Academic Literacy Experiences of Undergraduate Students: Comparing Generation 1.5, International, and Native-speaking Populations

Luciana Findlay

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ACADEMIC LITERACY EXPERIENCES OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS: COMPARING GENERATION 1.5, INTERNATIONAL, AND NATIVE-SPEAKING POPULATIONS

by

LUCIANA JUNQUEIRA FINDLAY

Under the Direction of Diane Belcher

ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that international undergraduate students have been the most studied population in the field of Second Language Writing and that generation 1.5 students have received increasing attention in the past decade, our knowledge of what happens in college composition and subject-area classes with these students is still limited (Belcher, 2012). Moreover, surprisingly little is known about how these students’ academic literacy experiences compare to those of undergraduate native-speakers of English or about faculty’s perspectives regarding the academic literacies of these three student populations. Accordingly, the purposes of the present study were (1) to investigate generation 1.5, international, and native-speaking students’ academic literacy experiences and needs in composition and subject-area classes in first-year college as well as (2) to explore instructors’ perspectives and practices concerning students’ academic literacies. Multiple-case studies were conducted with twelve focal participants during their first semester in college: four international, four generation 1.5, and four
native-speaking undergraduate students. Furthermore, the students’ composition instructors (n=4) and some of their subject-area instructors (n=18) also participated in the study. Data collection procedures included interviews, classroom observations, and written artifacts from both students and instructors, such as assignments, commented-on essays, prompts, reading materials, rubrics, and syllabi. The findings revealed that the three student populations faced some challenges in their first semester of college pertaining to reading, writing, and socio-academic literacy practices. Some of their difficulties were similar across the board (e.g., limited reading and writing practices) while others were specific to each student population (e.g., lexical issues for international students). Nonetheless, the generation 1.5 and international students succeeded in all of their classes and appeared to be more academically socialized than the native-speaking students. These multilingual students learned to develop effective study strategies and draw on resources available to them while the native-speaking student participants did not seem equipped with the socio-academic tools needed to negotiate postsecondary academic literacy demands. Additionally, the findings indicate that the instructors’ expectations regarding reading practices in their courses did not always align with those of the focal participants as faculty seemed to place a much higher importance on reading than the students did.

INDEX WORDS: Academic literacy, Reading practices, Writing practices, Generation 1.5, International Students, Native-speakers, English as a second language (ESL), First-year college, First-Year composition, Faculty’s expectations, Case study
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LUCIANA JUNQUEIRA FINDLAY

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To Kyle and my wonderful parents, Alvaro and Nícia
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The body of students at postsecondary institutions in the United States has become increasingly diverse over the last several decades with populations of different profiles and needs (Friedrich, 2006). Multilingual\(^1\) students represent at least 21% of the K-12 school population and approximately 11% of the college population in the United States today, and – according to recent government statistics – these numbers are expected to continue to grow rapidly (Kanno & Harklau, 2012a). Among these multilinguals, undergraduate students have been the primary focus of research in the field of second language (L2) writing over the past 30 years (Belcher, 2012; Leki, Cumming & Silva, 2008; Matsuda, 2008). The fact that composition courses are often mandatory for all students in most U.S. universities and that the majority of scholars studying L2 writers work in these postsecondary institutions has promoted the investigation of these multilingual undergraduate learners’ writing and contexts with the goal of improving writing instruction in these settings (Matsuda, 1999, 2006; Leki, Cumming & Silva, 2008).

Most multilingual undergraduates in the U.S. are ‘international’ students and ‘generation 1.5’ (i.e., immigrant or resident English as a second language, ESL) students (Kanno & Harklau, 2012a; Matsuda, 2008). Although this categorization may seem more accurate than ‘generalizing’ students as simply ESL or even multilingual students, Matsuda and Matsuda (2009) argue that terms like ‘international’ and ‘generation 1.5’ might also be imprecise and can lead to false distinctions. These authors explain that the label ‘international student’ is based on

\(^1\) I have chosen to use the term ‘multilingual’ here rather than the more commonly used terms ‘ESL’ or L2 writers to refer to students that speak more than one language because of the controversial connotation these terms have gained in the past few years, especially regarding writers in college composition. I also felt that addressing the English of generation 1.5 students as their ‘second language’ would be a misrepresentation of these students’ actual language abilities and ownership of English. Further, since several of these students speak more than two languages, the term multilingual seemed more fitting than bilingual.
the students’ visa status while the term ‘generation 1.5’ is based on students’ characteristics, and these terms\(^2\) are not mutually exclusive. Thus, it is important to keep in mind that multilingual students might not fit into just one ‘category’ given that these populations are remarkably different and that “no one label can accurately capture their heterogeneity” (Spack, 1997, p. 765).

With this caveat in mind, we see that the bulk of research on L2 writing has been on international undergraduate students in the U.S. and worldwide, and most curricular and pedagogical recommendations have targeted this population (Belcher, 2012; Harklau, Siegal & Losey 1999; Leki et al., 2008; Matsuda, 2008). The growing interest in generation 1.5 students among L2 writing researchers is a much more recent phenomenon dating back from the late 1990s when this “term first entered the consciousness of many TESOL and composition specialists” (Matsuda & Matsuda, 2009, p. 51) with the publication of Harklau, Losey and Siegal’s (1999) ground-breaking volume on generation 1.5 students in college composition classes. The amount of work on this population in our field is, therefore, more limited – though it has steadily increased over the years and some earlier work also focused on immigrant students, as further discussed in Chapter 2.

Despite the ample research on international students’ language issues and pedagogical implications for instructors working with multilinguals, “surprisingly little is known about what actually happens in classrooms with L2 writing students” (Belcher, 2012, p. 134). Research is also still scarce on multilingual students’ (both generation 1.5 and international) experiences in college (but two exceptions are Leki, 2007 and Hirano, 2011) and on “college-going patterns and goals of language minority students” (Harklau & Siegal, 2009, p. 29).

Even less understood are international and generation 1.5 students’ academic literacy experiences when they are placed in the same classrooms, both in composition classes and

\(^2\) The terms ‘international’ and ‘generation 1.5’ students are further discussed in Chapter 2.
subject-area courses, or how the academic literacy experiences of these multilingual students compare to those of native-speakers of English. In fact, our knowledge of how multilingual students fare in subject-area courses and develop through their undergraduate careers is still minimal (Belcher, 2012).

In addition, research on the practices of instructors simultaneously teaching diverse populations of students is also scarce in the fields of both L2 writing and first-year composition as well in teacher-cognition research. Although research on language teacher cognition has grown rapidly in the past two decades, the volume of work in teacher cognition research in L2 writing and reading instruction has been limited. The few studies that do examine teacher cognition of L2 writers do not consider teachers’ knowledge of and beliefs about sociocultural aspects of literacy, reading-writing connections, or their students’ backgrounds and possible L1 literacy influences in their L2 academic literacy skills. In fact, very little teacher cognition research has addressed how L2 writing teachers understand the concept of literacy itself (but see Cross’s, 2011, study on L1 literacy teachers and Tardy’s, 2011, works in the first-year composition context).

In sum, comparative research on the academic literacy experiences and needs of generation 1.5, international, and native-speakers of English in higher education still seems rather limited, and studies of instructors’ perspectives, expectations, and practices toward these three student populations, particularly when they are enrolled in the same courses, are also somewhat scarce. In fact, to my knowledge, no study in applied linguistics has simultaneously investigated the academic literacy practices of these three diverse student populations in postsecondary education. Costino and Hyon (2007) as well as Doolan (2011; 2013) and Doolan and Miller (2012) included generation 1.5, international, and native-speaking students in their
studies (Costino & Hyon’s ‘US born’ participants were raised in bilingual homes, however), but their focus was on students’ preferences for mainstream or composition courses for bilinguals and on linguistic analyses of written texts, respectively. That is, though these authors worked with these three distinct populations, their goal was not to examine these students’ academic literacy practices in composition or subject-area courses or their instructors’ perspectives.

The aim of the present investigation was to explore the academic literacy experiences and needs of undergraduate generation 1.5, international, and native-speaking students not only from their perspective but also from that of their instructors, and thus to try to determine whether there are differences in how these student populations navigate the academic literacy demands of higher education. To this end, multiple case studies (Duff, 2008) were conducted in order to examine the college experiences encountered by the three student populations, the focal participants, during their first academic semester in composition classes and subject-area courses at an American university.

Additionally, in order to examine teacher perspectives on the academic literacy needs of those different student populations, the practices and expectations of the students’ composition and subject-area instructors were investigated. While the primary focus of the study was on the students, instructors’ perspectives were also sought out because of the crucial role their expectations and practices play on the needs and experiences of students. As Bazerman (1994) eloquently put it, “it is within students, of course, that the learning occurs, but it is within the teacher, who sits at the juncture of forces above, below and sideways that the learning situations are framed” (p. 29).

It is also important to point out that some composition scholars consider English composition to be a subject-area course in its own right. However, because the reading and
writing practices of composition courses are quite different from those of general education courses and courses in the majors, I decided to explore the students’ experiences and needs in these classes separately. Further, courses other than composition classes are called ‘subject-area’ courses throughout this dissertation instead of ‘courses across the curriculum’ not to cause any confusion with the Writing Across the Curriculum movement (WAC) in composition studies. According to Russell, Lea, Parker, Street, and Donahue (2009), “the term WAC means efforts to improve students’ learning and writing (or learning through writing) in all university courses and departments” (p. 395). The subject-area courses included in the present study consist of general education courses as well as courses in the majors.

The main contributions this dissertation hopes to make are to provide detailed accounts of three student populations’ experiences in college composition and subject-area courses and identify what the differences in their academic literacy needs are in order to point us in the direction of the types of teaching and academic support that might be beneficial for these student groups. The following research questions guided the study.

1. What are the similarities and differences in the academic literacy experiences and needs of undergraduate generation 1.5, international, and native-speaking students in first-year composition classes and subject-area courses?

2. What literacy expectations and goals for generation 1.5, international, and native speaking students do composition teachers have and how do they see themselves attempting to help their students meet these expectations and goals?

3. What literacy expectations and goals for generation 1.5, international, and native speaking students do subject-area instructors have and how do they see themselves attempting to help their students meet these expectations and goals?
1.1 Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized as follows. In Chapter 2, I first operationalize important terms and concepts used throughout the study and then review relevant literature on the academic literacies of generation 1.5, international, and native-speaking students. In Chapter 3, I describe the methodology employed in the study, from recruitment procedures to data analysis, and then offer descriptions of the research context and participants. In Chapter 4, I provide profiles of each focal participant in order to bring these students to life and to help frame the findings discussed in the following three chapters. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 present the findings regarding reading, writing, and socio-academic practices, respectively. In Chapters 5 and 6, the students’ experiences and needs are discussed first, followed by the instructors’ perspectives, while Chapter 7 focuses only on the students’ practices as the faculty did not discuss the more social aspects of students’ academic literacies in detail. Finally, in Chapter 8, I conclude the dissertation by summarizing the major findings, placing these within pertinent literature in the field, offering pedagogical implications, and addressing the study’s limitations and directions for future research.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purposes of the review of literature presented here are to offer operationalizations for the terms and concepts included in the dissertation and to take stock of the body of work on the populations and topics pertinent to the study (i.e., academic literacies of the three student populations investigated and college demands). Given the issues involved with identifying different populations of multilingual students, this chapter begins by discussing the terms ‘international’ and ‘generation 1.5’ students.

2.1 Labeling International and Generation 1.5 Students

The terms ‘international’ and ‘generation 1.5’ students were most likely ascribed to multilingual learners with the best of intentions from researchers earnestly attempting to better characterize what they came to realize were different types of students with diverse backgrounds and needs. However, these labels have been under fiery attacks – especially ‘generation 1.5’ – from scholars in L2 writing, composition studies, and critical pedagogy for the past two decades (e.g., Benesch, 2008, 2009; Bhabha, 1994; Chiang & Schmida, 1999; Matsuda & Matsuda, 2009; Spack, 1997; Talmy, 2001, 2004). Theses critiques, or rather criticisms, claim that such labels are grounded on power inequality (Bhabha, 1994), monolingual/monocultural ideologies (Benesch, 2008), ethnocentric stances (Spack, 1997), or simply reflect the imprecisions of terms in the field, which tend to mask the diversity of students they represent (Matsuda & Matsuda, 2009).

International students have been most commonly studied under the umbrella terms ‘ESL’ or ‘English language learner’ (ELL) students or under the more contested term ‘non-native speakers of English’. However, given that various populations of students were being conflated
under these terms, more ‘specific’ labels such as international students have become increasingly popular, particularly in college composition, where the diversity of multilingual writers is more prevalent. The traditional definition of international students has been that of foreign students who come to the U.S. on a student visa to improve their English skills and/or pursue higher education with the intent of going back to their countries upon completing their studies (Roberge, 2002, 2009). However, according to Spack (1997), this term has social and political implications since it is sometimes used, as is the case with ESL, in reference to all students whose first language is not English or who may speak another language at home, including generation 1.5 students. She also points to the association of this term to the “elitist field of international (intercultural) education” (p. 766), which, after Noronha (1992), has isolated itself from racial or ethnic issues. Furthermore, Friedrich (2006) and Matsuda and Matsuda (2009) point out that not all international students fall nicely into the category described above. For example, many of these “temporary sojourners” (Belcher, 2012, p. 133) move to this country as exchange students in high school and decide to stay and go on to college and even graduate school, and some never leave – as was the case with once high school exchange student and now established scholar Paul Matsuda (Matsuda & Matsuda, 2009).

