [...] they have readings on the syllabus, that they can reference, but I don't test, I don't teach out of the textbook at all. (GOV 211 professor)

The fact that the professor did not reference the textbook directly in his lectures seems to have been interpreted by Solange as its being unnecessary. When I asked her about it, she said, "the other textbook, we don't use, it's just like review" (Solange, interview 6). It is not clear whether she ever read the textbook at all.

While most, if not all, of the readings in Solange's section of GOV 211 were stand-alone pieces of writing such as the "Gettysburg Address" and FDR's "State of the Union Message of 1944", the professor was very competent in providing the necessary historical and political backdrop against which the reading could be understood and discussed. At one point, Solange mentions how essential the professor's explanations were. She says:

We'll just read together [in class] cause it's really complicated. He has like, every time we read, he have to explain, cause we can't just read the whole thing, we'd never understand what they are talking about. So like he usually does the reading in class, then talk about it, explaining and write notes down. (Solange, interview 6)

When I observed this class, I was quite impressed by the professor's dynamics and ability to maintain students' interest while explaining and discussing, for example, the downsides to bipartisan politics. In the notes that I took during the observation, I wrote "Teacher speaks with passion, energetic, as if telling a story. [...] A joke here and there. Quite entertaining. [...] Funny." And, while telling a story, this professor was able to provide the background information that students lacked and that was not provided in the reading.

If the GOV 211 professor played a crucial role in situating a piece of text so that students could understand it, a different picture developed when an assignment required independent reading. This became evident when Solange worked on her first writing assignment for this class. The guidelines are reproduced below.

Read Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream" speech following the examples of our reading of the Declaration of Independence, Lincoln's speeches, and FDR's State of the Union Message. Once you have thoroughly read the speech, prepare an essay that addresses the following questions: How is King's speech similar to the other document we have looked at? How does it differ? What kind of equality does King seem to be arguing for? Finally, what kind of change in the role of government would King's understanding of equality seem to require and do you agree that government should take on such responsibilities?

Figure 5.1 American Government – Guidelines for essay 1

The professor acknowledged that this was a "tough paper" because students "had to read Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream' speech and effectively interpret the speech and then make an argument based on their interpretation of it" (GOV 211 professor). Solange mentioned

several times that this was indeed a very difficult paper to write and I think the root of her difficulty was slightly different from what the professor had anticipated. I attribute much of her difficulty to her not being familiar with the history surrounding the speech and what motivated Martin Luther King to write it, in the first place. This paper is an example of a reading-to-write assignment, or what Leki and Carson (1997) call *text-responsible* writing. According to Leki and Carson, in this type of writing, “writers are responsible for demonstrating an understanding of the source text” (1997, p. 41). Reading and writing, thus, become necessarily intertwined and, trying to separate them may be a futile attempt. However, for the very practical reason that I have separated my research results into two separate chapters: reading practices and writing practices, I felt it necessary to choose one chapter to place Solange’s difficulty with the MLK paper. I have decided to discuss it in the reading chapter because I do believe the major source of her struggle was with the reading and understanding of the speech more than an issue with demonstrating, in writing, her understanding of the text. I hope the final part of this discussion will make this point clear. When I was trying to learn more about the assignment, I asked Solange if they had read the MLK speech in class. She replied: “No. That’s the thing. We had to read it on your own” (Solange, interview 6). And then, in a subsequent interview, she said: “I never really understand the Martin Luther King, the whole thing. I think he’s a civil right movement leader and stuff, but it’s just so hard to write about him. [...] There’s too much like deep stuff. [...] It goes back in the days” (Solange, interview 7). Her paper shows her perhaps naïve reading of the speech when she writes, for example, “[MLK] found a way of stating the obvious without offending anybody or taking the side of any race” (Solange, GOV 211, essay 1). Thinking about this assignment retrospectively, the professor realized that ESL students may have an extra layer of difficulty when tackling it. He said:

It just never crossed my mind that I needed to say in class that [...] King is making the speech in the era of segregation. This is so matter of fact that it just escapes notice that you'd need to point out to somebody that segregation, institutionalized discrimination, is taking place in America. [...] But I realized later that is a big obstacle because there are just so many of these cultural references that [ESL students] don't have the background to pick up. Admittedly it's something I'm not always thinking about in structuring assignments. (GOV 211 professor)

The other course that required a lot of background knowledge to understand the readings was the World Issues class (GOV 207). Arezo, Sabrina and Yar Zar took it. Unlike Arezo and Sabrina, who had a very difficult time in this class, Yar Zar thrived in it. Having chosen International Relations as his major, the issues discussed in GOV 207 were right down his alley. He said he loved that class and looked forward to it. Arezo and Sabrina, on the other hand, were constantly struggling in that class, although they eventually did find resources and strategies that helped them cope with it. These will be discussed later. Arezo's comment below summarizes how they felt about the GOV 207 most of the time:

I'm scared of some of the classes, you know, it's just like it's really difficult for me, there's like for my government class, we had to read two articles that's like 10 to 15 pages long and two of them each day and like I read the article, it's like I read I don't understand, I can read, but I don't understand what's going on. (Arezo, interview 1)

All the readings for the World Issues class were articles taken from journals such as *Foreign Affairs* and *Current History*, with most of them published between 2003 and 2009. Students were typically assigned one to two articles per 50 minute class. The professor was well aware of the importance of background knowledge to understand these texts, and understood it

was his responsibility to provide it in his lectures. As he explains, “The article is imminently understandable. It’s no different from reading say a newspaper article describing a military takeover in Thailand or some place else. But what is the background? Is there some background? That’s where I do the [...] filling in the material” (GOV 207 professor). What made the readings for this class particularly difficult is the fact that, unlike GOV 211, which focused exclusively on American Government, it covered issues in several different countries. The course description on the GOV 207 syllabus reads: “This course examines some of the major issues engaging the attention of world leaders, including security issues, international financial and trading regimes, global ecopolitics, and ethnic conflicts” (GOV 207, syllabus). Students read on a variety of topics such as globalization, terrorism, and human rights, and covered different parts of the world such as Europe, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa.

Despite the professor’s conscious effort to provide the necessary background, it is clear from Sabrina’s comment below that what he taught in class was probably still above where she was in terms of coming to understand these issues.

In class, I just don’t understand what he’s saying. Just because he, our teacher know a lot about this stuff, and he’s like a professional for this stuff, but like he thinks that we know the same things so he just goes on and like but we’re just starting, you know. Cause like sometimes when people know too much about stuff, they don’t really care about how like, I know he knows we don’t know much, but like he just goes on. And also, he always changes the subject and he goes on something that we don’t even need for the test or for this article, so he’s just giving us a big background. (Sabrina, interview 3)

An indication that both Sabrina and Arezo did not have much knowledge about the topics being discussed is the fact that they both had trouble pinpointing the main ideas in an article.

Sabrina said: “I don’t know what exactly to take notes about so if I start taking notes on one thing I miss the other thing.” (Sabrina, interview 1). Likewise, Arezo did not know what to highlight in the text when she read it. She says: “I highlight things that I think it’s important, and [the tutor] is like ‘you shouldn’t highlight this part, it’s not important at all’, and I was like ‘okay’ (Arezo, interview 1). When they started doing poorly on the tests, they asked the professor for help and got frustrated when he simply told them to read the articles again. This is illustrated in their comments in the table below.

Table 5.5

On being asked to read again

Participant	Comments
Arezo	If a person is a fast reader they can finish an article in like in 30 to 40 minute, but for me to finish that article it takes me like about one and a half hour [...] cause I’m a really slow reader and also like I read it, like a sentence and then I always like okay, what was that about? so I read it again, so it takes me longer, and he want me to read it more than five times if I could, to understand. (interview 1)
Sabrina	So, me and Arezo try to read the article together and we like talked to the teacher and tell him that it was hard for us to understand what’s the article, like, our English is not that good to understand the concept of the article, [...] he told us to read it again. And I was like how you want us to read it again? (interview 1)

As the semester unfolded, and Sabrina and Arezo kept mentioning the difficulty they were having with the readings for GOV 207, I would sometimes wonder whether their difficulty derived more from a language problem or from lack of background information. As is often the case, some combination of both factors played a role in their difficulty. However, a few of the comments they made during our interviews made me lean toward lack of background information as a major factor. Arezo was telling me, for example, that at one point they had read an article about Afghanistan, and how the Taliban had moved to Pakistan, and the discussion centered loosely on whether America should intervene or not. Arezo said: “that was the only

article that I actually got it and I actually talk in class” (Arezo, interview 1). In a similar vein, I asked Sabrina if the articles were becoming less difficult a couple of months into the semester. She said: “They are difficult like they don’t change, except like if it’s something that I know more about, and like I’m familiar with, or it’s something easy to understand, like, you know, common sense and everything, it’s easier (Sabrina, interview 2). Another piece of evidence that having more background knowledge significantly enhanced comprehension came from Sabrina’s comments about her 5th exam in GOV 207. In her first four exams, she scored 44%, 64%, 80%, and then 56%. In her 5th exam, she got 96%. Different factors contributed to such remarkable improvement, and the specific resources and strategies she used to study will be discussed below. However, in terms of background knowledge, I thought it was quite telling what Sabrina had to say. When I asked her what had changed from exam 4 to 5, she said, “basically like even though there were more articles, but they were all containing almost the same information [...] always there was something different, but like it was about I think the same thing” (Sabrina, interview 3). Clearly, and perhaps unsurprisingly, the more she read about the same topic, the better she was able to understand it, which supports the idea that the readings for GOV 207 were particularly difficult because of the variety of topics and areas of the world it covered. Reading more about the same topic seemed beneficial not only because it gave Sabrina more knowledge about the topic but also because it may have increased her familiarity with the vocabulary related to the topic.

The two cases discussed above making the case that insufficient background knowledge can create a reading challenge revolved around specific students in specific classes; that is, Solange in the American Government class, and Arezo and Sabrina in the World Issues class. A different situation occurred, however, with Tabasum. Having the least formal education among

the seven participants, the gap in her knowledge base was often a cause for struggle. When I asked her how she felt her experience of interrupted education affected her as a college student, she said:

It affects because every time I like compare myself to other student I don't know, I don't know English of course, but I don't know like the area subjects, like I'm supposed to know, cause it's not the language problem, it's like I should, everyone knows already and I don't know cause I didn't go to school. (Tabasum, interview 4)

An example of how this lack of knowledge affected Tabasum is her experience in the Speech class (COM 203). As would be expected, the focus of this class was on public speaking, which was reflected in the grading criteria: 350 points came from four speaking assignments, 50 points from a speech evaluation essay, and 150 points from monthly quizzes (30 points each).

The quizzes were divided into three parts in the following way:

One third of the questions will be current events questions addressing foreign, domestic, economic, and social issues. The second third will draw from reading assignments and lectures. The purpose of the quizzes is to allow students to become conversant in the issues that shape our lives, and to provide the raw materials with which to create and express our opinions. The final portion of the quiz will ask for students reactions to the assigned reading material.” (COM 203, syllabus)

Even though Tabasum was getting B's in her speeches, she said she was concerned about this class because she was not doing well in the quizzes. When I asked her to tell me about the quizzes, she explained: “the quizzes that we have every 3 weeks is all current events. We have to go online every day and read the current event, and I cannot keep up with that” (Tabasum, interview 2). It is interesting to note that even though the current events section of the quiz

actually comprised only a third part, in Tabasum's mind, probably due to her struggle with it, the whole quiz was all about current events. She also told me that, in class, the professor had instructed students to go to news websites such as BBC.com and read the headings to keep up to date with current events. Tabasum, however, felt that just reading the headings was not helpful since she needed to be able to explain the event in the quiz. To complicate matters, Tabasum explained that "whenever I go [to a news website], cause I don't go every day, I go like once a week or before the quiz date, and there are like thousands of news and I don't know like which ones to read" (Tabasum, interview 2) – a comment which is akin to Arezo's and Sabrina's difficulty in discerning what was important in their readings for GOV 207. Two examples of current events questions are: 1) There are two big stories coming out of California. Describe one of them., which Tabasum got full credit for, and 2) Who is the famed film director arrested in Switzerland on Saturday? What is the story behind his arrest?, which she left blank.

Tabasum told me about her struggles with the current events section of the COM 203 quiz in our second interview. By that time, I did not have the course syllabus, since Tabasum had forgotten to bring it to me in our first interview, and, by the second interview, she told me the syllabus was not available online anymore. When I finally got the syllabus from the professor, I was surprised and saddened to see that a minor part of the course (at least in terms of the grading scheme) was causing her so much stress. Talking to the professor, I was even more surprised to learn that the quizzes could actually be taken in pairs. The professor explained that her rationale for allowing conversation during a quiz was two-fold: "if there's any test anxiety they can kind of work it out" and "it's a communication class so you should be able to communicate" (COM 203 professor). After interview 2, Tabasum went to talk to her professor, who "gave some clues how to study and what's gonna be in the quiz. And this time she said talk to your partner"

(Tabasum, interview 3). Between knowing better what to read and consulting with a peer, Tabasum got a much better quiz grade: 22 out of 30 in quiz 4, coming from a very low 8 out of 30 in quiz 2. Tabasum explained that in the previous quizzes “I was kind of thinking it’s not fair to cheat the quiz with another person [so] I wasn’t talking to my partner, like I have to do by myself” (Tabasum, interview 3).

5.1.5 Reading challenges in exams

At the undergraduate level, student learning is often assessed through exams (e.g., Carson, 2001). My participants’ experience in their first year of college was not different. Even though some courses included an essay writing component, exams were, by far, the most prevalent way of assessing learning outcomes. In some of the classes, such as World Issues, grades were given exclusively based on exams. It is therefore unsurprising that the topic of exams often came up in my interviews with the participants. Exams in many of the classes my participants took in their first year contained multiple-choice questions. These questions often comprised a major portion of the exam and, at times, its totality, which reflects the “ubiquity of multiple-choice tests in college” mentioned in Harklau (2001, p. 50). In Carson (2001), for example, all the exams at the undergraduate level consisted exclusively of multiple-choice questions. At Hope College, however, there were courses that my participants took that never used multiple-choice questions in exams, such as English, Anthropology, and Solange’s section of American Government. Exams in these classes included instead fill-in the blanks, ID questions, short answers, etc. As I analyzed the data, I was able to identify two reading issues arising from exams, which I discuss below. Difficulties with exams related to writing issues will be discussed in chapter six. Interestingly, none of the participants ever mentioned exams as a

source of difficulty whenever we discussed reading challenges. It seems that, in the participants' mind, reading implies reading textbooks or articles, but not questions in exams.

The first reading issue that I noticed participants had when taking an exam is language related. As can be seen in Table 5.6, some of the participants mentioned that they sometimes had trouble understanding a question, and, therefore, could not answer it well.

Table 5.6

Language problem in reading exam questions

Participant	Comments
Arezo	On the test I wouldn't understand some of the question and I would just guess or leave it blank. [...] I didn't get some of the questions, like there were some words that I had no idea what it mean, and like I don't know what it was asking me to do or to write, so, I think it was the English part that was difficult. (interview 1)
Kayhan	I thought I studied things very well, but I didn't, and that's the thing that's kind of screwing me in that class. It's just, you feel like you understand the stuff, okay, this is easy, this stuff is easy. [...] It's just the test. The other things, I mean, I'm not doing bad on them. I have good grades. It's the tests, it's just killing, totally. [...] Second test, I looked at the outline, and I still failed the test. [...] some of the stuff that's on it, that's vocabulary that's on the study guide, but he gives his own examples and his things, that you don't even know, his own words, it's like his level of tests [...]. To me it sounds like a bunch of jibberish. I don't understand it and like I try really hard to apply it, okay, what did I learn in the book, let me see the vocabulary words. (interview 7)
Tabasum	[In] exams [the Economics professor] give different examples and he uses different, like the way, his exams are hard because it's all examples and his personal examples I don't understand. [The textbook] is clear. (interview 8)
Musa	For Biology, the language is pretty much playing a lot of role. [...] On the exam, some questions I didn't understand, but because I recognized a few words, I could relate it to the terms, if I just knew what it was talking about, then that would be easier. (interview 5)

The excerpts above illustrate a situation in which the participants may even have known enough content to answer a question, had they understood what was being asked in the first place. Arezo's and Musa's excerpts seem to indicate that their difficulty was related to language

comprehension. Kayhan's quote, however, gives us a more nuanced insight and points towards two possible sources of difficulty: one being language related, and one, possibly, content related. When he says the professor uses "his own words", and that "it sounds like a bunch of jibberish" to him, the problem seems to be that Kayhan could not understand the synonyms or paraphrases the professor used in the exam and that he might have understood the questions better if the professor had used the same wording as the textbook or the study guide. The other possibility, however, hinted at when Kayhan says "but he gives his own examples", seems to indicate that Kayhan's understanding of the content may have been limited to the situations explored in the textbook or in the lectures, but not enough to let me him extrapolate and apply it to new situations. Tabasum's quote also seems to indicate that her difficulty involved transferring knowledge to different situations or, in her words, to the professor's "personal examples". It's also arguable that both possibilities, the language problem and the content problem, often took place simultaneously and fed into each other.

With her years of interrupted education, Tabasum was always the one who struggled the most in exams or any other assignments. Sometimes she would say something that would completely take me by surprise and make me wonder what else she did not understand that I did not know of. I describe one such incident below. We were talking about a quiz she had taken in her Speech class that day. I happened to have observed this class, so I had a copy of the quiz with me. An excerpt of our conversation is found below:

E: So, which [current events] did you write about?

T: Erm A, C, D, E, G, H, and I wasn't sure about I.

E: Yeah, but you only have to write about five.

T: Five of them. So, if one is wrong then I had six, so it's okay.

E: But it says if you write more than five she'll only read the first five, no?

T: I hope she's gonna read all of them.

E: I don't know, it says "if you choose more than five you'll only be given credit for the first five."

T: It means don't do more than five? (Tabasum, interview 3)

I was completely taken aback when she wanted to confirm what the instructions meant. Had I only seen her answers in the quiz, I would have assumed that she had not read the instructions, or that, having read them, decided to answer extra questions, just in case the professor chose to consider them. This was, incidentally, a strategy she often used. That she was not sure what the instructions meant took me by surprise. With occasional (that I could observe) reading difficulty in understanding simple instructions such as this, it is indeed remarkable that Tabasum did as well as she did in her first year at college.

The second reading issue related to exams is the difficulty all the participants had with multiple-choice questions. Granted, this difficulty does overlap with the language issues discussed above, but I have decided to discuss it separately for two main reasons. First, the number of comments on multiple-choice questions was so prevalent that I think they deserve to be looked at separately. Second, it seems that it was not so much the language itself that posed a problem, but the way the choices were constructed. As will be seen below, Arezo mentioned, for example, that she would get confused with words such as "increase" and "decrease". I don't believe that in any other situation she would have trouble telling one from the other, but the way the multiple-choice alternatives were constructed caused her confusion. Table 5.7 shows comments participants made about this type of questions.

Table 5.7

Challenge imposed by multiple-choice questions

Participant	Comments
Yar Zar	And now I'm meeting with [the tutor] about the readings because on the last test, I was supposed to do really well and I got a C on it, and me and [the GOV 211 professor] we were talking and he was like, he goes "it almost breaks my heart to give you a C because like on the back, short answers" if it was only short answers, I got an A minus on that part, but the thing is, the multiple-choice screwed me over. (interview 8)
Arezo	[The Economics] class is not hard. It's easy and it's easy to follow him, he's really like he go slow and he repeat himself a lot and we do take like really good notes. But it's just his test, I don't like the way he give his test.[...] and like multiple-choice is just, I don't know, it just confuses me. Cause there is the answers, there is like it's almost like the same and sometimes you don't remember if it's increasing or decreasing and one thing is increasing and the other thing is increasing too, you know, but then you're like "okay, what's for this one?" So, it's just kind of like confusing. (interview 7)
Kayhan	[The Psychology] tests, it's difficult, it's really difficult. He gives so many examples and his questions are tricky. [...] they are very tricky [...] his tests are the bomb. (interview 8)
Tabasum	Sometimes I'm not good with like to take tests sometimes and multiple-choice. I told [the REL 100 professor] and he said "okay, write essay". He gave me the option to write essays like with each exam attach my essay, so that helped. (interview 5)
Sabrina	Sometimes it's like I know what the answer is but like [the GOV 207 multiple-choice] answers in the test are so close to each other so that like I get confused and I don't know which one for sure to choose. Cause it's like the first one and the second one are the right answers, but like the third one is wrong and it's all of the above and I don't know which one to choose, I can't choose all of the above cause it's gonna be wrong anyway, so I just have to guess between the two answers. So that's what messes me up the most. (interview 2)
Solange	[I was] super surprised cause I felt like I did good [in the Economics exam]. But on the essay writing part, I did good, like cause the essay writing part was 14 points and I got 12 in one of them and I got 11. And he said like to get 14 is really difficulty. [...]. So, in the writing part I did good, but the problem is [the multiple-choice]. (interview 6)
Musa	I wrote two essays on the [Economics] exam, it was okay. But the multiple-choice and the answers, they have, maybe, they are similar in some way but just like just a little bit of difference that put you off, so if you see something, you know, "oh, this is the answer" but there may be a little error in it that might throw you off. (interview 8)

As can be seen in several of the excerpts above, one of the reasons participants had difficulty with multiple-choice questions derives from the fact that they found the alternatives too similar, or too tricky, which confused them. Arezo, for example, discussing her low grades in her Economics exams, mentioned that she would get confused with words such as “increasing” and “decreasing”, and that she would often not remember which construct increased, and which one decreased. An example from her Economics exam, which illustrates her comment well, is the question below:

If the supply of a good increased, what would be the effect on the equilibrium price and quantity?

- a. Price would increase and quantity would decrease.
- b. Price would decrease and quantity would decrease.
- c. Price would increase and quantity would increase.
- d. Price would decrease and quantity would increase.

Figure 5.2 Economics exam - Sample multiple-choice question

Interestingly, many of the multiple-choice questions that Arezo got wrong in her Economics exams, including the one above, used opposite words such as “increase” vs. “decrease”, “more rapidly” vs. “less rapidly”, and “raising” vs. “lowering”.

Another way in which multiple-choice questions confused my participants is when it included an “all of the above” option, as remarked by Sabrina in her comment about the World Issues class. It is interesting that, in her comment, she says that even though she knew that the first two answers were right, she still thought the third one was wrong, and therefore did not choose the “all of the above” option, “guessing” instead between the two answers she considered correct. An example of this type of question is found below:

Which of the following will likely impede Brazil's drive for regional leadership?

- a. Inadequate military resources
- b. Unwillingness of other nations to follow
- c. Competition from Venezuela under Hugo Chavez
- d. All of the above

Figure 5.3 World Issues exam - Sample multiple-choice question

Many times, especially for the Economics class and clearly stated by Arezo on Table 5.7, participants would claim that the content was not hard, and that they could understand both the textbook and the lectures well, but it was the multiple-choice questions that posed a problem.

Solange summarizes the issue with the Economics class, saying:

He's a good teacher. I pay attention to class, and then I have all my notes and I read the book, but, still, just the way he makes the multiple-choice. He's not good at making the multiple-choice. He makes them really like so close to each other. It's just, I don't know what's different, cause everything, it seems like it's right, but actually one something is wrong. (Solange, interview 7)

The Economics exams also contained a couple of short answer questions, which students tended to do better on, giving support to the idea that students did know the content better than their failing exam grades were showing. Musa's and Solange's comments above make this point clearly. Students also seemed to do better in the short answer part of the Sociology exams than in the multiple-choice questions, and this was also the case with Yar Zar in his American Government class. In his quote on Table 5.7 above, for example, Yar Zar mentions that in the short answer part of the exam, he got an A minus, but that his overall score had been a C because he had done so poorly on the multiple-choice part. From the students' perspective, this discrepancy between their performance on multiple-choice questions and on short answers was

due to the way the multiple-choice questions were constructed. Professors, however, offered different explanations for the inconsistent scores. When Yar Zar met with his GOV 211 professor to discuss his grades, the professor suggested Yar Zar might have gaps in comprehension when doing his readings, perhaps missing the specific information tested in the multiple-choice questions. Yar Zar says, “So we were trying to like figure out what is going on. And [the professor] thinks that when I’m reading I’m not really like understanding” (Yar Zar, interview 8). The Sociology (SOC 200) professor offers yet another explanation for the difference in scores. When I asked her if students tended to do better in one part of the exam compared to the other part, she said:

Generally, they do better in the writing component. [...] I give them choices, I may list seven questions and I say: answer any three. You don’t have that option in a multiple-choice, you either know it or you don’t. But I wanna give them an opportunity to write, to think critically in their writing, [...] and so by building in those options I think one of the reasons why they do so well is, other things being equal, they can surely find three things that they know the answer to in a decent way. Because they are not, with a couple of exceptions, they are all questions that deal with different topics. (SOC 200 professor)

Even though the Economics exams did not give students a choice of short answer questions, they often included several sub-questions, giving students some flexibility in their answers. An example of an Economics short answer question is:

Our economy has been struggling to recover from a recession that started in December, 2007. Last week it was reported that our unemployment rate in February held steady at 9.7%. It has also been reported that real GDP rose 5.9 % (on an annual basis) during the fourth quarter of last year. Given this information use the Keynesian diagram to illustrate where you believe this information places our economy in relation to potential GDP. Early last year Congress passed a

\$787 billion stimulus package that is a combination of additional government spending and tax cuts. Illustrate how these policies might affect your diagram. Are these policies consistent with what Keynes might have prescribed for the economy? Why, or why not? What are some potential benefits and costs of this approach?

Figure 5.4 Economics – Sample short answer question

Just for the sake of illustration, Arezo and Solange got, respectively, 10.5 and 11 out of 15 for this question, scores in the C range. Even though my knowledge of Economics is very poor, it seems that a reasonable understanding of Keynes' model would be important to answer the question above. Looking at the multiple-choice section of the same exam, I find there are three questions out of 23 about the Keynesian model, each worth three points. Arezo got the three of them incorrect, and Solange got two of them incorrect. As the SOC 200 professor puts it, in a multiple-choice question, "you either know it, or you don't." The Economics professor, unfortunately, was not available for an interview, as mentioned in the methodology section. It is therefore not possible to verify whether he tended to give students a higher score in the written part to make up for lower scores in the multiple-choice part. It is worth noting that my participants were not the only one struggling with the Economics exams. Without having talked to the professor, I obviously do not have any information about class average, but I have noticed that in the three (out of four) exams that I had access to, the professor added nine or ten points to each student's score to adjust the curve, an indication that the class, as a whole, had done poorly on the exams.

Tabasum's case, as usual, follows a different pattern from the other participants'. She also took the Economics class and, unlike the other students who usually did better in the short answers section of the exam, she did equally poorly in the multiple-choice part of the test and in the short answers. I have three of her four exams and, in each exam, there were two short answer

questions. Out of the total six short answer questions, she left two completely unanswered and, for another two, she only drew the graph but did not write any prose. The only type of exam question Tabasum seemed to thrive in was matching. She gave me three exams for her Psychology class. In two of them, there was a matching section, one with ten items and one with 14 items, in which students were asked to match a term with its definition. Tabasum got all of them correct, an indication that she could competently deal with the “high school” type of testing, as discussed above, but still had a lot of trouble dealing with all other types of exam questions.

5.1.6 Reading challenges: A summary

The seven participants all faced various challenges in relation to reading practices in their first year of college. They encountered difficulties that can be considered almost inherent to the transition between high school to college, but they also encountered difficulties arising from the fact that they still struggled with the English language and sometimes did not have the background knowledge professors assumed first-year undergraduate students would have. In the remainder of this chapter, I will first discuss the resources they used to cope with these challenges, and then the strategies they developed and used to help them. As I alluded to earlier, these participants were, most of the time, incredibly flexible in adjusting to the demands imposed by the reading practices they faced. An intriguing exception was their experience in the Economics class. As the semester progressed and they started doing poorly in the exams, I felt certain they would be able to find a way of turning it around, especially because they would reassure me that Economics was not difficult and that they could understand both the textbook and the lectures well. All five participants who took that class, however, struggled with the exams from beginning to end, failing most of them, and sometimes barely getting a passing

grade when the professor adjusted the curve and gave them extra points. In the end, they all ended up passing the class with a C or a D. Even though they were happy passing the class, most of them expressed frustration at having their GPA affected so negatively by a General Education class.

5.2 Strategies developed and used to cope with reading challenges

As discussed above, the seven participants faced various reading challenges in their first year of college. Most of the time, however, they were quite adept at developing strategies to help them cope with these challenges. For the sake of organization, I have separated the different strategies into separate sections below, but for the same reading challenge, participants may have resorted to more than one strategy, either simultaneously or consecutively. It is also important to note that some of the strategies were only used temporarily, often until they were proven ineffective, after which a different strategy would be tried out.

5.2.1 Not doing the assigned readings

All the participants, at some point, for one course or another, claimed they were not doing the assigned readings before class and relying on lectures and the occasional accompanying PowerPoint slides, instead, to learn what they were supposed to learn. They gave different reasons for doing so, but, in essence, this was a strategy that they used mostly to manage the amount of reading they were assigned to do for the different courses. In other words, taking into account that there was often not enough time to do all the assigned coursework, participants chose to forgo some of the readings, usually offering a rationale for doing so in a specific discipline. This strategy was often followed by a strategy of reading selectively (discussed below) when studying for an exam.

It was surprising to me that many of the participants were using this strategy of not doing their assigned readings before class at the beginning of the spring semester. In our first interview that semester, soon after winter break, I was so puzzled to hear so many of them saying that, for many of the classes, they were not doing the readings yet, and that they were waiting for the first exam to see how they would do. When I asked Sabrina why she wasn't doing the readings for the Sociology class, she said "I don't know how his test is, so like this is the first one, so we're just trying to see how it works" (Sabrina, interview 5). Likewise, Yar Zar's reply to the same question was, "I don't know, I guess I'm just taking a different approach, you never know. It may work out, it might not work out" (Yar Zar, interview 6). I also thought it was interesting that, just a semester earlier, Yar Zar had said that not doing the reading and relying on the lecture instead was typical of high school, but that in college you actually had to do the reading (see his comment on Table 5.1 above). I often wondered if it was because they had been so successful in the summer and fall semesters that they decided to slack off a little to see if they could get away with it. As will be seen in the discussion below, if this was their intention, the reprieve did not last long. Table 5.8 shows one excerpt for each of the participants in which they claim they were not doing the readings and explaining the rationale behind it.

Table 5.8

On not doing assigned readings

Participant	Comments
Yar Zar	<p>E: You are not regularly reading the [Sociology] chapters before going to class? Y: No, because for her, she repeats everything that's in the book, on the PowerPoint. E: So you don't think the reading is necessary? Y: No, not all. E: And when you got the study guide, you went back to the PowerPoint and you could get all the information? Y: Right. Yeah. (interview 6)</p>

Arezo	<p>A: But like before my [Sociology] first test I wasn't doing the reading too, so that was the only thing that, cause a lot of [the questions] was from the reading too, so.</p> <p>E: And you weren't doing the readings? Why not?</p> <p>A: I don't know. There's just so much other stuff. And when she goes over it in class, what's the whole point of reading?</p> <p>E: So there were things in the test that she didn't go over in class, but were from the readings?</p> <p>A: From the readings, yeah, a lot of people said that. So I learned. (interview 6)</p>
Kayhan	<p>E: Had you read the [Psychology] chapters in the book before class?</p> <p>K: No, because I have a hard time understanding that stuff before he actually teaches it, then I understand a little bit, have an idea, because it's a lot of big words, if you just read before, you just get all confused. (interview 7)</p>
Tabasum	<p>E: Are you reading the [Economics] book now, for the next exam?</p> <p>T: Yeah, I'll try.</p> <p>E: But you haven't started it.</p> <p>T: Yeah. Whenever I have time, I do my reading, like my English class and my Psychology, but there's not enough time to read for all of them.</p> <p>E: And you always leave Economics for last cause you don't like it?</p> <p>T: Yeah ((laughs)) (interview 6)</p>
Sabrina	<p>The reading, I haven't read the [Economics] textbook. [...] Because like, you know, he goes through the chapters, and he talks about it, and like if there are like terms and stuff, like, that we [need to] know we erm, he talks about it in class and we take notes about it. (interview 5)</p>
Solange	<p>Before the first [Economics] exam, I never really used to read [the textbook], cause he was explaining everything. But I started because the first one it was stuff from high school. To me it was like a review, almost. So I never read the book. But, after, when I see how I did in the exam, I started developing the habit of reading the book. I thought that's gonna help me. It did kind of help me for my exam. (interview 7)</p>
Musa	<p>E: Are you reading the [Economics] textbook before you go to class?</p> <p>M: I don't have the textbook, so I borrow.</p> <p>E: You don't have the textbook? How do you study?</p> <p>M: From notes, from class.</p> <p>E: Maybe that's why you're not doing well, Musa.</p> <p>M: The textbook is like 200 something and I don't have money to pay for it, so, but I think my friends have the textbook, so.</p> <p>E: But have you been reading it at all from your friend?</p> <p>M: For the last exam, yes, but then since I didn't do well on that, just forget reading the book too. (interview 6)</p>

As can be seen from the excerpts above, there were a few different reasons why a participant would not complete the assigned reading before class. The most common rationale

given was when a participant perceived the lecture as being a mere repetition of the textbook. This is clearly illustrated by Yar Zar, who claims that the Sociology professor “repeats everything that’s in the book”, or by Sabrina who says that the Economics professor explains all the terms that the students need to know. Solange’s rationale for not reading the Economics book at the beginning of the semester includes the fact that he explained “everything” in class, coupled with the fact that most of that initial information was a review for her, who had taken Economics at high school. The idea that the PowerPoint slides and the textbook are equivalent seemed to be so present in Kayhan’s mind that, at one point, he said, “everything in the [Psychology] book comes from the PowerPoint, basically” (Kayhan, interview 5) instead of the other way around. With this perception that the textbook is redundant, it is not surprising that students would echo Arezo in questioning “what’s the whole point of reading?” However, the strategy of skipping the assigned reading, a strategy that many of the participants used at the beginning of the spring semester, generally did not result in good grades when the first exams came. Arezo and Solange make this point above and, after the initial low grade, both of them, as well as most of the others, decided to start reading more. Yar Zar was probably the only one who claimed he did not read (or skim) the Sociology textbook throughout the semester, relying, instead, on the PowerPoint slides the professor used in the lectures. He claimed he only referred to the textbook when there was something on the study guide that he could not identify in the PowerPoint slides. His attitude was slightly different, however, for the American Government class, a course needed for his major. At first, he was not doing the reading for that class either, claiming that the lectures and the PowerPoint slides were easy to follow. Moreover, he had heard from Kayhan, who had taken that class in the previous semester, that that would be enough. In his words, “I just never get to [the Government readings], cause it’s like cause I feel like you know you go to the class, and if

you have the PowerPoints, that's what Kayhan told me, it's like you go to class and get the PowerPoint down and you'll do okay" (Yar Zar, interview 5). But, because this class was in his major, he felt compelled to do the readings, which he did more of later in the semester, despite not seeing any clear benefits in doing so. He says, "I think [doing the reading] is gonna help me understand a little better, and maybe (?), but as long as you are looking at the PowerPoint, he's just going by the PowerPoint. So, it's really, like there's really no point in reading" (Yar Zar, interview 6).

A second reason participants gave for not doing the assigned reading was a perception that the lecture conflicted with the textbook and that the professor gave precedence to his or her exposition in class. Sabrina makes this point when she says:

I'm reading just parts of the textbook for right now, [...] sometimes she have the definitions on, and she goes "don't look at the book because this is, I think, this is a better definition of it", so I don't wanna get confused with the definition. She was like "I would like to see this stuff, rather than what's on your book". (Sabrina, interview 5)

A third reason for not doing the reading before class is given by Kayhan above. He explained that this was his first Psychology course and that he found it very difficult to understand the content. At that point in the semester, he was learning about neurons and the brain. He therefore chose not to do the reading before class, waiting for the professor to explain the main points and then, later, do the reading. Solange, in her American Government class, sometimes did that too.

A fourth reason mentioned by the participants was sheer lack of time. Tabasum, for example, in the excerpt above, says that "there's not enough time to read for all of them" and, in choosing what not to read, she would leave her least favorite class for last such as in the case of

the Economics class. Throughout the data collection period, Tabasum was often behind in her readings for several of the classes we talked about. Of the readings for her World Religions class, she said, “I don’t get enough time to do all the reading and, when I go to my room, I’m planning to read and I have so many other stuff to do yeah well, I’ll read whenever I have time, but I’m still behind.” She explained that she had no problem following the lecture, but the same could not be said about participating in class discussion. Unlike other classes in which the professor’s lecture was the main mode of classroom dynamics, the World Religions professor often included small group discussions in his class. I asked Tabasum if the professor ever checked whether the students had done the reading in class. She answered:

We discuss, every day, our reading, and [the professor] like he go over every important point and what we read, but he encourages to share our erm like opinion about the reading, but since I’m, they are all upper classmates, I don’t speak in that class. I just sit quietly. (Tabasum, interview 1)

As discussed in her profile, Tabasum always lacked confidence to speak in class, and this feeling was exacerbated when she felt she was the only first-year student, as was the case in the World Religions class. The day I observed this class, the professor started off by writing three questions on the board and asking students to work in groups of five or six. Each group had to choose and discuss one of the questions and find a passage in the reading that supported their answer. The questions were:

1. One aspect of Buddhism that is exemplified by the Dalai Lama (My land and my people).
2. One point of comparison with Black Elk.
3. How data on Buddhism informs your developing ‘theory of religion’.

Figure 5.5 World Religions - Discussion questions

Tabasum sat with the group of students near her, but remained quiet throughout the group discussion. She later told me that she was behind reading the Dalai Lama book, which students were supposed to have finished by the day I observed that class.

In most cases, as participants prioritized the use of their time, they tended to skip the readings for the classes they were not very interested in, usually General Education classes that they were required to take. However, in some cases, their time was so scarce that they ended up not doing the readings even for classes in their major or when they knew they would benefit from doing the reading. Musa exemplifies this situation in the exchange below:

M: The [Biology] lectures are okay.

E: Are you doing the readings?

M: Not now, I'm not ready yet, but I'll start. For the last exam, I actually looked at the PowerPoint and read the book, so it helps a lot, I think I scored better than the first one.

[...]

E: Okay. But you are not reading before going to class.

M: No. There's too much going on, there's too much to do. By the time you are done with your entire homework it's like midnight or one o'clock. (Musa, interview 6)

Even though Musa often did not do the assigned readings before going to the Biology class, he tried to have an idea of what was coming up by reading the PowerPoint slides that the professor made available to the students before he started each chapter. Musa says, "Sometimes you read the textbook, but mostly I go over the PowerPoint for the class and then, what we did today, I'll go over it before next class, then I know when he continues, then I know what he's talking about" (Musa, interview 5).

Unlike the other participants, who started the spring semester not doing some of the readings to see if they could get away with it, Musa states that he actually did at least some of the readings for Economics initially, but, seeing no results after the first exam, decided not to do it anymore, or, in his words, “just forget [about] reading the book.” In his case, doing the readings for that class involved the extra step of borrowing a book, since he claims he couldn’t afford it. He makes this point in the comment reproduced on Table 5.8 above. Of all the participants, he is the only one that ever mentioned not having the money to afford a textbook. Their scholarship included a substantial amount for books each semester, but because Musa was taking more credit hours than the other participants, and the Biology course required two textbooks, one for the lecture class and one for the lab, he explained he had run out of money for books that semester.

5.2.2 Doing the assigned reading selectively

Even though the strategy of substituting reading for lecture, as discussed above, was used by all the participants at one point or another, an alternative strategy that was more commonly used to cope with too much or difficult reading was that of reading selectively. Participants used this strategy extensively, sometimes simply skimming a text, or, other times, reading specific parts of a text following professor-supplied guidelines such as PowerPoint slides or study guides. Each of these will be discussed separately below.

5.2.2.1 Skimming

As can be seen on Table 5.9, participants often resorted to skimming in order to tackle their reading assignments.

Table 5.9

Skimming

Participant	Comments
Yar Zar	I skim through [the World Issues articles] for the discussions because that's when I really get into the discussions. Because when the exam comes, I'll go back and I'll do a study guide, you know, but like now I've been reading the whole thing because we have quiz on it. (interview 1)
Arezo	I do skim through [the Economics textbook]. If I don't have time, I'll just go and skim through it and then, if I have time after class, then I'll read it. (interview 6)
Sabrina	I didn't read the whole [Sociology] chapter, but like skimmed through it. (interview 7)
Solange	Sometimes, the readings, if they are really long, for me, I tend to ask my [Anthropology] teacher like if they are really long, and I have other stuff to do, [I] ask if I can skim through it, like I don't have to know every detail, she gives us that choice like to go through it and think, just pick up the main idea. (interview 4)
Musa	From the [Economics] syllabus, I just go and look at the text of that area and just skim the reading. (interview 5)

From the comments above, participants seemed to use skimming as a reading strategy quite deliberately, especially before going to class, often with the intention of reading the text again after class, or before the exam. Some of the professors, such as those for Anthropology and American Government, condoned the use of this strategy. As Solange's American Government professor said, (also on Table 5.2), "there's [...] nothing wrong [...] with skimming the material, especially if you're having a hard time understanding it."

Kayhan and Tabasum, however, never used the word *skim* in their interviews. As I analyzed the data, I wondered if they actually never did it, or whether perhaps they did it, but did not know the word for it. There is also the possibility, of course, that they did use skimming, knew the word for it, but just never mentioned it to me. I find it unlikely, however, that that was the case because, as with all the other participants, the issue of reading came up several times during our interviews, they often had difficulty completing the reading assignments in time, so if

they were aware of this reading strategy, and knew the word for it, I am quite certain they would have mentioned it. Looking at all the data I have for these two participants, it seems likely that Kayhan did skim some of his material, but I am not sure Tabasum ever did.

In our first interview, I asked Kayhan how he usually approached his readings. His reply was:

I'm more of a quick reader, but if I don't understand, I read back again cause sometimes, when I read, I don't understand what I've just read so I just try to read again, maybe I don't understand the point, maybe I miss something important, but I'm more kind of read quick, but most times if I don't understand so I try to go back. (Kayhan, interview 1)

My interpretation of his reply is that he tended to skim the readings (being a “quick reader”) while doing some comprehension checks. He mentions that, in reading quickly, he may “miss something important,” which leads me to believe that he was not reading for details. One could also interpret his answer as him saying that he was a fluent reader. Considering his educational background and his interview data, however, I find this unlikely. For example, when I asked him how he thought his educational background affected him as a college student, he said, “the English is still kind of hurting me a little bit, [...] I can read it, but understanding it is a little bit hard for me. I can't understand it as fast as other students can, so. That's the problem” (Kayhan, interview 4).

Tabasum, on the other hand, never seemed to apply any strategy that could make her reading more efficient. She always seemed to read word for word, looking up those she did not know. When I asked her if she had ever tried not looking up all the words she did not know, she said, “I get lost if I don't look the words, I just read and don't understand” (Tabasum, interview 2). In our final interview, she mentioned again that she looked up all the words she did not know

because, if she didn't, she was not able to understand what she was reading. And when the amount of reading was such that she felt she could not catch up, she said, "when I'm so behind, I just gave up" (Tabasum, interview 2).

5.2.2.2 Reading according to PowerPoint slides

As discussed above, Yar Zar and Musa used the PowerPoint slides in their Sociology and Biology classes, respectively, in lieu of reading the textbooks. In Musa's case, this strategy was just a short-term prop to help him follow the professor's lectures before he found the time to actually read the textbook. In Yar Zar's case, the PowerPoint slides seemed to effectively replace the textbook most of the time. Sabrina, on the other hand, used the content on the PowerPoint slides to select the parts of the textbook she was going to read.

When discussing how much of the Sociology textbook she had been reading, Sabrina replied explaining her method for selecting which sections to read. She says:

If I look at the PowerPoint and it talks about a subject, if you look at the book, you find the subject, if it talks about it in a page, you read the page about it, so just, if it's a paragraph, you read the paragraph about it. (Sabrina, interview 5)

Clearly, she employed this strategy to save time and avoid reading what she considered unnecessary. She explained that a section in the textbook could be five pages long, but the part that was on the PowerPoint actually made reference to only one paragraph. So, "instead of reading the five pages which [...] don't have to do anything with it, we read the paragraph that she's talking about" (Sabrina, interview 6). Sabrina tried to do this selective reading before each class, or just after a class, although she did not always have the time to do it. She says, "I haven't done that for every single PowerPoint, cause she have like a crazy amount of PowerPoint, she have like 50 slides over PowerPoint [per chapter]" (Sabrina, interview 5).

Later in the semester, however, Sabrina realized that the strategy of giving precedence to the PowerPoint over the textbook was not working well. She says:

Well, I try to go through the PowerPoint, but I don't understand what the PowerPoint says, like, it's not helping me as much as if I read the book.[...] So, I don't like the PowerPoint. [...] Like, if I don't read before the class, I read during the class, or I read it like after the class. (Sabrina, interview 7)

5.2.2.3 Reading according to study guides

In the different courses that my participants took in their first year of college, there were different materials provided by the professors that served the purpose of informing students what the key concepts and ideas were for a specific section of the course. Even though these materials received different labels in the different courses (e.g., handout, study guide, review sheet), because they shared the same purpose, I will use the term *study guide* to refer to all of them. My participants made extensive use of these study guides, often to the point that they did not know what to read or study if they were not given one. Table 5.10 below contains comments from all the participants explaining how they used the study guides to help them determine what they were supposed to read and know.

Table 5.10

Reliance on study guides

Participant	Comments
Yar Zar	Before the exam, I go to the study guide. The study guide makes you read the book. Like, you look at the study guide, you read the book. (interview 6)
Kayhan	It's in the book, and the way I study, basically with the chapters and basically like I look at the study guide, I basically like memorize the study guide. (interview 6)
Arezo	I read [the article] ahead of time and I kind of get it[...] I also look at my, the bulletin points that he want us to know about, I look at that and then I find those words and then I highlight, like I highlight a lot of stuff [...] that's important,

	and he also, like when we go to the class, he show his article that he highlighted, so most of my highlights are the same as his highlights. (interview 2)
Tabasum	I have [...] the study guide, I didn't find all the answers, I'm gonna ask. (interview 2)
Sabrina	I'm reading just parts of the textbook for right now, and also she said that she'll give us a study guide so I'm gonna try to do the study guide through the book too. (interview 5)
Solange	In Anthropology, she gives us like review sheet whereby you have questions that guide your reading. (interview 4)
Musa	The basic thing is like I look at the question [in the review sheet] and just read a lot, on that stuff, on the topic. (interview 4)

As is clear from the comments above, all the participants relied heavily on the study guides they received in their classes. Sabrina's comment about the Sociology study guides below summarizes how all the participants felt about the importance of this type of material:

[The professor] give us the study guide and not everything that's on her PowerPoint is in the study guide, so like I would know like what things to study instead of studying something that I don't even need to study and know about it, and I don't know about the things that she wants us to study. (Sabrina, interview 6)

At least in two instances during the data collection period, participants claimed they did not do well in exams because they did not have a study guide or because they got it at the last minute and did not have time to go over all of it. Kayhan, for example, told me that he did poorly in his third Psychology exam because he did not have a study guide. He explains:

For the third one that we took yesterday, we didn't have a study guide, and I kind of like I got lost totally [...], it was too much. Cause if you have a study guide [...] it shows what you need to study, don't worry about everything else, so I started reading everything and then like you kind of forget about all the information because it's too much stuff to grasp in two and a half chapters. It's a lot of vocabulary words and it's just not, it didn't go well. (Kayhan, interview 7)

It is clear from Kayhan's comment that he had difficulty discerning the key points in the two and a half chapters he had to study for that exam without the aid of a study guide. Not having the study guide for that exam, however, seems to have been Kayhan's oversight. He claims he did not find it on the course webpage, but when we checked the webpage together during the interview, not only was the study guide there, but chapter overviews and lecture outlines.

The other case in which participants claimed they did poorly on an exam because of an issue with the study guide was for the Sociology first exam. Arezo, Yar Zar and Sabrina claim they got the study guide at the last minute and never had the time to go over all of it especially because it was much longer than they had expected. Their situation was clearly aggravated by the fact that they had not been doing the readings and were waiting for the study guide to start studying for the exam, which only happened the night before. Yar Zar's account below shows that he clearly underestimated the time he needed to get prepared for the exam.

I was doing [the study guide], I was still on question 1 and it was about twelve o'clock [a.m.]. We started at like around maybe 9, because we, you know, we didn't expect, we were just like "oh, study guide", you can just go in, look at the powerpoint, get it. Oh my God, it's not like that at all. Until around like 12:30 we found this girl who had finished all of them, so we went to her, we copied all the notes in the library and we tried to study, me and Sabrina fell asleep in the library at 3. (Yar Zar, interview 6)

Just to clarify, the reason Yar Zar took so long working on question 1 is because that question contained "like 30 different vocabulary words where you had to find, and some of them she wants us to have from the notes and she gave us in class, and some of them from the book" (Sabrina, interview 6). The fact that a peer had been able to finish the whole study guide leads

me to believe that if Yar Zar, Sabrina and Arezo had been doing the readings regularly the fact that the professor gave them the study guide at the last minute would not have been so much of an issue.

5.2.3 Enhancing the reading experience

As my participants struggled with reading in their first year of college, besides not doing the readings or doing it selectively, another strategy they often used was to enhance their reading experience by finding different ways of improving the quality of their reading. This is the focus of this section.

5.2.3.1 Finding moments and places conducive to better reading

As has been discussed at different points above, Arezo had a lot of difficulty reading the articles for the World Issues class. It was interesting to see how proactive she was finding ways to make her reading experience more effective. Three changes that she implemented after failing the first three exams for that class were not to do the readings in her room, not to look at a computer while doing the readings, and not to do the readings before going to bed. She explains:

Instead of studying in my room, I go study somewhere else, like in a study room or library, and I do, I try to like don't go towards my computer, cause then I'll be distracted there, and I try to like stay away from my computer. [...] Cause like you are reading something that you're really not interested in and like sometimes people would do that on purpose to go to sleep, [...] so whenever I read those articles that I have no interest in, I get really sleepy, and I still try to stay awake and read it, but when I'm reading, I don't get anything. But like when I'm reading at the time when I'm not sleepy and I'm somewhere like sitting on a desk or library, in a quiet place, and trying to concentrate in the article, I get it more. (Arezo, interview 2)

Sabrina, similarly, found out that she was more productive if she studied at the library instead of at her room. At the beginning of spring semester, she said:

Since we got back, I'm hitting the library every evening, so I'm there until 11 o'clock trying to get my stuff done, cause I know if I'm in my room, like I won't really get a lot of stuff cause, you know, the girls will come and we'll start talking and stuff like that.

[The library has] quiet rooms, or like the quiet part of the library there are tables, you just sit there and do your homework, so it's really helpful. So, cause like, you know, [...] you can't go and take a nap, or like, anything like that. (Sabrina, interview 5)

Solange also mentioned going to the library to study instead of staying in her room, where she would often get distracted. She says, "I don't want to be in my room a lot, cause every time I'm in my room I just sleep or I watch TV" (Solange, interview 5). Yar Zar did not give any specific reason for choosing the library to study, but this seems to have been the place where he would normally go whenever he needed to study. He indicates this preference when he says, for example, "I have an exam on Friday, which means I'm gonna have to hit the library tonight" (Yar Zar, interview 5). It is important to clarify that these participants were not working on research papers, so they used the library simply as a quiet place where they could focus on their studies.

The other three participants did not specifically mention going to the library to study, but they all spent time there, so it is possible that they also did at least some of their coursework there. Tabasum, for example, spent many hours at the library because she worked there. Musa, at least in the fall semester, would always go to the library to use the computers that were available there because, initially, he did not have his own and, later in the semester, he had a computer, but no word processing software. Kayhan also seemed to go to the library regularly, and he

particularly seemed to enjoy the social interactions that took place there. He said, “you go to the library at night, there’s always people to meet. It’s almost impossible not to talk to anybody. You always think, I’m gonna go to the library and talk to anybody, because you always end up talking to somebody.”

5.2.3.2 Reading with a peer

Several of the participants, as seen on Table 5.11 below, relied on peers to aid their comprehension of course material. Some of the participants were explicit in saying they did the reading together, and while doing so they shared their understanding of the text, and others mentioned studying with peers, or asking them for clarification on points they were not clear about from the lectures and readings. I have grouped both situations together.

Table 5.11

Reading or studying with a peer

Participant	Comments
Yar Zar	Kayhan is tutoring me in this. [...] we’ll do the study guide like two days ahead and then we’ll get together before the exam again. (interview 6)
Kayhan	I’ll probably look for help. I don’t think I can do without help. [...] My roommate, he took the class, so, obviously, I might need something, he took the class, so. (interview 5)
Arezo	We read one of the bullets from the study sheet ,and then like everybody tell their own answer, what they think about it, like what they remember about it and then we just write everybody’s, if we think it’s right, we write everybody’s answer there. (interview 5)
Sabrina	We would read the book, and we would try to, first, when we started reading the book we could not understand anything that was going on, like what are they talking about, but then we started reading it in groups, you know, so it was like me, Solange, Arezo and Tabasum would sit down and read the book together and we would kind of understand cause if I pick up something I would tell and if they pick up something they would tell, so we kind of get the concept of what’s going on in the chapter or anything. (interview 1)
Musa	The thing that really helped me was, my roommate is a Psyc major so he helped me review some stuff and what the professor explained me, [...], he kind of broke it down for me. (interview 8)

It is noteworthy that my participants had a clear preference for working with peers that either belonged to their cohort of seven refugees or were their roommates. The implications of this preference will be discussed below in the section that covers peers as a resource.

Even though most participants seemed to enjoy and profit from studying with peers, two exceptions to this tendency were Solange and Tabasum. Solange was aware of her preference, which she stated clearly, “I like learning by myself, I don’t perform as well in groups, I focus more, like especially if it’s reading, but if it’s something to do, like activities, I like doing the groups, but reading, I like doing for myself” (Solange, interview 1). Tabasum never mentioned a preference one way or another, but rarely did she mention studying with a peer. She seemed to rely mostly on tutors arranged by the Academic Support Center at Hope College. This will be discussed below. This can be a reflection of the shyness she often felt coupled with her generally not being comfortable as a college student. These two issues are mentioned in her profile.

Studying with peers clearly helped my participants clarify questions they had about the content. It also helped them minimize their study load by dividing up the study guide into sections and assigning different parts to different students in the group. They would then all get together and share their notes. Lastly, at least in Sabrina’s case, studying with peers gave her an important insight into how the professor constructed his multiple-choice questions. She explains, “when we were studying in the group thing, the day before, the girls were like so when he has like all of the above, it’s almost always all of the above” (Sabrina, interview 3). Indeed, in the seven multiple-choice questions that the professor shared with me, three of them had either an “all of the above” or an “a and c are correct” alternatives. In all three cases, these were the correct options. Sabrina had mentioned that she would often get confused by questions that contained alternatives like “all of the above”, thinking that, for example, “a” and “b” were

correct, but not “c”, so she could not choose “all of the above”. Instead, she would just arbitrarily choose either “a” or “b”. When interviewing the professor for this class, he mentioned that students should sometimes be able to pick the correct answer even without having read the material “because you can figure it out from the way the question is laid out. And, you know, that all are correct except and you’re looking at these and suddenly there’s a pattern. You know, this one’s going that way, it’s going the same way, it’s going the same way, it’s got to be the one that’s not” (GOV 207 professor). This pattern seems to have been identified by the students Sabrina was studying with, but she had not been able to figure it out by herself.

5.2.3.3 Using a dictionary

As discussed above in the reading challenges section, all the participants mentioned, at one point or another, having some reading difficulty related to unknown vocabulary. It is therefore interesting to see that, despite being a reading strategy for some of them, using a dictionary was generally not a very popular strategy, at least as reflected in the data collected. Table 5.12 below shows comments from those participants who reported using this strategy.

Table 5.12

Using a dictionary

Participant	Comments
Tabasum	If I don’t use dictionary then I don’t understand [...] I have a paper dictionary I usually carry with me. (interview 2)
Kayhan	I look sometimes on the internet to see what [a word means], I look in the dictionary. (interview 4)
Solange	When I’m reading, I usually sit next to my computer cause I don’t have a dictionary, so I type in dictionary.com so that’s when I define most of the words. (interview 1)
Musa	I need to have a dictionary by my side when I’m reading so I can be able to translate, and I have a French and English dictionary I look up the words. (interview 1)

Of the four participants who reported using a dictionary, only Tabasum and Musa seemed to have a hard copy and seemed to use it regularly. Kayhan and Solange mentioned online dictionaries, but the excerpts above were the only times they brought up this topic in our interviews. Sabrina and Arezo also mentioned online dictionaries, but they seemed to use this resource more frequently when working on writing assignments. Arezo says, for example,

I just read [the article] and I don't use a dictionary. I don't have one. [...] If I'm writing something and I have no clue what it is, so I just go online and look for the definition of the word, but like, reading an article, it would take me like days if I do that, so I'll just like read it and I highlight the things that I think it's important. (Arezo, interview 1)

It was interesting to notice the change in Musa's use of the dictionary as the year went by. At the beginning of the fall semester, as can be seen in the comment above, Musa seemed to use his English-French dictionary quite frequently. In our last interview, however, he seemed to be weaning himself away from this habit, which accompanied an improved self-confidence in his reading comprehension ability:

Before, I would just read, because it's there, I don't really get it, I can read an entire sentence, I don't try to understand [...] what the author was talking about, but now, I can read and picture "oh, he's talking about this", except when there are words that I can't get then I have to use, I mean, dictionary or something, but, I mean, now I'm trying to, even with that, I can still go and read, there's a word that I don't get, but I keep reading and figure out what the meaning is. (Musa, interview 8)

Yar Zar, likewise, even when he felt the reading was difficult, as it sometimes was in the Theatre class, tried not to focus on the words he did not know, but, rather, kept reading to see if he could grasp the overall idea of the play. He says:

When I'm reading [...] like in Theatre, it's like really hard, what I would do is I'd just keep reading and then I'll try to make sense out of it, you know, you know how sometimes you just skip it and if you keep reading it starts making sense, you pick it up, so that's what I'll do every now and then. (Yar Zar, interview 1)

5.2.3.4 Re-reading after lecture

When the World Issues professor suggested to Arezo and Sabrina that they should re-read the articles when they could not understand them, they did not think his advice was helpful and they felt frustrated. This is discussed above. As it turns out, both of them ended up going back to the articles after the lectures and found the practice very useful. Arezo explains her new reading habit:

In my government class, instead of reading the article once, I read it once before I go to the class and then we discuss in class and once after the class and it just help me, cause we talk about it in class and once I read it again afterward, then I like kind of remember "oh, yeah, we did talk about this", so [...], it's better for me. (Arezo 2)

Sabrina did not mention re-reading the articles after the lectures, but she said she started going over the parts she had highlighted in the articles, as well as over her notes, after the professor had explained the articles in class.

This was not, understandably, common practice among the participants. Most of the strategies they used to cope with reading involved trying to find ways of cutting back on the time they needed to accomplish the reading assignment. Reading the same text again clearly did not fit this description. Just to illustrate, when I asked Kayhan if he ever re-read the plays he had struggled with in his Theatre class, he replied: "No, you've got to be kidding me, no way. I must lose my mind" (Kayhan, interview 6).

5.2.3.5 Tutor-supported reading

As will be discussed below, tutors for the different courses are available to students at Hope College. Most of my participants made use of this resource to help them with readings they had difficulty with. Table 5.13 shows some of their comments.

Table 5.13

Tutors helping with reading

Participant	Comments
Yar Zar	Now I'm meeting with [the American Government tutor] about the readings [...] because, you know, some of the stuff, it's a government book, so it's like some of the stuff need to be explained, so [the professor] wanted me to meet with my tutor like more. (interview 8)
Kayhan	When I read that Federalist Papers, [the American Government tutor] explains what it's saying and what it meant to say, what its meaning is. And actually when he explains it, I understand it and then so that helps a lot and I basically take notes on the Federalist Papers, what it's saying, I take notes what its meaning is, so, it helps me. (interview 2)
Arezo	[The World Issues tutor] just like help me go over the article once again and I just take more notes and the study guide that [the professor] give us, the points, we go over each point and talk about it. (interview 2)
Tabasum	First, like [the Economics tutor] said, "what do you not understand in the content?" and I said "I don't understand anything" and then we read the book, the first time we read the book [...] and the second time we just study the sample questions. (interview 8)
Sabrina	I met [the World Issues tutor] on Sunday, and we spent an hour talking about one of the articles, cause it was so long, so he was explaining me the article about Chavez. (interview 3)

The support tutors gave the participants varied according to the participant's needs. At times, participants would meet with tutors just before exams to go over parts of the study guide they were not sure about. Other times (as seen in the excerpts above), participants met with the tutors more regularly to go over the texts they had difficulty understanding. Arezo, for example, at one point, was meeting with her tutor for the World Issues class twice a week, every week. Yar Zar, at the end of the spring semester, reported having a tutor for almost every class.

Tabasum, similarly, reported requesting and meeting with tutors for almost all of her classes.

Two exceptions for this tendency were Musa and Solange. Musa did report joining Sabrina once when she was meeting with the Economics tutor, but he arrived late and just participated in the last part of the session. Neither of them ever reported requesting a tutor. This may be a reflection of their more self-reliant attitude. Solange said, for example, “I like learning by myself”

(Solange, interview 1) and, likewise, Musa said, “I like to do things by myself, like trying to figure out how to do this problem or how to read this thing, understand it” (Musa, interview 1).

5.2.4 Seeking out assistance from professors

Most of the participants in this study, when they felt they were struggling with content, took the initiative to seek their professors’ help. These interactions did not seem to focus exclusively on the readings students were asked to do, but more generally on the combination of readings and class lectures. I have chosen to consider this seeking out of professors’ help as a reading strategy because I figured if the readings were unproblematic, the participants would probably not need to seek their professors’ help to clarify content. Table 5.14 below summarizes some of the comments my participants have made regarding their interactions with professors outside class.