International students have also been called “eye learners” (Reid, 1997) in reference to the primary medium through which they have learned English: written texts. Reid (1997) argues that these students normally learn English via reading and writing in their home countries, where they study primarily vocabulary, verb forms, and language rules.

The much more controversial term ‘generation 1.5’ was first coined not by composition specialists or L2 writing scholars but by sociologists, Rubén Rumbaut and Kenji Ima (1988), working with refugees. In their final report to the “Office of Refugee Settlement”, the authors
provided a detailed account (i.e., 205 pages) of a comparative study they conducted from 1986-87 in San Diego, CA, on the adaptation of refugee youth from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. They looked at successes and challenges of these refugee youths with respect to their educational and occupational accomplishments and assessed their prospects for economic self-sufficiency in the U.S. It was in this context that the term ‘generation 1.5’ was first used to refer to participants who were:

[N]either part of the “first” generation of their parents, […] who made the fateful decision to leave and to flee as refugees to an uncertain exile to the U.S. […]; nor are these youths parts of the “second” generation of children who are born in the U.S., for whom the homeland mainly exists as a representation consisting of parental memories […]. Rather, the refugee youths in our study constitute a distinctive cohort: they are those young people who were born in their countries of origin but formed in the U.S. (that is, they are completing their education in the U.S. during their formative periods of adolescence and early adulthood); they were not the main protagonists of the decision to leave and hence are less beholden to their parents’ attitudes […]; and they are in many ways marginal to both the new and old worlds, for while they straddle both worlds, they are in some profound sense fully part of neither of them (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988, p. 22).

This definition was then extended by Harklau, Siegal, and Losey (1999) to include characteristics based on linguistic and educational profiles of immigrants in general and has since then been loosely used to describe immigrant students who move to the U.S. at a relatively early age and attend American schools for most of their K-12 education. According to Roberge (2002), the term gained resonance because “it captured the ‘in-between’ position of students who did not seem to fit within traditional definitions and categories” (p. 109). This “in-between-ness” (Benesch, 2009, p. 65) has, however, been the primary reason some scholars have come to reject the term, for they believe its ‘discourse of demographic partiality’ (Benesch, 2008) portrays immigrant students as lacking first and second generation identities and as “being pathologized as different” (Benesch, 2008, p. 298) learners who are neither non-native nor native speakers of English.
In addition to not accounting for the complexity of language and identity issues in a globalized world, Matsuda and Matsuda (2009) argue that the term ‘generation 1.5’ has in fact caused the ‘erasure of resident ESL writers’ who have been present not only in the U.S. school system but also in research in the L2 writing field since the mid-1950s. In their historical chapter in Roberge, Siegal, and Harklau’s (2009) newer volume on generation 1.5 in college composition, Matsuda and Matsuda explain that the immigrant student population in the U.S. was already significant in higher education back in the 1950s when *Language Learning* published an article by Slager (1956) on the differences between international and generation 1.5 students, whose title reads: “The Foreign Student and the Immigrant – Their Different Problems as Students of English”. Matsuda and Matsuda (2009) further argue that this earlier publication and others like it were most likely either ignored altogether or interpreted as “a justification for excluding resident ESL students from the purview of college TESOL specialists in the context of the then-emerging TESOL field” (p. 54). Thus, unlike the fields of education and composition studies where discussions of resident ESL students have actually been vibrant since the 1970s, the fields of TESOL and applied linguistics have been under the impression that the presence of immigrant students in U.S. schools began in the 1990s (Mastuda & Matsuda, 2009).

Additional problems with using terms like ‘generation 1.5’ as one-size-fits all are that immigrant students’ experiences vary tremendously according to their age of arrival, family socioeconomic status as well as their level of education, their reason for leaving their home countries, and where in the U.S. they establish residence. Therefore, a more flexible and fluid use of the term has been advocated in order to include students’ wide-ranging backgrounds (Roberge, 2002, 2009). According to Doolan and Miller (2012), four main criteria have been used to identify these students by researchers working with this population over the years:
“Generation 1.5 students […] “(a) have been in the U.S. educational system for more than 4 years, (b) regularly speak a language other than English at home, (c) have relatively strong English speaking and listening skills, and (d) are younger than 25 years old” (p. 1). These criteria vary from study to study but what seems crucial is that researchers systematically provide clear and multi-dimensional descriptions of their student participants’ characteristics (Matsuda & Matsuda, 2009).

These discussions on the accuracy and appropriateness of the term generation 1.5 appear to have had at least some impact on the field as scholars seem to be increasingly more cognizant of the rather imprecise nature of the term and most of them have, if not adopted a different term, at least begun to acknowledge its limitations in their reports (e.g., di Gennaro, 2011; Doolan & Miller, 2012; Friedrich, 2006; Nakamaru, 2010). In fact, Linda Harklau herself has qualified her discourse about generation 1.5 students noticeably over the years. For instance, in a colloquium in the Journal of Second Language Writing, Harklau (2003) recognizes that “the term ‘generation 1.5’ unfortunately lends itself far too easily to essentializing and to a discourse of need – a way to label bilingual students as in need of remediation” (p. 155). However, it should be noted that she reiterates in the same piece that she still believes the term is useful albeit unstable and contested. It is also interesting to see that over a decade after the term ‘generation 1.5’ was introduced to the applied linguistics field in Harklau, Losey and Siegal’s (1999) “Generation 1.5 Meets College Composition: Issues in the Teaching of Writing to U.S. Educated Learners of ESL”, the most recent volume co-edited by Harklau now reads “Linguistic Minority Students Go to College” (Kanno & Harklau, 2012b).

Still another term that has been used to describe this immigrant student population is ‘ear learners’, the counterpart to the ‘eye learners’ term discussed earlier. Again, Reid (1997) used
this term to refer to how generation 1.5 students normally acquire English, that is, mainly through aural and oral interactions. Much of the discussion of these students’ language features has been based on the idea that their language is primarily “ear-based” (Reid, 1997, p. 18). It should be pointed out that these are just some of the terms most commonly used to refer generation 1.5 students, but for a more detailed review see Roberge (2009).

I have personally opted to use the term ‘multilingual’ when referring to both of these student populations together in light of the discussions above. Moreover, I have chosen ‘multilingual’ over ‘linguistic minority’ because, in my view, the latter term seems to carry a connotation of language deficiency and a discourse of exclusion, instead of capitalizing on the linguistic and cultural resources these multilingual students bring to their literacy experiences (Canagarajah, 2006).

I have, nonetheless, maintained the terms international students and generation 1.5 students when addressing these populations separately because I believe they function as useful heuristics in discussing the similarities and differences of these linguistically and culturally diverse learners. Furthermore, having taught these two populations of multilingual writers, I must admit that I find a striking resemblance between the definitions of international and generation 1.5 students discussed above, including the description from Rumbaut and Ima (1988), and my former students. The terms are not used here, however, to refer to these students’ linguistic or cultural backgrounds as deficient or problematic, but in order to tailor our instruction and research to students’ needs, we have to acknowledge their differences. I now turn to what we have learned from research on these students’ academic literacy needs as well as those of native-speaking students.
2.2 What We Know about the Academic Literacies of Undergraduate Students

Before delving into what research shows about international, generation 1.5, and native-speaking undergraduate writers, a brief definition of academic literacies is in order. Following Johns (1997) and Leki (2007), the term literacy as used in this dissertation represents more than ‘reading and writing’ skills, as literacy also involves listening and speaking. Further, it “encompasses ways of knowing particular content, languages, and practices […] and relates to the social context in which discourse is produced and the roles and communities of texts, readers, and writers” (Johns, 1997, p.2). That is, literacy here is seen as a social practice (Gee, 1990; Lea & Street, 2005; Street, 1984) and thus refers to shared experiences with various mediators, such as parents, teachers, siblings, classmates, and texts. The term is used in the plural (i.e., academic literacies) because, as Johns (1997) explains, “there are many literacies, especially in academic settings, acquired in different ways and for different purposes” (p. 3).

The body of research in the field of L2 writing has explored a variety of issues related to international students’ academic literacies, such as their writings (for both rhetorical and linguistic features), writing and reading strategies, composing processes, response to feedback, plagiarism or textual borrowing concerns, preferences for mainstream or L2 composition courses, and L1 transfer or influence (Leki et al., 2008, Silva, 1993). Works on multilingual undergraduate writers’ academic literacy experiences in college along with research on curriculum design have also investigated the various writing demands and practices of composition classes as well as of courses across the curriculum (Reid, 2001).

With respect to generation 1.5 students, language policy makers and educational sociologists have focused on socio-political, economic, historical, and disciplinary forces that impact these students (Roberge, 2009; Kanno & Harklau, 2012a), while college composition and
L2 writing have explored their academic literacy experiences especially in their trajectory from high-school to college (e.g., Allison, 2009; Blanton, 2005; Harklau, 1998; 1999; 2000; Harklau & McClanahan, 2012; Hartman & Tarone, 1999; Mayer, 2012) and college (e.g., Crosby, 2009; Chiang & Schmida, 1999; Hirano, 2011; Kanno & Harklau, 2012b; Leki, 2007; Louie, 2009).

Descriptions of multilingual students’ written linguistic features have also been discussed, from a more intuitive perspective of teachers’ working with these students (e.g., Reid, 1997, 2006; Ferris, 1999, 2009; Friedrich, 2006; Frodesen, 2009; Frodesen & Starna, 1999; Slager, 1956) to more recent large-scale quantitative studies as further detailed below (e.g., di Gennaro, 2009, 2011; Doolan, 2011; Doolan & Miller, 2012).

With respect to native-speakers, research on teaching practices and curriculum design in first-year composition courses is prolific and so are studies of undergraduate writing (see Rogers, 2010, for a synthesis of longitudinal studies of writing in American higher education). Likewise, Russell et al. (2009) point out that research on the different academic genres and discourses students experience in higher education is also extensive. Moreover, research on ‘college readiness’ and on the retention of undergraduate students in higher education has investigated incoming college students’ academic preparedness and freshman students’ behaviors in first-year college, respectively, in order to identify the skills necessary for the demands of higher education (Donham, 2014) and to uncover factors that are important for college success (Kim, Newton, Downey & Benton, 2010).

Given these somewhat diverse threads, the general findings of these bodies of work are synthesized in separate subsections below. The first three subsections address general literacy characteristics and related socioeconomic and cultural factors of international students, generation 1.5 students, and native-speaking students, respectively, while the fourth and last
subsection provides a comparative summary of the main tendencies research shows on particular language features of these students.

2.2.1 International Students

We now know with certain confidence that the more L1 education and the stronger L1 literacy skills a student has, the better his/her chances are of succeeding in an L2-medium university (Belcher, 2012; Leki, et al., 2008; Roberge, 2009). International students usually have high socio, cultural, and educational capital when they arrive in the U.S., that is, they come from privileged and well-educated backgrounds and generally fare very well in post-secondary settings in this country (Reid, 1997; Roberge, 2002; 2009).

These ‘eye learners’ (Reid, 1997) also appear to have a greater understanding of grammatical metalanguage and often have a better command of reading and writing than speaking and listening, and their English, consequently, is usually more formal (Friedrich, 2006; Harklau, Siegal & Losey, 1999; Leki, 1992; Reid, 1997; Roberge, 2009). In addition, given their high levels of L1 education, such students tend to be familiar with reading and writing strategies in their L1s, which can be transferable to their L2, and are most likely aware of and respectful of their own cultural and linguistic traditions (Friedrich, 2006; Leki, 1992; Roberge, 2002). In fact, as Friedrich (2006) points out, “it is not uncommon for international students to label rhetorical practices in English as “worse” or as less intuitive than the ones they bring with their native tongues” (p. 23).

With respect to learner attitudes and acculturation, international students tend to accept their ‘ESL’ status and thus assent to and even welcome their placement in composition courses for ESL/L2 students (Braine, 1996; Harklau, Siegal & Losey, 1999; Leki, 1992). They not only expect to have ‘errors’ in their language production but also usually welcome grammatical
correction (Ferris, 1999; Leki, 1992; Nakamura, 2010). Yet, international students experience a variety of reactions and emotions toward the new culture they are immersed in, and they may or may not want to acculturate (Carson, 2001; Friedrich, 2006). According to Schumann’s (1986) Acculturation Model, these students’ successful second language acquisition (SLA) is directly related to how they perceive their social and psychological distance from the target culture. In other words, the more distant they perceive themselves, the greater are the chances that their language ability may not develop as fast or as much as if they perceive a close connection with the new culture (Carson, 2001). The generally more limited oral proficiency of international students may also contribute to feelings of not belonging as it can prevent them from expressing frustrations and needs. Similarly, their somewhat limited command of English when compared to their L1 skills can also cause them extreme frustration and feelings of having “knowledge trapped inside” (Friedrich, 2006, p. 23), which can make the process of acculturation more difficult.

2.2.2 Generation 1.5 Students

The first important characteristic of generation 1.5 students that needs to be acknowledged at the onset is that their experiences and circumstances are extremely diverse and have different impacts on their academic literacy development. Their backgrounds vary, for example, from voluntarily immigrating to the U.S. following their parents’ job relocation to fleeing to this country as refugees escaping the horrors of war and refugee camps. The amount of interrupted education these students with diverse backgrounds have experienced is, of course, also wide-ranging. Furthermore, their socioeconomic backgrounds differ greatly, and, whereas a few generation 1.5 students may enjoy their family’s financial security, the vast majority of them have been reported to work long hours (often 40 hours or more weekly) while going to school
full time. Their parents’ education level also varies and while a minority of them may be well-educated in their L1s and know some English prior to arriving in the U.S., most parents have no knowledge of English when they first immigrate nor do they learn the language living in enclave linguistic communities; some are also illiterate in their L1s (Blanton, 2005; Harklau, Siegal & Losey, 1999; Harklau & Siegal, 2009; Reid, 1997; Roberge, 2002, 2009; Rodby, 1999).

In addition to all of these factors, age of arrival also profoundly impacts generation 1.5 students’ language development and academic success (Frodesen, 2009; Louie, 2009; Roberge, 2002, 2009; Rumbaut, 2004; Valdés, 1992) to the point where different labels or more “refined categories” (Louie, 2009, p. 43), such as generation 1.25 and 1.75 have been suggested (e.g., Rumbaut, 2004). In an ‘age of arrival’ continuum, students moving to the U.S. as young children, between 0-5 years old, would be members of the generation 1.75 for they are ‘closer’ to the second generation of U.S.-born kids. At the other end of this continuum are generation 1.25 members, who are adolescents between the ages of 13-17 when they immigrate and thus share more characteristics with the first generation of adult immigrants (Louie, 2009). While this subdivision of labels may seem somewhat crude and has not caught on in our field’s literature, research indicates that immigrants’ age of arrival indeed has a close relationship to how literate they are in their L1s and, therefore, is a powerful indicator of language acquisition, adaptation, and educational attainment (Friedrich, 2006).

As the discussion above indicates, generation 1.5 students, who can be abruptly immersed in the U.S. culture and in the English language, acquire the language primarily through hearing as “they listened, took in oral language (from teachers, television, grocery clerks), and subconsciously began to form vocabulary, grammar, and syntax rules—learning English through trial and error” (Reid, 1997, p. 18). Accordingly, they generally have very developed oral
fluency (although age of arrival plays an important role here), understand American culture well, and are familiar with the behaviors and language of their peers at school (Blanton, 2005; Harklau, 2000; Harklau, Siegal & Losey, 1999; Roberge, 2002, 2009; Valdés, 1992). Because of the fragmented and ‘low track’ (Harklau, Siegal & Losey, 1999) formal English instruction they have received all through secondary school in the U.S. (most schools still do not have efficient and systematic placement methods and adequate language support programs), undergraduate generation 1.5 students are generally more comfortable with everyday language and might lack study skills, including writing and reading strategies (Harklau 2000; Harklau & Siegal, 2009; Harklau, Siegal & Losey, 1999; Reid, 1997; Roberge, 2002, 2009).

Regarding their learner attitudes and acculturation, the picture is much more complex than that of international students given that generation 1.5 students must deal with identity negotiation, adaption, and assimilation inside and outside of schools from the day they arrive in the U.S. and throughout their lives (Harklau, 2000; Harklau, Siegal & Losey, 1999; Roberge, 2002, 2009). Roberge (2002) points out that contrary to the common belief that adaption is relatively easy for immigrant children, research shows that they are vulnerable to psychological difficulties that accompany leaving behind a familiar environment and taking on more family responsibilities in the new country, such as parenting younger siblings (due to the long hours many immigrant parents work trying to provide for the family) and doing ‘language brokering’ for their non-English speaking parents.

One of the most recognized psychological and cultural challenges generation 1.5 students face, especially the younger ones, is “intergenerational conflict of value” (Roberge, 2002, p. 112). Such conflict is caused by the students’ more readily assimilation of U.S. traditions and values than that of their parents, who tend to expect the children to continue to follow behaviors
and customs from their home countries. In addition to conflicts at home, generation 1.5 students often face discrimination at school not only from American classmates who see them as ‘foreigners’ but also from “U.S.-born same-ethnicity cohort” (Roberge, 2002, p 112) who may see generation 1.5 students as “fresh off the boat” (FOB) (Tamly, 2001) and from more recently arrived immigrants who may perceive these generation 1.5 students as too ‘Americanized’. Thus, their identity formation is particularly challenging as they have to negotiate complex multicultural identities, a process that becomes even more difficult when generation 1.5 students, who many times consider themselves as native-speakers of English (Chiang & Schimda, 1999), are treated as ‘ESL’ or international students by composition instructors in college and do not have their ownership of English and American culture recognized (Harklau, 2000; Harklau & Siegal, 2009; Harklau, Siegal & Losey, 1999; Roberge, 2002, 2009).

Finally, as expected, generation 1.5 students have been known to reject or resent placement in ‘ESL classes’ in college and may see their errors and teachers’ correction as evidence of their non-mainstream status (Friedrich, 2006; Holten, 2009), although Ferris (1999) points out that because of their long exposure to the U.S. educational schools system, generation 1.5 undergraduate students are often familiar with patterns and pragmatic phenomena involved in teacher-student communication, teacher written corrective feedback, and notions of revision and multiple drafts. She furthered argued that research has shown that generation 1.5 students find teacher feedback helpful and have a positive attitude towards it.

2.2.3 Native-Speaking Students

Most likely because they face greater needs in composition courses and are normally placed in the same composition sections as multilingual students, college basic writers have been the main focus of research on native-speakers’ academic literacies in applied linguistics research
(e.g., Costino & Hyon, 2007; Friedrich, 2006; Leki, 1992; Matsuda, 2003). Yet, much of the discussion presented here about basic writers in composition courses might also apply to the general population of native-speaking students and are likely to be familiar to composition instructors.

Research has shown that undergraduate basic native-speaking writers (i.e., writers who have been judged to need special help with their writing skills due to their scores in standardized tests, such as the ACT and SAT) are more comfortable with everyday language and are still learning more specific uses of the English language. Thus, they tend to transfer some of the conventions of oral language into written texts, and many of them are not familiar with grammatical metalanguage. Additionally, these native speakers might lack study skills and writing strategies, and some might have been held back by the educational system, being placed in remedial or developmental courses. Finally, they tend to resent being placed in ‘remedial’ or ‘developmental’ English composition courses (Friedrich, 2006; Leki, 1992).

Furthermore, studies in higher education have shown that college students (the majority of them being expectedly American students, despite the increasing population of multilingual students) are not reading much (Loes et al., 2013). Arum and Roska’s (2010) study revealed that the amount of reading most college students engage in is less than what is expected by post-secondary institutions, a finding also reported by Gallik (1999) and Hendel (2004). Loes et al. (2013) also point out, citing (Bradshaw & Nichols, 2004), that the decrease in reading practices between 1983 and 2002 within the U.S. population is most pronounced among those aged 18–24 (a 28% decline) and those aged 25–34 (a 23% decline).

Regarding retention and predictors of college success (again, even though these studies do not identify the student populations investigated, the majority of students most likely
comprise native speakers), research shows – not surprisingly – that factors including socio-economic status, ethnicity, geographic location, and being a first-generation college student correlate with the persistence and performance of students (Kim et al., 2010). In addition, as might be expected, being personally engaged with on-campus activities and developing social support networks has also been shown to foster academic success (Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie & Gonyea, 2008). Similarly, research on personal variables, such as “time utilization, strategic organization and study approach, academic self-esteem, efficacy, confidence, and stress and emotional components, student involvement with campus life, motivation, and task relevance” (Kim et al., 2010, p.), indicates a direct relationship with college performance.

With respect to ‘college readiness’ (i.e., “the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed – without remediation – in a credit-bearing general education course at postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program”, Conley, 2008, p. 24, as cited in Donham, 2014, pp. 1-2), recent research shows that most incoming college students do not seem to be prepared for the demands of higher education (Donham, 2014). According to the Reality of College Readiness 2013 report from ACT, “only 25% of ACT-tested students in 2011 were reported to have met college-readiness benchmarks in all four subject areas: English, reading, mathematics, and science” (Donham, 2014, p.3). In addition, a survey of college instructors’ by the ACT 2012 National Curriculum Survey revealed that only 26% of faculty teaching writing, reading, mathematics, and science believed that incoming students were ‘well prepared’ or ‘very well prepared’ for college work (Donham, 2014). Donham (2012) summarizes research on college readiness as follows: “the literature suggests that schools are often falling short of graduating students with the level of sophistication required in college-level academic work” (p. 6).
2.3 Language Features of the Three Student Populations

In light of the factors presented above, it is important to keep in mind that the following language characteristics of generation 1.5 students reflect general findings researchers have reported over the years with a variety of participants and do not represent all generation 1.5 students’ cases. Of course, the same is true of international students, but besides the fact that their L1 literacies and age of arrival are more similar in general, L2 writing research on these students has a longer tradition and more results have been corroborated (see Leki et al., 2008 and Silva, 1993).

In their writing classes, international students are not only in the process of learning specific uses of English and writing conventions, but are also still developing their overall language skills (Friedrich, 2006; Leki, 1992). For example, in his meta-analysis of empirical research on L2 writing features, Silva (1993) reports that, when compared to L1 students, L2 writers tend to write shorter texts with more morphosyntactic errors, including problems with verbs, prepositions, articles, and nouns. He also notes that stylistic differences are reported on L2 writing, such as a larger number of shorter T-units, less complex coordination but more simple coordination, less subordination, fewer free modifiers, less cohesion, and overall less lexical variety, specificity, and sophistication. In fact, more recent research has underscored that lexical knowledge is among the main linguistic needs of international students (Crossley & McNamara, 2009; 2011; Myers, 2003; Nakamura, 2010). Crossley and McNamara (2009, 2011) have shown, for instance, through sophisticated computational analyses (e.g., Coh-Metrix tools) of large learner corpora data, that international student writers appear to have “less-connected lexical networks than L1 writers” (2009, p. 132). The authors claim that these students’ writing tends to
be not only lexically more simple than that of L1 writers but also more lexically and semantically disengaged, and “less specific and less ambiguous when compared to L1 texts” (2011, p. 281).

In addition, L1 transfer or cross-linguistic influence (CLI), well documented in SLA oral studies, has also been reported in international students’ writing regarding rhetorical and morphosyntactic structures of learners of different proficiency levels (e.g., Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Hinkel, 2002; Jarvis, 2010; Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008; Leki et al., 2008; Reid, 1992), although it appears that the lower the student proficiency level, the more CLI is found (Rinnert & Kobayashi, 2009). Much debate has surrounded the field of contrastive rhetoric since its advent with Kaplan’s (1966) seminal article, but despite the serious controversies this field of study has generated (see Casanave, 2004), that L1 rhetorical knowledge influence – to different extents, given a variety of factors, and in a very complex way – L2 written production is now recognized (Carson, 2001; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996).

On the other hand, scholars have argued that generation 1.5 students tend to lack metalanguage, much like their American high school peers, and their writing may be informal, presenting colloquial language (Ferris, 1999, 2009; Harklau 2000; Harklau & Siegal, 2009; Harklau, Siegal & Losey, 1999; Reid, 1997; Roberge, 2002, 2009). In fact, Doolan’s (2011) large quantitative study revealed that the ‘spoken features of language variable’ was not significantly different between generation 1.5 and L1 students but it was significant between generation 1.5 and international students. Generation 1.5 students’ advanced oral skills can, nonetheless, help them with practice and instruction on grammatical issues that take advantage of this fluency and of their intuitions about English instead of focusing on metalanguage alone (Ferris, 1999).
Researches have also claimed that generation 1.5 students, because of their ‘ear-based’ language acquisition (Reid, 1997), are likely to make more errors in their writing than international students and L1 students (Ferris, 2009; Muchinsky & Tangren, 1999; Reid, 1997) and that verb errors account for the most common type of errors (Ferris, 2009; Foin & Lange, 2007; Frodesen, 2009; Frodesen & Starna, 1999; Mikesell, 2007; Reid, 1997). The writing of generation 1.5 students has also been characterized by a combination of errors found in L1 and L2 (Ferris, 2009), and research has pointed to lexical problems, such as unsuccessful idiomatic expressions and register-inappropriate lexical choices, as common problems in generation 1.5 students’ writing (e.g., Ferris, 2009; Frodesen, 2009; Frodesen & Starna, 1999; Reid, 1997). However, Nakamura’s (2010, p. 105) study revealed that the advanced fluency of these ‘ear learners’ help them with lexical facility (i.e., “putting words together idiomatically”), flexibility (i.e., “access to alternatives”) and intuition (“ability to judge what ‘sounds right’ or what does not”).