Table 5.14

On seeking assistance from professors

Participant	Comments
Kayhan	My government professor, I started to know him, and then er [before] the test, he was like “if you need any help you can come to my office”. He knew that I’m gonna need help, so, he helped me, it took one hour of basic understanding every, the PowerPoint slide, everything, cleared up. (interview 4)
Arezo	I talk to [the World Issues professor] a lot and, every time I go to his office, I’m there for 45 minutes and 15 minutes of that time that we talk is about my stuff, [...] how I should study and everything. [...] I just say that I do this, I do that, what else should I do to improve? And I just go if I have question. (interview 2)

Tabasum	[The World Religions professor] is very respectful and he's very nice, like he always ask me if I have question or like anything, but I'm shy, I don't speak like in front of (the class?), but, yeah, I always ask him question and go to his office. (interview 4)
Sabrina	I talked to [the Economics professor] like three times so far and the only thing he tells me is to read the book. (interview 8)
Solange	I [talk to my professors] a lot [...] especially when I don't understand, I don't wanna go just without understanding. (interview 1)

Most of the time, when participants sought their professors' help, they seemed to have a specific question about the course content that they wanted to ask. If they had a more global difficulty with the class, however, they tended to look for tutors instead. Tabasum clarifies this point in the interaction below:

T: I went to talk with [the Economics professor] before I took the exam because [...] I had question.

E: Was it the first time that you go talk to this professor?

T: Yeah, [...] Because before, I didn't understand, I didn't know what to ask. (Tabasum, interview 8)

Likewise, Sabrina explained that she had not looked for the World Issues professor outside class because "for his class I don't even know what to ask him. This is like the biggest thing, I don't know what to ask him" (Sabrina, interview 1).

The only case in which a participant seems to have interacted more regularly with a professor was Arezo in her World Issues class. It is interesting that, initially, she had shied away from any interaction with this professor. Of this initial period, she says, "I wasn't talking to him. I was too afraid. I was like 'he's gonna hate me, I don't have good grades in his class'" (Arezo, interview 2). Once they started interacting, Arezo would go to his office at least once a week to talk about study habits and questions she had from the readings and class discussions. According

to Arezo, they also spent a good amount of time with her teaching him some Urdu. She mentioned he was doing research on Pakistan and trying to learn the language.

Unlike the other participants, Yar Zar and Musa very rarely sought their professors outside of class, especially to talk about reading assignments. Yar Zar only reported meeting with a professor once, when he was struggling with the multiple-choice questions in his American Government class. Musa often talked to his Freshman Composition instructor about his essays but, other than that, does not seem to have interacted with any other professor outside class. Witnessing his frustration with the Economics exams, I asked Musa if he had ever talked to that professor. He replied that he had not and explained why:

I don't think that's gonna help me that well cause not to say I don't understand the material. English is like really, I didn't understand his way of writing cause, you know, it's writing, but Econ, the material is there. You can read it and, but just on the test, the question just totally, I don't even know what it's talking about. (Musa, interview 8)

I do not know whether Yar Zar still does not interact much with his professors, but I know that Musa has changed his attitude, and is now more proactive seeking his professors' assistance each time he feels he needs it. At the end of our final interview, he mentioned that after participating in this study, "one thing that I've learned is to go see the professor. [...] You said, 'Why didn't you go see the professor?' and I was like 'I don't know'. That's something that I've learned. I need to talk more to professors" (Musa, interview 8). When we met a year after the study was over, he reiterated that that was the major lesson he got from our work together, and that in his sophomore year he had interacted with his professors a lot more as a result of that.

5.2.5 Reading strategies: A summary

Despite facing several reading challenges in their first year of college, all seven participants were quite pro-active in finding strategies to cope with them. By not doing all the assigned readings, reading selectively, enhancing their reading experience, and seeking help from their professors, my participants were able to manage the readings they were expected to do. How much of the content in these readings they actually grasped is beyond the scope of this study. The fact that, despite the challenges, none of the participants failed a course seems to be a remarkable feat.

5.3 Resources used to cope with reading challenges

At one point during data analysis, the boundary between a strategy and a resource became blurred and I questioned whether I actually needed to discuss them separately. It became obvious to me that a resource by itself is innocuous unless a participant decides to take advantage of it in order to tackle a challenge. A resource, by itself, does not accomplish anything. Yet, if different resources were not available, my participants would not have been able to develop and use many of the strategies discussed above. I believe now that the key role played by the resources used by my participants warrants a separate discussion. This section, therefore, focuses on the resources themselves while the previous section focused on my participants' strategic use of these resources.

5.3.1 PowerPoint slides

Several of the classes my participants took in their first year of college did not make use of PowerPoint slides. However, in most classes where this technology was used consistently, the slides became an important resource for my participants. As discussed above, Yar Zar tended to rely almost exclusively on the PowerPoint slides for his Sociology class and not read the

textbook. Musa read the Biology slides before and after class, besides reading the textbook when preparing for exams. Tabasum went through the slides in her World Issues class while studying for exams. Most of the participants also used PowerPoint slides, when available, to help them with note-taking, and this will be discussed in the next chapter.

In my interview with professors, some of them mentioned their use (or not) of PowerPoint slides. They often gave a rationale for using them (or not), and talked about the content displayed on the slides. I summarize their comments in Table 5.14 below.

Table 5.15

Professors' use (or not) of PowerPoint

Professor	Comments
BIO 111	I've just relied upon the PowerPoints provided by the publisher [...] If somebody were to sit in lecture and not read the book at all, they may be in trouble, but they would know at least the areas that they should be familiar with if they simply paid attention to what I was talking about from the PowerPoints.
GOV 211	I think it's just a more common trend that the kids just don't engage with reading, you know, quite as well. You know it's also one of the things we fight that the kids are becoming increasingly acclimated to having information spoon fed to them. It's why I refuse to use PowerPoint presentations because my observations of students with them is they will write down everything that's on that slide and will not listen to a single thing outside of it. I will utilize the board to indicate important concepts, terms, things of that nature.
REL 100	[The lecture] connects both [the textbook and the biographies], and it provides additional material. So, um, I try to provide an overall framework for understanding whatever tradition we're looking at. [...] And [...] I base that on the PowerPoints.
SOC 200	I'm working on some answers to a student inquiry [...] she's asked me, "what does this essay question mean?" It was something not in the book; it was a topic I talked about in class. I mentioned that this person and their concept for how we acquire the social self is not mentioned in the book. [...] So now I'm having to respond and say, "well, this was in class" and it's mentioned, it's listed in the PowerPoint but only in bullet forms. So she can't get her answer from reading the PowerPoint, she just sees it listed there.[...] I'm hoping that they know that they need to listen, they need to know that I don't read from the PowerPoint, I go from a bullet point and go off here and give examples.

While the BIO 111 professor seemed to use PowerPoint slides mainly to highlight key information students needed to know, both SOC 200 and REL 100 professors seemed to use the slides also to provide additional information not mentioned in the textbook. The comment by the SOC 200 professor is particularly interesting, considering that Yar Zar mentioned several times that he was able to get all the information he needed in this class from reading the PowerPoint slides. Yar Zar also mentioned that he never took notes to expand the bullet points. The professor makes it clear that not all the information could be retrieved from the PowerPoint slides. She explains that a student would be able to find a topic listed on a slide, but that the development of the topic took place orally, through the lecture. In other words, just from reading the bullet points on a slide a student would not be able to know what the topic was about.

This mismatch between how Yar Zar (and the other participants in that class) viewed the content of the PowerPoint slides and how the SOC 200 professor viewed it seems to relate somewhat to the comment made by the GOV 211 professor. He says, “my observations of students with [PowerPoint] is they will write down everything that’s on that slide and will not listen to a single thing outside of it.” In the Sociology class, since students already had the slides, either in hard copy or electronically, they did not even have to write down what was on each slide. In the class that I observed, none of my participants took notes from the lecture. The only thing they would occasionally do was some highlighting or underlining on their copy of the slides. The participant that was following the slides electronically alternated between the slides and YouTube. My participants were not alone in this passive attitude, though. In the class that I observed, even though the last part of the class was devoted to questions from the review sheet, very few students asked a question throughout the entire class period. It is possible that the use of PowerPoint slides contributed to this low level of student participation. However, I believe there

were other factors in the lesson dynamics that hampered a more active student attitude in this class: the professor stood behind her computer most of the time, rarely using any gestures or body language, and the lecture was delivered in a soft, monotone voice, as if the professor were reading from a script.

The GOV 211 professor may have a point that using PowerPoint slides is a form of spoon feeding students and that students tend to rely too heavily on the content shown on the slides instead of listening to and taking notes of the lectures. However, it would seem that, at least for students with a similar profile as my participants, PowerPoint slides can be beneficial in that they highlight important information and offer a visual support to accompany lectures.

5.3.2 Study guides

Sifting through the written documents collected from the several classes my participants took in their first year of college, I have identified different types of material that served the purpose of informing students what the key concepts and ideas were for a specific section of the course. Most of the time, this material was handed out before an exam in order to aid students in their preparation, but, in some cases, such as in the World Issues class, students had access to this material before they started doing the readings for that section. Even though all these materials shared the same purpose, their formats and labels varied widely. For practical reasons, as mentioned above, I refer to all these materials as *study guides*. Table 5.15 summarizes the different study guides I had access to. This list therefore does not represent all the study guides my participants received in their first year of college, but those my participants, or their professors, shared with me.

Table 5.16

Different types of study guide

Course	Label	When	Content
ANT 200	Key concepts	Before reading on a new topic	A list of concepts and questions about the topic.
ANT 200	Review sheet for final exam	Before final exam	Exam format; a list of 3 to 10 questions per topic, with more questions for material covered after exam 2. Total of 63 questions.
ECO 110	Sample questions	Before each exam	Around 40 multiple-choice questions with key on last page.
GOV 207	Handout	Before reading a new set of articles	For each article, a list of 3 to 10 main issues and the approximate number of multiple-choice questions from the article that is to appear on the exam.
GOV 211 (Yar Zar)	Study guide	Before each exam	Exam format; for each topic, a list of 2 to 7 questions; for each Federalist Paper, a list of 1 to 6 quotes; 3 essay questions.
PSY 101 (Kayhan)	Review	After each section	A list of around 25 to 35 key terms and approximately 15 questions.
REL 100	Exam study guide	Before each exam	A list of 50 terms and seven central themes.
SOC 200	Review sheet	Before each exam	For each chapter, a list of about 30 terms/people and between 9 and 14 questions.

As discussed above, one of the reading strategies my participants often used, especially before exams, was to do their reading, or review it, following study guides provided by their professors. Gauging from the different comments professors made about the content of their study guide, this strategy seems warranted. The REL 100 professor, for example, said that his study guides were “comprehensive” and that “what concepts [students] are accountable for are [...] on the study guide.” Similarly, the SOC 200 professor explained that “if [something] is not on the study guide, it’s not on the test.” The participants in that class seemed to have understood this message well and used the study guide to determine what they should know and what they need not worry about. The SOC 200 professor corroborates this use of the study guide, saying

that, “it also serves as a guide for being practical. Is there anything that I don’t need to know? They always ask that. And so, that’s why I say, yeah, if it’s not on the review sheet basically you can ignore it.” The ANT 200 professor, who gave out a study guide for the cumulative final exam, added that it also served the purpose of reminding students of the concepts discussed at the beginning of the semester. She says:

I give them [...] a detailed review sheet and that pulls out, you know, what are the key concepts from the beginning of the course that they need to know. They need to remind themselves what cultural relativism is, what holism is. And [...] they might not need to remember what polyandry is. (ANT 200 professor)

If, on the one hand, students and professors seemed to be in agreement that study guides covered essentially all students needed to know before an exam, students’ expectations of how the information on the study guide would be asked on an exam, on the other hand, sometimes differed from the way professors actually used it. At least for two classes, participants expressed frustration that the professor did not use the study guide as they had expected. Yar Zar, for example, mentioned that for his American Government (GOV 211) class, there was a big mismatch between the study guide and the exam, rendering the former useless. In his words:

For the first two exams, I just went by the study guide. It really was useless and waste of time. It makes me really mad because I did the study guide like I literally go over every single one of [the items on the study guide], and half of it that were on the study guide were not on [the exam]. Like the quotes that I studied on [the study guide], they were not on [the exam]. It was different quotes. (Yar Zar, interview 7)

The quotes that Yar Zar refers to were quotes taken from the Federalist Papers, which were listed on the study guide. He explains his study method:

This is one of the quotes, [...] I'll memorize some of the words, so if I see, I know who's saying it, and I know what it means, but on the second exam, these were on the study guide but the ones for multiple choice were not on the study guide so I got like screwed big time. (Yar Zar, interview 6)

The only part of the study guide that Yar Zar found useful was the section containing potential essay questions, since out of the three listed, one was to be found on the exam. Because I did not have access to the GOV 211 exams, and this professor was not a participant in this study, I have no way of verifying what caused the mismatch perceived by Yar Zar. Clearly, he expected the exam to resemble the study guide more closely.

Participants in the Economics (ECO 110) class also seemed to expect the exam to contain questions that were more closely related, if not identical, to the sample questions on the study guide. Tabasum, Arezo and Sabrina seemed to expect at least some of the questions on the exam to be taken directly from the study guide. Tabasum said, for example, “[the professor] just gave us like kind of guideline for exam, what's gonna be, but it wasn't the same like he gave us like study guide, it wasn't the same. It was different” (Tabasum, interview 6). Likewise, Arezo said, “I studied [...] the multiple-choice part in the study sheet that he give us, but like none of them [on the exam] was from that study guide, like I didn't see anything that was from the study guide and I studied that a lot” (Arezo, interview 6). Finally, Sabrina echoed both Arezo and Tabasum and said, “I did [...] the questions he gave us, the sample questions were not on the test at all” (Sabrina, interview 6). The other two participants who took that class, Musa and Solange, did not seem to expect to find the sample questions repeated on the exam, but they did not find the study guide helpful. It is not clear where my participants got the idea that the sample questions would

be on the exam. Arezo had a similar misunderstanding regarding questions for the final exam.

She said:

[The professor] said that seven questions were gonna be from your previous tests, but they were not really like from my previous test. They were just like, I mean, they weren't exactly like the same questions, but we expected it to be like the same question cause he said that it was gonna be exactly the same, but it was different, so. (Arezo, interview 8)

The day I observed the Economics class, the professor did mention that part of the final exam was going to be cumulative. I did not write down his words verbatim, so I am not sure exactly how he worded it, but what I understood as I sat in that classroom was that seven of the multiple-choice questions were going to be from topics covered in previous tests. It never crossed my mind that he would be using exactly the same questions.

Professors, in general, seemed to view their study guides as indicating the basic knowledge students needed to have for an exam, but the questions asked in the exam would usually go beyond that and challenge students by asking them to elaborate on the basic knowledge. Except for the potential essay questions in the GOV 211 study guide, no other study guide indicated that exam questions would be taken directly from it. For example, when I asked the REL 100 professor whether the study guide included questions that would be on the exam, he replied, "Not exact questions. It does include a list of thematic questions and drawing from those questions and from the terms, I formulate the questions. [...] I think of those questions as challenging students to think about ideas." The ANT 200 professor also highlighted the connection of ideas she expected students to be able to make as they answered questions on the exam. She explained that, "the exam questions tend to ask [students] to put different domains

together. [...] So, the goal is really getting them to think holistically, think about how these different aspects of social organization are interconnected.” As an example, she mentions:

So let’s say there might be a question [on the study guide] that asks about kinship systems and, or domestic organization and there’s another set of questions that ask about economic organization, I’d ask them a question [on the exam] that gets them to put those together and say, talk about how they influence each other. (ANT 200 professor)

5.3.3 Tutors

Many of my participants relied on tutors to help them cope with reading challenges. Hope College has a system to provide tutors whenever they are requested by students. If a student feels he or she needs tutoring in a class, they contact the instructor, who, in turn, contacts former students who were particularly successful in that class to see who might be interested. The instructor then passes on a list with the contact information of potential tutors to the student who requested it. Once a student and a tutor have been matched, the Academic Support Center is notified and the tutor gets compensated for the time he or she spent tutoring the student. Tutoring is part of the work-study program at Hope College.

5.3.4 Professors

Professors were, in general, a key resource for my participants. They played some very important roles while mediating the students’ construction of knowledge. They made course content and readings accessible to students mostly through their lectures, and they were responsible for providing other important resources my participants made use of such as PowerPoint slides, study guides and tutors.

My perception, being on the Hope campus many times during two semesters, was that professors there were largely available to students. Their office hours, as shown on their syllabi,

are also evidence of such availability. Most professors held ten office hours a week, besides being available by appointment as well. I would often see professors in the hallways or in their offices, and, most of the faculty participants seemed to genuinely care about their students. Musa summarizes the atmosphere at Hope well, saying that, “Hope is a really nice community where people are willing to help you” (Musa, interview 4). He then clarified explaining that by community, he meant professors, students, and staff.

There were a few cases, however, when interactions between a participant and a professor did not go so smoothly, especially initially. Some of my participants felt intimidated by their professors at first, and they tended to feel more comfortable around those professors who “knew them” or “understood them.” It was not always clear to me what they meant by these phrases, but, generally, participants seemed to be more at ease with professors who knew a little about their background as refugees and, mostly, that they were language learners. Tabasum, for example, specifically asked me to include her Speech professor in the study, hoping that, by participating in the study, the professor would learn more about her. She says, “I was wondering if [...] you could come to my speech class and talk to [my professor] because I don’t think she, she is not interested to learn about me” (Tabasum, interview 2). In the following interview, Tabasum reiterates her feelings saying, “I talked to her once but I thought this is not gonna help because she didn’t know anything about me and [...] I don’t think she’s gonna listen to me” (Tabasum, interview 3). In our last interview of Fall semester, when I asked Tabasum what she had learned from our research process that semester, she replied:

Talk to your professors all the time and get them to know [you], because it’s helpful, because it’s important for us if they know us because in the beginning, in my speech

class, she didn't know me, [...], and I thought she was not nice to me and at the end when [...] she know me, she was so nice to me. (Tabasum, interview 4)

I cannot say for sure what triggered the Speech professor's change in attitude. It can, for example, just be Tabasum's perception that such a change took place. Or, alternatively, it could be that the professor became more friendly with Tabasum once she realized that Tabasum was indeed struggling and wanted to do better. Considering that Tabasum always sat in the last row and never participated in class, it is quite plausible that the professor thought she was not interested. As the Speech professor said, once a student comes to talk to a professor, the professor sees that student "as someone who cares" (COM 203 professor). Or, it could also be that, once the professor learned that Tabasum was a refugee with interrupted education, she felt more sympathetic towards Tabasum.

In any case, it seems that the initial reluctance to seek a professor can be the result of the participants' lack of confidence, and that after the initial interaction takes place, a friendly relationship can develop. At least this was the case with Tabasum in her Speech class and Arezo in her World Issues class (discussed above). Kayhan, in contrast, struggled in his Psychology class, but never got to talk to the professor. When I asked the professor whether Kayhan had ever been in his office, he replied that he had not and that he had heard from another student that Kayhan was intimidated by him. He showed surprise that anybody would feel that way, because "I'm not intimidating" (PSY 101A professor). It is unquestionable that the professor is the best person to help a student who is struggling in his or her class. For the less self-confident participants, however, taking the initial step to establish a relationship with a professor whose class they cannot follow well may be a daunting task. Even though it can be argued that college is not a place for handholding, and that students should come better equipped to college, it is

clear that some students can benefit from faculty who reach out to them. Establishing contact with a professor outside class is particularly important for students who do not feel confident enough to ask questions in class. As Arezo says categorically, “I don’t ask question right in the middle of the class” (Arezo, interview 1).

5.3.5 Peers

As discussed in the section on reading strategies, many of the participants in this study relied on peers to help them with reading challenges. It is interesting to notice that the peers my participants chose to work with were usually either another participant, that is, a student belonging to the initial cohort of seven refugees, or a roommate. I found it striking that very rarely did they mention studying with a classmate that did not belong to one of these two groups. This led me to wonder how comfortable my participants would be looking for a peer to study together if they did not belong to a small cohort, or had roommates. Leki (2007) mentions the importance of socioacademic relationships for academic success. She defines these relationships as “those friendly relationships that students develop with peers and teachers through their academic interactions in shared classes” (p. 261, 262). In my participants’ case, it seems that merely sharing a class did not lead to socioacademic relationships with peers, at least in their first year at college. Rather, they tended to seek the help of peers whom they felt closer to than just being classmates. This finding seems to underscore the importance of providing students, especially as they transition from high school to college, with support systems such as first-year seminars and freshman learning communities, through which students are better able to connect with peers and develop a sense of community.

5.3.6 Dictionaries

Even though Musa and Tabasum reported using a dictionary often, the other participants rarely, if ever, mentioned they used this resource. As someone who also learned English as a teenager/young adult and used a dictionary extensively, I found this quite puzzling. Perhaps it is because I learned English as foreign language and did not have speakers of English around me all the time that I needed to use a dictionary so often. Kayhan, for example, listed different things he would do when he needed to know what a word meant, leaving the dictionary for last. He says:

I ask [the ENG 095 instructor], sometimes I ask my friends that know English, [...] they know a lot and they are better English speakers than I am, so I ask them, I look sometimes on the internet to see what it is, I look in the dictionary. (Kayhan, interview 4)

It could also be that, after living in the States for a number of years, and having had a significant part of their education here, many of these participants do not feel like a language learner anymore.

5.3.7 Resources: A summary

In order to deal with their reading challenges, my participants made use of several resources available to them. The vast majority of these resources were either directly or indirectly made available by Hope College. Among the institutionally provided resources are the professors, of course, and also the invaluable tutors. Even though it can be argued that professors are available in any higher education institution, it would seem that in a small liberal arts college, such as Hope, professors are generally more accessible. As discussed above, there are exceptions to that, but, in general, professors in liberal arts colleges take teaching as their primary function, and, therefore, tend to focus more on their students than their colleagues in research universities

do. My participants also relied on peers as resources to help them cope with reading challenges. Unlike professors and tutors, who are institutionally sanctioned resources to promote academic development, peers were informally sought out by my participants. As mentioned above, roommates and the other students in the refugee cohort were clearly preferred over other classmates when it came to studying together. Relationships with these two groups of peers were facilitated by Hope College through the Bridge Program, which admitted the seven participants as a cohort, with a special transition program over the summer, and the requirement that first year students live on campus in shared dormitories and thus, have roommates. Except for Tabasum, who did not seem to get along with her roommate, and Kayhan who was not close friends with his, all the other participants seemed to have established good friendships with their roommates.

CHAPTER 6

WRITING PRACTICES: CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES, AND RESOURCES

In this chapter, I address the writing practices my participants engaged in in their first year of college. Following the same macro-organization as the one used in the previous chapter, I will first present the writing challenges my participants faced, and then I move on to discuss the strategies they developed to cope with these challenges. Lastly, I discuss the resources they employed as they found ways to deal with writing assignments successfully.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, participants often seemed to perceive reading as a single general ability, not mentioning a distinction between reading a journal article or a biography, for example. Interestingly, their perception of writing practices was quite the opposite, with all the participants making a distinction between writing an essay for their Freshman Composition class, writing an essay for other classes, or writing short reflections, to name a few of the writing practices they engaged in. Some of these writing assignments, such as the short reflections, did not seem to pose any major difficulty to any of the participants, whereas the essays for the Freshman Composition class received concentrated efforts from all the participants, who engaged in a process of revisions for each essay that involved, at least in one case, as many as ten different drafts.

Tables 6.1 and 6.2 below contain a summary of the writing assignments and written exams my participants engaged in in Fall 2009 and Spring 2010, respectively. For each participant, I list, in this order, the course, the type of writing assignment and/or written exam, the required length (if available) and the percentage that the writing represented of the final grade. In cases when participants took the same course, but from different instructors, I have

added a letter to the course number (e.g., ENG 101A and ENG 101B) to make this distinction clear.

Table 6.1

Writing assignments in Fall 2009

Participant	Course, assignment, length, weight
Yar Zar	ENG 095, 2 essays (one ungraded, for baseline assessment, and one graded), 3 to 5 pages each, 35% THE 201, 1 response paper, 7% BCC 100A, short reflections
Arezo	ENG 095, 2 essays (one ungraded, for baseline assessment, and one graded), 3 to 5 pages each, 35% BCC 100B, 6 short reflections, 25%
Kayhan	ENG 095, 2 essays (one ungraded, for baseline assessment, and one graded), 3 to 5 pages each, 35% GOV 211, 1 essay, 3 pages, 20% ANT 200, 3 papers, 2 to 3 pages each, 40%; 3 written exams (identification, short answer and essay questions), 45% BCC 100C, 6 short reflections, 50%
Tabasum	ENG 095, 2 essays (one ungraded, for baseline assessment, and one graded), 3 to 5 pages each, 35% REL 100, 1 take-home final exam essay, 500 words, 12.5% COM 203, 1 speech evaluation, 4 to 5 pages, 10%; BCC 100A, short reflections
Sabrina	ENG 095, 2 essays (one ungraded, for baseline assessment, and one graded), 3 to 5 pages each, 35% BCC 100B, 6 short reflections, 25%
Solange	ENG 095, 2 essays (one ungraded, for baseline assessment, and one graded), 3 to 5 pages each, 35% ANT 200, 3 papers, 2 to 3 pages each, 40%; 3 written exams (identification, short answer and essay questions), 45% BCC 100B, 6 short reflections, 25%
Musa	ENG 095, 2 essays (one ungraded, for baseline assessment, and one graded), 3 to 5 pages each, 35% ANT 200, 3 papers, 2 to 3 pages each, 40%; 3 written exams (identification, short answer and essay questions), 45% THE 201, 1 response paper, 7% BCC 100A, short reflections

Table 6.2

Writing assignments in Spring 2010

Participant	Course, assignment, length, weight
Yar Zar	ENG 101A, 5 essays, 3 to 5 pages each, 90% GOV 211, 1 essay, 3 to 4 pages, 20% SOC 200, 1 term paper, 5 to 7 pages, 25%; 2 partially written exams (definitions and short answer questions), approx. 20%
Arezo	ENG 101A, 5 essays, 3 to 5 pages each, 90% ECO 110, 7 short essays, 1 page each, 10%; 4 partially written exams, approx. 30% SOC 200, 1 term paper, 5 to 7 pages, 25%; 2 partially written exams (definitions and short answer questions), approx. 20%
Kayhan	ENG 101A, 5 essays, 3 to 5 pages each, 90% THE 201, 2 performance critiques, 30% PSY 101A, 1 experimental design, 1page, 15%; 3 theme papers, 3 to 4 pp, 25% KIN 380, reflections, 25% KIN 201, reaction papers, 1 to 2 pages each, 25%
Tabasum	ENG 101B, 5 essays, 3 to 5 pages each, 90% ECO 110, 7 short essays, 1 page each, 10%; 4 partially written exams, approx. 30% PSY 101B, 1 paper and 2 research papers, 400 words each, 15%; 4 partially written exams (discussion questions), approx. 10%
Sabrina	ENG 101A, 5 essays, 3 to 5 pages each, 90% ECO 110, 7 short essays, 1 page each, 10%; 4 partially written exams, approx. 30% SOC 200, 1 term paper, 5 to 7 pages, 25%; 2 partially written exams (definitions and short answer questions), approx. 20%
Solange	ENG 101A, 5 essays, 3 to 5 pages each, 90% ECO 110, 7 short essays, 1 page each, 10%; 4 partially written exams, approx. 30% GOV 211, 2 essays, 4-5 pages each, 35%; 2 written exams (identification, short answer, essay questions), 55%
Musa	ENG 101A, 5 essays, 3 to 5 pages each, 90% ECO 110, 7 short essays, 1 page each, 10%; 4 partially written exams, approx. 30% PSY 103, 1 research paper and 4 journal entries, 2 pages each, 45% BIO 111, 2 lab reports, 5%

6.1 Writing challenges

All the participants were quite aware that their ability to write in English was still developing and that they needed help especially with editing and proofreading. The writing samples that I was able to collect from my participants, especially unrevised ones, attest to this difficulty. Because of this language issue, each time my participants had to write a piece that they perceived had to be in “perfect” English, which usually happened to be for the English classes, they would ask for assistance. Except for the writing assignments that were perceived as requiring “perfect” English, most of my participants rarely mentioned that they had trouble with writing while in the process of doing it. This may have been the result of the fact that, in general, participants did not seem to have an internal gauge to determine how good their piece of writing was or how well they had attended to the requirements specified in the assignment guidelines. They often had to rely on external assessment. As a result, their perception of how challenging a piece of writing was often depended on the feedback they got from the professor they had written that piece for. For example, when I asked Kayhan if he thought he would get a better grade in his second essay for the Anthropology class than he had for the first, he replied, “I can’t really tell right now. I’ll have to see. You never know” (Kayhan, interview 2). As a result, participants sometimes would only realize the challenge imposed by a writing assignment retrospectively. They would sometimes think that they had successfully completed a writing assignment only to find out later, as they received their professors’ feedback, that their paper had (sometimes major) problems.

6.1.1 Language issues

Considering that all the participants in this study learned English as their second or third written language, it is not surprising that they encountered some difficulty writing in English,

especially in an academic setting. Table 6.3 below shows some of the comments participants made regarding their weaknesses writing in English.

Table 6.3

Language affecting writing

Participant	Comments
Yar Zar	I'm worried about English because grammar is my weakness and I don't know how to deal with that. (interview 1)
Arezo	If you know English, like you've been here for a long time and your grammar, not grammar, but your English is good, then you can write a good paper, without having a lot of mistakes. For me, that's the problem. Like every time I write a paper I have a lot of mistakes, and like I repeat myself saying one thing over and over like cause I don't know any other words to say, it's like using the same words over and over and it feels like you're repeating yourself. (interview 4)
Kayhan	I'm not very good at grammar, [but] the only class that really care for it is for my English papers. (interview 2)
Tabasum	I don't know English, of course. (interview 4)
Sabrina	Grammar is so hard [...] I wanna be better on my grammar and write better, like, at least close to college level writing, like improve my vocabulary words.(interview 1)
Solange	I really struggle in English, so, even though I like putting my thoughts down, like I find it so difficult like to write, to begin the writings. It's just so hard [...]. Like once I start it, it's good to go, but to start the first paragraph, I struggle so much, you don't understand. So that makes me, I don't know, it makes me feel like I'm not a good writer [...]. And then another thing I feel like sometimes I run out of words, I don't know what to use anymore like what I'm gonna write about. (interview 3)
Musa	I wrote the entire paper and then ask friends to read it and one thing that I'm not good at is grammar, so they'll check it. (interview 1)

The two most common language weaknesses affecting writing, as reported by the participants, regards grammar, followed by vocabulary. Awareness that they had grammar issues may have been exacerbated by the emphasis given to this area of language in their Introduction to College Writing class (ENG 095). The purpose of this course, as found on the syllabus, was “to prepare students for the writing tasks of English 101 and college by examining the basic

elements of grammar that contribute to coherence and effective communication at the sentence and paragraph level.” Questions on the midterm exam for this class included, for example, listing the eight forms of the verb “to be”, listing five objective case personal pronouns, identifying different phrases (e.g., gerund, prepositional, participial), and identifying and classifying subordinate clauses. Most of the participants struggled in the quizzes and exams for this class, which may have contributed to the value they placed on grammar and their perception that they were not good at it. This is not to say that there was not room for grammar improvement. Quite the contrary, Table 6.4 below shows examples of grammar issues I have identified in my participants’ unrevised writing. All the excerpts were taken from answers written in exams.