More recent large-scale quantitative research comparing the writing of generation 1.5, international students, and native-speaking students presents a much more complex picture regarding error patterns (e.g., di Gennaro, 2009, 2011; Doolan, 2011; Doolan & Miller, 2012). More specifically, while Doolan and Miller (2012) found many more errors on generation 1.5 student writing when compared to L1 student writing, especially with respect to verbs, prepositional phrases, and word form, Doolan (2011) found that errors were significantly fewer in the writing of generation 1.5 students than of international students and that generation 1.5 students scored significantly higher in terms of holistic writing quality than the latter. Doolan (2011) argues that the generation 1.5 student writing was actually closer to the L1 student writing sample in his dissertation study. He concluded that “generation 1.5 writers closely resemble the
errors of L1 writers at both developmental and first-year composition (FYC) levels [of the samples in the study]” (Doolan, 2011, p. 131).

Moreover, di Gennaro’s (2009) analyses using a Rash measurement model revealed no difference in the writing of generation 1.5 and international students’ in terms of grammatical, cohesive, or sociolinguistic control. However, a whole-group analysis revealed that generation 1.5 students scored significantly better in rhetorical control than international students. The author posits that generation 1.5 students may “adopt essay organization patterns learned in US high schools, which likely correspond to the expectations of the essay raters in [her] study” (p. 551). Further, a separate-group analysis indicated differences in length and content, with international students’ texts being shorter but demonstrating a greater ease with content control.

In her larger dissertation study, however, di Gennaro’s (2011) findings show quite different trends. First, when using a many-faceted Rash whole-group analysis, she found that international students performed better than generation 1.5 students. Separate-group analyses revealed that international students scored highest for grammatical control and lowest for sociopragmatic control whereas generation 1.5 students’ performance was the opposite: best in sociopragmatic control and lowest in grammatical control. In follow-up qualitative analyses, di Gennaro (2011) found that register knowledge played an important role in the students’ performances. For instance, “international students’ use of sociopragmatic markers reflected a tendency to draw on personal opinions and other non-academic sources” (p. 5), and generation 1.5 students’ grammatical errors pointed to lack of awareness of grammatical features of academic writing.

These apparently conflicting findings may be the result of very different research methodologies and data analyses. On the one hand, Doolan (2011) and Doolan and Miller (2012)
used error categories based on previous studies and Doolan’s own qualitative pilot analyses to narrow down the selection of categories used in the studies, which were then coded both manually and using the Biber’s tagger (1988). On the other hand, di Gennaro defined writing performance in terms of the language ability constructs operationalized by Bachman and Palmer (1996) and used Rash measurements to analyze the data. In addition, two incidental findings of these studies may suggest further potential explanations for their contradictory results. In di Gennaro (2009), a greater diversity of scores among the raters for generation 1.5 texts than for international students was found, and the author posited that generation 1.5 students’ writing “may be more problematic for raters to judge, leading to greater discrepancies in scoring due to rater differences and not to student ability” (p.548). An interesting trend was also revealed in Doolan and Miller’s (2012) qualitative analysis of the error patterns in their study. The generation 1.5 verb errors found were “often situated within rather complicated clausal structures” (Doolan & Miller, 2012, p. 9), such as embedding and inversion structures, suggesting that these students may be grappling with complex structures but have not yet achieved a full linguistic control of them, and this “may represent a difference between Generation 1.5 and L2 texts” (Doolan & Miller, 2012 p. 10).

It should also be noted that these four studies did not simply analyze the same data or subsets of the data differently, but in fact used completely different data and data collection procedures. In fact, di Gennaro (2009) and Doolan and Miller (2012) appear to have been pilot studies for di Gennaro’s (2009) and Doolan’ (2011)³ dissertations, and are a reminder of the importance of testing research methods prior to carrying out large scale quantitative studies. The disparities reported in these studies point, nonetheless, to the rather fragmented knowledge base

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³ The sometimes lengthy publication process in some fields in academia is most likely the reason for Doolan and Miller’s (2012) pilot study being published after Doolan’s (2011) dissertation was completed.
we currently have of linguistic features in generation 1.5 students’ writing, and they further reflect not only the diversity of these students but also how different and unique their needs may be from international students.

Although composition courses in American post-secondary institutions are far from homogeneous (Canagarajah, 2006; Matsuda, 1999; 2006; Tardy, 2006; 2011), research on multilingual students’ literacies has focused primarily on these students’ experiences from the perspective of L2 specialists and parallels to the field of composition and rhetoric are rarely drawn. In other orders, when exploring the academic literacies of multilingual students, applied linguistics researchers have not compared the multilingual writers’ experiences to those of native-speaking students. Exceptions are the linguistic analyses of Doolan (2011; 2013), Doolan and Miller (2012), Connerty (2009), which compare the language features of international, generation 1.5, and native-speaking writers, and Crossley and McNamara (2009; 2011), which compare texts written by L2 writers (both ESL and EFL learners) and native-speaking students. These studies’ primary focus was on the multilingual students’ writing, and native-speakers texts served as a base-line comparison for their analyses. Thus, the features of native-speakers’ written language are reported in comparison to multilingual students’ writing in those works.

Overall, these comparative linguistic analyses show that the writing of native-speakers is significantly closer to those of generation 1.5 students than that of international students in terms of holistic scores, error types (i.e., spelling, word choice, word errors, subject-verb agreement, determiners, prepositional phrases, verb tense, verb form), and number of words per text. These studies also indicate that, though not statistically significant when compared to the writing of generation 1.5 students, the native-speakers’ texts received the highest holistic scores and presented the fewest errors in the categories listed above.
2.4 Undergraduate Students’ Academic Literacy Needs in Higher Education

In this section, I provide a brief account of research on overall college demands and then consider whether composition courses have prepared multilingual students’ for these demands and their literacy needs. I will conclude the section by examining scholars’ recommendations on how we can better address the needs of multilingual writers.

2.4.1 College Demands

It is important to keep in mind that the findings discussed here represent expectations that the three student populations, generation 1.5, international, and native-speaking students are likely to encounter in higher education. Much of the research on post-secondary writing demands is on typical writing assignments and assessment criteria, as investigated in the WAC movement or on issues related to language, rhetoric and audience in majors like Business, Engineering and Nursing, examined in ESP and EAP research (Reid, 2001). Further, studies exploring multilingual writers’ experiences and faculty responses to their writing in college have included both international and generation 1.5 students, even when specific labels are not used (e.g., Leki, 2007).

Despite commonly held views that writing and reading are central to success in college, what different lines of inquiry have shown is that little writing may be done in undergraduate classes in particular in lower-level courses, although some majors may require more writing and reading assignments than others (Reid, 2001; Leki, 2007; Moran, 2013). Multilingual writers are likely to do even less writing given all the group-work tasks assigned in college, which are conducive to students’ distributing responsibilities that often do not include multilingual writers in charge of the write-up (Leki, 2007). Further, reading assignments in undergraduate courses are
described as being disconnected from writing a lot of times, including in composition courses (Leki, 2007).

Additionally, there are important differences between English and ESL departments and subject-area courses with respect to what they value in terms of writing quality as well as the types of writing and reading assignments requested (Hirano, 2011; Leki, 2007; Leki & Carson, 1997; Leki et al., 2008; Reid, 2001; Russell et al., 2009). The overall picture is that English and ESL instructors show a greater concern with undergraduate students’ linguistic and rhetorical command, whereas professors from other disciplines are more preoccupied with content and tend to overlook language issues (e.g., Bridgeman & Carlson, 1984; Hirano, 2011; Johns, 1991; Leki & Carson, 1997; Leki, 2007; Santos, 1988; Zamel, 1995). Nonetheless, certain language errors, such as article omission and subject deletion (commonly reported patterns in international students’ writing), are more stigmatized than others and can cause faculty more distraction and frustration (Leki et al., 2008). The nature of assignments taught in composition courses seems distant from those of subject-area courses as the former focus primarily on genres (e.g., narratives, research papers, argumentative essays) that are not found in the subject-area courses, which mostly involve informative types of writing, including reports, proposals, and summaries without analysis (Leki, 2007; Leki & Carson, 1997; Melzer, 2003; Reid, 2001).

That research has also suggested that despite the many linguistic and often cultural and sociopolitical challenges multilingual students face, many of them develop strategies to cope with their literacy needs and that a strong support system and relationships with faculty and classmates can help these students succeed in college (e.g., Adamson, 1990, 1993; Hirano, 2011; Leki, 1995, 1999, 2003, 2007; Robdy, 1999; Riazantseva, 2012).

Finally, research on college readiness and retention indicates that the following skills are
important for academic success in higher education: cross-disciplinary skills, knowledge, and dispositions (Conley & McLaughy, 2012) for these students “engage in learning experiences that involve them seeking, evaluating, and integrating information as well as developing reading and writing skills that contribute to construction of ideas and insights” (Donham, 2014, p. 7). Other behaviors and skills reported to be essential for college success include: intellectual openness, inquisitiveness, interpretation of data and factual information, problem solving, and precision (Conley, 2007). Similarly, Donham (2014) points out that the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing lists the following dispositions that are directly related to student success: curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition.

2.5 Multilingual Students’ Academic Literacy Needs in Composition Classes

In light of the findings reported above, it seems that composition classes – with their focus on genres less common in other discourse communities and grammar and mechanics, especially in ‘ESL composition classes’ – may not be preparing undergraduate students in general and multilingual students in particular for the writing demands of courses across the curriculum or classes in their majors. Additionally, certain literacy skills have been argued to be universal in successful written communication, such as knowledge of discourse communities, subject matter, genre, rhetoric, and writing processes (Beaufort, 2005; Johns, 1997), yet these do not appear central to the curricula of most composition classes as previously suggested. It should be noted, however, that research also shows that even though ESL writing classes may not adequately prepare students for college demands, multilingual writers tend to find ESL writing classes friendly and low stakes and believe that these courses help them practice their English (Leki, 2007; Leki & Carson, 1997).
In addition, most composition courses for multilingual writers are actually designed by ESL writing programs to meet the needs of international students and not those of generation 1.5 students (Harklau, 2000; Harklau, Siegal & Losey, 1999; Matsuda, 2008). As Matsuda (2008) explains, the foundations of these courses were developed over half a century ago when the majority of multilingual writers were indeed international students. However, with the 1965 Immigration Act, which allowed “more equitable distribution of visas to applicants throughout the world” (Roberge, 2009, p. 8), and the beginning of open admissions at community and urban colleges (Matsuda, 2008), the influx of generation 1.5 students in postsecondary settings in the U.S. has increased rapidly. Nevertheless, as Matsuda (2008) pointedly argue, “ESL writing programs and teacher education programs are only beginning to explore the implications of the changing demographics” (p. 163).

Ferris et al. (2011) indicate that this is a problem not only in ‘ESL writing programs’, but in first-year composition programs as well. In their study on the backgrounds, philosophies, and practice of college writing instructions, both in mainstream and in ‘ESL’ composition courses, Ferris et al. found that many multilingual students take general first-year composition courses but that instructors are not well prepared to deal with these students’ needs. Specifically, their general results revealed that most instructors, in attempting to adapt to responding to L2 writers’ texts, provided detailed feedback on language errors. Additionally, many teachers believed they were addressing these students’ needs by referring them to external resources, such as sending them to ESL composition sections or to the writing center. Still some instructors were completely oblivious to the fact that they had L2 students in their classes, and some were aware

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4 L2 is the terminology used in Ferris et al. (2011), and whether these are international or generation 1.5 students is not clear, although a combination of both is the most likely scenario.
of it but did not believe that students’ language background are relevant and that they have specific needs. These findings seem to reflect prevailing monolingual assumptions in composition studies, which, according to Matsuda (2006), enable a ‘myth of linguistic homogeneity’.

Although these findings may seem disconcerting, Belcher (2012) remind us, however, that “the picture is by no means completely bleak” (p. 133) when we consider the promising possibilities documented by researchers of their own classroom efforts. For example, in John’s (1990, 1997, 2009a, 2009b) ‘socioliterate approaches’, students can explore, as trained genre analysts or ethnographers, genres and demands of subject-area courses linked to their English for academic purposes (EAP) classes. Benesch (2001), as cited in Belcher (2012) also reports on similar approaches with linked classes although in her courses she emphasizes a “more critical theoretical perspective, arguing for not just needs but ‘rights’ analysis” (Belcher, 2012, p. 134). Another published account of linked classes is found in Murie and Fitzpatrick (2009) in which the authors describe in great detail the ‘Commanding English program’ at the University of Minnesota where they teach. This is a first-year writing program tailored to generation 1.5 students that offers, through linked courses, reading support courses connected to introductory college courses. These linked courses also provide a learning community to students as they normally enroll as a cohort in several subject-area courses that are linked to the writing program. Similarly, Holten (2009) and Reynolds, Bae and Wilson (2009) report on their efforts to create writing courses designed to meet the needs of generation 1.5 students at the University of California Los Angeles and University of Houston, respectively. Both chapters provide extensive information from needs analysis and placement procedures to curriculum and syllabus design, and Reynolds et al. (2009) also offer samples of first-semester assignments in their appendices.
Tardy (2011) is another scholar who shares her attempts to identify language practices and raise awareness of multilingual writers’ needs at the first-year writing program at her own institution for she hopes to “provide strategies for others who may wish to examine their own local contexts with an eye toward self-reflection and potential change” (p. 639).