Table 6.4

Sample language issues in unrevised writing

Participant	Comments
Yar Zar	“Sui generis”, is a social structure phrase use by many/all sociologists to explain social groups. The meaning of “sui generis”, is that basically whole is better then the seperate parts. To explain further, an example of a social group basketball teams.” (SOC 200, exam 2, beginning of short answer)
Arezo	“Durkheim discoverd social facts in his study of suicide rate in France. He experiment which social group commet suicide the most, the moms, college student, or unemployee person. his discovery is related to the focuse of sociology because he is studying the behavior of individuals in different situations.” (SOC 200, exam 1, short answer)
Kayhan	“US made a policy to prohibit immigration because there is so much of them happening. Should we allow ones that are suffering economically or should we allow immigrants that cross the border with documents.” (ANT 200, final exam, part of short answer)
Tabasum	“I think the most common theme that found is that Black Elk, Dali Lama, and Joan of Arc have is they were powerful and guide for their community in that time. They believe in peace and tried to save people’s life. They struggled in their life because because there were people against them and gave them hard time.” (REL 100, final exam, beginning of short answer)
Sabrina	“If the GDP rises it kind of helps the economy to be moving towards Long Run equilibrium. Which means that we are doing a little better. But we still have high rate of unemployment.” (ECO 110, exam 3, beginning of short answer)

Solange	“Economist agrees with free-trading but nations thinks its very risk – especially when comes to trade of developing countries (most African, South America, Asia) versus developed countries (like western countries in Europe & US, Canada).” (ECO 110, exam 1, part of short answer)
Musa	“Anthropologists learn about other societies different them theirs. [...] If the researcher begin to think that what he is learning about is inferior, he would not the real meaning of why the people of that culture do beliefs so cultural relativism just prevent the researcher from misunderstand or joking about other cultures.” (ANT 200, exam 1, part of short answer)

The excerpts above show that, without time or resources to revise, my participants’ writing still lagged behind what would be expected at college level. Still, it is important to point out that not all of their unrevised writing was full of grammar or spelling mistakes. There were sections in their exams that were quite error-free and, for the most part, even when language issues were present, their ideas were clear and they were able to effectively convey their thoughts. An exception to this pattern was Tabasum, whose unrevised writing always contained a lot of grammar and spelling mistakes, which sometimes affected comprehension. She mentioned, for example, that one of the reasons she was doing poorly in the quizzes for her Speech class was because the professor could not understand what she wrote, and would thus deduct points off of her answers. She says, “sometime I write but she does not understand what I write. [...] I write anything I remember, but she give me like minus” (Tabasum, interview 2).

Because of the difficulty my participants experienced with writing in English, most of them commented on the fact that they needed more time to complete a piece of writing than most of their American peers did. As an illustration, Musa says:

Sometimes, it takes, you know, some people to write a paper, you know, two days you write a paper, you’re cool, I would take a week to write a paper, you know, just writing, and sit there, be thinking again what to write. (Musa, interview 4)

6.1.2 Note-taking

The difficulty students had to take notes varied from class to class, depending mostly on how fast the professor delivered his or her lecture, and whether there was PowerPoint support or not. Most participants had trouble taking notes in at least one of the courses in their first year. As can be seen in the comments in Table 6.5 below, the most common complaint was that they could not take notes fast enough to keep up with the professor's pace.

Table 6.5

Comments about note-taking

Participant	Comments
Yar Zar	[The professor] speaks so fast and like the powerpoint goes so fast, I have to be like typing, typing, typing, the whole time. [...] Sometimes I just have to put dot dot dot and then just go the other point he's talking about. (interview 6)
Arezo	And the teacher, he goes too fast. By the time I write one sentence, the notes, he's already in another section. So, I can't keep up and it's really really hard. (interview 1)
Tabasum	[I don't take a lot of notes] because I'm not very good when [the professor] speaks I write down. Sometimes I take notes, but I rather listen carefully than writing down. Cause like I can only do one thing. [...] [My notes] are not helpful [...] when I study for my exam I don't use my notes. Sometimes I just throw them away. (interview 8)
Sabrina	I can take notes, but I just can't keep up with the professor [...] Even though I take notes, I don't know what exactly to take notes about so if I start taking notes on one thing I miss the other thing. [...] I do take notes, helpful sometimes, but I just get lucky when I take good notes or when I take bad notes (interview 1)
Musa	I don't get everything but at least the one I get is okay because before I even write something down he keep talking, I get that part, the other part I don't get it, but just skip it. (interview 5)

The difficulty to keep up with the professor's pace mentioned by many of the participants can also be a result of the transition between high school and college and the way note-taking is done in the two institutions. As Harklau (2001) states, students often find taking notes in college more demanding than taking notes in high school. Arezo addresses this issue, saying:

I'm still learning to take notes. In high school, the teacher like goes slower and they will ask you if they should go to the next like if you get everything you needed, but here, they will just keep going and going and wouldn't stop for you to finish your notes. (Arezo, interview 1)

Unlike the other participants, Kayhan never complained that he had trouble taking notes. This can be a reflection of the fact that, in general, he did not take a lot of notes, relying mostly on readings and study guides. As he explains:

Sometimes, when I feel like I'm gonna, like, the important part [of a lecture], if it's a little thing that's not gonna be mentioned in the book, maybe that I'm gonna forget, I just write it in my notes.[...] I don't take a lot of notes because it's mostly, I think it's in the book, and the way I study, basically with the chapters and basically like I look at the study guide. (Kayhan, interview 6)

Solange's case was quite distinct when it came to note-taking notes in that she showed a lot of confidence in her ability to take good notes and spoke openly about it. She says:

I'm a good notetaker, I take really good notes, so if I read through my notes, I get everything. Cause I'm someone who just listens and whatever they say I observe by listening, that's how I learn the base, they talk, I listen and I take notes, that's it, [...] That's how I learn. [...] I trust my notes really good, like sometimes I won't do the study guide, I'll just read my notes. (Solange, interview 2)

Indeed, when I looked at the notes she took in her Anthropology class on the day of my observation, I was quite impressed at the amount of information and level of detail she was able to record as the professor spoke. A potential downside to her approach of just listening and taking notes is that the Anthropology professor, for example, thought that Solange was not very

engaged in her class and that “a lot of times she may be working on other things.” After I explained that Solange actually had good notes for her class and that she had told me that she did not like participating because she felt she could not speak and write at the same time, the professor said, “so maybe I’ve been mis, mis, maybe I’m wrong. No, she’s definitely, she’s usually writing a lot, and I’m just not sure whether it’s writing anthropology or whether she’s writing another class’s homework” (ANT 200 professor).

After Solange mentioned a couple of times that she was good at note-taking, I asked her how she knew it. In her answer, she mentioned three reasons. First, she was able to pass classes relying mostly on her notes. Second, when all the participants were taking the World Religions class together in the summer, she said that they all wanted to look at her notes and said, “Solange, you take good notes.” Lastly, and perhaps most remarkably, she said:

Another thing like I’m a good note taker, I don’t write what the teacher says, like I make it into my own words. If I don’t understand something, for example, if you say a big word, like I don’t know, I know I won’t be familiar with this, so, I write it down, just for the sake of learning, but I have to learn my own definition, what it means, I go back and read those small notes that I take. (Solange, interview 2)

Finally, when I asked her how she had learned to take notes, she replied:

Well, I think in Africa cause, you know, we don’t have textbooks where it’s like the teacher writes it on the board, you write it down. And another thing is as you’re writing stuff, things kind of get in your memory, I think, cause you’re going through it. So, that’s where I learned, cause I wasn’t like back home we didn’t have any technology thing, no books, it’s only one book in the school, which the teacher share it so, they write

something on the board, you write it down. That's how it works. So, that's how I learned to take notes. (Solange, interview 2)

Solange's confidence and ability to take notes clearly set her apart from the other participants, who would, at times, struggle with note-taking. There was one class, however, in which, except for Tabasum, all the other four participants taking it had extensive notes, even though the professor did not use PowerPoint slides or handouts. This was the case with the Economics class. Arezo explains how it is that they could all take good notes in that class:

I can keep up with him. Cause he repeats too, like some things that is really important for us to take notes, he'll repeat like three times. That's really helpful. [...] He's like really slow and a good pace that you have enough time to take your notes. And he also write it on the board, like something that's really important like the topic of that day, so he just write the topic down on the board, and then we write it and then he talks about it and then I take notes under that topic, so that's really helpful. (Arezo, interview 6)

When I observed the Economics class I could indeed verify that the professor spoke at a very slow pace, at times almost dictating his lecture, and at other times writing down the main points on the board. He also tended to repeat the most important parts of his lecture. As was discussed in the previous chapters, the copious notes my participants took in this class did not help them do well in the multiple-choice exams.

6.1.3 Writing essays and papers

As mentioned above, participants in this study did not often mention any major difficulty while working on essays or papers. As will be discussed in the section below, they would sometimes learn that the paper they had turned in had a problem only when they received feedback. Tabasum was the only one who consistently struggled with any longer piece of

writing. She usually went through several revisions and would sometimes turn in work late. It is amazing that, despite her difficulty, she would often mention that she loved writing, and she did not seem to mind the numerous visits she took to the Writing Center to improve each of her pieces of writing.

It is possible that the difficulty participants might have had writing essays and papers was pre-empted by their proactive attitude seeking help when they felt they needed it and by their having been assigned a writing tutor in Spring 2010, when they all took the Freshman Composition class (ENG 101). ENG 101 was undoubtedly the class that required the most writing from these students and, from their very first essay, they had a tutor available to them. The tutor was also available to help them with writing assignments for other courses. In the strategies section below, I will discuss my participants' work with this writing tutor and, in the resources section, I will talk a little bit more about tutor as a resource.

Despite the fact that my participants seemed to be doing fine in their ENG 101 class, they all worked very hard on each of their essays. I believe there were two main motivations behind such hard work. First of all, they were all trying to raise their GPAs, which, after the fall semester, was lower than they had hoped for. They were striving for A's in all of their classes, but the ENG 101 class was different from others because, not having any in-class writing or exams involved, it gave participants somewhat more control over the grades they could get. The second source of motivation came from their experience in the ENG 095 class. They only had one graded essay in that class, and they all got a C on it. Arezo said that, in her conference with the ENG 095 professor at the end of the course:

[The professor] said that like it's not, for going to English 101 writing like this paper, you'll get a C, but you won't get a better grade than that. [...] And she was like "Going to

English 101 is not that easy at all, you know, you have to write a better essay than this” and I was like “okay.” (Arezo, interview 4)

Participants then started the spring semester intent on getting top grades and believing that their writing was not good enough for the ENG 101 class. They therefore put a lot of effort to ensure that they received the help they needed to make their essays as good as possible. They succeeded in doing that and it was not uncommon for my participants to receive an A on their ENG 101 essays. Yar Zar remarks on this transition from ENG 095 to ENG 101, “It’s so funny like coming from [ENG 095 instructor] pretty much saying that paper is trash and then this other professor who gave me like a high B, so it’s just I was really like happy” (Yar Zar, interview 6).

Participants did not put nearly as much effort into revising their writing for other classes as they did for ENG 101. As will be discussed below, except for Tabasum, who tended to rely on the Writing Center to revise all of her papers, all the other participants would typically just ask a peer to proofread their papers and rely on content area professors not penalizing them for language problems.

6.1.4 Professor’s feedback indicating problem

As mentioned above, participants in this study rarely reported difficulty working on their writing assignments, and they were especially unlikely to mention any difficulty with the writing per se. In text-responsible writing (Leki & Carson, 1997), participants would sometimes report having difficulty with the reading part of the process. As was discussed in the previous chapter, Solange encountered difficulty understanding the Martin Luther King Jr. speech, on which the writing assignment depended on. When working on research papers, Musa and Tabasum, for example, had difficulty finding appropriate articles to write their papers on and had to get assistance from their writing tutor to do the library search.

Even though participants tended not to experience major challenges while in the process of writing an essay or a paper, there were a few occasions in which the feedback they received from the professor indicated that the paper had a problem. It is possible that in some of these cases, the origin of the problem lay in misunderstanding the guidelines, which would probably point to a reading problem. I have decided to discuss these cases in the writing chapter, though, because participants never mentioned that they had trouble understanding the guidelines. It is also possible that, at times, having understood the guidelines, they had trouble writing their papers in a way that reflected that understanding, and they ended up failing to fulfill all the requirements spelled out in the assignment.

Below, I discuss two incidents in which the paper was returned ungraded to the student with a request that the student redo the assignment. I then discuss minor cases in which participants did not follow all the requirements specified in the guidelines.

6.1.4.1 Kayhan's experimental design project for Psychology

Kayhan had not mentioned the experimental design project to me until the interview after he had received negative feedback from his professor. Figure 6.1 contains an extract from the guidelines.

Experimental Design Assignment

Below you will find eight hypotheses. Each hypothesis is simply a statement that could be supported by evidence or proven to be false by the evidence. Your task for each assignment is to choose one hypothesis from the list of eight and design an experiment that could test that hypothesis.[...] Please provide the following information [...]: (1) Provide your name and list your specific hypothesis; (2) Provide a description of your experiment (please be as specific as possible about how you will conduct the study, including a description of your participants and your method of choosing them); (3) Specifically list your independent variable as well as the experimental and control conditions of the variable (remember that your independent variable is

the thing you think will produce a change in behavior – that is, the “cause” half of the hypothesis); and (4) Mention your dependent variable (remember that the dependent variable is the behavior that you will be measuring – that is, the “effect” half of the hypothesis).

Possible Hypotheses (choose only one).

[...]

Figure 6.1 Psychology 101 – Partial guidelines for experimental design

In his one and a half page typed assignment, Kayhan follows the organization required in the guidelines, using the following headings: name, hypothesis, description, experimental group, control group, independent variables, dependent variables, and other. His writing under each heading, however, reflects insufficient understanding of the concepts involved in each of these headings. Figure 6.2 below reproduces Kayhan’s response to the assignment.

Name: Kayhan

Hypothesis: People in noisy environment are more likely to suffer from high blood pressure, anxiety and feelings of helplessness.

Description: My experiment will be at a party where we experience the most noises. The party includes old and young males and females. I will choose two males and two females of to get a test of both sides. The reason I choose the adult age is because they are likely to suffer from high blood pressure and anxiety.

Experimental Group: Adult females who have certain problems with their health and are very sensitive. I will also young guys who are also very sensitive.

Control group: Young and old healthy individuals to use as my comparison to my experimental group.

Variables:

Independent: parties, car running on the highway, TV, kids

Dependent: Noises like the ones in the Independent variable will cause anxiety, high blood pressure because of your hormones, age and also sensitivity. For a young person, that might be the case but the hypothesis is wrong.

Other: I think they hypothesis was wrong stating that noisy environments affect people. It did not say which people.

Figure 6.2 Kayhan's response to the experimental design assignment

Kayhan's response seems to indicate that besides only having a vague idea of what each concept implied, Kayhan did not seem to know how to design an experiment. His response also contains editing mistakes that reveal lack of proofreading. In his handwritten comment, the professor wrote, "I really don't know what you're doing. Did you understand what I was asking? What you have done is not acceptable. I suggest you meet with my T.A. to get some help." Kayhan followed the professor's suggestion and met with his teaching assistant before resubmitting his assignment. I was not able to get a copy of the resubmission, or the grade he finally got. When Kayhan showed me this assignment and the feedback he got from the professor, he said:

I didn't do well. I didn't understand the assignment. [...] I came kind of late that day, that day I was absent and then it was due the next day, [...] I think I probably missed the explanation he did during that time that I was sick. (Kayhan, interview 6)

Even though Kayhan claims that he did not do well because he did not understand the assignment, it seems more likely that the problem lay in his incomplete understanding of the concepts involved in the assignment as mentioned above. It is unclear whether Kayhan did indeed miss the class when the professor went over the assignment. The professor did not recall Kayhan being absent that day, and seemed puzzled that Kayhan had done so poorly in that assignment. He says,

And this could be a cultural difference, but [...] it didn't seem like he took it seriously. Like he just thought it was a joke or something [...]. He's like nonchalant, kind of no big deal and it was a serious thing. We went, and what was even more strange, we went

through a class exercise before this was due. We did the exact things with another example and kind of debating the pros and cons of controlled groups and experimental groups and what to think about. And the math between that and this never happened, the connection never happened. (PSY 101 professor)

Kayhan also displayed this “kind of no big deal” attitude when he told me about his meeting with the teaching assistant. He says:

I talked to his TA, teacher assistant. Yeah, I talked with her and she helped a lot. She studied psychology for two years, so, yeah. It’s a student. It was like nothing, there is nothing wrong, it’s just you really didn’t understand the assignment I was talking about. I mean if I had understood the assignment I would have done well. (Kayhan, interview 6)

Confirming his professor’s impression, Kayhan did seem to have taken his rejected assignment quite lightly, saying “there is nothing wrong.”

6.1.4.2 Musa’s applying anthropology paper for Anthropology

For the Anthropology class (ANT 200), students were asked to write three essays during the semester. The second of them, entitled “Applying Anthropology”, required students to “use anthropological approaches and concepts to address an issue in your home community” (ANT 200 syllabus). Musa’s first attempt at writing this essay was returned to him ungraded and he was given an opportunity to rewrite it. The 2-page single-space guidelines for this assignment were quite detailed and they are partially reproduced below.

Guidelines for ANT 200 Applying Anthropology Essay (100 points)

(3 pages double-spaced 12-point font)

GOAL To apply anthropological concepts, frameworks, and techniques to a real world situation.
SCENARIO

The local government in your home town/city announces that a donor has given some funds for research. The money must be used to study a social issue in the community, and the researcher

must be a local resident who will use anthropological approaches for the study. Use knowledge from ANT 200 to write a proposal. You are free to choose the issue (social problem, public concern, or source of tension) to study. The proposal must contain three sections.

SECTION I: Describe the issue to your reader and explain why it is a problem. [Example: teen parenthood is not automatically a social problem. What ARE the negative effects?]

SECTION II: Analyze the causes of the issue in this community by answering 1 and 2.

1. Use the concept of *holism* to explore why the issue exists. To do so, you need to discuss *at least three* aspects of the community which contribute to the situation and how they interweave. What are those aspects?

a. [List of possible factors]

b. Deepen the analysis by discussing how one or more of our six ‘components’ of society relate to the issue. [List of components] Do two or three components cause this problem or help us to understand it? Discuss several characteristics of each relevant component (2 or 3 maximum) to demonstrate specifically how the problem relates to the components.

2. Somewhere in this section, you must answer question a or b in a few sentences:

a. How might you use the concept of *ethnocentrism* to explain why this issue exists?

OR

b. How might you use the concept of *cultural relativism* to study the issue?

SECTION III: Describe how you would study the issue.

This section contains a detailed plan for how you would do the research. Which anthropological field research methods could you use to investigate the issue? For a convincing plan, specify which techniques to obtain what types of information, with which subgroups in the community, in what settings, and why that information would help you understand or solve the issue.

TIPS FOR WRITING THE ESSAY:

[A list of tips including how to pick a topic, how to use the components as a framework for explaining the problem, and how to be persuasive]

EVALUATION

I will grade the essays based on your effectiveness in applying the concepts and frameworks to the situation, insights generated through the analysis, the detail and creativity of your plan for

ethnographic research, and clarity of expression. For more detail, see the grading rubric.
Please include a printout of the grading rubric with your proposal when handing it in

Figure 6.3 Anthropology – Partial guidelines for Applying Anthropology essay

As indicated at the end of the guidelines, the professor also gave students a grading rubric listing six criteria and the number of points for each category. Just to illustrate, one of the criteria reads, “(5) How thorough, detailed, and creative is the author’s plan of research for the study, and does it use a variety of appropriate methods? (25 points)” (ANT 200 Applying Anthropology Essay Grading Sheet). The professor had also left past papers for students to consult at the library circulation desk. This piece of information was on the syllabus that was posted on the course website, but not on the initial syllabus given out in class at the beginning of the semester. Besides Musa, Solange and Kayhan were also in this class and none of them knew about the available samples when I asked them, even though the professor told me she had mentioned that in class several times. The three of them agreed that it would be helpful to look at a past paper before writing theirs.

Despite the detailed guidelines and grading rubric, Musa’s first attempt at the Applying Anthropology essay was not framed as a proposal to study a social problem. His essay, entitled “Arranged Marriages in Conakry, Guinea (Fula/Fulani Ethnicity)” was a well written, carefully revised description of arranged marriages in Guinea. At the end of his first paragraph, Musa lays out the organization of his essay, which describes well what he did:

I will begin by first discussing the detailed preparation required for a Fula arranged marriage. Second, I will explain exactly how the ceremony of this ethnic group is performed. Finally, I will analyze the role of married Fula women at home. (Musa, ANT 200, essay 2, end of first paragraph)

When he got the essay back from the professor, there were two handwritten comments: one on the first page, and one on the last page. The comment on the first page read, “Let’s meet to talk. We need to clarify the assignment and then think through what problem you think needs to be studied, what factors cause the problem to exist, and how you’d gather information in a study of it”, and the comment on the last page was, “Great description of the practice – now, you need to define a problem related to it and how you’d go about studying it. The essay should be framed as a proposal to study an issue, rather than a description of it.”

For his second attempt, Musa changed his topic and wrote about unemployment among women in Guinea. The beginning of his second essay is reproduced below.

Job Search Problems Women Face in Guinea, Conakry.

After a long reflection on my first topic, I thought about changing to another topic that would be more like a problem that I am familiar with. With the help of a presentation, and the film screening that I attended a few weeks ago, I think a good problem to study is the problem Conakry's women have finding jobs. For this project; I will first begin by defining the problem which I want to study. Then I will give a little analysis of the factors of this problem, then, finally I will describe the process which I will use to study the issue.

Figure 6.4 Musa’s 2nd attempt at the Applying Anthropology essay

It is clear from the paragraph above that Musa’s second attempt at the Applying Anthropology essay is much more closely aligned with the assignment guidelines than his first descriptive piece. He got a grade of 87.

6.1.4.3 Unfamiliarity with academic genres

Kayhan’s and Musa’s incidents above were the only times when participants in this study were asked to resubmit assignments. There were other times, however, in which points were deducted from a grade because a participant did not follow all the instructions in the guidelines. In this section, I discuss the answers three of my participants gave to a specific question from an

anthropology exam and offer a possible explanation to their difficulty complying with the question.

In the final exam for the anthropology class, there was a short essay question that asked students to write a research proposal to conduct an anthropological study – a task that was very similar to the Applying Anthropology essay discussed above. The question included a description of the points that needed to be addressed in the answer, with key words and concepts underlined. Figure 6.5 reproduces the question.

PART II: SHORT ESSAY [30 points]. Answer the following question. Your answer should be at least 2 paragraphs, with supporting details and examples.

You have political permission and unlimited resources to conduct anthropological research into a topic of your choice anywhere in the world. The only condition is that your study must apply anthropological approaches to help improve the quality of life for the group of people with whom you conduct the research.

Write a detailed research proposal including these points:

- a) The group(s) on whom your research will focus and the exact question which you will investigate (what you want to learn about the group). To justify the project, you must show how the study will accomplish one of Haine’s principles for applying anthropology (*preservation* and *equality*).
- b) Use either the concept of holism or cultural relativism for your project, as well as two components of society you will study in order to answer your question. State why that concept and these components will be relevant.
- c) How you will do the study and why. To address this point, you must discuss at least two research methods you will use to gather data and why you have chosen them (what information you might learn by using them). Finally, specify one measure you will take to ensure that the project benefits the group.

To support the proposed project, your discussion of the research question, components, and methods must refer to at least one case study each from the course.

Figure 6.5 Anthropology – Final exam short essay question

Three of the study participants were taking this Anthropology class: Solange, Musa, and Kayhan. None of them complied fully with all the points asked in the question. As an example, none of them referred to any case study as was being asked in the last paragraph of the question, and this was noted in the professor's comments on all three exams. The grades they got for this question were: 20, 18, and 18 out of 30, respectively.

Reading each participant's answer to this question, however, it seems that failure to follow the specific points asked in the question was compounded by a lack of familiarity with the academic genre of research proposals. None of the answers written by my participants looked like a research proposal. There were parts in their answers that resembled a proposal, but, as a whole, they did not.

Solange's answer, for example, consisted of three paragraphs. The first paragraph, found in Figure 6.6 below, seems to be an introduction to what could potentially be a research proposal.

In order to learn one society, you have to step from yours and learn from the other without adapting their culture and find the way of looking at significant things in society as a symbol of interconnectedness. Cultural relativism and holism plays a major rule in a research. I am doing a research why they are too many refugees settling in U.S.A. First I visit their homeland to learn about the current conditions. The countries that I am focusing on are Somalia and Rwanda. Another method is I am getting involved with non-government organization that helps refugee in USA by observing how they adapt to the new cultural and lastly to see if they are living a transnationalism life. If I find my reasons and represent my research to the government, the refugees will benefit when donations and grants are given to the resettlement agencies as well as other refugee organizations in their new homeland.

Figure 6.6 Solange's first paragraph to the Anthropology essay question

Instead of further detailing her project idea in her subsequent paragraphs, Solange uses her second paragraph to define holism and cultural relativism and, through these concepts, to make the point that people are all connected and to explain why she chose to visit the refugees'

homeland. In her third paragraph, she argues that when refugees come to the U.S., they tend to get along and leave their differences behind, without forgetting their homeland, thus living in a transnational world. She does not go back to her project idea to lay out how she planned on carrying out her study.

Like Solange, Musa begins his answer in a way that could potentially be developed into a research proposal, but, halfway into his answer, he changes gears and presents data as if he had already conducted his study. Figure 6.7 reproduces excerpts from his five-paragraph essay.

Research have shown us that most women after crossing to long range and enter in the USA some behavior that they hold sacredly change. My research is base in the United States, most percisely in Atlanta, Georgia. My main concerne and question that I want to know is that, why is this change occuring? Therefore for this project, the group on whom I will research will be women that came from countries other them the U.S.A, [...] so in this case I am studing the case of Conakry women who come to Atlanta.

First to study this case I will adapt myself with an immigration agency [...]. Then I will interview my subjects and observe them for many weeks so that I can be able to come up with an aquirate data for my paper. I will interact with them but also ask/interview their husbands to have a male propestives of these changes the women are having.

“Back in Conakry, we the women are seen by the men as a subordonnant,” one of the lady I interview said to me. [...] “It is our culture and I is a good culture,” said one of the lady’s husbang that I interviewed.

Soon these women enter the Atlanta, there is a change that occurs. They tent to be more independent than dependent of their husband. [...]

Their husbands on the other hand do not totally accept their ideal that, their wives might want to be independent. [...]

Figure 6.7 Musa’s partial answer to the Anthropology essay question

As mentioned above, this exam question was very similar to the Applying Anthropology paper students had written during the semester, and which Musa had had to rewrite. His second submission of that paper had been quite strong, and this may have helped him write the first two paragraphs of his exam essay. It is unclear, however, why he wrote his exam answer as if he had already conducted his study, even making up interview quotes. It is also noticeable that, besides not mentioning any case studies, he also failed to discuss the concepts of preservation and equality, he did not include the concepts of cultural relativism or holism, and he did not discuss any component of society.

Lastly, Kayhan's answer, reproduced in its entirety in Figure 6.8, consisted of one long paragraph, in which he plans to study peasants in France. There are no clues in his answer as to why he chose such an unlikely topic. It is possible that this issue had been discussed in class, but the professor also seemed puzzled by the topic, putting a question mark on the margin next to the part where Kayhan describes the different classes in France.

Peasants in France

The reason they are peasants is because of their level of education, and their social backgrounds. In order to understand this, we must understand society as a whole. There are 3 different classes. First are the priests, second are the clerics, and last are the peasants. how are they adapting to the actions conveyed by the upper classmen. This will be my research. We can't understand society just by looking at that group. We have to look at all the other groups. We also can't research based on our research question. We have to look at all components of society. The informal interviews would be the best way to gather information about a society because we are talking about a big society. We can also take pictures. I can't do this research based on my terms. I must do research based on their terms because that is who I am doing research on. I am from the US. For hunger, I can bring in food for the people so they don't have to worry about that.

Figure 6.8 Kayhan's answer to the Anthropology essay question

Even though Kayhan's answer does refer to some of the key concepts required by the question, for the most part, his writing lacks coherence and development. For example, in his research question, he mentions "actions conveyed by the upper classmen," but fails to clarify what these actions might be. He mentions he will use informal interviews, but does not say who he will be interviewing. Similarly, he mentions taking pictures, but does not clarify whose pictures he will be taking. And his last sentence seems to appear out of thin air. It is important to remember that this piece was written under exam conditions, and it is possible that Kayhan was running out of time. Still, it seems that, if he were more familiar with the research proposal genre, he should have been able to write a more coherent piece in the time he wrote his answer.

It is unknown how much time (if any) was spent in class discussing research proposals. However, considering that the Applying Anthropology assignment was an opportunity to write a research proposal, and that the assignment was discussed in class, the professor is likely to have gone through the main components of a proposal with her students. Her guidelines for both the paper and for the exam question were quite detailed. She had also left past papers of the assignment at the library, which, as mentioned above, participants did not know about. In other words, the professor seems to have given students plenty of guidance in how to write a research proposal and, yet, these three participants were clearly not familiar enough with the genre to be able to write one in an exam situation.

Because the essay question in the exam was so similar to the Applying Anthropology paper, it would seem likely that, if a participant had successfully completed the writing assignment, he or she should be able to write a strong answer in the exam. Musa's paper was already discussed above. Kayhan never shared his essay with me, but the grade he got on it, 78 out of 100, indicates that his paper was not very strong. Solange's three-page essay was

generally well-written and carefully revised, and it did address most of the requirements of the assignment. Following the guidelines on Figure 6.3, Solange described the issue and explained the problem, she analyzed different causes to the problem, and, in a brief paragraph at the end, she describes how she would study the issue. Her last paragraph is reproduced in Figure 6.9, interspaced with the professor's handwritten comments in square brackets.

In closure; in order to find solutions for all these problems, I have to set up series of interviews for the teachers, authority, parents and students [about what topics?]. But before I do this I have to engage in a lot of activities in the particular community [such as...? Observe in homes?]. I would even ask the teacher if it's okay to attend some of his lectures to observe what goes on in a classroom. I would even be closer to the parents by attending the same church they go to because people are more friendly in this places and it would be easier for me to get their agreement for me to do my research. [Could use archival research too, see how long the problem has existed, how it's explained]

Figure 6.9 Solange's last paragraph in her Applying Anthropology essay

As can be seen above, the professor wrote four comments on this last paragraph. In contrast, throughout the rest of the essay, she had only made two other comments asking for clarification. In her final comment in the essay, the professor wrote, "A good analysis of an important topic. The research plan is a bit thin and some anthro concepts were needed, but overall, it is quite solid." In the essay grading sheet, under the question that regards the plan of research for the study, the professor wrote that it was "fairly good – could use more development." All this feedback from the professor seems to indicate that there was room for improvement in Solange's research plan. Solange's exam answer, similarly, did not lay out a detailed plan to carry out her study.

Considering the answers my three participants wrote in the anthropology exam, together with Musa's failed first attempt at the Applying Anthropology essay, Solange's underdeveloped

plan of study for the same essay and Kayhan's failed first attempt at the experimental design assignment in Psychology, it seems that, in all these cases, part of the challenge experienced by the participants was due to lack of familiarity with the genre they were expected to write in.

6.1.5 Writing challenges: A summary

Throughout their first year in college, despite language issues, participants in this study did not seem to have faced major challenges in completing their writing assignments. An exception was Tabasum, to whom writing always required an enormous amount of effort. Interestingly, though, despite her mentioning constant visits to the Writing Center, and occasionally saying that she needed extra time to complete a writing assignment, she did not seem to find writing particularly challenging and was often proud of the pieces she produced. In order for Tabasum, with less than six years of schooling in her whole life, to be able to navigate the waters of academic writing practices so smoothly, she needed to use a number of different strategies, which will be discussed below. Moreover, the fact that she did not seem to have faced many writing challenges in her first year of college seems to be partially due to the encouraging feedback she often got, even when such feedback was not completely warranted. A specific example from her Psychology class will be discussed below.

Even though participants in this study, for the most part, did not seem to face much difficulty writing, the experience Solange, Musa, and Kayhan went through in their anthropology class shows that specific types of genre may impose more difficulty than others. Compared to the detailed, prescribed guidelines for the research proposals, both for the essay and for the exam question in the anthropology class, many of the writing assignments my participants did for their other classes, including the ENG 101 course, were argumentative papers, which gave students

more freedom in how they tackled the assignments. An example of guidelines for an argumentative paper is shown in Figure 6.10.

GOV 211 – Paper 2

Prepare a 4-5 page paper on one of the following topics. [...]

- 1) Make an argument either supporting or opposing the following statement: “Abraham Lincoln’s presidency was a constitutional dictatorship.”
- 2) Explain the two roles played by American presidents as head of state and head of government. Do you think that presidents can perform both of these roles effectively? Use the presidency of Barack Obama to defend your argument.

Figure 6.10 American Government – Guidelines for essay 2

Because argumentative papers depend essentially on the quality of the argument developed, students can complete an assignment in many different ways. As an example, Solange actually misread the guidelines for the assignment above and still managed to get a B. She says:

I was expecting an A, but [...] now I feel okay, cause I did the paper on a different argument, I kind of, my thesis statement, I kind of messed it up cause, okay, you see, I did the first one [...] make an argument [...] so, what I read instead of constitutional dictatorship, I thought it was unconstitutional. (Solange, interview 8)

Another feature present in several assignments my participants worked on was the inclusion of some form of personal response to the issue at hand. An extract of Kayhan’s guidelines for the first psychology theme paper is shown in Figure 6.11 to illustrate how personal experience could be incorporated into a writing assignment.

Psychology 101

Information for Theme Paper #1

1. Choose a basic psychological process described in this third of your book that is of interest to you.
2. Explain how you have come to appreciate the psychological complexity of this process and why you now know that it is more complex than you thought before you enrolled in this course.
3. Include at least one oversimplification of this process that you now know is incorrect.

Figure 6.11 Psychology – Extract of guidelines for theme paper #1

Later in these guidelines, the professor describes the expected format for the paper and says, “The more of an effort you make to bridge what you have learned about the process from class and the book with your own experiences with the topic, the more brownie points you win,” emphasizing the importance of bringing personal experience to the paper.

In summary, what seems to set apart the research proposal assignments in the anthropology class is the fact that they were not argumentative or descriptive, another type of writing my participants were familiar with, and they did not allow for the inclusion of personal experience, even though the topic to be studied should be familiar to students. Also, it can be argued that writing research proposals was particularly difficult for my participants because, as first year students, they did not wear the anthropological hat comfortably enough to understand the point of planning a study. The professor, however, did include a third assignment in her course, which required students to actually carry out a study by doing some field work. Despite the professor’s best efforts to scaffold the writing of the research proposal, the three participants in her class did not seem to have understood the genre well enough to write a proposal in their final exam.

6.2 Strategies developed and used to cope with writing challenges

Participants in this study often did not seem to experience as much difficulty with writing as might have been expected considering the language issues they still struggled with as language learners. This is likely the result of the fact that, most of the time, participants used several different strategies while working on their writing assignments, and this may have prevented major writing challenges from developing.

This section on strategies starts by exploring different ways participants dealt with the fact that it was sometimes difficult to take lecture notes. The remainder of this section presents different strategies my participants used to deal with writing assignments.

6.2.1 Making note-taking more efficient

As discussed above, except for Kayhan, who did not try to take a lot of notes in class, and Solange, who was very confident taking notes, the other participants all struggled with note-taking in at least one of their classes. Among the participants who struggled, Tabasum is the only one who did not seem to have sought ways of supplementing her notes. Rather, she seemed to believe that her notes were not useful and, thus, mentioned not using them for studying. The other four participants developed and used two main strategies to make up for their shortcomings, and these will be discussed below.

6.2.1.1 Sharing notes

If more than one participant was taking the same class, a strategy that was often used to make up for incomplete notes was to study together and share notes. Sabrina and Arezo mentioned this strategy a couple of times, which may be an indication that they perceived this study habit as being more relevant and helpful than the other participants who shared notes with them.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Arezo and Sabrina had a lot of difficulty dealing with the content for the World Issues class (GOV 207). Because the readings were so complex, it became even more important to pay attention to the lectures in class to understand the issues explored in the articles and to take notes that they could later use to study. Yet, as mentioned above, Arezo and Sabrina could not keep up with the professor's pace and often felt they were not able to take complete notes. A strategy that they developed and used quite successfully was to study together with Yar Zar and to share notes. Initially, they only shared the notes they had taken in class. As Arezo and Sabrina started meeting with their tutors, however, the notes they shared consisted of the notes they had taken in class in addition to the notes they took as they discussed the articles with their tutors. When Arezo, Sabrina, and Yar Zar got together to study, they would go over the professor's handouts, sharing their notes for each of the bullet points. After discussing and agreeing on the main information they needed to know for each point, they would consolidate their notes and type up a new set of notes, which they would later use to study before the exam. After each study session, then, the three of them would have an identical set of notes, which was a compilation of their individual notes. Sabrina describes one study session:

So like it was me, Yar Zar and Arezo. We studied together and like we shared notes and we made a study guide and we're asking each other questions, and so like we spent like five hours in the library trying to like you know work on it and stuff, and we just review it when we go back to our rooms. (Sabrina, interview 2)

Likewise, Arezo describes how the three of them studied together, highlighting the process of consolidating notes:

We went together and we all had our notes and we go over each bulletin point that [the professor] give us on the study guide paper and we just [...] discuss about it and then we

all three see if we all have same, if we have it in our notes too, and which one we think is more important, which one we should like know for the test, so we all put it in one paper and then we make three copies. (Arezo, interview 2)

The World Issues class was the only class in which participants were so methodical about the way they shared their notes, creating a shared version out of their individual notes. Sabrina and Arezo sometimes also shared notes for other classes. In the Economics class, for example, Sabrina, Solange, and Arezo always sat together, side by side, so they could help each other out while in the process of taking notes. Sabrina explains, “there’s like Solange and Arezo, and then if I don’t finish something, a sentence, I’ll look at Arezo, and she tells me. If she doesn’t finish one sentence, I help her out” (Sabrina, interview 6). This collective note-taking was possible because, as discussed above, the Economics professor spoke very slowly and students could sometimes write down what the professor said word by word. Arezo also reported sharing Economics notes with Solange while studying before an exam. When asked if they had similar notes, Arezo said, “Sometimes I have more stuff that Solange don’t have and sometimes Solange have some stuff, cause like you cannot pay attention the whole one hour fifteen minutes, so sometimes you’ll miss something” (Arezo, interview 7).

6.2.1.2 Taking notes on PowerPoint slides

In courses where the professors used the PowerPoint technology and made the slides available to students before class, participants often took advantage of this material and used it as a springboard to their notes. Sabrina exemplifies this strategy by describing how she takes notes in her Sociology class:

I do print out her PowerPoint slides for every chapter, and then I just take notes, stuff that she says “oh, this is really important,” so I highlight it, or if she talks about it more, we

just like, you know, have notes on it, right next to the slide, or like at the end of the slides. (Sabrina, interview 5)

Arezo used the same strategy for the Sociology class, “I print the lecture before I go to class, like right before I go to class [...] and I go and take some more notes if she don’t have it on the PowerPoint” (Arezo, interview 6). Indeed, on the day I sat in that class, I could observe that both of them had a copy of the PowerPoint slides the professor used in the lecture, and Yar Zar had the slides open on his laptop computer. Arezo wrote down a few sentences to complement the information on the PowerPoint slides and highlighted some key words while Sabrina and Yar Zar did not take any notes at all. Unlike Sabrina, who at least had the intention of taking notes, when I asked Yar Zar if he had taken any notes the day I observed that class, he said simply, “I never take notes” (Yar Zar, interview 7).

Musa, in his Biology class, also followed the professor’s PowerPoint in his laptop computer and used his notes to write down information not contained on the slides. He explains, “So, basically [...] what I write down is his mostly explanation because sometimes there’ll just be a word in the PowerPoint, but it have other related stuff, so I’ll write those down instead of just look at the PowerPoint” (Musa, interview 5). When I asked to see the notes he took of the class I observed, I could identify several points that were repeated from the PowerPoint slides, but there was also extra information he had written down.

6.2.2 Relying on content area professor’s focus on content

All the participants in this study viewed the writing assignments for their English classes (ENG 095 and ENG 101) differently from the ones for their other courses. The English essays always received a lot more time and dedication to become as polished as the participants could make them. Table 6.6 below shows comments in which participants explicitly state that the bar

for the English essays was different, especially as far as grammar was concerned. Since all the participants were aware that they still had language issues (see discussion on language issues above), they worked particularly hard whenever they were writing for an English course. My participants perceived content area courses, on the other hand, to focus less on the language and more on the information conveyed in the writing, thus giving them some leeway in how they wrote.

Table 6.6

Relying on content area professor's focus on content

Participant	Comments
Arezo	I'm really bad at writing and my grammar is not that good. In my English class I worry about that. (interview 5)
Kayhan	[The Psychology professor] is not on the grammar, he's not gonna kill us about grammar, he cares about your information, what you have on there, and I put a lot of examples in there. (interview 7)
Tabasum	It wasn't hard, it wasn't like English essay, and he doesn't care a lot about English and grammar and everything. (interview 6)
Sabrina	The professor is so understanding, like coach, and like he know I'm not good at English so if I don't write the exact word for it, he will understand what I mean. (interview 1)
Solange	Cause English is like, it's English, man, she's gonna check everything, [...], you know, it's English, such as checking grammar and stuff, whereas this [essay for Anthropology], she's just looking for the main idea, what you have to say. So, it's kind of different. (interview 2)
Musa	For English you have to watch out for the grammar, even [for] those [other papers] you have to, but not as English, you have to be very careful when you are writing English paper. (interview 7)

Yar Zar was the only participant that did not explicitly say that he treated essays for the English class differently from the way he wrote for other classes. Yet, his behavior indicates that this was probably the case. For all his English essays, except for the last one, which was a minor revision of a previous essay, he always had the writing tutor proofread his writing before turning

his papers in. In contrast, for his Sociology paper, which was in fact longer than any of his English essays, he did not ask anybody to proofread it before turning it in.

The fact that participants were less concerned about perfecting the writing they did for content area courses does not necessarily mean that they turned in poorly written, unrevised work. Many of the participants, such as Arezo and Tabasum, always asked somebody to proofread their papers before they turned anything in. The main difference was that, for the English essays, they would usually go over several drafts and revisions before turning them in whereas, for the other classes, they would usually write a paper up, ask somebody to proofread it and then turn it in.

Kayhan was the only one of the participants in this study who took a more cynical approach to writing in content area courses. At one point, he told me quite smugly that, even though the writing he submitted for these classes was unrevised and very simply written, he often got top grades. He said, “To me, I write like an elementary student [...]. I just keep getting 10 out of 10. [...] I don’t care much about grammar. I just write like a 10-year old kid” (Kayhan, interview 7). As mentioned in other places, Kayhan was a less dedicated student than the other participants, and this is another example of his more detached behavior.

My participants’ perception that content area professors are not so strict when it comes to the language used in their writing is corroborated by findings in other studies. Leki and Carson (1997), for example, make this point clear when they claim that:

In writing classes, content must be clear but can never be wrong. What you write, in a sense, does not matter, but how you write matters a great deal. In content courses, on the other hand, how you write does not matter; it is what you write that counts, and you can be wrong. (p. 56)

Some of the content professors that participated in this study also mentioned that they were not so stringent with the language used in their students' writing, especially when they knew that a student was a language learner. Table 6.7 below shows some of the comments they made.

Table 6.7

Content area professors' comments downplaying language

Professor	Comments
ANT 200	One could argue that we, particularly if a student has a deficit in writing, that probably we should be even more diligent about it saying, "no, you need to do it this way." But I'm not a writing teacher, I'm also looking for the content.
PSY 101A	You've got to draw a line someplace and since it's not a writing class. [...] It's a judgment call on my part. I mean it's very, maybe it's too arbitrary. But if they, if their writing is clear and they are showing me that they've thought about it and they made a valid effort, then they do fine.
PSY 101B	For students who had some language problems, I'll usually make a couple of marks, I won't make a big deal of it, but if they don't put an article, Tabasum has that problem she doesn't put particular articles in there, so it changes the meaning, so I'll put a little note there, I'll put "an" or "the", or something like that, so they know what should be in that particular place. But I very seldom, very seldom, take off points, particularly for people who have more struggles with language. I just don't do that.
SOC 200	But when I have a student for whom English is their second language, and that becomes apparent to me, and it isn't always apparent, I cut them some slack in terms of how I grade the mechanics of their writing in their paper.

The strategy of relying on content area professor's focus on content thus seems warranted and, by using it, participants were relieved from centering their attention on language, which they knew was one of their weaknesses. By using this strategy, they were better able to shift their attention from "how" they were writing, and concentrate on "what" they were writing.

6.2.3 Working with the writing tutor

In the spring 2010 semester, all the participants in this study were registered to take the ENG 101 class. Anticipating that they would need help writing their essays for that class, the Academic Support Director hired an undergraduate student through the work study program to

tutor my participants and help them with writing assignments not only for the English class, but for any other classes they needed help with. In the resources section below, I describe the tutor and discuss the pros and cons of having had this tutor assigned to work with my participants. Her pseudonym is Elizabeth.

During that spring semester, all seven participants sought Elizabeth's assistance, especially at first, when they started working on the writing assignments for the English class. The frequency with which they met with Elizabeth and what stage of the writing process they needed help with varied widely from participant to participant and from the beginning of the semester to the end. For the first ENG 101 essay, for example, Sabrina and Arezo reported meeting with Elizabeth several times, from the very beginning of the writing process, working on idea trees to generate content, until the final proofreading stage before turning in their essays. Both of them met with Elizabeth quite regularly during the whole semester, although probably not as many times per essay as they did for the first one.

The other participants met with her fewer times and, more often than not, just to ask her to proofread their papers. Throughout the whole semester, Yar Zar, for example, only met with Elizabeth to show her his completed essays and to ask her to proofread them for him. In his words, "I don't work with her that much. Maybe I'll do my paper and I'll have her read it. I'll just do it like that. I don't work with her as much as other students" (Yar Zar, interview 6). Solange and Musa met with her to develop ideas for some of their initial essays, but, in line with their more generally self-reliant attitude, they later chose to write their essays by themselves and just seek her help for proofreading. Solange explains:

I don't like it when we meet Elizabeth, I feel like she's helping me too much so I like doing stuff by myself and then I send her for review and then she tell me what I did

wrong, instead of like before I start writing anything I'm asking her questions [...] I want to write before I go ask her. (Solange, interview 7)

Likewise, Musa said, "I don't like going to Writing Center, or meeting Elizabeth, [...] I think they hurry, [...] the only time I really needed advice in my paper was to edit it. [...] Yeah, proofreading, and I know she's pretty good at that" (Musa, interview 8). Tabasum met with Elizabeth occasionally, but, in general, she preferred going to the Writing Center to get the support she needed, especially because at the Writing Center she could get individualized attention whereas Elizabeth usually met with the participants in small groups or pairs.

To contextualize part of the discussion on the help my participants received from Elizabeth, the guidelines for the first ENG 101A essay are partially reproduced in Figure 6.12 below.

ENG 101A

Essay #1 Guidelines:

This assignment asks you to conduct a brief rhetorical analysis of one of the magazine advertisements that I have made available [...].

You should begin your essay by providing a detailed **description** of the ad that you have chosen in order to establish exactly what it is that you will be analyzing. Describe the images, text, and layout of the ad as thoroughly and **objectively** as possible. Pretend that your audience has never seen the ad, and that they will be relying completely on your powers of description to provide a context for understanding your essay. You will also need to note where the ad originally appeared (e.g. *Cosmo*, *People*, *Maxim*, etc.). Don't worry about providing a separate introduction to your essay; the description itself will serve as an introduction to your analysis.

Once you have completed your description of the ad, you should then move on to **analyze** the rhetorical choices that have shaped its composition. Essentially, you must reflect back upon and **interpret** the description with which you began the essay, in order to show your reader how all of those details work to convince a specific audience to buy a particular product. As you generate your analysis, you may wish to consider the following questions: [list of questions] Be

as specific as you can in your responses, and use details from the ad to support your points. Make sure that you give your essay an interesting **title** that hints at some of the conclusions reached in your analysis, and (as always) **PROOFREAD YOUR WORK**.

Figure 6.12 ENG 101A – Guidelines for essay 1

In the interview extract below, Sabrina describes the meetings she had with Elizabeth to work on the first ENG 101A essay:

E: Tell me a little bit about your work with Elizabeth. How often do you meet her, how does it happen?

Sa: Basically, most of us meet her the week that we have the paper due, but before that we'll think about our topic and maybe we'll start writing stuff, and then when we meet her, she helps us to get more, you know, to think about more ideas that we could write about and like, you know, she'll help you to approve your idea, if that's a good thing for your paper to write about or not, and so.

E: So when you meet with her, have you already written something or you just thought about it?

Sa: The first paper that we did, I didn't have anything on, cause I wasn't sure about the topic I was gonna do, so I chose my topic, and then we did this idea tree, which was like, you know, which you are gonna write about, description, and, you know, analysis, and it was your something else, I can't remember, like, you would analyze it, like real specific, so I had these like three columns, and I would just like put the points down and then write about them.

E: So she helped you organize your ideas.

Sa: And then so like and then I started writing about it. And then she would check, you know, how, she would be like "Oh, write more here, or."

E: So it's the second time that you met, or you did it right there?

Sa: Yeah, like second time I met. So like I will write and then she'll go over and be like "change that, go over this, read this again" and then like, you know, you keep rechanging your paper and she'll keep reading it for you and see if that sounds better than last time.

E: Okay. So how many times do you usually meet her for each paper?

Sa: Well, like, sometimes, even like we meet her like maybe like 4 times that week, but you don't always get a chance to like, you know, be like really, cause it's all of us, so like she tries to spend time with every single one of us, but it's just sometimes you might get like the whole 3 hours that you're sitting there, you might just get maybe like 20 minutes to look at your paper, but at the same time like everybody else's trying to get their papers done too. (Sabrina, interview 6)

For the first essay, then, Sabrina met with Elizabeth at least four times. As becomes evident in the last part of the interview extract, these meetings generally did not seem to make the best use of the students' time. Several of them would meet Elizabeth in the same time frame, and they had to wait for their turn to show her their writing. This issue will be discussed further in the resources section below.

As Sabrina met with Elizabeth, she went through several revisions of her paper. In her words, "you keep rechanging your paper and she'll keep reading it for you." Unfortunately, Sabrina never shared her several drafts with me. Arezo, on the other hand, was very co-operative and generously shared the many drafts she had for each of her first three ENG 101A essays. She had the habit of printing out each draft and, on the hard copy, she, or her tutor, would write their comments to be incorporated in the next revision. This practice may have contributed to Arezo's

ability to keep track of her several drafts and revisions and, later, share them with me. The fact that I had access to several of Arezo's drafts and the comments on them made it possible for me to analyze her writing process. In the section below, I discuss an unexpected outcome of this analysis.

6.2.3.1 A piece of writing composed by four hands

In this section, I dissect part of Arezo's first ENG 101A essay to show how much of the writing in her final draft had actually been worded by Elizabeth. Just like Sabrina, Arezo also met with Elizabeth several times while working on her first essay, and the contributions the tutor gave her were spread over several encounters. I was not present in any of the meetings that Elizabeth held with Arezo, or with any of the other participants, so I cannot be sure how much exchange of ideas took place before Elizabeth would write them down in her handwriting. It is possible that, at times, Elizabeth and Arezo talked about an issue together and that Elizabeth simply took notes of their discussion in the interest of time. This seems to have been the case, especially in their first session, when they were brainstorming ideas. In later meetings, however, it seems that Elizabeth simply changed the wording in Arezo's writing to make an idea clearer or an image more vivid. In any case, when I say that Arezo incorporated Elizabeth's wording in her writing, it means that I was able to find that specific wording handwritten by Elizabeth in one of the drafts Arezo shared with me. Because of the piecemeal nature of Elizabeth's assistance, with a few new phrases suggested at each meeting, I believe that neither Elizabeth nor Arezo were aware of the end result of their work together and would be surprised to realize that so much of what Arezo wrote in her final draft had been previously written by Elizabeth in one of the earlier drafts.

Before presenting the result of this analysis, however, a few words of caution are in order. It is important to clarify that the first paragraph, which I discuss in this analysis, is far more populated with Elizabeth's words than the rest of the essay. This discussion, then, does not aim at identifying a pattern in Arezo's writing, but rather, at pointing out a possible outcome of a student requesting and receiving a lot of help from a tutor. While it is true that Elizabeth did not seem to have received the necessary training to work as a writing tutor, she was not alone in offering what could be considered excessive help to my participants. As will be discussed below, the Academic Support Director, the Writing Center, to a lesser extent, and others have also been very generous with the help they gave the participants in this study. A final point to bear in mind is that Arezo may not have been the only one whose writing became so intertwined with Elizabeth's wording. She was, however, the only participant who gave me several revisions of the same essay done with Elizabeth's help, which made this analysis possible. At the same time, it is important to highlight that Arezo did not get this much help from Elizabeth in all the writings she did. In her final paper for the sociology class, for example, she wrote a 6-page essay without any help, except for final proofreading, and got an A on it.

The guidelines for the first essay for ENG 101A are found in Figure 6.12 above. For this essay, Arezo gave me seven different drafts, each of which is briefly described in Table 6.8.

Table 6.8

Arezo's drafts for ENG 101A essay 1

Draft	Brief description
#1	Handwritten, three bubbles (description, analysis, evaluation) linked to a fourth bubble (thesis). The four bubble headings and the content in the description and analysis bubbles are in Elizabeth's handwriting. Arezo took several notes around each bubble as reminders of what to write about.

#2	Arezo's handwritten introductory paragraph, populated with Elizabeth's handwriting correcting grammar (e.g., from "he have" to <i>he has</i>), changing words (e.g., from "driving a boat" to <i>sailing a boat</i>), and adding words (e.g., <i>expensive blue shirt</i>), phrases (He is between 25/30 year old, <i>and seems very fit, even athletic</i>) and even complete sentences (e.g., <i>He is holding the steering wheel in a way that suggests that he is trying to maintain control</i>).
#3	Three paragraphs, typed, and a fourth paragraph, handwritten. The introductory paragraph now contains all the suggestions made by Elizabeth on draft #2. On the typed page, Elizabeth made a few editing comments and some additions (e.g., you can <i>clearly</i> see). The handwritten part, a short paragraph, is full of Elizabeth's handwriting, crossing out some of Arezo's writing and adding some new ideas (e.g., <i>He appears to be dressed casually, even hurriedly, and could be in a tropical location</i>).
#4	Three paragraphs, typed, incorporating Elizabeth's wordings on the previous draft, and six sentences in bullet points handwritten by Arezo, probably with ideas to include next. No comments by Elizabeth.
#5	Very similar to draft #4, with the sentences in bullet points now typed. A few comments on the bullet point part by two different people. One of them may have been Elizabeth
#6	Three paragraphs, typed. Most of the bullet point sentences in draft #5 have been incorporated in paragraph 2. Elizabeth added a few phrases to this draft (e.g., <i>When flipping through the pages of</i>) and wrote a complete sentence on the back of the second page (<i>Behind him, a storm appears to be brewing, and the wind is blowing his wet hair to one side of his face</i>).
#7	Final draft. Grade: 90.

The first paragraph in Arezo's final draft is reproduced in Figure 6.13 below. All the words in italics could be found in earlier drafts in Elizabeth's handwriting.

When flipping through the pages of the August 2006 issue of Maxim magazine, you might stop on the image of an extremely attractive man sailing a boat. The buttons on his shirt are open half-way, and you can clearly see his ample chest hair. Behind him, a storm appears to be brewing, and the wind is blowing his wet hair to one side of his face. He is wearing a long-sleeved, expensive blue collared shirt, with the sleeves rolled up. He is between twenty-five and thirty years old and seems very fit, even athletic. This model appears to be dressed casually, even hurriedly, and could be in a tropical location, and on his breast pocket there is also the Nautica logo. He is holding the ship's wheel firmly, in a way that suggests that he's trying to maintain control. On the bottom right-hand corner, there is a picture of the sleek Nautica Voyage cologne, housed in a square, glass container.

Figure 6.13 Arezo's first paragraph in final draft with Elizabeth's wording in italics

Shocking as it may be to realize that over half of the wording in Arezo’s first paragraph was written by Elizabeth, it is important to remember that this is the result of their work together over several encounters. A deconstruction of the first sentence in that paragraph, shown in Figure 6.14, clearly illustrates this point.

When flipping through the pages of the August 2006 issue of Maxim magazine, you might stop on the image of an extremely attractive man sailing a boat.

The parts in italics were found in Elizabeth’s handwriting in the following drafts:

Draft 1: *extremely attractive* (in idea tree)

Draft 2: *sailing* (crossing out “driving”)

Draft 3: *In the August 2006 issue of* (insertion of words in italics)

Draft 6: *When flipping through the pages of*

Draft 6: *you might stop on the image of* (crossing out “can see an”)

Figure 6.14 Arezo’s first sentence in ENG 101A essay 1 deconstructed

Not having been present in any of the meetings that Arezo had with Elizabeth, I cannot tell under what circumstances Elizabeth provided all the help that she did. Did Arezo ask her to write down the ideas they were discussing together? Did Arezo ask her for extra ideas? Did Elizabeth hurriedly write over Arezo’s text so she could move on and help the next student? I cannot tell. However, once Elizabeth had written a suggestion on a draft, it is not hard to understand that Arezo would incorporate that in her revision. Elizabeth was, after all, the assigned writing tutor. After analyzing Arezo’s first paragraph for her first ENG 101A essay, Solange’s comment seems to make more sense, “I don’t like it when we meet Elizabeth, I feel like she’s helping me too much” (Solange, interview 7).

6.2.4 Going to the Writing Center

Out of the seven participants, Tabasum was by far the one who went to the Writing Center the most often. As mentioned above, even after a specific writing tutor had been assigned to work with these students in spring 2010, Tabasum still preferred the individual attention she could get at the Writing Center. The only other participant who would sometimes make use of this resource was Arezo. The other participants either went there very infrequently or never went there in their first year of college.

Whenever she had the time, Tabasum always went to the Writing Center before turning in a piece of writing. Even when she wrote a short piece, such as a reflection for her Freshman Seminar, she liked to have her writing checked so she would not have too many mistakes. As was mentioned in her profile, Tabasum was a very diligent student who worked hard to make up for her years of interrupted education. She was very earnest in everything regarding her education, and this becomes evident in her comment about why she had her writing checked at the Writing Center even when she knew that the professor was not concerned about language, “Well, in my [Freshman Seminar] class, [the professor] doesn’t take it seriously, but cause I was so serious, I’m serious about writing, so I take it seriously, I do my best” (Tabasum, interview 4). Each time Tabasum had to work on an essay, she would go to the Writing Center at least a couple of times, starting at the very beginning of the writing process. She describes her work at the Writing Center in the extract below:

I go [to the Writing Center] every time I have to write an essay. [...] First I write like a brainstorm and I go there [...] cause I put all my ideas and “is this good enough? or should I add more in?” [...] They check like my outline and brainstorm and after that

then I can write. I go back home and write, and I'll bring it back for proofread and make comments, so what I need more or what I should take back. (Tabasum, interview 1)

Like Arezo, who incorporated most if not all of Elizabeth's comments in her revisions, Tabasum also took the advice she got from the Writing Center very seriously. At the end of the fall semester, when I asked her what advice she would give to a new student coming to Hope College as far as writing practices were concerned, she said:

My first advice is like start early, yeah, don't wait until the end [...] because, I mean, at the end, you don't have time to work on it more, because you don't know, because when you go to the Writing Center, they tell that your paper is horrible, you have to redo it. (Tabasum, interview 4)

An incident that showed me how serious Tabasum was about revising her paper when the Writing Center told her to do so occurred when she was working on the second essay for her ENG 101B class. Our sixth interview happened to be right after her English class, when her second essay was due. She told me that she had not turned in her essay that day because when she went to the Writing Center that morning for a final proofreading, she was told that she needed to revise some more. Tabasum had already had ten points deducted from her first essay, which lowered her grade from a C to a D, because she was late turning it in, and the professor did not give her the extension she had requested. Tabasum told me about having her request denied, saying, "[The professor] said 'if you are turning [in] one hour late, it's ten points off.' So I was like so disappointed, she never like paid attention that I need help, or I have difficult time" (Tabasum, interview 8). As a result, when Tabasum realized she would not be turning in her second essay on time, she did not even try to ask for an extension. That day I asked Tabasum whether she thought revising her essay would make it so much better that it would be worth the

ten points she knew for sure the professor would take off from her grade. She replied simply that it really did not matter. The Writing Center had told her she needed to work more on her essay, so she had to do it.

Our meeting that day ended up being shorter than usual because she arrived late and had to leave on time. I felt frustrated that I had not been able to talk longer with her. After our interview, I wrote down in my journal that she “came late for the interview and seemed stressed out, not doing well in exams or essays.” Indeed, she later told me that she had felt particularly depressed that day. The decisions that Tabasum took that day and the following, before turning her essay in, proved to have very undesirable consequences, which I discuss in detail below under the section on “Asking others outside Hope College.”