While these are encouraging endeavors of the type we hope to see more in both ESL and first-year composition courses, they have obviously been pursued by specialists established in the field and experienced practitioners but to what extent regular composition instructors apply similar pedagogical approaches is a question that remains unanswered. I now discuss several more pedagogical implications put forth by scholars on how to meet multilingual students’ academic literacy needs.

2.6 Meeting Multilingual Students’ Literacy Needs in Composition Courses

First, placement options in composition classes are not clear for generation 1.5 students since post-secondary institutions follow their own assessment criteria for U.S. high-school graduates (Roberge, 2009). Accordingly, generation 1.5 students are often placed in a host of classes, such as ESL, Basic, and mainstream classes. In most institutions, nonetheless, these students are sent to ESL composition classes, given their perceived language needs and the fact that special programs tailored to generation 1.5 students (like the ones mentioned above) are not normally financially viable (Matsuda, 2008). Thus, ESL instructors trained to teach writing to international students should first recognize and accept the fact that they will most likely continue to have a diverse population of multilingual writers in their classes. Their efforts might be more profitably spent in trying to learn how to better serve these students instead of trying to revert the demographics back to international students only (Matsuda, 2008).
The next step advocated by most, if not all, scholars working with multilingual writers is that teachers must be aware of the different language and cultural backgrounds of these students and learn as much as possible about their complex characteristics and academic literacy needs (Crosby, 2009; Harklau, Siegal & Losey, 1999; Harklau & Siegal, 2009; Holten, 2009; Matsuda, 2008; Murie & Fitzpatrick, 2009; Reynolds et al., 2009; Roberge, 2009). They can do so by attending professional development opportunities, including conference sessions and workshops, on generation 1.5 students and familiarizing themselves with the literature in the field (Matsuda, 2008). They should, naturally, also strive to keep abreast of the literature on international students. However, since they are (or should be) ESL specialists, most of the suggestions discussed here pertain to generation 1.5 students.

Another effective way of getting to know multilingual learners better is by using biographical questionnaires in writing classrooms, asking students questions about their language and family backgrounds (Goen-Salter et al., 2009; Holten, 2009; Matsuda, 2008; Reynolds, et al., 2009). After seven years working on implementing and fine-tuning a writing program tailored to generation 1.5 students, Holten (2009) suggests three variables that are useful in considering whether multilingual students fall into the generation 1.5 ‘category’ and that could be included in such questionnaires: “(1) length of time in the U.S. schools, (2) the language culture of the students’ home, and (3) their parents’ educational backgrounds” (p. 182). It is important to ensure, however, that questions do not refer to dichotomies, such as ‘native’ or ‘non-native’ speakers of English, given the complexity of this student population (Matsuda, 2008).

Allowing multilingual students to “comfortably describe how they identify themselves” (Goen-Salter et al., 2009, p. 236) can not only help teachers better understand students’ background and inform classroom practice, but also create opportunities for identity negotiation
in the classroom. This can be accomplished through writing assignments that explore students’
language uses and identities (Goen-Salter et al., 2009), such as literacy narratives and literacy
timelines (Matsuda, 2008). Crosby (2009) further highlights the importance of helping these
students to develop content in their writing and to learn writing strategies. For example, Bloch
and Crosby (2006) introduced blogging in a beginning composition course for generation 1.5
students as “a bridge to develop [students’] writing proficiency without concern for issues of
rhetoric or composition” (Crosby, 2009, p. 117), and conventions of academic writing were then
gradually incorporated into the course.

In addition to writing assignments, readings should also be carefully selected with
generation 1.5 students’ needs in mind and should be “understandable to learners or made so
through instruction” (Crosby, 2009, p. 117), since many of these students may not be very
proficient readers. Thus, reading strategies as well as discussions of texts should be promoted in
the classroom.

With respect to grammar, instructors need to remember that while generation 1.5 students
may lack metalanguage knowledge, they may still benefit from some grammar instruction in
writing classes (Crosby, 2009). The use of unnecessary jargon about grammar should be avoided
and individualized instruction and feedback along with “editing exercises that target their errors”
(Crosby, 2009, p.117) could be valuable.

Finally, Matsuda (2008) stresses that, as reflective teachers, we should “learn as much as
we can about our own teaching” (p. 170) and systematically assess and reflect on our practices.
As part of reflective teaching, course content, syllabi, textbooks, and learning objectives will
need to be reassessed and materials and topics that may alienate some generation 1.5 students
will need to be replaced. For instance, writing prompts asking students to compare their home
countries with the U.S. or to describe a favorite holiday or tradition ‘back home’ are clearly inappropriate for this student population (Harklau, 2000; Matsuda, 2008).

2.7 Summary

In this chapter, I have defined important terms used throughout the dissertation and reviewed pertinent literature on the academic literacy practices of the three students populations included in the study as well as research on college demands. The next chapter presents the study methodology, research context, and participants.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The present dissertation is an attempt to bridge some of the perceived gaps in our current state of knowledge discussed in the previous chapters. It aims at systematically exploring generation 1.5, international, and native-speaking students’ academic literacy experiences in the same college classes from their perspective as well as that of their composition and subject-area instructors.

In the following sub-sections, I elaborate on the methodology employed, including research questions, recruitment procedures, data collection and analysis, and provide descriptions of the research context and participants.

3.1 Methods

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) explain that a case study is not a research method. According to the authors, “case study is a decision about what is to be studied, not a methodological decision, although it also guides how inquiry proceeds” (p. 255). This dissertation consisted of multiple-case studies, or what Stake (2005) calls a collective case study, in order to study and “generate in-depth understanding” (Simons, 2009, p. 21) about the different populations described in Chapter 2 (i.e., generation 1.5, international, and native-speaking students). Stake (2005) argues that understanding multiple case studies can “lead to better understanding, and perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases” (p. 446).

3.1.1 Research Questions

In order to provide in-depth analyses and a thick description of the multiple case studies, this study, qualitative in nature, was conducted over one academic semester, guided by the following research questions (also listed in Chapter 1).
1. What are the similarities and differences in the academic literacy experiences and needs of undergraduate generation 1.5, international, and native-speaking students in first-year composition classes and subject-area courses?

2. What literacy expectations and goals for generation 1.5, international, and native speaking students do composition teachers have and how do they see themselves attempting to help their students meet these expectations and goals?

3. What literacy expectations and goals for generation 1.5, international, and native speaking students do subject-area instructors have and how do they see themselves attempting to help their students meet these expectations and goals?

3.2 Context

The present study was conducted at a small public university in the Southeast of the United States during the fall of 2013. The university has five colleges, Liberal Arts, Engineering, Nursing, Science, and Business Administration, and offers 80 study areas and 71 degrees. With an enrollment of 7,376 students at the time of data collection, the school takes pride in providing a low student-faculty ratio of 16:1 and having the highest average freshman ACT score (26.4) among public universities in its state. Other statistics frequently advertised by the university include having been ranked number one on return on investment (ROI) in its state in 2013 with an average starting salary of 47K for their graduates. Despite its relatively small size, the institution is a tier-one research university, hosting more than 12 research centers and labs, earning more than 1M dollars per year from intellectual property, and financing 97M dollars in federal research funding. The university’s 400-acre campus is located in the same part of town as major military and private defense contractors as well as federal and private industries and
research plants. This city was listed in August 2013 in CNN Money Magazine’s top 10 cities “Where the Jobs Are”.

The school’s student body comes from 44 states and 82 different countries, and in order to better serve these students, the English department offers composition classes for multilinguals, and the school also has an ESL program and an Intensive English Program. The former offers support for matriculated students while the latter assists students in preparing them to attend English-medium universities.

With the help of one of my dissertation committee members, I was able to contact the English department chair and was granted a site approval letter to conduct the research at the institution. This letter was submitted with my application to the IRB at GSU, and the protocol for the proposed study was readily approved.

3.3 Recruitment Procedures and Participants

In order to recruit the students for the study, I e-mailed the composition instructors teaching “English 101S” classes before the beginning of the semester. The EH 101S class is a credit-bearing first-year composition course (i.e., four college-level credits, and upon passing EH101S, students can register for EH102) that follows a similar curriculum used in regular EH101 courses, but it has a “studio” (S) component taught by graduate teaching assistants (MA in English), where students work on papers and receive additional help on writing their assignments. The EH101S courses are designed for developmental writers who might need more assistance with their writing skills, such as multilinguals and students with low reading ACT scores. All international students are required to take this course instead of regular EH101 sections, and this is why I began my recruitment by contacting composition instructors in these classes. Generation 1.5 students, having graduated from American high schools, are sometimes
placed into the EH101S sections when they come into college with an “ESL” or “ELL” label from their high schools. However, these students have the option of taking a placement test given by the English department if they wish, and, if their scores meet the English department requirements, they can place out of EH101S and enroll for regular EH101 sections. Likewise, generation 1.5 students as well as native-speaking students with low ACT scores in the reading portion who are placed into EH101S, are also allowed to take the English placement test and are able to switch to regular EH101 sections depending on their score on the test, as happened to be the case for three of the four generation 1.5 students in the study (as discussed in Chapter 4).

Because the number of generation 1.5 students in the EH101S was very low (as identified in the questionnaires discussed below), I also e-mailed regular EH101 instructors and recruited participants from those sections.

In my e-mails to these composition instructors, I briefly introduced my research project and requested interested volunteers to contact me in order to schedule a meeting to discuss the study. I had already met these instructors at the department’s fall orientation since I was also teaching a composition course at the school, which I believe contributed to their prompt cooperation.

In our meetings, I explained the study in more detail and clarified to the instructors that I would also need for them to join the study if their students agreed to volunteer as focal participants. All four instructors I met with agreed to allow me to recruit students from their classes and to be a part of the study if needed. Two of the instructors (one teaching EH101 and one EH101S) were full-time lecturers with an MA in English and had previously taught these courses at the institution several times. The other two instructors (one EH101 and one EH101S) were MA English graduate teaching assistants; the EH101S GTA instructor was teaching it for
the first time while the EH101 GTA was in her last semester of the master’s program and had taught the class three times previously. Once I had recruited the students, I went over the informed consent with the composition instructors (Appendix A).

I visited their classrooms during the first week of classes and briefly announced to the students that I was conducting a study on academic literacies of different student populations and asked whether they would be willing to fill out a biographical questionnaire used to select potential participants. These questionnaires asked specific questions about students’ language background so that I could identify their status (i.e., generation 1.5, international, or native-speaking students; see Appendix B). Most of the students in the seven classes I visited agreed to fill out the questionnaires, and I gathered over 200 surveys from which to select potential participants.

I reviewed the answers within the same week the questionnaires were collected and identified several possible generation 1.5 participants based on their language background and whether they had graduated from an American high school, a criterion normally used in studies with this population (e.g., di Gennaro, 2011; Doolan, 2011; Doolan & Miller, 2012). For the international students, I had to select the ones who were enrolled in EH101S classes taught by instructors other than me as the majority of the international students that semester were in my own EH101S section. Once I selected potential participants, I contacted the four instructors whose students I planned to recruit and went back to their classes to talk to the students in person.

There were just a few international students in other instructors’ section, and I presented the study to all of them, but only four demonstrated interest in volunteering. Since I had a set number of international students, I recruited the first four generation 1.5 students from my list
and they agreed to join the study, so I did not need to recruit any of the other generation 1.5 students pre-selected. Since the pool of native-speaking students was quite large, I talked to five students who had demonstrated interest in participating in the study in their questionnaires and four of them volunteered to the study.

I then explained the study in more detail to these 12 students who had agreed to participate, and we scheduled our first interview, when they gave me their signed informed consent (Appendix C). These students were the focal participants and were offered a small monetary remuneration for participating in the study (U$40).

While 12 focal participants for a multiple case study might be considered quite a large number (Duff, 2008, for example, reports that two to six is often the range of participants found in multiple case studies in applied linguistics research), I decided to begin the project with a larger pool of participants because of the potential risk of attrition. At the time, I made the decision that more data would be better than not enough data and, if necessary, I could analyze just some of the data collected for the dissertation. Thankfully, however, my fears proved wrong, and no participant dropped the study.

I have, nevertheless, analyzed the data in its entirety and have decided to include all of it in this report for two main reasons. First, after closely following these students’ during their first semester in college, I began to see how different and yet similar some of their experiences were and how the entire data set, as opposed to selected portions of it, painted a truer and more illuminating picture of their realities and academic literacies. Further, it is my hope that, although not necessarily allowing for generalizations in the positivistic sense of the term, these 12 case studies will provide a more robust representation of the three diverse populations studied.
In my first interview with the 12 focal participants, I asked them which courses they were taking that semester and the names of their instructors. I then contacted two subject-area instructors per student and asked for their collaboration in the study. My choice to contact just two instructors for each student instead of the entire faculty they had that semester was due to logistics. Working with 12 students and four composition instructors proved very time-consuming even before I began to interview general faculty and observe their classes. Thus, I opted to limit the number of subject-area instructors I would recruit in order to make the study more manageable and data collection more systematic and rigorous.