As mentioned above, Tabasum went to the Writing Center every time she needed to turn in a piece of writing for any of her classes, even though she knew that content area professors were often not concerned about language issues. She was well aware of her language difficulties and told me that, “I can’t just turn my paper that I wrote, so I need help” (Tabasum, interview 7). When she was writing for her English class, then, she worked even harder because she knew that the main focus of the evaluation would be on “how” she wrote the paper, rather than on “what” the paper was about. She describes her struggles each time she had to write an essay for her ENG 101B class in the extract below:

I try hard like whenever I have English paper I don’t sleep like for a week and I work on that. And [the professor] doesn’t understand that. I mean, she saw me like I go to like 20 times or 10 times to writing center because I want to learn and I want my paper to be good. (Tabasum, interview 7)

Perhaps there is some exaggeration in the extract above, but I have no doubt that Tabasum did indeed work extremely hard on all her ENG 101B writing assignments. As the spring semester progressed, I could sense Tabasum's growing exasperation with the professor's lack of sympathy towards her struggles and hard work. Besides the professor's refusal to give Tabasum some extra time to turn in her essays, the professor seemed bothered by the fact that Tabasum was getting so much help. Or, at least, this is how Tabasum felt. It is possible that the professor was particularly bothered by the external help Tabasum got for her second essay (to be discussed below), and that that was what she was referring to in her criticism, but that is not the way Tabasum took it. Tabasum understood the professor's comment on her getting excessive help as a reference to all the help she was getting from different sources including the Writing Center and others at Hope College. In Tabasum's words:

I keep working on [my writing] and I work harder and harder and even though like my English teacher, she is not happy I'm getting so much help, but I still get help and I still go [to the Writing Center], I don't give up. [...] She says like in the class and she has on her syllabus to go to the Writing Center. When I went, when she sees me, she doesn't make a good impression. She told me that I get too much help and she's not happy about it. And I don't know what's the problem, why it bothers her. [...] She said "basically you are getting too much help" and why it bothers her? Cause I need help and I'm getting that help. And people gave me. It's not that I go like beg people. It's open for us and I get that help. (Tabasum, interview 8)

Unlike Elizabeth, the writing tutor, the tutors in the Writing Center generally made fewer additions to my participants' writing, at least as revealed in the drafts shared by Arezo and Tabasum. One sample that I have of the work done at the Writing Center is Tabasum's draft of

her first ENG 101B essay. The essay was typed and sprinkled with markings made by a tutor from the Writing Center. Most of these markings corrected editing problems such as use of articles and prepositions, subject-verb agreement, and verb tenses. At the end of the draft, the tutor wrote three points Tabasum should include in her conclusion. Interestingly, Arezo did not seem to receive the same type of detailed editing help as Tabasum, even though she would have liked to. Arezo tells me why she thought the Writing Center was not so helpful for her:

I don't think Writing Center helps a lot because I go for [ENG 095] assignment, I went there like five times before I turn in my paper and I still have like a lot of grammar error and that is exactly what I go for, to check my grammatical error, and I still have like a lot, [...] I want them to help me with my grammar errors, so, it didn't help a lot. (Arezo, interview 5)

In the spring semester, Arezo went to the Writing Center at least twice while working on her third ENG 101A essay because Elizabeth happened to be out of town during that period. In these two commented-on drafts, which Arezo shared with me, there is a total of only three editing comments and most of the feedback she got at the Writing Center seems related to the organization of ideas, especially on the earlier draft. Interestingly, though, at the back of the earlier draft, the tutor did write down a rather long piece, which Arezo incorporated in a modified form into her final draft. The tutor wrote:

It was six o'clock and I had a stomach virus. I visited the [Health Clinic] earlier that day – they told me to come back for medicine if it got worse. I went back, but the doors were closed and locked. I had no access to get the free pain relievers available at the [Health Clinic].

This essay will be discussed further below together with the contributions Arezo received from the Academic Support Director.

6.2.5 Seeking help from professor

Except for Yar Zar, all the other participants met with their professors to talk about writing assignments at one point or another. They all thought the experience was helpful and that they were given useful advice. Some of their comments regarding their professor's assistance can be found in Table 6.9.

Table 6.9

Consulting with professor about writing

Participant	Comments
Arezo	I go to [the ENG 101A instructor's] office too, for my second paper, because my thesis, he don't like it in class, so I write it again and I go to his office, he says "it's a little bit weak, you should do this and that" so I emailed him but he didn't respond me, so I went to his office again. [...] He just told me like how it should be, he said "your like introduction it has to be like big, like you are starting big, [...] and then your thesis" so it's like going from big to small. (interview 6)
Kayhan	I started talking [to the ANT 200 professor] first of all about the basic er what we did in class and, just after the class was done, I started talking about "I don't understand this" and from there as it went on we went to her office and she started "what's your focus on your leisure activity [assignment]" and I started talking about it and she helped me out a lot because she told me about what should you focus on, that kind of help me what to write about (interview 1)
Tabasum	The [ENG 095] teacher, she's very helpful. I can go and she's always there. I always go to her room and she helps me. (interview 2)
Sabrina	For your writing assignments, I guess like, if you're feeling comfortable with your topic and stuff, stick to it, if not, go to your professor and talk to her about it and see if she thinks you should like she can give some advice, like she's not gonna tell you "Oh, you should change it" you know, but like you're gonna feel more comfortable about your topic when you are trying to explain to her. (interview 4)
Solange	We talk to [the ANT 200 professor] all the time [about the fieldwork project] like cause you have to report, to tell her how it's going, cause all this, you don't wanna end up doing all the work and at the last minute you find you did the wrong thing. So we have to check in with her, we try to check in with her every week or every two weeks.

Musa	I usually take my time and go meet with [the ENG 101A instructor]. Since the first essay, cause the first essay I didn't meet with him, and I score, I thought I did well, I scored less, so, all the rest [of the essays] I met with him. [...] I usually take my draft and ask him "this is my draft, my ideas", showing the ideas trees and he asks me "what are you talking about" and whenever it doesn't sound right to him he tell me "you should find something else for this place because I just think it's awkward" so, yeah, it was helpful. (interview 8)
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It is possible that Yar Zar did not ask his professors for help completing his writing assignments because, of all the participants in this study, he was the most confident in his writing ability and in his general preparedness to be in college. The fact that he had been in the U.S. the longest and had gone to a private high school certainly played a role in promoting his self-confidence. Self-confidence, however, did not always translate into good grades. Yar Zar was indeed quite surprised when he did not do well in his second essay for ENG 095, the only essay that got graded in that class. Just to clarify, students had written a first essay for that class at the beginning of the semester, which ended up not being graded. In my interview with the instructor, she mentioned that she intended to grade those papers, but this never happened. Students, therefore, did not receive any feedback on their first essay before writing their second. At the end of the semester, the instructor had an individual conference with each of her students and, in this meeting, she compared both essays with each student, pinpointing areas that had improved and areas that needed further improvement. Both essays were marked mostly for grammar errors, with numbers and letters on the margins referring students to sections in the grammar book they had used. Only the second essay was graded.

Yar Zar talks about his reaction to the low grade he received in his second ENG 095 essay in the extract below:

I didn't take the advantage, like other [...] students went to [the ENG 095 instructor], and you know, they sent her their whole paper, and then like she corrected the whole thing

and send them back. I didn't do that. Or go the Writing Center, so I guess that was my fault, my disadvantage. [...] I got a 70 [on the essay]. I was hoping to get like a higher grade you know because, at that time, I didn't know it, I was like "oh, you know, I love writing papers, I get As and Bs on them, I'm gonna get a good grade on this [...]." And then, at the meeting, she was like, she trashed my paper like something and I was like "all right, I'm not even gonna say anything". (Yar Zar, interview 4)

Unfortunately, Yar Zar did not share his essay with me, so I was not able to see in which areas he got most of his points deducted. The instructor did mention that Yar Zar had several problems with verb tenses in both essays, which showed to her that he had made very little improvement during her course as far as verb tenses were concerned. In the extract above, Yar Zar seems to imply that he could have gotten a better grade if he had asked the instructor for help or had gone to the Writing Center. Although this may have been the case, it is somewhat striking that all the seven participants got a grade in the low C range, with the highest grade being a 73.5.

During their first year, except for Yar Zar, all the other six participants looked for their professors outside class time to talk about writing assignments and found these interactions beneficial to the completion of the writing tasks. As was discussed in the previous chapter, at the end of the data collection period, Musa mentioned that he felt he should have talked to his professors more often since he realized that his frequent meetings with the Freshman Composition instructor were very helpful. Likewise, at the end of the Fall semester, when I asked Kayhan what he had learned from doing the Anthropology essays that might help him when writing future essays, he said:

Well, I always feel like I should have gone to the professor more, cause the professor always feels happy when students come for help. [...] Professors are really happy, I

mean, they're not gonna go up there and say "you know what, I'm tired of you, you shouldn't be coming here anymore". They're not gonna say that, they're just gonna be happy to help and they may give you really good suggestions. (Kayhan, interview 4)

6.2.5.1 Tabasum in her World Religions class

The kind of assistance that Tabasum received from the World Religions (REL 100) professor was different from the assistance she, or any of the other participants, received from the other professors in their first year of college and, hence, I discuss this case separately. It is important to mention that the REL 100 professor knew all the participants in this study quite well since, except for Tabasum, they had all taken his class in the summer and, moreover, he had been assigned to play an advisory role to all of them. He was particularly well aware of Tabasum's psychological state in the Fall as a consequence of her brother's death, mentioned in her profile in Chapter 4. The REL 100 professor explains his advisory role in the extract below:

It's just a position that the Provost appointed me to. [...] I've been given no guidelines, other than really a charge to stay attentive to how they're doing and to report back to administration when necessary and just really to be a point person also for the administration. [...] They each actually have their personal advisor. But I'm an advisor then for all of them. [...] They all know that I'm available and I have all their phone numbers and sometimes they drop by and I email them. So I'm just keeping connected and I want to talk to each of their advisors too. And, um, hopefully, you know, detect anything that needs to be looked at. You know, there's Tabasum's case in dealing with a death. So especially I'm paying attention to her right now. [...] I think the idea is that I'm assigned by the institution to care actively. (REL 100 professor)

In previous semesters, when this professor taught the REL 100 course, he often had a take-home essay to complement each of his four exams. Because of a heavier teaching load in the semester that Tabasum took his course, however, he chose to forgo the essays for the first three exams, just keeping it for the final. Tabasum took exams 1 and 2 and did very poorly. She told me that she had felt sick on the day of the first exam and, as a consequence, had not been able to answer all the questions. Looking at her first exam, which she shared with me, one can see that she only attempted to answer 13 of the 25 questions, all worth 4 points each. Even though only five of the answers are marked as correct and two of them as half correct, the professor gave her a grade of 51 out of 100, which is nearly the same as giving full credit for each of her attempted answers. Tabasum mentioned that she was not able to finish her second exam either and, at this point, the professor decided to let her write essays to replace her second and third exams. Tabasum did not show me her second exam, but she did share the essays that she wrote for exams 2 and 3 as well as the emails she received from the professor, in which he gives her feedback on the essays. Upon receiving her essay replacing her third exam, the professor sent Tabasum an email saying that it was “quite impressive” and asking her who had helped her. In her reply to him, she says:

Before I started the essay I discussed the topic with the REL 100 tutor. Then I wrote the rough draft. During the weekend the tutor was not available, so I asked one of my friend who is from England and an English major to revise my essay. After he made some suggestion, I had to add more to it. Finally I went to writing center to make sure if I had a good thesis or if I had mistakes.

Tabasum received an A on this essay. Regarding the help she got while writing her third essay, even though her reply to the professor cannot be considered dishonest, it certainly

downplays the writing abilities her “friend who is from England” had. As will be discussed below under the section “Seeking help outside Hope College”, this “friend”, Mr. Raymond, was actually a retired linguist who has published books and articles. Mr. Raymond also helped Tabasum write her final essay.

An analysis of Tabasum’s final exam for REL 100 shows that it was graded in a similar way as her first exam, with Tabasum essentially receiving full credit for each of the answers she attempted. One of the questions, for example, reads “What are 3 common elements in the life narratives of Buddha and Christ?” Tabasum’s unfinished answer is “Buddha and Christ both have incredible stories. The common element is.” Even though Tabasum did not answer what had been asked, she did not get any points deducted in this question.

In an end-of-semester email to Tabasum, the REL 100 professor told her that she ended up with a B- for the class. He ended the email writing “This is quite an achievement on your part and I am extremely proud of you.” In summary, Tabasum’s experience in her World Religions class was quite unique, in that the professor not only modified his course structure to accommodate her difficulty with exams, but also showed incredible generosity towards grading. In an email to me, partially reproduced below, the professor talks about the experience of having Tabasum in his class and gives a rationale for the accommodations he made for her. He writes:

Tabasum is the only student in my years of teaching at Hope that I have given the option of writing an essay instead of doing an in-class exam. Tabasum did the first in-class exam, but then took my option to write an essay for the 2nd and 3rd unit exams. She did, however, do both the in-class Final exam together with the required essay that all students were asked to write. In the end, then, there were just two exams that she replaced with essays.

This exception was made because of my perception of the difficulty Tabasum was having as a result of her brother's death and in adjusting [to] full-time classes at Hope. I note also that in some semesters [...] I actually have students write essays instead of taking exam.

It seemed logical to give Tabasum this option as she was obviously under significant emotional duress and not handling class examinations well. (REL 100 professor)

It is quite remarkable that a professor showed such flexibility to accommodate a student's difficulty. Even though the generous grading of Tabasum's exams may raise a few eyebrows, replacing some of the exams with essays seems to be a fair adjustment to let her show what she had learned, especially considering her long years of interrupted education aggravated by a strenuous psychological period following her brother's death.

6.2.6 Seeking help from others at Hope College

As discussed above, when participants worked on writing assignments they often got help from Elizabeth (the writing tutor), the Writing Center, and their professors. They also got help from other people at Hope College, especially when it came to proofreading. Table 6.10 below shows the people that helped each participant the most with proofreading.

Table 6.10

Help with proofreading

Participant	Who proofreads your papers?
Yar Zar	Some friends at work, or Elizabeth.
Arezo	The Academic Support Director, Elizabeth, or roommate.
Kayhan	Self, the Academic Support Director, or Elizabeth.
Tabasum	The Writing Center, Elizabeth, or the Academic Support Director.
Sabrina	Yar Zar or Elizabeth.
Solange	Roommate, self, Elizabeth, or the Academic Support Director.
Musa	Friends, or Elizabeth.

As would be expected, Elizabeth was mentioned by all the participants, at one point or another, as having helped them with proofreading. Tabasum, as usual, got a lot of help with her writing at the Writing Center at all stages in her writing process. Solange and Kayhan mentioned getting better at proofreading their own work, although they often asked others as well. Most of them also asked their roommates or other friends to proofread their work. Musa and Yar Zar, despite getting occasional help from Elizabeth, seemed to rely mostly on friends for proofreading. Arezo, on the other hand, only asked her roommate for help with proofreading when she had to write shorter pieces such as the short essays for the Economics class. Another important source of help that participants had access to was the Academic Support Director (ASD). The ASD had been the instructor for the ENG 095 course in Fall 2010, and, at the end of that course, she told all her students, including the seven participants in this study, that she would be available in case they needed any help in the future. Most of the participants who sought the ASD's help did so when Elizabeth was not around and usually just asked her to proofread their work before turning it in. An exception was Arezo, who sometimes got help from the ASD several times during the writing process. Arezo's interactions with the ASD were facilitated by the fact that Arezo worked at the ASD's office. Arezo would often take advantage of times when the office was not busy and the ASD was available to ask ASD to look at her essays. In Arezo's words,

I'll go to [the ASD] cause she said I can go there, plus I work there, so like [when] there's nothing to do at my work and she come and talk to me about something [...] so that time I can go just over my essays. (Arezo, interview 5)

A similar analysis to the one presented above in section 6.2.3.1 can be made of Arezo's third essay for ENG 101A to show how the contributions made by the ASD and the Writing

Center were incorporated in Arezo's writing. The guidelines for the essay are reproduced in Figure 6.15.

ENG 101A

Essay #3 Guidelines:

Last month, the Hope College Board of Trustees found themselves presented with a very interesting proposition. An anonymous Hope alumnus has pledged to make a substantial monetary gift to the school--up to \$20 million dollars--but there are a few strings attached:

1. The money must be used to establish a new project or initiative at Hope or to significantly enhance an existing one; it cannot simply be invested or used to pay down existing debt.
2. The money can only be used for a single purpose; it cannot be divided among a variety of projects.
3. The way in which the money is to be used must clearly connect to the mission, purpose, and goals of Hope College, as spelled out in the college's strategic plan.
4. Hope students must have a significant voice in deciding how the money is to be spent.

In order to meet all of these demands, the administration is asking individual Hope students to submit proposals for how to make the best use of this tremendous gift. The suggestions will be posted on a special section of the college website, so that the entire Hope community can read and react to them. At the beginning of April, the Board will vote on the top five student proposals and present them to the donor, who will then make the final decision.

Your task is to craft a 4-5 page proposal that clearly identifies how you think this money should be used and why. Your audience is the entire Hope community, since your plan is something that will most likely impact all of us, but with special emphasis on the administration because they are the ones who will select the proposals that will be presented to the donor.

Figure 6.15 ENG 101A – Guidelines for essay 3

For the third ENG 101A essay, Arezo gave me ten different drafts going from the initial five-line outlining of paragraphs to the final version submitted to the instructor. Several different people commented on these drafts, including Elizabeth (drafts 2 and 3), Writing Center tutors

(drafts 4 and 8), a peer (draft 7, during class peer review), and the ASD (drafts 1, 5, 6, and 9). Elizabeth's contribution to this essay happened mostly at the beginning of the writing process since she had to go out of town when the essay approached the deadline. Elizabeth's absence is the main reason why Arezo as well as the other participants looked for help elsewhere for essay 3.

In a similar fashion to Elizabeth, the ASD also gave Arezo generous feedback on her drafts, often rewording full sentences and adding new ideas. Figure 6.16 below shows Arezo's first paragraph in draft 5, in which she incorporated the contribution she had received from the Writing Center on draft 4 (the contribution from the Writing Center is italicized). On this typed draft, the ASD scratched out and reworded or added several sections in red ink. Figure 6.17 shows Arezo's first paragraph in draft 6, which exclusively reflects all of the ASD's comments on draft 5. Just to clarify, in each of the drafts, the ASD gave Arezo feedback on specific paragraphs. Considering all the drafts that the ASD reviewed, all the paragraphs ended up getting extensive comments. For the sake of brevity, I only focus on the first paragraph.

Health...the most important in life

It was six o'clock on the evening and I had a stomach virus. I visited the Health Center earlier that day, they told me to come back for medicine if it got worse. I went back, but the doors were closed and locked. I had no access to get the free pain relieves available at the Health Center. This is important because Hope College is giving a monetary gift of \$20 million dollars and the Hope College board of trustee is deciding to spend the money on something useful at Hope College. What you think is better and helpful to use the money on? I believe Hope College should spend the \$20 million dollars getting Health Center open until mid-night, with fuller staff for students, because it is more beneficial for Hope community.

Figure 6.16 Arezo's first paragraph for ENG 101A essay 3 – draft 5

Improved Health Care for Students

It was six o'clock in the evening and I was throwing up and my stomach was cramping. When I had visited the Health Center earlier that day, they had told me to come back for medicine if my symptoms got worse, but when I went back to get some medicine the doors were closed and locked. I had no access to get the free pain relievers available in the Health Center until it reopened at 8:00 a.m. I thought of my experience when I learned that Hope College had been given a monetary gift of \$20 million dollars that the Board of Trustees must decide how to spend. Hope College should spend the \$20 million dollars to improve the health care provided for students because it is more beneficial for Hope community.

Figure 6.17 Arezo's first paragraph for ENG 101A essay 3 – draft 6

The ASD made yet another addition to Arezo's first paragraph when she reviewed draft 6. She replaced "it is more beneficial for Hope community" at the end of the paragraph with "it will relieve the anxiety of parents and provide better health care of its students." The first paragraph in Arezo's final draft, the one she turned in, is reproduced in Figure 6.18, with all the contributions from either the Writing Center or the ASD in italics.

Improved Health Care for Students

It was six o'clock in the evening and I was throwing up and my stomach was cramping. When I had visited the Health Center earlier that day, they had told me to come back for medicine if my symptoms got worse, but when I went back to get some medicine the doors were closed and locked. I had no access to get the free pain relievers available in the Health Center until it reopened at 8:00 a.m. I thought of my experience when I learned that Hope College had been given a monetary gift of \$20 million dollars that the Board of Trustees must decide how to spend. Hope College should spend the \$20 million dollars to improve the health care provided for students because it will relieve the anxiety of parents and provide better health care for its students.

Figure 6.18 Arezo's first paragraph for ENG 101A essay 3 – draft 10 (final version)

In this final version, about 80% of the words in the first paragraph were written by either a tutor at the Writing Center or by the ASD and, of the remaining words, several were taken from the guidelines such as “monetary gift”, “\$20 million dollars”, and “the Board of Trustees.” Compared to the first paragraph in essay 1 discussed above, Arezo incorporated even more words from others in her first paragraph of essay 3. This is probably due to the fact that she got help from two different people on essay 3, resulting in the ASD modifying suggestions made by the tutor at the Writing Center.

As striking as it may be to look at Figure 6.17 and to realize that a student turned in an essay that, at least from the analysis of a single paragraph, seems to have been written mostly by others, Arezo’s process of constantly seeking help and incorporating the suggestions she received was a very successful coping strategy. She got 95 on essay 3 and, among other comments, the instructor wrote “good overall organization, very well written at the sentence level, and great job.” It is worth pointing out that the ENG 101A instructor periodically received reports from the writing tutor and the Writing Center letting him know of the type of help his students received. The instructor was also aware that students got help from the ASD and viewed the participants’ proactive attitude in seeking help positively, as is evident in his comment below.

A lot of [the participants] rely heavily on the ASD who they had last semester. They will go back and meet with her and get her to look at things, they will go to the Writing Center, they’ll get peers, they are much more willing to put in the work than a lot of the native speakers are, which is interesting to me, that there is this, they don’t take it for granted that they can just say what they mean to say and it will be perfectly clear, they realize that they have to kind of work at it. (ENG 101A instructor)

If, on the one hand, Arezo's strategy of seeking constant help worked for her all the time, on the other, Tabasum, who needed and requested more help than any of the other participants, had a very unpleasant experience with how her ENG 101B instructor interpreted the amount of help she received. This was mentioned above in the section on the Writing Center and will be discussed in the section below.

6.2.7 Seeking help outside Hope College

Throughout the data collection period, there were very few instances in which participants sought help from people outside Hope College. In fact, except for Tabasum, who, at times, received substantial help from Mr. Raymond, a previous tutor, the only other time that I knew of a participant requesting help outside Hope College was Yar Zar asking a friend from high school to proofread one of his essays. The very different ways in which Yar Zar and Tabasum dealt with the help they got is remarkable and will be discussed below. I start by considering Yar Zar's case first, a one-off request for help, and then I move on to discuss the help Tabasum got from Mr. Raymond.

Yar Zar had just finished writing his ENG 101A essay 2 the night before it was due. He was at the library and did not feel like going all the way up to the girls' dormitory, where Elizabeth, the writing tutor, was working with some of the other participants. He then saw on his Facebook page that some of his high school friends were online and he asked them whether they would be willing to proofread his paper. One of his friends agreed to help him and sent his paper back, fully revised, late that night. He describes his reaction to her revisions in the excerpt below:

[My friend] didn't send me my paper until like 2 in the morning like when the library was about to close. And me and Kayhan read my paper, we just looked at each other, and we

were like “there’s no way [the ENG 101A instructor] is gonna think this is my paper”. Because like she went in, like she’s really good at writing, she went in and switched everything around and used all these big words that me and Kayhan were confused. [...] Then she’ll take the ideas out that she doesn’t like and she just throw in these bigger better ideas, and I was like “I wish I could turn it in and get an A on it, but he’s gonna know, like. I don’t even know what the paper is about anymore. (Yar Zar, interview 6)

Yar Zar then decided to disregard his friend’s “bigger better ideas” and simply turn in the paper the way he had originally written it. He did not mention whether he used any of her help with proofreading, but, by looking at the editing problems in his final version, it seems likely that he did not. He did, incidentally, end up getting 90 out of 100 in this essay.

In stark contrast to Yar Zar’s disregard of his friend’s generous contributions to his paper is Tabasum’s decision to turn in a paper for ENG 101 revised by Mr. Raymond without even looking at the revisions he had made. But first, some background.

Mr. Raymond is a retired linguist who has been volunteering in the refugee community for a number of years. He met Tabasum soon after she came to the States and, from the beginning, helped her frequently with her school work. After Tabasum went to college, she continued to seek Mr. Raymond’s help, especially in Fall 2009. In our first interview of Spring 2010, she explained to me that:

Mr. Raymond always helps me like whenever I have to write anything I discuss with him and then he gives me some ideas, or if I’m confused or anything he helps me and like I write my rough draft and send it to him and he makes addition. (Tabasum, interview 5)

She reported using Mr. Raymond’s help for all of her writings in the Fall. The help that Mr. Raymond gave Tabasum in her World Religions essays in that semester, in particular, has

already been mentioned above. In the Spring, she asked Mr. Raymond for help for the first, and only time, when she worked on her ENG 101B essay 2 assignment. Despite Tabasum's numerous revisions for many of her papers, she never shared enough drafts with me to allow for an analysis of her writing in the same way that I have analyzed Arezo's. The drafts that she usually gave me were either very early ones, containing a few sentences in her handwriting, or almost complete typed versions. It was hence not possible for me to analyze Tabasum's writing in order to identify the specific contributions made by Mr. Raymond or the tutors at the Writing Center.

After successfully using Mr. Raymond's help in many of her writings throughout the years, including in her World Religions class, I can only imagine Tabasum's shock when the ENG 101B instructor refused to accept her second essay claiming that it was not her work. As was mentioned above in the section on the Writing Center, Tabasum did not turn in her ENG 101B essay 2 in class when it was due because a tutor at the Writing Center had told her, earlier that day, that her essay needed further revision. On top of that, because she already had a D in her first essay, she was afraid of not doing well again and running the risk of failing the class. In the extract below, she describes her state of mind:

In the first essay, I thought I worked so hard and I turned in late, but I thought at least I'm gonna get a B, cause I was so excited, it was my favorite topic, and I was very disappointed and plus she took points off, so, I mean, I was discouraged in the first essay, and the second one, I had like, I was so nervous that I'm gonna fail this, if she gave me D on that one, this one, I'm gonna fail [...]. That's why I turned it late, and I thought maybe I should work more on it. (Tabasum, interview 7)

In my interview with her the day her second essay was due, she mentioned that she was probably going to talk to Mr. Raymond that night to ask him to revise her paper for her. What followed, which I learned only a month later when we met for our next interview, was a sequence of events, which Tabasum slowly started to reveal to me about ten minutes into the interview, after we had already talked about another course. When I asked her whether she wanted to talk about the English or the Economics class next, she simply said, “I don’t want to talk about English. I don’t like that class” (Tabasum, interview 7). She then went on to say:

Well, I do, I like that class, but my professor, she’s very complex person, she never helps me. [...] So when she saw my second paper, she said “it’s too good. You didn’t write your paper.” But I was honest, I told her I went to Writing Center and Mr. Raymond revised my paper. Then she said “I’m not gonna give you any grade because you didn’t write your paper.” And I did, I mean, I worked so hard, I was about to cry, like it was the hardest paper ever. [...] And then she asked me to re-write it. Sit in front of her in her office and write. She give me two hours and I wrote it in front of her. And she gave me a 50 on that. Here is my essay, I brought it. [...] So, that’s why I don’t want to talk about it. Cause I was so excited about that class and I thought I had the best teacher. (Tabasum, interview 7)

On Tabasum’s rewrite, the professor wrote, “This is C+/B- paper (grade of 80). I am taking off 10 points for turning it in late + 20 points for cheating by turning in work that was not yours. Grade = 50.” Even now, as I write this dissertation almost a year and a half after I read this comment, I am still overtaken by feelings of sadness, frustration, and even anger that this incident happened, and, even more so, that it happened the way it did. This was certainly the most emotional and difficult situation that I had to deal with throughout my data collection. I still

find it quite unbelievable that the professor did write that comment on Tabasum's essay. If anything, and technically speaking, what proof did the professor have that the essay was not Tabasum's work? And, from a Bakhtinian perspective (Bakhtin, 1981), aren't our words always populated with words of others? As Leki (2007) argues, the writing process is necessarily intertwined with "other humans and human activities" (p. 262). It is important to clarify that all I know about this incident has come from Tabasum. And she was not always straightforward or easy to understand. During the few months that were still left in the data collection period, I revisited this incident with Tabasum a few times trying to get a better understanding of what happened. It is also worth clarifying the reason I felt uncomfortable speaking to the professor to gain insight into her perspective. My interview with the ENG 101B professor had actually taken place after she had rejected Tabasum's late essay. She did tell me that Tabasum would have to rewrite that essay, but never explained why. Because she had made it clear in our email exchange preceding the interview that she was not open to discussing any issues directly related to Tabasum, I did not ask her why Tabasum had to rewrite her essay. To complicate matters, when telling me about the whole incident, Tabasum mentioned that the professor had asked her whether I had written that essay, which made me feel particularly uncomfortable. Given all these circumstances, I never contacted the professor to talk about what happened.

What I know of the story is that the evening after she did not turn in her essay in class, she sent it to Mr. Raymond so that he could help her. The following morning, he emailed her essay back and, according to Tabasum, "Honestly, when Mr. Raymond sent it back to me, I was really depressed, I mean, cause my paper was late, and I didn't read it. I just turned it to her" (Tabasum, interview 7). Tabasum did give me both versions of her essay: the one that was

rejected and the one that she rewrote, besides some handwritten early drafts. When I asked her what parts of her rejected version were written by Mr. Raymond, she said:

Like when he said about how English is, there is difference between English and how, like what countries speak English like British, Australia and United States, well, that's, when you read you will know because you can keep this paper, the one that I gave you cause this is mine and that's his, you'll understand. (Tabasum, interview 7)

Before presenting parts of Tabasum's two essays, I reproduce below the first two paragraphs of the guidelines for ENG 101B essay 2.

ENG 101 B – Essay 2

Global or Standard Languages: Pros or Cons

Choose to write about either English as a global language or the role of Standard English in the United States. You must provide background information about what it means to be a global or standard language, and you must discuss what this entails.

You will choose to present either a generally negative or a generally positive view of global/standard languages. Depending on whether you are focusing on the negative or positive, you will present good and bad effects of having such a language. You can consider the effect on society as a whole, on specific groups within that society (especially minority groups), and/or on individuals.

Figure 6.19 English 101B – Partial guidelines for essay 2

Before comparing the rejected and the re-write versions of Tabasum's essay, it is important to point out that the re-write version that the professor graded, and that Tabasum shared with me, was actually not the one she wrote in the professor's presence. It is not completely clear to me how the revisions of her re-write went. What I understand is that Tabasum did rewrite her essay in front of the professor when she was requested to do so. She told me that she was allowed to look at her notes at that time. The professor read Tabasum's handwritten essay and, claiming that it was difficult to understand because of too many grammar

and spelling mistakes, asked Tabasum to type it. Between leaving the professor's office and turning in her re-write, Tabasum went at least once to the Writing Center. The professor was aware of this visit and, during our interview, had actually given me a copy of the report she had received from the Writing Center, in which the tutor describes what aspects of Tabasum's writing she had worked on and what suggestions she had given Tabasum.

Comparing the two versions of Tabasum's second essay, the first difference that becomes evident regards the length: the rejected version is four pages long whereas the re-write is hardly two and a half pages long. While the language used in the rejected essay is quite polished and, at times, sophisticated, the language used in the re-write is clearly more colloquial. As Tabasum mentioned, in the rejected version, there are long stretches about dialects, which do not appear in the re-write version. According to Tabasum, these are additions made by Mr. Raymond, which, had she read the essay before turning it in, she would have removed. When I asked her what she would have done if she had read Mr. Raymond's revised version before sending it to her professor, she said, "there are some things that I don't really understand about like British, about all this people speak languages, what they have in common and what's the difference, I don't understand that, and I should have take off those things" (Tabasum, interview 7). To illustrate some of the differences between the two versions, Figures 6.20 and 6.21 below contain the first two paragraphs and the first sentence of each remaining paragraph in the rejected version and in the re-write version, respectively.

The Importance of Standard Language

For second language learners of English, the task of learning to read and write in a formal standard English is made more difficult by the bewildering number of varieties of English used by the native speakers around them. I, Tabasum, emigrated to the United States in 2004 and studied English as a second language in high school. However, all around me, I heard other kinds

of English, and this was confusing.

All languages have a variety of dialects and, typically, one is viewed as the more prestigious and professional standard. In Indonesia and Malaysia, most people speak one of the many dialects of Malay. Because there are much greater differences among the dialects than there are in English, the Indonesian and Malaysian government have each set up standard dialects of the language that they call Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Malaysia. These standard dialects are the language of books and newspapers and the language of schools and colleges. Though French has many dialects, there is an Academy of scholars that tries to ensure that the French that is spoken or written obeys the rules of Standard French and thus preserves the French national identity.

English in the United States or Britain or Australia consists of many dialects. [...]

Standard English in the United States has two major varieties – the written language and the spoken version. [...]

But, in fact, it is not necessary or desirable for English speakers to be able to use just one dialect. [...]

The ability to use a more formal standard English enables speakers to communicate orally to others complex ideas and feelings because standard written English provides very precise ways to do this. [...]

Education would be a far more difficult process if there were no convention of using a formal standard English. [...]

Whether a person meets college professors, bank tellers, receptionists, or news anchors, the language used and understood is the standard variety. [...]

Moreover, there are a great many grammars of English written for many purposes. [...]

For written English, the understanding and use of Standard Written English is essential, because it functions as the one kind of English with which speakers of any English dialect are expected to be thoroughly familiar. [...]

Standardization in language is important in the ways that standardization in measurement, for example, is important, standardization such as the metric system. [...]

It thus seems that to take advantage of the many opportunities offered in the United States and to achieve the American Dream of a full life with a good home and a good income, it is absolutely essential to be able to read and write good Standard English. [...]

Figure 6.20 Tabasum's ENG 101B essay 2 – Rejected version

The extract above, despite being only a partial reproduction of the rejected essay, gives us an idea of the kind of help Tabasum may have gotten writing it. The second paragraph, for example, discusses dialects not only of English, but of Malay and French, and I take this to be one of the sections that Tabasum wishes she had removed. Incidentally, the readings from the textbook that were assigned before essay 2 do not include any information about dialects around the world. Besides having entire sections added, it is clear that Tabasum also got substantial help with the overall language used in the essay. A cursory look at the first sentence of each paragraph shows a level of language complexity that is much more sophisticated than what Tabasum would typically use in her writing. Comparing the rejected version with the re-write version, partially reproduced below, it is interesting to note that some of the sections are exactly the same (shown in italics below). I believe these repetitions may have resulted from Tabasum copying sections from her rejected version while revising her re-write.

Why Standard Language

I, Tabasum, emigrated to the United States in 2004 and studied English as a second language in high school. However, all around me, I heard other kinds of English, and this was confusing. Standard English means speaking the English language grammatically correct, exactly the way one writes. Even though standard language seems difficult to learn, in the classroom setting everyone should speak Standard English in order to prepare students for the workforce. In business places Standard English is spoken, so it is beneficial for everyone to understand it. *College professors, bank tellers, receptionists, and news anchors all speak Standard English* (in business places/professional atmosphere). These employees have to have special skills in order to be qualified for these professions and to communicate to each other professionally to each other and to the customers. For example, two applicants go for a job interview and one speaks Standard English while the other one does not, of course the one who speaks Standard English is more likely to be hired. Because the employers qualify them by their speaking skills and if the applicants speak Standard English they can make a good impression on the employers. What is important is that speakers of English are able to communicate clearly with others and the

use of standard dialect of English makes communication easier because it is more professional and more formal. [...]

The ability to use a more formal Standard English enables speakers to communicate to others complex ideas and feelings because standard written English provides very precise ways to do this. [...]

Since English dialects differ also according to social levels, someone hoping for a higher status position should try to speak like those having this higher status and employers may be biased against speakers of a lower status dialect. [...]

So that is why schools have to train students to use the standard written dialect of English, which is almost identical anywhere that English is spoken as a first language. [...]

Figure 6.21 Tabasum's ENG 101B essay 2 – Re-write version

Whereas the rejected version contained several different ideas, ranging from dialects in different parts of the world to issues of language standardization, the re-write version essentially argues for the benefits of using Standard English to facilitate communication, especially in professional settings. Another difference between the two versions lays in the language used. As mentioned above, generally speaking, the language used in the re-write version is somewhat more colloquial. Just to illustrate this point, the section that talks about job applicants in the re-write version reads: "For example, two applicants go for a job interview and one speaks Standard English while the other one does not, of course the one who speaks Standard English is more likely to be hired." In the rejected version, this part reads: "Employers in the professions and in most kinds of business speak Standard English, interview job applicants in Standard English and expect those whom they interview to speak and understand Standard English."

Having looked at both versions of Tabasum's ENG 101B essay 2, it is not surprising that the professor should have felt that Tabasum had received too much help writing that essay and decided to do something about it. The rejected version is far superior to her re-write both in terms of language and content. What I find surprising, however, is the manner in which the

professor chose to deal with this issue, at least from Tabasum's account. The professor accused Tabasum of turning in work that was not hers and of getting too much help. She did not help Tabasum understand, however, what would have been a more appropriate conduct or what kinds of help were acceptable. I find it particularly disturbing that the professor wrote on her revised essay that she had "cheated," which, to me, implies intentional wrongdoing. If anything, I am certain this was not the case. It is regretful that the professor did not use this incident as a learning opportunity, especially considering that she was Tabasum's writing professor, a professional that, in theory, would be better prepared to explain and deal with issues of authorship. Rather, the professor seems to have exempted herself from this situation, telling Tabasum that she should go back to the ENG 095 class because she was going to fail her class anyway. After this incident, Tabasum did not seek Mr. Raymond's help again, at least in that semester, and the ENG 101B professor showed more understanding towards Tabasum's situation, giving her extended time to turn in her essays. Tabasum did end up passing the class with a C.

6.2.8 Starting ahead of time

As can be seen in Table 6.11 below, all the participants were aware of the importance of starting their writing assignments as early as possible. By starting ahead of time, participants mentioned that they could send their drafts to their professors if they needed feedback, they would have enough time to rewrite their essays, they were more likely to be able to finish on time, and they would not be panicking at the last minute. Most of the participants mentioned the importance of starting ahead of time when I asked them what advice about writing they would give to new students coming to college.

Table 6.11

Starting ahead of time

Participant	Comments
Yar Zar	Do not do what I did, stay up one night and write like 4 hours.[...] If you have like [a] 4 to 5 page [writing assignment], maybe do a page each day, you know, spread it out, I think it's all about time management. If you manage it well, then you'll do good, but sometimes if your professor doesn't like, just go meet with them, and, you know, see how they are, and you know, you send your paper to them before the due date so they can correct it and then you get a better grade. (interview 4)
Arezo	My advice is like never start on things like late. Always start as early as you can, then you can get it like done on time, that's like the best feeling ever that I have, finishing my work like on time or before. And if you wait for long time and start the last minute, you end up with a bad grade and you will like be stressed all the time and you won't go to sleep all night. (interview 4)
Kayhan	It's always good [to] write and always rewrite. Don't just do it once and expect it to be good. [...] Always rewrite and always read out loud your paper, see how it is. It's the only way I correct my mistakes. (interview 4)
Tabasum	My first advice is like start early, yeah, don't wait until the end. [...] Every time [...] I don't have enough time to do my assignment so that's yeah, because I experience myself. Every time I'm late for every assignment, even when I started like on time, I still need more time you know like compared to other students I need more time. So it's better to start ahead maybe before other students. (interview 4)
Sabrina	It's really good if you start [...] thinking about your paper, putting your ideas down earlier, few days at least earlier, and then like every day work on it and then the night you have to do it, just like, you know, finish it and stuff. (interview 4)
Solange	First, for writing, I would say start before time. Just don't start the night the writing is due. Cause I learned from my mistake. If you do that, then you start panicking, and then you feel like you're gonna forget other stuff if you're just like trying to get everything in one night. [...] cause the teacher they usually give you maybe one month before [...] the essay is due. Instead of waiting the night that it's due you'd better start working on it earlier and then that way you could see, you can make an appointment with the teacher to go talk to, or you can write a rough draft and then you know send it to her and she'll go through it. (interview 4)
Musa	If you write your paper early, you can go and [the professor] can take a look at it and give you a little feedback. (interview 2)

Interestingly, many of the participants seemed to have learned this strategy the hard way. As Solange and Tabasum mention in the extracts above, they learned that it was better to start working on their writing assignments earlier after they did not do so for an assignment and suffered the consequences. Similarly, Arezo explains how she learned to start working on her writings early:

My speech class that we had to write, I would just start like, tomorrow is the speech we had to give, I would start like the night before that when I had like a week, so I learned from that not to start at the last minute. And I did end up not sleeping at all that night like one night writing for the speech and [World Religions], two essays. I slept only like 10 minutes or something that day. (Arezo, interview 4)

6.2.9 Using other languages

Out of the seven participants, Musa was the only one who consciously resorted to his first language for literacy, French, when he struggled with writing in English. He said, “Sometimes, the essay is really hard, I try to write it in French and then translate it” (Musa, interview 6). None of the other participants mentioned resorting to a different language to help them cope with their assignments in college. Quite the contrary, Solange thought that her native language sometimes interfered in the way she wrote in English. She said, “I think sometimes I write things I think about in my language, and it doesn’t make sense, you know when you try to translate something, it doesn’t make sense?” (Solange, interview 3).

Musa’s use of French to facilitate his writing in English is undoubtedly a result of the fact that he considered his reading and writing skills to be better in French than in English. None of the other participants, in contrast, seemed to believe that they had better literacy levels in their native language than in English, even though they all acknowledged that they still had

difficulties with English. Solange considered herself to be “half half”, explaining that she can read and write in Kinyarwanda well enough to be understood by her grandfather, but that her writing was not perfect. She then laughed and said:

When I speak, they say I have an accent [in Kinyarwanda]. I don't feel it, but that's what they tell me. I think I have an accent in every language I speak, that's the thing, cause I speak too many. I'm half half. (Solange, interview 4)

Arezo expressed her positioning between her native language, Farsi, and English in a very similar manner, saying that she was “half way” (Arezo, interview 4). Sabrina, likewise, said that she was “in the middle” (Sabrina, interview 4), not having a good written proficiency of Farsi, her native language, Russian, her previous school language, or English. In the extract below, she describes her experience with these three languages:

[In Belarus] I felt like I was fluent or like I understood everything in class, [...] but right now, since I haven't like read Russian, or talked Russian in so long, I haven't read and written in years now, [...], so it's really hard for me now to like if I sit and try to read [...]. So like now, I'm in the middle. I can't do anything. So, it's really hard [...], sometimes I think why didn't we just come to the United States, and [...] I would have at least known one language that's like I know it, you know, I really know everything about it, and I know, like I'm fluent and I don't have no problems, but now it's like these three different languages that I'm struggling with, so it's really hard. (Sabrina, interview 4)

6.2.10 Using samples as a model

During the data collection period, that I am aware of, only two professors made writing samples available to the participants in this study: the Anthropology and the Biology professors. As discussed above, the participants who took the Anthropology course did not make use of the

past papers the professor had left for their perusal at the library reserve. In the Biology course, the professor made a lab report sample available online and Musa, the only participant taking that class, did use it successfully to write his two lab reports.

A comparison of Musa's first lab report, which he shared with me, and the sample shows that Musa followed the organizational structure provided by the sample, dividing his report into the following sections: introduction, methods and materials, results, and discussion. Musa's report also contained an abstract, a section that did not appear in the model. In terms of language, Musa's report contains only a few phrases taken from the sample such as "Only the combination of both X and Y, and X and Z, resulted in" and "This indicated that." A few of the phrases and sentences in his report were taken verbatim from the lab manual such as "Enzymes are proteins that function as biological catalysts. A catalyst is a substance that..." and "the ability of the enzyme catechol oxidase to catalyze." Despite these instances, Musa clearly attempted to paraphrase most of the content he got from the textbook.

Besides providing a sample, the Biology professor also included a peer review in the process of writing the lab reports. Musa said that the feedback he got from his peer on his first report was useful in that she gave him some feedback on language as well as some help with plotting a graph. Besides the English classes, the Biology course was the only one to require peer review. In addition, the professor also required the rough draft with comments on it to be attached to the final version and, according to the grading rubric, 4 points out of 25 were given for turning in the rough draft and for writing "thorough, clear, helpful, constructive criticism" on the peer's draft. Musa got 24 out of 25 on the first lab report, getting half a point taken off because his title was not descriptive of the report, and another half a point because he should

have included at least two sources in addition to the lab manual. In this 19-item grading rubric, there was no line that focused on language.

6.2.11 Lifting from source

In her Psychology 101 class, Tabasum was assigned three papers. Two of these, essays 2 and 3, were text-responsible (Leki & Carson, 1997). Essay 2 asked students to compare and contrast two articles of their choice that dealt with the use and abuse of alcohol. Essay 3 asked students to choose an article about a research study in psychology and a) present a summary of the study, b) say what students learned from reading it, and c) say what the article contributes to the field of psychology. Tabasum received 30 out of 30 in essay 2 and 29 out of 30 in essay 3. Both essays were between one and two pages long each.

Comparing the articles that Tabasum read for the assignments (often chosen with the help of the writing tutor) and the papers she wrote, I was able to identify a few sections that were copied verbatim from the source, and others that were attempted paraphrases, but still very close to the source. Some examples of each case are presented in Figure 6.22 and 6.23.

“It is far more advantageous to provide adolescents with information and problem-solving strategies that empower them to make more informed decisions concerning their alcohol use in the future” (essay 2)

“[The] experience teaches them not to do things we expect college students to do such as: develop positive identities, develop intimate relationships, talk, trust, and feel” (essay 2).

“Adults with anxiety disorders were more likely to transmit distress to their partners when their partners featured certain habitual response styles such as hostility and rejection, or symptom accommodation” (essay 3).

Figure 6.22 Tabasum’s PSY 101B essays 2 and 3 - Extracts copied word for word from source

In the extracts below, the words that are common to Tabasum's writing and the source have been underlined, and the words in the source that have been replaced by synonyms are presented in bold.

Tabasum's writing	Source
<p>Article A Parks interviewed a <u>senior high school student who, experiencing some difficulties</u> as a <u>adolescent client</u>, <u>has a history of alcoholism in his family</u> and he is worried about his younger brother's potential to use and abuse alcohol. <u>The harm reduction intervention's main focus is to empower this adolescent client with information so he can make an informed decision/choice in the future to change his alcohol consumption.</u> (essay 2)</p>	<p>In the video, a case demonstration of harm-reduction approaches with high school <u>students</u> focuses on a rather compliant 17-year-old, [...] male <u>high school senior</u> [...] <u>who is experiencing some difficulties</u> [...]. This <u>adolescent client has a history of alcoholism in his family</u>, and he is concerned about his younger brother's potential to use and abuse alcohol [...]. <u>The focus of this harm reduction intervention is to empower this adolescent client with information so he can make an informed choice</u> of what steps, if any, he would like to take <u>in the future to modify his alcohol consumption.</u> (Parks Jr., 2007)</p>
<p>This article is about today's college aged <u>children of alcoholics make up one third of the total student population</u>. To compact this, many <u>effective programs have been delivered to assist children with this issue</u>. The <u>overwhelming number of people affected by parental alcoholism</u> actively supports the <u>necessity of help and intervention for collegiate adult children of alcoholics (ACoAs)</u> through <u>support</u> systems. (essay 2)</p>	<p>Collegiate <u>children of alcoholics may make up as much as one-third of our student population</u>. <u>Effective programs have been developed to assist these young people with this issue</u>. <u>The necessity of providing support and intervention for collegiate adult children of alcoholics (ACoAs)</u> is clearly <u>supported by the overwhelming number of people affected by parental alcoholism</u>. (Landers & Hollingdale, 1988, p. 205)</p>

<p>This article discussed about <u>adults with anxiety and disorder often report problems with personal <u>relationships</u>. <u>The author</u> of this article researched that anxiety negatively affects close relationships. So <u>the author examined the relational effect of anxiety by <u>sampling the daily mood of 33 couples in which the wife was diagnosed with an anxiety disorder</u>. The <u>result showed significant concordance between wife's daily anxiety and husband's distress</u>. (essay 3)</u></u></p>	<p>Although <u>adults with anxiety disorders often report interpersonal distress</u>, the degree to which anxiety is linked to the quality of close <u>relationships</u> remains unclear. <u>The authors examined the relational impact of anxiety by <u>sampling the daily mood and relationship quality of 33 couples in which the wife was diagnosed with an anxiety disorder</u>. [...]. <u>Results also indicated significant concordance between wives' daily anxiety and husbands' distress</u>. (Zaider, Heimberg, & Iida, 2010, p. 163)</u></p>
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Figure 6.23 Tabasum's PSY 101B essays 2 and 3 - Paraphrases

Tabasum's lifting from the source can be regarded as a successful strategy if only grades are considered. However, I find it unfortunate that the PSY101B professor did not compare Tabasum's writing with the sources she had chosen and, therefore, did not realize that a substantial part of Tabasum's writing had actually been taken either directly or just slightly modified from the source. By not noticing Tabasum's use of the source and giving her high grades, the professor signaled to Tabasum that her way of writing was acceptable and missed out on what could have been an important learning opportunity for Tabasum.

It is important to clarify that I view Tabasum's lifting from the source as patchwriting (Howard, 1999) and not plagiarism. In other words, I take her way of writing to be a developmental stage in which she, as a novice writer, is learning to use sources appropriately. I do not believe she had any intention of deceiving, which, according to Pecorari (2003), would be a "standard feature of prototypical cases of plagiarism" (p. 318). In this sense, together with

Pecorari, I argue that “patchwriting deserves a pedagogical, rather than a punitive, response” (p. 320).

6.2.12 Writing strategies: A summary

Participants in this study used a number of strategies to cope with their writing assignments in their first year of college. Perhaps because they were so proactive seeking help, they actually did not struggle with writing as much as one would have expected, given their level of written English proficiency. Seeking too much help, however, can create unexpected situations such as those illustrated by Arezo’s essays in her ENG 101A class, discussed above, which became overpopulated with other people’s words. Or, from Tabasum’s incident in her ENG101B class, we learn that students need to be careful with the help they receive, especially if the source of help is not one provided by the institution.

6.3 Resources used to cope with writing challenges

The section above, on writing strategies, described different ways the participants in this study went about working on their writing assignments so as to make up for their still developing language proficiency and academic literacy in English. Most of these strategies relied on the use of resources that were either made institutionally available by Hope College (e.g., the writing tutor and the Writing Center) or drawn upon from each participant’s personal relationships at Hope College or outside of it. This section discusses these resources.

6.3.1 The writing tutor

The most prominent writing resource that was common to all the participants was Elizabeth, the writing tutor. Like all the participants, Elizabeth was a first-year student, and she had taken the ENG 101 course in the Fall, just a semester before she was hired by the Academic Support Center to be the writing tutor for the participants in this study. It seems unquestionable

that having a writing tutor working exclusively with these seven students was a good idea and another example of the level of support Hope College was willing to provide to this cohort. By tutoring students on the different writing assignments for the different classes, this tutor would be able to have a more holistic view of each student's difficulties and progress and, in theory, would be able to offer more targeted support than, for example, if different tutors from the Writing Center worked with these students on their various assignments. Overall, this seemed like an efficient tutoring solution both for the tutor and for the students. In practice, however, and, in hindsight, I wonder if this was the best arrangement. As far as I know, Elizabeth did not receive any training in tutoring before she started her job, nor did she have any experience tutoring writing, let alone tutoring writing to language learners. There were pros and cons in having Elizabeth as a dedicated writing tutor working with my participants, and I discuss these below.

The fact that Elizabeth was a first-year student may have contributed to the development of rapport between her and my participants, and soon they established a friendly relationship. In general, the participants seemed to admire her for being a writing tutor in her first year. Because Elizabeth did not have an office, or office hours, and in an attempt to accommodate the students' busy schedules, the tutoring sessions often took place in the evenings, sometimes rather late, either at the library or at the girls' dormitories. This arrangement was only possible because the participants and Elizabeth all lived on campus. The informal relationship that developed between Elizabeth and the participants, however, also had drawbacks, which were aggravated by Elizabeth's sporadic lack of professionalism. In one instance, several of the participants met at Elizabeth's dormitory for a three-hour tutoring session and, during one of these hours, Elizabeth basically did not interact with any of the students because she wanted to watch her favorite show

on television. There was also at least one time when a participant had agreed to meet her at the library, and she did not show up. In addition, the informality of this tutoring arrangement sometimes prevented my participants from asking her for help because they knew she was busy with her own school work or, conversely, Elizabeth would sometimes say that she was not available to help them because she was too busy. This is certainly the kind of situation that would not have taken place if the participants were going to the Writing Center for help. As an example, at one point, I asked Tabasum why she was going to the Writing Center instead of working with Elizabeth. She said, “Well, [...] I don’t know where she is, how’s her schedule. Whenever I call her she’s busy and she never answer me.[...] I called her, she said ‘No, I have two paper myself’, and I was like ‘okay’” (Tabasum, interview 6). Similarly, Arezo told me why she had not worked much with Elizabeth towards the end of the Spring semester. She said, “[Elizabeth] was really busy. Because she said she had like, I don’t know, 17 pages for one class. [...] She writes a lot cause she’s like International Study, she have a lot of essays herself” (Arezo, interview 8).

In summary, even though having a dedicated writing tutor for these students sounded initially like a good idea, in the end, it seems that these students might have gotten better support if they had worked with the trained tutors in the Writing Center instead. Despite the incidents mentioned above, however, there is no question that Elizabeth spent many hours working with these students and provided them with a lot of help. Unfortunately, however, as discussed above and illustrated by Arezo’s ENG 101A essay 1, the type of help she provided, as an untrained tutor, was often not optimal.

6.3.2 The Writing Center

As is common to Writing Centers in different colleges and universities, the Writing Center at Hope College offers students support with writing ranging from “brainstorming and organizing ideas, to revising for complexity and quality of thought, to editing your paper for format and grammar” (Hope College website). The Writing Center is staffed with peer tutors from several departments such as English, History, Animal Science and International Studies. Their website makes the point that one of the things tutors do not do at the Center is simply proofread papers. They recommend students to seek help at the beginning of the drafting process and to return later to work on final editing issues. Even though walk-ins are allowed, students are encouraged to make online appointments before seeing a tutor. The Center is open every day, except Saturdays, and they have extended hours going until 10pm on most days.

Among the participants, Tabasum was the only one who consistently went to the Writing Center during the two semesters comprising the data collection period. Arezo also went there several times, but, overall, she got more help from Elizabeth and the Academic Support Director. The reason the other participants rarely went to the Writing Center can be attributed to two main factors. In Fall 2009, they were not required to write many essays or papers. In Spring 2010, when all the participants took the ENG 101 course and, therefore, had more writing assignments to work on, they were assigned a dedicated writing tutor, as discussed above. Had the writing tutor not been available, I believe the participants would have gone to the Writing Center more often.

6.3.3 Professors

Professors were mentioned in the previous chapter as an important resource that my participants drew on when dealing with reading practices. Likewise, they were an important

resource when it came to writing practices. In general, professors did not assist students with the actual writing of papers and essays. Rather, the main reason participants sought their help when working on writing assignments was to clarify aspects of the assignment they were not sure about, or to confirm whether their ideas and drafts were in line with the professors' expectations. Just to illustrate, Solange mentioned meeting her Anthropology professor every week or every other week to talk about the final project for that class. Musa met with ENG 101A professor for each one of his essays after he did not do so well on his first one. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the interaction between professors and students outside class was facilitated by the fact that faculty at Hope College take teaching as their primary responsibility and have an average of ten office hours per week.

6.3.4 The Academic Support Director

The Academic Support Director (ASD) was an important resource for the participants of this study for several reasons. In her institutional role, she provided the participants with the writing tutor in Spring 2010. She was also the instructor for the ENG 095 course all the participants were required to take in Fall 2009. Through that class, she got to know the whole cohort and, informally, offered to help them with writing assignments for the other classes. Most participants took advantage of this offer at one point or another, especially when the writing tutor was out of town and not available. Arezo, in particular, sought ASD's help quite often because she did part of her work-study hours in ASD's office.

6.3.5 Peers

When dealing with writing practices, the participants in this study resorted to their peers at Hope College basically in two situations. When they felt their notes were incomplete, they met with peers to share notes and study together. In this situation, they seemed to prefer peers that

were closer to them such as their roommates or the other students in the cohort. This preference was also shown when dealing with reading difficulties, as discussed in the previous chapter. Participants also sought their peer's help when they needed somebody to proofread their papers. Interestingly, for proofreading, participants did not seem to have a clear preference for closer peers; rather, they seemed comfortable asking any friend or co-worker whose English they believed was better than theirs.

6.3.6 Friends outside Hope College

As discussed above, there were only two instances in which participants sought help from friends outside Hope College. In both cases, the help that these friends provided could be considered excessive. In Yar Zar's case, once he realized all the changes his friend had made to his essay, he decided to disregard her help. In Tabasum's case, she turned in the revised essay she received from her friend without reading it and, as a consequence of the significant amount of contribution he had given her, the professor did not accept her essay claiming that it was not her work. From both experiences, it seems that students should use caution when employing friends outside their home institution as a resource.

6.3.7 Writing samples

During data collection, that I am aware of, writing samples were made available to students in only two classes: Biology and Anthropology. The Biology lab report sample was put to good use by Musa, who used the sample as a springboard to write his own lab reports. The samples made available by the Anthropology professor, on the other hand, ended up not being consulted by any of the three participants who took her class, even though they all mentioned that they would have liked to look at a past paper before writing theirs. An important difference between the Biology and the Anthropology samples was the means through which they were

made available to students. The Biology sample was available online whereas the Anthropology past papers were available in hard copy on reserve at the library. Even though students were familiar with electronic reserves, they did not know about physical reserves, which became evident when I told them about the past papers, and they all looked puzzled by this new concept.

Even though participants had a handful of other resources available to help them cope with writing practices, I consider models to be an important resource for the development of academic writing, and it remained underutilized by both the professors and the participants in this study. According to Hyland (2003):

Models are used to illustrate particular features of the text under study. Representative samples of the target discourse can be analyzed, compared, and manipulated in order to sensitize students to the fact that writing differs across genres and that they may need to draw on the particular structures and language features under study to achieve their writing goals. (p. 87)

Although a more thorough development of genre awareness (Johns, 2009) would perhaps be better suited for a writing class, I believe that content area professors can help students at least become familiar with the genre they have been assigned to write in by going over a sample paper in the classroom and highlighting the prominent features of that specific type of writing. This would be particularly useful when the assigned paper belongs to an identifiable genre of academic writing such as a lab report, a research project, or an experimental design. As Macbeth (2010) points out, “as instructional devices, models are primordial” (p. 37). At the same time, she cautions, it is important that students realize that a model is not “the right answer” (p. 34) to a writing assignment.

6.3.8 Resources: A summary

Participants in this study had access to a number of different resources that they used to help them cope with writing practices in their first year at Hope College. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I believe resources, by themselves, are not necessarily helpful. A college can provide a plethora of resources, but if students do not take the initiative of using these resources, they remain ineffective. I believe the supportive atmosphere at Hope College and the tremendous motivation driving these participants were key in determining the successful use of most of the resources available. At the same time, the use of well-intentioned support turned out to be problematic on a few occasions, which suggests that the participants in this study might have benefitted from some advice on how to use resources critically.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of Fall 2009, when this multiple-case study set out to investigate the experiences with academic literacies that seven refugee students would go through in their first year of college, nobody could have predicted what shape these experiences would take. It was anticipated that at least some of these students would encounter difficulty to cope with postsecondary work considering their previous education, often with significant interruption, their status as language learners, and lower-than-average scores on standardized measures for admissions. In a worst case scenario, a few of them could even drop out from college. At the same time, these seven students displayed very strong motivation and drive, which were expected to offset some of their shortcomings. Even though the seven of them had initially agreed to participate in this study, I always feared that some of them might abandon the project, not only due to drop-outs from college, but also as a result of participants not having the time to meet with me as their time dwindled between increasing study and work demands. Contrary to all concerns, the seven participants in this study completed their first year of college successfully. With the exception of one student dropping one class, they all passed all the courses they registered for in Fall 2009 and Spring 2010. As Harklau (2011) argued, we need more accounts of success stories of linguistic minority students in higher education in order to better understand what factors facilitated their journeys. It has been an honor to accompany these seven refugee students in their trajectory in first-year college and to register and disseminate their success stories. As described throughout this dissertation, this success did not come easily. These participants used many strategies and resources during their first year and received, in a few cases, quite a lot of help. However, not all the participants required so much help and, even

among those who did need more help, with the exception of one student, they did not need it all the time.

I begin this concluding chapter by revisiting the research questions and, in doing so, I offer a brief summary and discussion of the major findings. Next, I discuss some pedagogical and research implications, followed by the limitations of this study and directions for future research. In the final section, I offer a brief coda with some information on the seven participants a year and half after data collection ended.

7.1 Major findings

I begin this section by restating the research questions that guided this investigation and then move on to discuss how the findings address them:

RQ1: How do refugee students experience academic literacy in their first year in college?

RQ2: What challenges do refugee students encounter as they engage in first-year college reading and writing practices?

RQ3: What resources and strategies do these students use to cope with these literacy challenges?

Regarding RQ1, the overall experience these seven participants had with academic literacies in their first year of college can be considered successful given that, with the exception of one course being dropped, they all passed all the classes they registered for. At the same time, the day-to-day struggle to keep up and cope with reading and writing assignments presented these students with several challenges. If the final outcome was successful, it was mainly because these seven participants were tremendously motivated and very skillful in developing coping strategies and drawing upon the several resources made available to them by Hope College.

Next, I address RQ2 and RQ3 together by first presenting reading challenges and strategies followed by writing challenges and strategies. It may be important to clarify that the challenges I discuss are the ones I observed my participants experiencing. I do not mean to imply that all refugees or, more broadly speaking, all language learners in college would face the same challenges. Likewise, I do not exclusively attribute the reading and writing difficulties my participants had to their interrupted education or their status as refugees, language learners, or first-year students. In all likelihood, it was a combination of all these factors that influenced how they negotiated academic literacies in college. After going over challenges and strategies, I then discuss the resources my participants used to cope with reading and writing challenges together because, despite some variations, the pool of resources the participants drew upon to deal with reading and writing difficulties was essentially the same.

As far as reading practices go, it seems that most of the challenges my participants faced had one of three main reasons at its root. The first major challenge stemmed from a shift in assumptions and values regarding reading practices in high school and college. Resonating with Harklau's (2001) findings, my participants had an initial hard time getting used to the idea that in college "you're on your own," to use an expression that often came up in our interviews. Contrary to the way things were done in high school, in college they were supposed to be responsible for checking the syllabus to see when reading assignments were due, for completing them, and for taking the initiative to seek help in case they had trouble understanding the reading. This source of difficulty, understandably, was more prevalent at the beginning of Fall 2009, when there were barely three months separating them from high school. As they got acclimated to literacy practices in college, this issue was not mentioned again.

The second source of difficulty, and possibly the most pervasive one, regarded readings that were not from textbooks. As Harklau (2001) claims, textbooks are central to reading practices in high school and college and, for her participants, “their high school experiences had thoroughly acquainted these students with the genre of introductory survey textbook” (p. 50). This may explain why textbook reading did not seem to present my participants with any particular challenge, whereas other types of readings did. Biographies and ethnographies were often problematic because of the number of pages whereas journal articles tended to be difficult because of more sophisticated language and/or participants’ lack of background knowledge. Solange’s experience in the American Government class of not being able to fully understand Martin Luther King Jr.’s speech because of lack of knowledge of the historical context surrounding it resembles the experience Spack’s (1997) case study participant, Yuko, had in her political science course. In Yuko’s perception, the difficulty she had in that specific class, which she ended up dropping, resulted from the fact that she did not have enough knowledge of the American and European histories, which she assumed her peers had.