I heard from most of the faculty I initially contacted with the exception of two instructors, so I went back to the list provided by the students and selected two more faculty members to recruit. I tried to choose faculty from a variety of courses in order to explore the academic literacy practices of classes from different fields, and a total of 18 subject-area instructors teaching the courses listed in Table 3.1 (the table also includes the composition courses) volunteered for the study. Because many of the focal participants were only enrolled in required general education courses, I had to recruit more than one instructor for biology, chemistry, and psychology. The instructors’ titles are also included in Table 3.1. Table 3.2 below illustrates the final numbers of participants in the study.

Table 3.1 Courses and faculty in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Number</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Instructor(s) Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACC 211</td>
<td>Principles of Accounting</td>
<td>Part-Time Lecturer, MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIO 119</td>
<td>Principles of Biology</td>
<td>1: Assistant Professor, Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1: Part-Time Lecturer, Ph.D. candidate (ABD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHE 121</td>
<td>General Chemistry</td>
<td>1: Professor, Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1: Part-Time Lecturer, MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECN 142</td>
<td>Principles of Macroeconomics</td>
<td>Professor, Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDU 115</td>
<td>Effective Reading and Study Skills Techniques</td>
<td>Part-Time Lecturer, MA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.2 Number of participants in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Composition Instructors</th>
<th>Subject-area Instructors</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of participants</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Detailed profiles of each focal participant are presented in Chapter 4, but Tables 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5 briefly introduce the generation 1.5, international, and native-speaking students, respectively.

Table 3.3 Focal participants: Generation 1.5 students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population Pseudonym</th>
<th>Ian</th>
<th>Jacob</th>
<th>Joy</th>
<th>Rachel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>S. Korea</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US High School</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in the U.S.*</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT score</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>34-36**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>N/D</td>
<td>Pre-nursing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
* At the beginning of data collection. ** As discussed in Chapter 4, Rachel’s ACT score is given in a range because she claims not to remember it. Yet, she was awarded a 4-year academic scholarship at the university that requires an ACT score between 34-36.

Table 3.4 Focal participants: International students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Time in the U.S.*</th>
<th>ESL in the US</th>
<th>Standardized Test score</th>
<th>Major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>David</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>One month</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20 (ACT)</td>
<td>Business Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Narushi</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>1 semester</td>
<td>567 (Paper-based TOEFL)</td>
<td>Electrical Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Xue</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>1 semester (writing class)</td>
<td>90 (TOEFL)</td>
<td>Business Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yu</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>One year</td>
<td>2 semesters</td>
<td>5.5 (IELTS)</td>
<td>Finance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.5 Focal Participants: Native-speaking students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>State of Origen</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>US High School</th>
<th>ACT score</th>
<th>Major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Aerospace Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carrie</td>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Pre-nursing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dalton</td>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tenesha</td>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Biology/Pre-vet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More detailed data collection procedures are discussed below, where I explain the different methods employed with each participant population.

3.4 Data Collection

Multiple data collection procedures were conducted in order to triangulate the data and gather as much information as possible about the participants, their perspectives, contexts, and sociocultural factors at play in the students’ and instructors’ experiences. Using data
triangulation to verify the validity of research results is especially important in qualitative research as the present multiple case-study for it offers a way to search for “convergence in research findings”, capturing “alternative and multiple perspectives on social reality” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, pp. 51 & 52).

3.4.1 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants. The students were interviewed three times during the semester (see Appendix D for the general interview guides): at the beginning, midpoint, and end of the semester. These lasted from twenty minutes to an hour, depending on the participant. The first interview consisted of questions related to the students’ language and literacy backgrounds and past school experiences as well as questions about their college classes, instructors, and expectations. The second and third interviews focused on the academic literacies they experienced throughout the semester and of follow-up questions from the first and second interviews, respectively. In other words, before conducting the second interview, I listened to the first interviews with each participant and developed follow-up questions along with more general questions about their classes and academic literacy practices; the same process was followed for the third interview. The composition instructors were interviewed two times (see Appendix E), at the beginning and end of the semester, and the subject-area instructors were interviewed once (see Appendix F). The total number of interviews was 62 (i.e., 36 with students, 8 with composition instructors, and 18 with subject-area faculty).

As with the focal participants, I listened to the first interviews with the composition teachers before developing more questions for the second round of interviews. Because these were semi-structured interviews, the guides in the appendices provided initial questions, but follow-up and probing queries also arose during our conversations. Hesse-Biber and Leavy
(2011) explain that while semi-structured interviews “rely on a certain set of questions and try to
guide the conversation to remain, more loosely, on those questions”, they “also allow individual
respondents some latitude and freedom to talk about what is of interest or importance to them”
(p. 102).

The interviews with the faculty addressed general questions about their courses, such as
course goals and objectives, as well as specific questions about how much reading and writing
were involved in the courses and about the instructors’ experiences and perspectives working
with multilingual students. Any other issues brought up by the faculty, including comments and
concerns about the state of secondary education in the U.S., although not directly related to the
research questions, are also discussed in the findings sections of this report. The interviews with
faculty lasted an average of 30 minutes, and were quite wide-ranging, varying from
approximately 15 minutes (with some Engineering and Math instructors) to an hour (with
Composition and Psychology instructors).

Although interviews are among the most commonly used data collection procedures in
case studies in applied linguistics (Duff, 2008), they are not a completely objective method, and
“it is important to recognize that a research interview is a ‘construction’ or joint production by
interviewer and interviewee” (Duff, 2008, p. 133). As Duff (2008) further explains, they should
not, therefore, be examined out of context, as if they were observations and facts. In the present
study, I view the interviews with the students and faculty as a ‘social practice’ (Talmy, 2010) and
as one of the main methods for generating data as they allow for an emic perspective of the
participants’ own experiences, needs, and beliefs. Nevertheless, being fully aware of the co-
constructed nature of qualitative interviews, I analyzed the data generated by these not only in
light of the research questions but also by comparing the identified themes to the data collected through classroom observations and artifacts, as described next.

3.4.2 Classroom Observations

Audio-recorded, non-participant (i.e., as the researcher, I took field notes but did not participate in the classes) classroom observations of the composition classes were conducted four times per instructor for a total of 16 observations, and the subject-area classes were observed once each (n=18). The final number of observations was thus 34. The field notes taken during the observations focused on student-teacher and student-student interactions as well as on instructors’ lectures, such as the material covered in class, visual aids used (e.g., PowerPoint slides, notes on the board), their delivery of the content, among other teaching practices. The focal participants’ behaviors in class were also observed. For instance, I recorded where the participants sat in class, when they took notes, talked to classmates, seemed to be paying attention to the lectures (i.e., by looking at the instructors and PowerPoint slides or boards), engaged with their phones and computers, asked or answered questions, and participated in peer-reviews and in-class writing in the composition classes.

3.4.3 Artifacts

Various students’ assignments (e.g., exams, essays, quizzes, homework) and lecture notes were collected, including commented-on papers and final essays from the composition courses. However, given the naturalistic and often messy nature of case studies (see Harklau, 2008, on the ‘messiness’ of naturalistic data), a systematic collection of documents was not feasible. I asked the focal participants to bring their assignments for all classes, or at least a sample of them, to our interviews, but while all students brought me something, I only have most assignments for
four students. Their organization and compliance in following instructions are further discussed in Chapter 4.

Artifacts from both composition and subject-area classes were also gathered, such as copies of syllabi, assignments prompts and rubrics, and some reading materials. I was able to collect the syllabi for all 22 instructors and essay prompts and rubrics for the four composition instructors for every assignment they had, and some prompts and rubrics for writing assignments in other courses, such as book and article reviews.

3.4.4 Research Journal

Although not a data collection method per se, research journals are a recommended practice for researchers working with qualitative research in general and case studies in particular as keeping logs of research activities is “helpful when information that earlier was very salient and memorable becomes harder to retrieve and reconstruct with time” (Duff, 2008, p. 142). In my research journal, I took field notes during the classroom observations and also used it to record any questions and impressions that arose throughout the data collection procedures. Further, I took notes about my decision-making processes as I developed interview questions and about apparent emerging themes I noticed while collecting data. At times, when my research journal was not handy or if I was not able to physically write down notes (e.g., when driving or walking around campus), I resorted to technology to keep a record of my thoughts by audio-recording myself on my smart phone. Given the iterative nature of qualitative research, data analysis is not restricted to post data-collection and begins to take place in the early stages of collecting data (Duff, 2008). Thus, keeping written and audio records of my activities, thought processes, and impressions about the data was instrumental in informing my data collection practices as well as my overall analysis and understanding of the data.
3.4.5 Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

A consideration of ethics is critical in any research project and its dissemination, particularly when human subjects are involved and the nature of the research is more qualitative. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) argue in their book *The Practice of Qualitative Research* that “the moral integrity of the researcher is a crucially important aspect of ensuring that the research process and a researcher’s findings are trustworthy and valid” (p.59). As previously discussed, in an attempt to provide triangulation and more objective findings, I collected different types of data and kept a research journal to increase the rigor of my interpretations. Further, I have tried to be as transparent and clear as possible in reporting my methods as well as in the data analysis section below in order to offer the reader full disclosure of how I have analyzed and interpreted the data and contribute to the validity of the findings.

Moreover, although often a controversial issue in qualitative research, generalizability or ‘transferability’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of case studies can be attempted by thick descriptions of participants and contexts (Duff, 2008). As Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) put it, thick description allows “readers of case study reports [to] determine the generalizability of findings to their particular situation or to other situations” (p.466). Accordingly, participants’ profiles as well as thick descriptions of their experiences and contexts are offered in the findings reported here. In addition, discussions are framed within previous findings reported in the literature in Chapter 8 so that conceptual commonalities and variation might be drawn.

Regarding the participants, every effort has been made to protect their identities. Some of the students chose their own pseudonyms, and when they opted not to, I tried to use names that were not at all similar to their original names while keeping their ethnicities. The sections of the composition and subject-area courses are not included in this report either, nor are faculty’s
names used. All data, including participants’ artifacts, have been stored in my personal computer, protected by a password. Finally, all participants were informed that their participation was completely voluntary and that they could skip any questions during the interviews or withdraw from the study at any time. A few participants, both instructors and students, asked if they would have access to the findings of the study, and I have informed them and the other participants that once the write-up of the dissertation was finished, I would share with them the findings, which I plan to do via e-mail.

3.5 Data Analysis

In the next sections, I explain the procedures I followed to analyze the different types of data collected.

3.5.1 Interviews

I transcribed the interviews with the focal participants verbatim using the transcribing software Express Scribe, version 5.50 (NCH Software). As aforementioned, before a new round of interviews, I listened to the previous interviews, taking notes and formulating new questions to ask the students, and I also took notes throughout the data collection phase in my research journal. However, I did not transcribe the interviews until data collection was over. The interviews with the faculty were selectively transcribed as I repetitively listened to them for recurrent themes, which were recorded on an Excel spreadsheet along with relevant quotes to be used in the findings. Recurrent themes in the focal participants’ interviews were identified in light of the research questions but also taking into consideration any recurring observations made by the students that were not directly related to the research questions. As Mackey and Gass (2005) explain, when conducting open coding of recurrent themes, researchers should look 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” (p. 241).

I manually coded all lines of the student interviews on Microsoft Word by reading and re-reading them and using different highlighting, symbols, and font colors to label the various themes. I also created a caption at the top of each Word document with the codes and labels in order to make future access to the data more manageable and quicker. I analyzed the interviews for each participant individually and once all interviews had been coded, I conducted a comparative cross-case analysis (Duff, 2008), identifying themes that were present in all students within their different student populations. In other words, I isolated the themes that were recurrent for all generation 1.5 students, international students, and native-speaking students in order to better conceptualize the similarities and differences between these groups of students rather than focusing on student’s individual experiences. While exploring each student’s trajectory in his/her first semester in college proved insightful and contributed to my overall understanding of the data, framing the findings in terms of student groups was imperative to answer my research questions and offer important ‘theoretical questions and connections’ (Lea & Street, 1998) concerning the academic literacies of these different student populations.

Accordingly, a total of 21 general themes were coded for generation 1.5 students, 25 for international students, and 17 for native-speaking students. Table 3.6 shows some of the themes identified in the focal participants’ interview transcriptions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Population</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generation 1.5</td>
<td>L1 usage/L2 at home/School &amp; ESL experiences in the U.S./Differences between High school &amp; College/Study Strategies/Reading &amp; Writing in College/Reading &amp; Writing in L2/Motivation/Busyness-Time Management/Digital Literacies/Socialization in College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>L1 usage/EFL experiences/ESL experiences in the U.S./Differences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be observed in Table 3.6, several of the themes were identified for all student groups since many of them stemmed from direct questions asked during the interviews. Therefore, once these recurrent themes were initially identified, I read over them again and used the marginal comments function of Word to provide more specific information about each one. For instance, for the theme ‘differences between high school and college’, generation 1.5 and native-speaking students had very different things to say based on their personal experiences. The former group repeatedly articulated that college seemed to be a ‘repeat of high school’ and that they did not perceive significant differences in the readings and assignments in college while native-speaking students constantly emphasized how much more difficult college was to them and how much more studying was involved. Another example of a sub-theme within the major themes illustrated in Table 3.6 was the frequent mentioning of family support and sacrifice under the topic of ‘motivation’ for international students. The findings are presented according to the main themes identified, focusing on the results from this more meticulous analysis of sub-themes.