The third major reading challenge for my participants concerned reading done under exam conditions, particularly the reading of multiple-choice questions. Even though the presence of multiple-choice exams was not as ubiquitous as in other settings (e.g., Carson, 2001), all seven participants mentioned they had difficulty discerning the correct alternative even when they thought they understood the material well. This was particularly evident in the Economics class.

To cope with these reading challenges, the participants in this study developed and used several strategies. The two strategies that were the most prevalent were to skip the assigned reading and rely on lectures for learning the material or to do the reading selectively, often following the main points as delineated by some ancillary material such as PowerPoint slides or

study guides. Participants also found ways to enhance their reading experience by finding times and places that were conducive to better reading, reading with others (e.g., peers and tutors) and/or re-reading after lectures. Participants in this study also resorted to their professors when their difficulty understanding the readings was not eased by lectures. Spack's (1997) participant, Yuko, also used some of the same strategies such as skipping reading sections that were too hard to understand and focusing on readings that her professors mentioned in lectures. What seems to set the participants of this study apart from Yuko, however, seems to be their reliance on peers, tutors, and professors. Even though Spack reports on Yuko occasionally meeting with her professors, this did not seem to happen regularly, and it seems that peers and tutors did not play any major role in Yuko's experience in college.

Some of the strategies the participants in this study used to cope with reading challenges depended simply on their initiative. Examples of such strategies would be finding places and times that are conducive to better reading and re-reading material after lectures. Most of the strategies, however, depended on materials provided by their professors or on people being available. Two types of materials provided by professors that were extensively used by all the participants were study guides and PowerPoint slides. Both of them guided my participants in deciding what materials to prioritize, hence playing a very important role in helping these students cope with the amount of material they were required to learn. As Carson (2001) argued, "what was important in reading was not just a function of what appeared to be important in the text. Importance was determined by the professor's focus, not just the reading alone" (p. 63).

During their first year at Hope College, participants in this study were required to engage in different types of writing practices, ranging from short reflection pieces to papers that were up to seven pages long. Considering their still developing English language proficiency, it is quite

remarkable that, in general, these students did not face many difficulties coping with their writing assignments. The fact that writing did not become a major challenge to them, in my analysis, is due to the fact that all seven participants were very proactive seeking help from the very beginning.

Most of the writing they were required to do in their first year consisted of either argumentative or expository pieces. In general, these types of writing did not pose any particular challenge to these students, provided they received the help they needed. This help varied widely from participant to participant. Some of them required assistance from the very beginning of the writing process, such as brainstorming ideas, while others only needed help mostly for editing and proofreading. The type of writing that challenged the participants in this study the most, as indicated by their professors' grades and feedback, regarded academic genres such as the research proposal and the experimental project design. Students' unfamiliarity with these genres seemed to have gotten in their way of writing acceptable pieces for these assignments. I contend that by incorporating some genre analysis in the classroom, professors could have helped these students learn about the key components they were expected to address in their writing.

Among the strategies the participants in this study used to cope with writing assignments, the most pervasive one, because used by all of them and used constantly, was to share the preparation of their written product with another person. The fact that they all sought help at some point with their writing assignments is the only common ground among the seven participants. Other than that, they differed in the amount of help they sought and received, the person they required help from, and in which part of the writing process they wanted to receive that help. The most confident and self-reliant participants often completed their writings by themselves, just seeking help at the very end of the process, to check for language problems.

Others, who needed more support, often went through several drafts aided by their writing tutor, the Writing Center, or some other people inside or outside Hope College. As was discussed in Chapter 7, the excessive use of this strategy sometimes backfired in that the resulting piece of writing was too heavily influenced by the person that helped to the point, in one case, of a professor rejecting a piece of writing claiming that it was not the student's work.

As discussed in the literature review, there are not many accounts of refugees' experience in college. The situation is not much better for international and Generation 1.5 students, and this is especially true for studies that go beyond the writing class. Now that I have completed this study and realized that, despite the challenges, these seven participants were able to develop and use coping strategies successfully, I began to wonder what happened in Festina's (Vásquez, 2007) or in Tran's (Blanton, 2005) case, that their experiences in college were met with so many obstacles. Did they not seek help? Was help available? Even in the detailed report written about Yuko's (Spack, 1997) experience in college, when we learn that she did not complete her introductory course in International Relations, there is no mention of Yuko seeking help from her professor, teaching assistant, or a peer. Up until this moment, it had never dawned on me that reports of students' academic experience often tend to focus on the students themselves, as isolated islands, and not provide the reader with information about the surrounding environment that necessarily interacted with these students' reality. From the findings of this study, it is clear that, for students who come to college with less than ideal academic preparation, success is largely contingent on the environment they are in and the resources they have access to. This fact is underscored by Leki (2007), who discussed how socioacademic relations can affect students' academic growth and by Allison (2008), who makes the point that language minority students

may be better served at community colleges, where more support is in place to help such students, than in large research universities, where such support may not be provided. She says:

[The] challenges [that] bilingual language minority students may face when they begin post-secondary studies can be mitigated if they enroll in institutions whose learning environments meet these students where they are linguistically and strategically by providing the instructional scaffolding that assists them to become competent, independent readers and students. (p. 182)

I attribute much of my participants' success in their first year at college to the supportive environment they found at Hope College. They were all, undoubtedly, extremely motivated and hard working. Yet, these characteristics may not have sufficed to overcome their difficulties if resources were not available around them. From a sociocultural perspective (Bakhtin, 1981; Cole, 1996; Volosinov, 1973; Vygotsky, 1987; Wertsch, 1985, 1991), this is just evidence that development occurs in the intersection between self and context. I believe neither motivation alone nor a supportive environment alone would have produced the same successful result as the combination of both together. Granted, not everything was perfect in my participants' experience in their first year, but, as far as support and resources go, Hope College was willing and eager to do their part. From the moment Hope College admitted these seven students, well aware that their academic preparation had gaps, they assumed their share of responsibility in starting these students on a journey that was anticipated to be challenging by preparing a net of support to provide them with the help they needed. This net of support went beyond the regular support system available to all students at Hope College, such as professors that focus on their teaching and tutors for the content areas, both of which were invaluable to my participants. Hope College organized the Bridge Program over the initial summer, when the participants took two classes as

a cohort, had weekly meetings with the Academic Support Director, and had two tutors to help them with the courses. After that, they were assigned a student mentor and a faculty advisor, besides their regular academic advisor, who were charged with regularly checking in with the students and being attentive to their academic development and well-being. Finally, in the spring semester, these students were assigned a dedicated writing tutor to help them with writing assignments in general and, particularly, with their work for the Freshman Composition class. These students also benefitted from several sympathetic professors who were willing to make accommodations on different levels to help them succeed. As Andrade (2009) explains, it is not uncommon for professors to adjust standards or grading criteria for students with low English proficiency, even though they may be reluctant to acknowledge such practice, perhaps because they do so unconsciously, or they do not want to acknowledge making their courses less rigorous. Hope College also showed their support to these students through the personal involvement of the president, the associate provost, and the dean of education, who all made a point of interacting with these students from time to time.

To reiterate, all these different types of support might not have yielded a successful experience to all seven participants in their first year of college were it not for their motivation and drive. My exchange with Solange below illustrates this motivation, and gives us some clues as to where this motivation might come from.

E: So, my question is, how much do you think your history of previous education, you know, with the interruption, changing countries and all that, how do you think it affects who you are today as an undergrad student?

So: I mean, like it's really my strength, like my history of missing school, it kind of is my motivation, it makes me like wanna do better, you know, so it's like my past is usually

my strength, like I learn from my past, my past it is like my motivation, it's not like my pity, I don't want it to be my excuse, I want to find something solid for me, like I could depend on. If I'm really feeling like I'm becoming lazy, I have to think about where I come from, and where I'm going now. [...] I can't be lazy. I have to work hard. (Solange, interview 4)

7.2 Implications

In this section I discuss implications this study might have for pedagogy and research.

7.2.1 Pedagogical implications

The first and foremost finding of this study as far as higher education institutions are concerned is that, even if not considered “college-ready” by traditional measurements such as the SAT, refugee students who graduate from high school and show high levels of motivation can cope with postsecondary academic literacy demands within a supportive environment that offers the necessary resources. A question that immediately follows from this finding then is what are the implications for the traditional admissions processes used in most post-secondary institutions? It may well be that these processes work well for most students, but, when it comes to students with a similar background as the participants in this study, a different criteria for admissions may need to be developed.

It is unquestionable that the successful experience these seven students had in their first year of college is largely a result of the commitment Hope College has shown to their education. Being a small liberal arts college, Hope was able to provide these students with a supportive context that is not easily found in large research universities. Yet, I believe this research has implications for other postsecondary settings, if only these institutions are willing to welcome students such as the participants in this study. Before suggesting what I believe can be done in

larger institutions, I highlight the “institutional structures” (Leki, 2007) that were in place at Hope College that offered the support my participants needed and that “enhanced [these] students’ ability to construct” socioacademic relationships that helped them navigate academic literacies in their first year of college. It is important to note that the socioacademic relations that were so important for Leki’s participants’ language and literacy development seemed to be limited to the academic setting for the most part. She explains that “these relationships were not maintained out of school; nor were they deep, lasting friendships” (p. 262). In my participants’ case, however, at least in their first year of college, it seems that the socioacademic relationships that were the most useful in helping them cope with academic literacies required some more personal involvement. Regarding peers, the participants in this study showed a clear preference for roommates or the other students in their small cohort of seven refugees, especially if they were going to study or read together. Whether these relationships will turn into lasting friendships we cannot tell, but my participants do spend time out of school with their closest peers. As an example, some of the participants in this study spent part of their summer break vacationing in Florida with some of their peers. As far as professors are concerned, some of the participants felt more comfortable interacting with those who knew about their background and, in one case, I heard of a professor visiting a participant’s home and meeting her parents. It seems that, especially for the participants that were less self-confident, it was important that some rapport was established before they felt comfortable disclosing their difficulties and asking for help.

Several institutional structures were in place at Hope College that facilitated my participants’ adjustment to college life and development of a sense of belonging that enhanced their capacity to develop coping strategies and use the resources that were available around them.

Among the structures that were developed especially for this cohort of students are the summer Bridge program and the involvement of the college's top tier administration and some faculty, as described above. Before fall semester started, all the new students took part in a two-day student orientation on campus, which several of my participants mentioned was very important for them in order to start meeting peers. Also, in the fall semester, they all took different sections of a one-credit freshman seminar, which was reportedly another good opportunity to meet people. Being a small liberal arts college, classes were generally kept small, which, coupled with teachers who focused on teaching and students, facilitated teacher-student interactions. These interactions were promoted further by the fact that classrooms and professors' offices were often in the same building, if not on the same floor. Another important institutional structure that was in place at Hope College was their requirement that first-year students live on campus. In many cases, although not all, the relationship my participants developed with their roommates in this first year turned into friendships, and roommates were often cited as a resource in this study.

Besides all these institutional structures offered by Hope College, I believe my constant presence as the researcher also played an important role in my participants' academic life in their first year. In the last interview with each of the participants, I asked them how they had been affected by the research process. Table 7.1 reproduces parts of their answers.

Table 7.1

On the role of the researcher

Participant	Comments
Yar Zar	You keep me organized I guess, you know all my schedule and everything. [...] It kind of makes me like think back or reflect back on the stuff that I've done and it probably makes me when I walk out of an interview probably makes me like maybe, you know, prepare better or maybe do some things different, you know, [...] like maybe let's say like I did bad on the exam, and we talked about it and you ask me why and I tell you why and this and that and then maybe next time

when I go and study for the other exam I'll be like "okay, you know, maybe I'll do this differently," yeah, it affects like that.[...] Because I talk about it now it's in my brain. Like versus not talking about it and just doing the same thing. (interview 8)

Arezo To be honest, I really like these interviews. I like having somebody to talk to about every class, and if I'm improving, if I'm not, I really like it, [...] it just help me, like I don't know, to be on top of things. Coming to interview and bringing all my stuff, I don't know, like you said that if I read before class and I was like I should go read and I would go read, yeah, I don't know, I learn a lot like I learn from these interviews to be more organized. [...] the other times you're always like complaining, complaining, complaining, you come here and you're like "Yeah, I did good in this part", so I think it helped me. [...] To me, it's helpful, like I like talking, so I can know myself, if I never talk to anybody, I don't think I'll know myself too. [...] Cause this is the only time when we do that. Like you won't go back to yourself and talk to yourself what I did good or if I should do better next time, like, it was helpful to me. (interview 8)

Kayhan I think it released the stress a little bit, yeah, you do certain things and you just can't talk about, I mean, when there's a stress level, you feel like you just can't, you need a specific person to talk to, like I don't want to talk to my roommate about it cause, honestly, we don't even hang, we have nothing in common [...], but, we, er, this interview, I kind of like relieve the stress when I talk about it, and like you can talk about all your classes, everything you feel, how you feel, totally, about your classes, totally [...]. I think "Ooof, I talked that. Man, I feel good." So, it kind of relieves the stress a little bit, that helps. And er, you know, it kind of motivates you more like [...] I just wanna go there and get a good grade on this test, cause I'm doing bad in this stuff you just talked about it. [...] I even get like some kind of motivating thing, "hey, did you do this quiz?" Oops, I forgot, I need to go ahead and do that quiz. That's another thing that helps me cause I think most of the time that I came I'd actually forgot something, that thing you mention, I just go there and do that thing. (interview 8)

Tabasum I think [the research] helped me to reflect my semester and all my classes, because we talked about it, I think it's very helpful. Because like I talk with my friends and with my advisor, but they don't ask these questions to help me go back [...] because you ask "why you don't read," it makes me think I have to read, and I have to do better on my next exam. It helps to reflect and do better. [...] Like I always have it like with myself, but I don't talk about it, so it helps to talk and discuss with someone. (interview 8)

Sabrina I guess it's a good thing to come talk to someone about, you know, how your year was and like, you know, how are your classes going, and that way you just realize, you know, oh , maybe I should start doing this cause, you know. When you talk about it aloud, you know, to someone, you get their opinion [...] makes me think about it, so I think that's a great thing about it. (interview 8)

Solange The interview kind of make me like when you ask me some questions, it's good, cause I really never thought about it, and, sometimes I feel like I don't know, I can't say it really affected me in everyday life, but it's kind of good someone keeping up with you, what you are doing, it's kind of good, like, it's kind of a

good feeling for me like someone asking me what I do, I know it's an interview and everything, but it makes me think about it too. [...] for example, if I realize I'm not doing the right thing, then this question kind of help me "oh, I didn't think about it, maybe I should do this differently [...]. I think it's a good thing. Just keeping up with, it's kind of keeping up with your thoughts, with your plans, which is good, [...] reflecting on yourself. (interview 8)

Musa

One thing that I've learned is to go see the professor. In any case, no matter what is English or French, or I mean, History, is to go talk to the professor. [...] You said "Why didn't you go see the professor?" and I was like "I don't know". That's something that I've learned. I need to talk more to professors and stuff. [...] I think it was just, you know, mostly put me on guard, where I am in classes and stuff. (interview 8)

Considering that these students had faculty advisors and peer mentors, it was interesting to see the roles they assigned to the research process and their interactions with me which, apparently, were not promoted by the interactions they had with their advisors and mentors. Participants explained that our interviews gave them the time and space to talk about and reflect on their coursework. This process helped them take stock of where they were in their studies, triggered ideas for different coping strategies, and encouraged them to be more organized. I attribute the benefits they reaped from the research process to the fact that I was an outsider and, more importantly, to the fact that we met regularly on a one-to-one basis and talked about all of their classes. Even though the participants had advisors and mentors, they did not meet with them regularly and, when they did meet, the interactions did not necessarily go into the details of any particular class. In general, it seems that the advisors and mentors relied on the participants' initiative to bring any issues to their attention. In this sense, I believe my participants' experience with the research process resembles Spack's (Spack, 1997) participant's. Spack explains, "the research itself, then, seems to have been an effective tool in helping her articulate and develop strategies for success. This finding suggests that she became a better academic learner because she had the opportunity to reflect on her own learning" (p. 45).

It is clear from the discussion above that the many institutional structures available at Hope College, coupled with the presence of a researcher, played important roles in my participants' successful experience in their first year at college. Even though not all can be replicated in different postsecondary settings, such as class size or dorm life, I believe that there are steps that other colleges and universities can take to better serve the needs of students like the participants in this study. First of all, I believe different admissions criteria should be considered for refugee students who graduate from high school, do not have the required scores in standardized tests, but show a very high level of motivation. The challenge, of course, is to determine this level of motivation. It is, undoubtedly, a subjective measure; however, at least to those at Hope College who were involved in the admissions process of these seven refugee students, motivation was evident, and it was one of the factors that influenced the decision to admit these students. If students like the participants in this study are not given the opportunity of attending college then, obviously, a discussion of other institutional structures to support them would be a moot point. Assuming that they are admitted into college, structures that might be useful in helping them adjust to college life and successfully negotiate academic literacies include: freshman learning communities, in which a small group of students led by a faculty advisor take classes as a cohort in their first semester (Laufgraben, 2005); first-year seminars, which "assist students in their academic and social development and in their transition to college" (Hunter & Linder, 2005, p. 275); sensitive faculty advisors and/or mentors, who can facilitate these students' adjustment to college and provide guidance; a peer mentor, who can provide guidance and tips from a student's perspective; a writing center; and tutoring services. From my experience as the researcher of this group, I would highlight the importance of advisors

and mentors (faculty or peer) meeting with students on a regular basis to check on their coursework.

This study also has pedagogical implications for schools that aim at preparing refugees for college. At a meeting in one such school, the other day, I happened to hear a member of the academic team mention that she thought the school should set higher expectations for their refugee students than going to a two-year college having to take ESL classes. She seemed to view this pathway as a failure, especially because the drop-out rate tends to be very high for undergraduate students who start in this path. Collier (1989) has made the point that immigrants that arrive between the ages of 8 and 12, without interrupted education, may take between five and seven years to reach the level of average performance on standardized tests. She also argues that adolescents who arrive with no previous knowledge of English “do not have enough time left in high school to make up the lost years of academic instruction” (p. 527). Considering that all the odds seem to be against refugee students who arrive in this country as an adolescent, often with significant years of interrupted education, I believe that managing to graduate from high school and start college is indeed quite an accomplishment. To expect these students to “catch up” to their American peers seems unrealistic to me. The point where this school can make a difference in the education of these refugees, however, is in how their alumni respond to the academic challenges they will unavoidably face in college. These students need to graduate from high school equipped with the motivation to develop coping strategies and look for resources that can help them negotiate academic literacies, so that they do not become another number in the sad statistics of college drop-outs.

7.2.2 Research implications

Findings from this study highlight the fact that the successful experience of these participants in their first year of college was strongly influenced by the supportive environment around them. This should come as no surprise since “language, writing, and learning cannot and do not take place primarily in the brains of isolated individual learners but are instead crucially, unavoidably, and inextricably bound up with social factors, with other humans and human activities” (Leki, 2007, p. 262). What might be surprising then is to find that reports on linguistic minority students in college do not always include a discussion of the contextual factors that may have contributed to the students’ performance. A discussion of whether there is a critical period after which it becomes very difficult to develop full literacy (Blanton, 1992, 2005) then may not be the most productive direction for research. A more fruitful discussion may be toward exploring the factors that facilitate academic success in college (Harklau, 2011).

7.3 Limitations and future research

Despite my best efforts, this study is limited in several ways. Many of these limitations derive from the research design itself. The fact that I only worked with seven refugee students, for only one year, and all from the same college obviously affected, if not almost determined, the scope of my research findings. It is worthwhile pointing out, though, that the experience college students have in their first year often affects the remaining years of their college career. As Reynolds and Weigand (2010) contend, “success in the first year of college is pivotal in determining overall undergraduate success” (p. 176). That I only collected data from one college presents a more serious limitation. Allison (2008), for example, found that the experience her linguistic minority participants had in college depended on whether they had gone to a community college or to a research university.

Another source of limitation comes from the fact that I was the sole researcher in this project. Considering the co-construction of knowledge that is inherent in the interview process, it is possible that a different researcher would have elicited different information from the participants in this study, and that the participants might have chosen to disclose aspects of their experience in college that they chose not to share with me.

To overcome these limitations, and complement the findings from this study, different further studies are warranted. First and foremost, it would be interesting to see how refugee students with similar backgrounds as the participants in this study fare in larger institutions, perhaps a two-year or a community college. Unless admissions criteria become more flexible in research universities, students such as the participants in this study will not be found in such institutions, especially as first-year students coming straight from high school. It would be interesting, however, to track the experience of refugee students who achieve better scores and make it to research universities. It would also be interesting to find refugee students who move from a more supportive environment such as a community college to a four-year institution to see if their successful experience in a small college (if that is the case) holds when they start attending a large university. Another study that might yield interesting findings is to follow participants for a longer period and verify whether their experiences in their first year of college change as they start taking classes in their majors.

7.4 Coda

Even though the data collection for this study only covered the experiences my participants had with academic literacies in their first year of college, I have been fortunate to meet some of my participants after the study was over. As I finish writing this dissertation, they are all in their junior year, still succeeding in their studies and, perhaps with the exception of one

student, they are all on target to graduate in four years. As they started taking classes in their majors, their college paths went different ways and, even though the seven participants still remain friendly, they no longer need each other as part of their support system. They seem to have been able to develop socioacademic relationships with other peers who are seeking the same majors. After the first year, they no longer needed any extra support to cope with academic literacies in college. All the support they seek and get is available to all students at Hope College.

Casanave (2002) said that “the name of the undergraduate writing game may be Survival Strategies” (p. 41). I extend the scope of her quote to argue that, at least in my participants’ experience, negotiating academic literacies in first-year college was, generally speaking, about finding the appropriate survival strategies. I conclude by citing Sternglass (1999), whose comment about her participants’ experience in college encapsulates my feelings about the participants of this study so well:

I am not arguing that the students in my study achieved the highest academic levels: what I am arguing is that they achieved sufficient expertise to become productive, contributing members of the society, and they acquired the self-esteem they deserved from their extraordinary efforts. (p. 6)

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Student consent form

Georgia State University
Department of Applied Linguistics and ESL
Informed Consent

Title: Refugees' experience with reading and writing in college
Principal Investigator: Diane Belcher (Faculty Advisor)
Eliana Hirano (Student Principal Investigator)
Sponsor: Language and Literacy Initiative – Georgia State University

I. Purpose:

You are invited to take part in a research study. The purpose of the study is to look at how refugee students who graduated from a U.S. high school deal with reading and writing practices in their first year of college. You are invited to take part in this study because you are a refugee, a freshman, and you just finished high school in the U.S. A total of two to seven students will be recruited for this study. The study involves 8 interviews of about one hour each over Fall 2009 and Spring 2010.

II. Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed by the student principal investigator four times in Fall 2009 and four times in Spring 2010. Each interview will last about one hour and will be audio taped. The questions in each interview will focus on your experience as a freshman, with emphasis on how you deal with reading and writing. You will also be asked to share reading and writing tasks you have for the different courses you take. The interviews will take place at the xxxxx College campus and we will choose a time that is convenient for you. At the end of each interview, you will receive ten dollars.

III. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits:

Taking part in this study may benefit you personally. Faculty at xxxxx College will have access to the results of this study and may use them in future course planning. Overall, we hope to learn about how refugee students deal with reading and writing in their first year of college. This information may benefit any educator that works with refugee students, mainly at college and high school levels.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Your grades will not be hurt or helped by talking to me or not talking to me. You will not be treated any differently by college faculty or students if you do or do not participate. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Only the principal investigators will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP), and the sponsor). We will use a fake name rather than your name on study records. The information you provide will be stored at a computer in the student principal investigator's home office. No other person has access to this computer. The recording of your interviews will be destroyed at the completion of the research. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. You will not be identified personally.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact Eliana Hirano at 678-491-7613 (eslelhx@langate.gsu.edu) or Diane Belcher, faculty advisor, at 404-413-5194 (dbelcher1@gsu.edu) if you have questions about this study. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio recorded, please sign below.

_____	_____
Participant	Date
_____	_____
Student Principal Investigator	Date

Appendix B

Admissions data release form

Georgia State University
Department of Applied Linguistics and ESL
Admissions Data Release Form

Title: Refugees' experience with reading and writing in college
Principal Investigator: Diane Belcher (Faculty Advisor)
Eliana Hirano (Student Principal Investigator)

Sponsor: Language and Literacy Initiative – Georgia State University

I. Purpose:

I am asking your permission to have access to your admissions material to Berry College. This includes your high school transcripts, standardized test scores (e.g., SAT and ACT), and essays submitted (if any). This information will be used to complement the data collected in the study you currently participate in.

II. Procedures:

If you agree to release your admissions data, I will contact the Director of Admissions at Berry College who will give me a copy of your admissions material.

V. Voluntary Release:

Releasing your admissions material is voluntary. Your participation in the current study will not be hurt or helped by releasing the material to me. You will not be treated any differently by the researchers if you do or do not release this information. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Only the principal investigators will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP), and the sponsor). The information you provide will be stored at a computer in the student principal investigator's home office. No other person has access to this computer. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. You will not be identified personally.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact Eliana Hirano at 678-491-7613 (eslelhx@langate.gsu.edu) or Diane Belcher, faculty advisor, at 404-413-5194 (dbelcher1@gsu.edu) if you have questions about this study. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu.

VIII. Copy of Release Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this release form to keep.

If you agree to the release of your admissions material for Berry College, please sign below.

Participant

Date

Student Principal Investigator

Date

Appendix C

Faculty consent form

Georgia State University
Department of Applied Linguistics and ESL
Informed Consent

Title: Reading and writing in college freshman courses
Principal Investigator: Diane Belcher (Faculty Advisor)
Eliana Hirano (Student Principal Investigator)
Sponsor: Language and Literacy Initiative – Georgia State University

I. Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to investigate the reading and writing tasks assigned in your classes. You are invited to participate because you currently teach students who are participants in a wider study. A total of around 10 to 20 participants will be recruited for this study. Participation will require about 1 hour of your time for an interview.

II. Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed by the student principal investigator in Fall 2009 and/or Spring 2010. The interview will last about one hour and will be audio-taped. The questions in the interview will focus on the reading and writing assignments required in the course you teach and the potential differences between refugee and other students in the way they deal with these assignments. The interview will take place on the xxxxx College campus at a time that is convenient for you.

III. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits:

Participation in this study may benefit you personally. You will have access to the results of this study and this study, which may give you insights on how refugee students deal with the reading and writing tasks assigned in college courses. Overall, we hope to gain information about how refugee students deal with reading and writing in their first year of college. This information may benefit other educators who work with refugee students, mainly at college and high school levels.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Only the principal investigators will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP) and/or the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the sponsor). We will use your course title rather than your name on study records. The information you provide will be stored at a computer in the student principal investigator's home office. This computer is password and firewall protected and no other person has access to it. The recording of your interviews will be destroyed at the completion of the research. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. You will not be identified personally.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact Eliana Hirano at 678-491-7613 (eslelhx@langate.gsu.edu) or Diane Belcher, faculty advisor, at 404-413-5194 (dbelcher1@gsu.edu) if you have questions about this study. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio recorded, please sign below.

Participant

Date

Student Principal Investigator

Date

Appendix D

Interview guide for students (adapted from Leki, 2007)

Background information (1st interview):

1. What countries did you live in before coming to the US?
2. What languages do you speak besides English? What language do you speak at home?
3. Can you read and write in any language besides English?
If yes,
 - a. In what other languages can you read and write?
 - b. Tell me about your experience learning this language.
 - c. How well can you read and write in this language?
4. How old were you when you came to the US?
5. Tell me about your school experience here in the US (what school did you attend, what grade did you start in, etc.)
6. Tell me about your experience learning to read and write in English. What or who helped you the most in this process? If you had to go through it again, what do you wish had been different?
7. Besides school assignments, how much do you read and/or write in English? For what purposes?
8. Tell me about your experience with the Bridge Program over the summer. How well did you do? Were the courses easier or more difficult than you had expected? In what ways?
9. From your experience in college so far, how is college different from high school?
10. What are your expectations for this first year of college? How do you feel about it? In what areas do you feel comfortable with? In what areas do you think you will need to work harder on?

Literacy questions (1st interview of each semester):

1. What courses are you taking this semester?
2. What do you expect to learn in each of these courses?
3. How do you feel about the reading and writing tasks required in each of these courses? Do you have any concerns about them?

Literacy questions (all interviews):

1. How do you feel about the courses you are taking?
2. How are you coping with the reading and writing assignments in your courses?
3. Do you have any concerns about the assignments you are expected to do?

For the questions below, participants will be asked to bring reading and writing assignments they want to focus on during the interview.

Questions about writing:

1. Have you had any feedback from your professors on your written assignments (e.g., homework, quizzes, exams, etc)? If yes, what type of feedback? If written, can you share it with me?
2. Have you needed extra support to cope with your assignments? What type of help have you needed?
3. How did you feel working on these assignments? (were they easy, difficult, how much time did they take?).
4. What did you learn working on these assignments?
5. What assignments are you working on now?
6. How well do you think you'll do on these?
7. Do you understand what is expected of you in these assignments?
8. How are these assignments similar or different from the ones you've done in the past? (including high school)

Questions about reading:

1. Tell me about the reading you are expected to do in your courses.
2. Do you have any difficulty coping with the amount of reading?
3. How important are the assigned readings to do well in your courses?
4. Is the content of the readings discussed in class?
5. If there is something in the reading that you don't understand well, what do you do about it?
6. How do you usually go about your readings? (read every word, look up every unknown word, just skim, take notes, etc)
7. How are these readings similar or different from the ones you've done in the past? (including high school)

Appendix E

Interview Guide for faculty (adapted from Leki, 2007)

1. What is the main goal of your course?

Writing assignments:

1. How much writing is involved in your course? What types of writing? How important is it?
2. How do students know how to do your writing assignments? What other resources do you expect them to draw on?
3. What difficulties or problems do they seem to have in doing the assignments?
4. What do you look for in evaluating writing?
5. What kinds of feedback do students get on their writing?
6. Describe a paper that you remember was unsuccessful.
7. Describe a paper that you remember was successful.
8. How would you compare the refugee students and the other students as far as their writing is concerned? Do you think they face any particular difficulty? What helps/hinders them in completing their writing assignments? Do they ask for assistance in fulfilling their tasks? Have they needed extra support? What type?

Reading assignments:

1. How much reading are students expected to do for your course? What types of texts are they required to read (textbook, articles, etc.)?
2. How well are students expected to know the material in the readings? Is the same content covered in lectures?
3. Are students expected to read critically or mostly for comprehension?
4. How are students held accountable for what they read (quizzes, discussion board, midterms, final, papers, etc.)?
5. How do reading and writing interact in your course? (do the assigned readings feed into the writings?)
6. What difficulties or problems do students say they have with the readings?
7. How would you compare the refugee students and the other students as far as their reading is concerned? Do you think they face any particular difficulty? What helps/hinders them in completing their reading assignments? Do they ask for assistance in fulfilling their tasks? Have they needed extra support? What type?