3.5.2 Classroom Observations

The field notes taken during the classroom observation were analyzed in order to compare the instructors’ and students’ practices to their interview statements as well as to provide more rich contextual information about the courses and participants’ behaviors. For
example, although most students claimed to take notes during classes, I observed and recorded in my research journal that only four student participants actually engaged in regular note-taking practices during lectures. Similarly, students asserted that they paid close attention to their classes, yet the field notes from classroom observations revealed that some participants spent a lot of class time on their phones and computers browsing the internet, as my conveniently sitting near them allowed me to witness.

Instructors’ beliefs and claims shared in the interviews did not always translate into actual practices either as further discussed in the findings. To illustrate, while most faculty claimed to only include brief key points on their PowerPoint slides and/or discussions and to emphasize to students the importance of reading the textbooks and reading materials, the classroom observations along with artifacts, such as assignments, indicate that for some courses the material covered in class came almost straight from book chapters and exam contents were primarily from the slides. Of course, mismatches between teacher beliefs and practices are a common trend in teacher cognition (Borg, 2006), and any apparent inconsistencies found in the instructors’ interviews and classes are not treated as criticism of their teaching in the findings but rather considered in relation to their impact on the focal participants’ academic literacy experiences and needs.

3.5.3 Artifacts

Finally, artifacts were also used to triangulate the data and were compared to the interview themes and classroom observation practices in order to examine instructors’ expectations and students’ needs related to reading and writing practices in the courses they took. Students’ composition essays and their instructors’ comments were also analyzed for the focus of teacher feedback on the writing of the three student populations. Some of the composition
instructors asserted in the interviews that they adapted their written corrective feedback to multilingual students’ needs, thus it was important to analyze their feedback on the students’ essays. In addition, students’ language patterns and error types were generally analyzed since previous research has suggested differences in language errors normally made by generation 1.5, international, and native-speaking students (e.g., di Gennaro, 2011; Doolan, 2011; Doolan & 2012; Reid, 1997). However, because a detailed account of the students’ language and error patterns was beyond the scope of this paper, only samples of the students’ writing are presented in Chapter 6 but not discussions of their writing features. The samples are included to illustrate their writing and point to certain issues, such as register (i.e., colloquial vs. formal language), some common grammar errors (e.g., subject-verb agreement, article usage, verb tense and aspect), lexical issues (e.g., word choice), and punctuation issues related to sentence structure and boundary (e.g., fragments, comma-splices, run-ons).

Moreover, this analysis was not comprehensive but rather selective of representative patterns in the students’ papers as detailed linguistic analyses were beyond the scope of the dissertation. That is, although I tried to identify errors and patterns within the categories listed above, I did not establish any rigorous measures for this coding, such as inter-rater reliability, and do not report amounts of errors in the findings or use this examination as part of the main findings of the study. Rather, this information is used as examples of the students’ overall language and writing abilities and framed within a discussion of the various literacy needs and experiences in their courses, which were the major focus of the study.

3.6 Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the research questions that guided the dissertation and the various methodologies employed as well as information about the research site and
recruitment procedures. Data analyses were also discussed in detail in order to offer transparency regarding the methods adopted and thus contribute to the overall reliability of the study. The next chapter, Chapter 4, provides profiles of each of the twelve student participants and sets the stage for the main findings discussed in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.
CHAPTER 4
FOCAL PARTICIPANTS’ PROFILES

Not surprisingly, the life stories of the 12 student participants in this study, like their journey in college, were quite distinct. Coming from different countries and cultures, the generation 1.5 and international students could certainly be depicted as the most diverse groups of individuals. However, the many ways in which the native-speaking students’ lives and school experiences varied were also quite striking. While the findings reported in Chapters, 5, 6, and 7 are framed in terms of the experiences these students shared as three distinctive populations in order to answer the research questions, I believe it is important to include a summary – even if brief – of what I learned from and about each of the students throughout the semester I worked with them. The summaries are presented into three subsections, namely generation 1.5, international, and native-speaking students, and in alphabetical order for the sake of organization. With the profiles, I hope to bring the participants to life as I share their voices and stories.

Of course my perceptions of the students have been shaped by the interactions we had, the formal interviews and informal conversations I had about them with people who knew them at different capacities, such as peers, instructors, and teammates, as well as by classroom observations and the many unplanned encounters I had with the students on campus and the city where we lived. Being at small university, in a relatively small city, I often saw the participants at the student center and cafeteria, walking to class, at restaurants in town, and at church. Again, as described in Chapter 3, I have tried to construe my interpretations based on all the data sources and not just on the interviews or my own impressions of the students, but I am fully
aware that the depictions I present here are a reflection of what the students allowed me to see and how I perceived it.

4.1 A Note on Transcription Conventions

Because the purpose of the interviews was to get information about the participants’ background and experiences and not to do any discourse or linguistic analyses, a simple transcription system was adopted as recommended by Duff (2008). In the excerpts presented here, the symbol […] refers to talk that I have ellipted, and punctuation, such as commas and periods, has been added to aid reading comprehension. In addition, words in square brackets have been provided to aid in interpretation of passages while the words ‘laughs’, ‘laughing’, ‘chuckles’, and ‘ chuckling’ were included to show when participants engaged in these behaviors. Finally, words in parentheses included in the excerpts indicate my own utterances.

4.2 Generation 1.5 Students

4.2.1 Ian

“Just tired and work really gets in the way a lot. Um work gets in the way of a lot of stuff, like events, hanging out, studying, relationships, you know (yeah), it gets in the way of a lot of things.” (Ian, Interview 2)

Ian moved to the U.S. from South Korea at the age of 11, without his family, to go to school. He lived with South Korean friends of his parents in a metropolis in the South East of the country for two years, when his mom and two sisters joined him. They then moved to the city where this study was conducted. His dad stayed in Korea to work and send money to the family in the U.S. and was still living there at the time of data collection. Ian was quite reticent in talking about his family situation, and I did not pressure him to share more than what he was comfortable with, but from what I understood, he had not seen his father since moving to the U.S. His mom did not speak English and apparently was self-employed. In Ian’s words: “she
actually works, but she doesn’t need to, I guess she doesn’t need to learn [English] because she
doesn’t work under anybody, so…” (Ian, Interview 1). The baby of the family, Ian had two older
sisters who were also in college and with whom he communicated both in English and Korean.
The three of them lived at home, and the primary language used in the household was Korean
since the mother did not speak much English.

Ian came to the U.S. without much knowledge of English at all (“I didn’t even know the
alphabets really” – Ian, Interview 1) and was placed in ESL classes from day one in 6th grade.
After taking two and a half years of ESL classes in middle school, he passed an exam and did not
have to take ESL classes until high school, where he was placed in ESL once again. He
explained: “I passed the ESL exam in middle school, but when I went to [Name of school] high
school they made me take the exam or they made me take ESL again. I guess they needed people
to be in that program so I did. I passed the exam again, so I I I got out of it after one year” (Ian,
Interview 1). He attributed his success in learning English to the support from family, friends,
and ESL teachers and to his motivation to read books, study, and watch TV in English. In the
literacy narrative he wrote for his EH101 class, Ian provided more details about how he learned
to read and write in his L2, as seen in the following excerpt.

To briefly summarize the 7 years of my life as a reader and writer [Ian was 18 at the
beginning of the study as reported in Table 3.3], I learned how to read and write the
alphabets in 2007, I read my first book in English and understood in 2008 […] I literally
spent the whole summer looking up every word in the book on my little electronic
dictionary I used to carry around with me everywhere. It took me a while for me to even
call myself a reader and a little longer to call myself a writer. But the fact that I was
young enough to catch up quickly was a big advantage. The biggest advantage that
helped me to become a reader and writer in such a short period of time was the
environment, meaning teachers at school, friends at church, and books in library. On
August 5, 2007 my journal says “I wish I can write a journal in English and be able to
read it when I get older.” in Korean. I had a strong motivation to learn to read and write
English, I practiced reading and writing every day.” (Ian, Literacy Narrative, EH101)
Ian gave his mother credit for his claimed abilities to read and write well in Korean during his interviews and in papers written for his EH101 class. He explained that his mom always encouraged him to read books and to keep a journal in Korean in order for him to develop his L1 literacy.

My mom is passionate about books, she is the biggest bookworm I know. She would always recommend two or three books every month and chose all of the books on my bookshelf since I was a toddler. My mom has always encouraged me to write a journal, because it will help me greatly in writing. Also, reading the books she gave me have shaped how I read and developed my reading skills and vocabulary. (Ian, Literacy Narrative, EH101)

He confessed, however, that he did not engage in much reading or writing in his L1 anymore. His writing in Korean at the time of the study consisted of sending text messages to his mom, and all of his other activities involving reading and writing were in English and digital, such as “a lot of texting”, browsing different websites, and social media, specifically Facebook and Twitter.

Ian’s ACT score was 25, and his acceptance letter recommended him to register for EH101S (i.e., English 101 with the studio component as described in Chapter 3) perhaps because of a low score in the reading portion or perhaps because of his ESL status from high school. The cut off score for EH101S was not available on the institution’s website, and Ian did not recall what reason the letter he received gave for his placement in EH101S. However, determined not to be in ESL any longer, Ian took a placement test before classes started and placed out of EH101S, enrolling for a regular EH101 class instead. His declared major was finance even though he was not particularly fond of mathematics. He chose finance after orientation day and explained that although he did not like math (or science), he liked money, economics, socializing and meeting new people – important skills in the financial world.
A sweet, carefree, laid-back and very much ‘Americanized’ teenager, Ian’s world appeared to revolve around socializing with his – mostly American – friends, going to the gym, and having a good time. Yet, he was constantly preoccupied with portraying an image of himself as studious and responsible. Although not always quick to respond to my e-mails or text messages, Ian came to all interviews (though not always on time), but habitually forgot to bring his assignments as I requested. Throughout the semester, he kept bringing up the importance of “a good GPA” and the added responsibilities he had taken on with work to help pay for his tuition, as seen below:

I feel like I have more responsibilities (uhum) so I try to help my parents pay for my tuition that’s why I have a part-time job (yeah) and now I’m looking, like, to see if I can get a full-time job, so to be full-time and… and to have that and be a full-time student, it’s really tough, so (yeah) I’m not sure… (Ian, Interview 2).

He worked at a retail sports store and had interviewed at a fast-food chain restaurant around the time of our second interview for a manager position where he would make more money and “not have to work as hard”, according to him (Ian, Interview 2). He did not get the job, however, and seemed rather disappointed about it. The tension between having to work and juggle school and social time was frequently brought up in his interviews. In fact, work always seemed to ‘get in the way’ of more important things for Ian as illustrated in the introductory quote.

Nonetheless, like the other generation 1.5 students, Ian claimed that college was not very different from his high school in terms of workload and that his high school prepared him well for higher education. In our first interview, he commented, “I really couldn’t tell [any differences between high school and college]. I guess the classes are bigger, um, but [name of school] high school really tried to make the environment close to college, so, it’s very similar. […] English, Math, and Science I think they are about the same.” (Ian, Interview 1).
He was, however, the least motivated about school of the generation 1.5 students in the study, and his social life was undoubtedly a big priority. Being very socially active, Ian participated in various events on campus and joined different organizations in his first semester in college. He was also quick to give me a report on what movies were being shown at school or what games were happening on campus on the weekends following our interviews.

His social skills seemed to serve him well when his zest for studying or working on assignments failed him. Always very respectful of and courteous towards his instructors and classmates, Ian was able to get notes and help on assignments from peers and gained the sympathy of the instructors he saw during office hours for assistance on papers and assignments. His English 101 instructor mentioned that although not an “A student”, Ian was sweet and polite and was trying to do better. The interviews, classroom observations, and artifacts might suggest a different reality, however.

For instance, Ian was in fact often late to classes and many times absent in the courses where attendance was not taken. He also waited until the last minute to work on his papers and reading responses for the English class and asked peers to ‘borrow’ their answers for economics assignments, copying them down in class right before they were due. As a matter of fact, he did not even own the textbook for the economics course and claimed that the book was not necessary to do well in the class. Realizing my surprise at this statement, Ian – trying to maintain the good student image he wanted to convey – quickly added that he did not have enough money to purchase the book. Despite his less than diligent and very much teenage-like behavior at times, Ian was skilled at taking advantage of the resources available to him, and his likable personality and the hard-working persona he strove to portray indeed seem to have helped him develop strategies to work around his weaknesses. Although he seemed to struggle with finding a balance
between school and work, Ian passed all of his classes in his first semester of college, earning
two As (one in BIO 119, Principles of Biology, and one in FYE100, First Year Experience), one
B+ (in EH 101, English Composition), and two Cs (one in ECN142, Principle of
Macroeconomics, and one in MA112, Pre-calculus Algebra).

4.2.2 Jacob

“I was really pushed in high school so I’m really good already and it’s kind of like math, in
calculus B where people say it’s the hardest, I’m bored in that class [laughs]. I literally I don’t
do anything in that class; I just sit there [...] well, I don’t know everything, I look at the book
while she’s teaching the rest of the class, I just look at the book, see if I can do a few problems, I
understand the problem, like how, why this works and I can just do from there on on my own,
then it’s just needing to be careful not make any silly mistakes here and there, and that’s it.”
(Jacob, Interview 1)

Confident, determined, and a student athlete involved not with one but two sports in
college, Jacob could come across as arrogant if you did not know him as the quote above might
suggest. He indeed excelled in sports and school and was not shy about his accomplishments.
However, Jacob was one of the kindest and most helpful students in the study, always
volunteering to help others. He was on time for every meeting we had, including one interview
when he was sick with the flu, shared with me all of his assignments, and even helped one of my
EH101S students who was doing a research paper on soccer literacies, participating in interviews
and recruiting the collaboration of other soccer teammates for the project.

Demonstrating work ethic beyond his years, 18-year old German Jacob was consistently
ahead of schedule in completing his assignments and never missed a class during the semester
(according to some of his instructors, my classroom observations, and his own self-reported
practices) despite having soccer practice five times a week and matches twice on the weekends.
As if not busy enough with his six classes and soccer, Jacob claimed to have “plenty of time”
(Jacob, Interview 1) in college and joined the track team to start training late in the fall when
soccer season would be over. The track coaches did not allow him to train until then worried about his health and schoolwork. Such concern seemed ludicrous to Jacob, but he was willing to listen to them for he was a respectful student.

Jacob’s confident and hard-working personality appears to have been developed through his upbringing and school experiences in the U.S. – where he had to work hard to adjust to a new country and succeed in his L2. He was also determined to do well in college and “get an A in basically every subject” (Jacob, Interview 1) since he was not able to do so in high school. Coming from a seemingly privileged background, Jacob moved to America at the age of nine with his parents and older sister when his father was relocated from Germany as a high executive of a German car company. Jacob did not recall knowing any English when he first moved but said that he learned the language fairly quickly at the international private school he attended for two years; he then attended a different private school for the rest of his secondary education. He explained that they did not have ESL classes at the international school, but all the “German kids” were sent there, where they had a program in which an older German student was paired up with a new German student in order to help with his/her transition as seen below.

Uh, I started 4th, uh, 4th grade in [Name of School], which is a school in [name of town where he lived up until college] (ok) and the reason I went there, and I went there for 2 years, it’s because it’s a school that actually had half German and half American, that whole German, like every German kid that kind of came over for [car company name] went there, yeah […] you had like, they were always paired up with someone German that could do both German and English so you could learn it (ah ok), but you learned it within like 2 months, you could like no problem speak it. (Jacob, Interview 1)

Jacob’s parents and sister spoke English well, but they only used German at home. When around people who did not speak German, they used English, however. Because he had moved away to go to college and lived on campus, Jacob used German primarily when calling or visiting home. Jacob’s L1 literacy appears to have been the least developed of the four
generation 1.5 students in the study because of his early arrival age and the fact that he did not practice reading and writing in German very often. As a matter of fact, Jacob pointed out that he was “not a big reader or writer or anything of that sort” (Jacob, Interview 1) in any language. While completely fluent in German, Jacob explained that he was only able to read and write at basic levels in his L1, and – unlike his older sister – was most likely not able to comprehend or produce academic texts because he did not know “complex words” (Jacob, Interview 1) and experienced difficulty with spelling in German. In fact, he recalled reading just one book, called “Dragon”, in German during his entire childhood. Interestingly, his chemistry professor was also German, and they only talked in their native tongue during his visits to her office. She mentioned in our interview that while definitely fluent in the language, Jacob’s spoken register was quite informal and that he addressed her using personal pronouns normally used with family and close friends only. He seemed unaware of this, however, and the instructor said she did not bring up this issue to him because she noticed that Jacob did not realize the differences in how she addressed him with more formal pronoun forms.

Although learning to speak English seems to have been relatively easy for Jacob, reading in his L2 was a challenge throughout school. Calling himself a “slow reader”, Jacob attributed what he considered a low ACT score of 26 to his reading speed. He said he was not able to finish the test because of the reading section and explained that this was a difficulty he faced all throughout school. Unlike reading in English, math and soccer were two areas in which he had excelled from back home, and he decided to capitalize on these strengths once he moved to the U.S. with his family. In his words:

My love for these two things only increased when my family moved to America. Soccer and math were two worlds that remained the same as I came to America. They practically are my childhood. They never change no matter what the language is. Numbers are always numbers and soccer is always soccer. They both are things I could understand
through that language barrier that I had to cross. It is not like numbers would just change into letters – at least not that I knew of yet. So I held on to these two worlds of mine and practiced them more and more. (Jacob, Literacy Narrative, EH101)

The importance of ‘practice’ was often brought up in his interviews as seen in the literacy narrative quote above. His concluding sentence in that essay summarizes his work ethic and school philosophy displayed throughout the semester. It reads: “Through my two big literacy events, it is made clear that practice is the key to becoming great at something” (Jacob, Literacy Narrative, EH101). He indeed diligently practiced soccer and running sprints, even when sick, and also practiced chemistry and math problems time and time again.

His very first chemistry exam was not what he had expected, and he was very unhappy with his grade. He did not tell me what his grade was, but it must have been a really low score because he needed to make A+s in all other tests in order to make an A in the class. Thus, after reviewing the test to understand what he had missed and talking to the instructor about it, he began to work on different chemistry problems over and over, almost daily, to ensure that he would learn them and be prepared for any type of question on the exams. He also went to PASS (Peer Assisted Study Sessions)⁵ and did all of his required chemistry homework, plus some extra exercises, with a track mate during his mandatory six hour/week-study hall⁶. He also exchanged tutoring with another soccer player whose major was chemical engineering (i.e., he tutored her in math while she tutored him in chemistry) in order to learn as much as possible and bring his grade up, a constant concern for him.

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⁵ Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) were peer-led study groups offered by the university to provide students assistance with approximately 20 historically difficult courses at the institution. The sessions were facilitated by ‘PASS leaders’; these were students who had successfully completed the courses they led and who had been trained for the position.

⁶ Student athletes at the university had to attend mandatory study hall every week. The amount of hours per week varied according to each sport, such as six hours for soccer and eight hours for track and field.
Study strategies like this one were implemented by him early on and, along with his impressive time management skills, seem to have greatly contributed to his academic success in his first semester in college. In our final interview, he mentioned – looking back at the semester – that he would not have done anything differently, with the exception of his first chemistry test “‘cause everything is just everything’s gone pretty smoothly and easy. It’s been a lot easier than I expected” (Jacob, Interview 3).

Jacob earned all As in the courses he took in the fall (EH101, English Composition, FYE100, First Year Experience, MAE111, Introduction to Computational Tools, MA172, Calculus B, and CH175 - Chemistry Lab), except for Chemistry 121. Despite all of his hard work to make an A in chemistry, he earned a B in the class, which was a great disappointment to him. Throughout the semester, he emphasized that although the course was “killing him” (Jacob, Interview 2) and that he knew bringing his grade up to an A would be a difficult task, he was still determined to do whatever it took to “get that A” (Jacob, Interview 1). Thus, the realization that he would need nothing short of 100 on the final exam was a “bummer” (Jacob, Interview 2). He explained how this math worked as follows, “And chemistry in order to have an A, I have to get 100 on the exam, nothing below that, but in order to have a B in that class, I have to get a 55 at least” (Jacob, Interview 3). He was relieved, however, that this was the only chemistry course he needed to take for his mechanical engineering major (“Yeah I only need chemistry 121. I’m done after this semester [laughing]. Thank God!”, Jacob, Interview 3) and hoped that this would be his “one B” (Jacob, Interview 3) in college.

Such ambitious goals were also one of his common traits. In our final interview, he told me about his grand plans for when he was done with school.

There’s two things that could happen. One, I take a regular, like, try to find a regular job and if I can’t find anything, my dad is the CEO of a company (uhum) and he always
invites like he’ll always take me in and let me work for him for a few years until maybe I find another job or something and actually the one thing right now that is the current plan is my best friend back in [name of town] who’s right now he’s doing a business major [...], he has a dad that is a surgeon specialist, a lot of money [chuckles] and my friend is going to uh found a company and then uh get me involved in it kind of like kind of a co-founder with me and if we ever have like any problem my dad could help ‘cause he’s a CEO so he already knows all that stuff and then the uh whatchamacallit my best friend’s dad (uhum) can back us up with money if we ever really needed it, like the thing is it’s only there if we actually do really need it like it’s an emergency (right) but other than that we are on our own but I think we’ll do pretty well actually. (Jacob, Interview 3)

These plans or dreams might certainly be seen as naïve, just like his initial expectations of only making As in college, yet Jacob and Rachel (another generation 1.5 student described below) were the only students who brought up somewhat clear plans for the future, and in both cases their families seemed to have played a key role in these ideas.

4.2.3 Joy

“Ehhh, ummm, actually, like, honestly, if like I don’t live with my cousin, I’d be like not study anything, like, my friend is like, he work really hard and then he can’t study alone so he has to drag me to study with him [laughing] (So that helps?) Yes, but like, you know, like I’m usually like whatever [laughs] [...] and then like, you know, like in the house, I probably, I’m the most like not smart one, cause they are all, like, made all As, and I’m like, oh my Gosh [...] if I at least I have one B, they’ll be like “Why you so not smart?”[whispering], things like that, I’m like ‘Okay’[laughs].” (Joy, Interview 3)

The ‘American’ name that Joy had adopted since coming to the U.S. was a bit unusual as it was not a regular proper name but a common noun with a positive connotation, so we (i.e., Joy and I) tried to emulate it by choosing the pseudonym ‘Joy’, and I believe no other name could better represent Joy’s bubbly and happy personality. Always cheerful and laughing, even when talking about her insecurities as in the quote above, Joy was a delight to be around. Although quiet and seemingly shy in her classes, Joy was very friendly and actually talkative once she got to know people. Our interviews lasted the longest among all participants, and every time she saw me on campus or at the restaurant where she worked (located just a couple of blocks from my house), she would come up to me and talk for several minutes. As she put it “So they are gonna
think, they are like, she really quiet but the people who actually know me is like ‘okay you are crazy’ [laughing]” (Joy, Interview 1).

Always very humble, she claimed to be “lazy” several times during our interviews and to be the least smart in her family as indicated in the introductory quote. I feel, however, that nothing could be further from the truth. For instance, Joy responded to every text message or e-mail I sent her promptly, was always on time, and was prepared for our interviews by bringing all of her assignments in organized folders. She reported to have only missed one class the entire semester because she was out of town for an immigration appointment for her green card and to have no tardies in any of her classes. Joy also worked on her assignments ahead of time, attended PASS sessions and math tutoring available at the math department, and visited her instructors’ offices when she felt that she needed help. She also finished the semester with the highest grades among all the study’s participants, making two A+s and three As; and she never claimed to feel busy or overwhelmed – all of it while working as a waitress at a local Thai restaurant.

Joy’s story is a great example of the difficulties involved in labeling students as generation 1.5 discussed in Chapter 2. She was identified as generation 1.5 because she graduated from an American high school and indicated in the biographical questionnaire that she lived with her family and spoke primarily Thai at home. However, unlike the other generation 1.5 students in the study, Joy moved to the U.S. as an exchange student at the age of 16 to attend 10th grade at a public high school in the North of the country, where she lived with an American host family for one academic year. Her mother then moved to the U.S., to the city where the study was conducted, and Joy moved in with her and with her cousins and aunt (there were seven people in her household) who had already been living here. They all spoke English, but used primarily Thai at home, except with Joy’s stepfather who was American and did not speak Thai.
Joy attended three different public high schools and did not take any ESL classes throughout her schooling in the U.S. She explained that she did not need to take ESL because she had taken three years of intensive English classes in Thailand, so her “English was okay”. Yet, because of her late arrival age, her L2 was the least native-like among the generation 1.5 students in the study, as the excerpts presented here reveal. In the literacy narrative she wrote for her EH101 class, Joy described her first year as an exchange student in the U.S., and the following excerpt provides a glimpse into how she developed her speaking skills in English.

At school, I pretty much understood what the teachers were teaching well enough to do well on the test, but the problem was that most of the time I was just sitting in the class talking to nobody. I had no confidence to talk to the students that already knew English fluently. Every time I talked to my classmates, I had to repeat myself or I had them repeat themselves because we were not following what each other was saying. As you know, I did not get to speak enough English back in my class in Thailand, only the teachers did. However, I did not give up, I still had my host family who spoke English too. Of course, I spoke to them everyday. From time to time, my “making English conversation skill” got better. After that, I could talk non-stop and make friends with everybody. (Joy, Literacy Narrative, EH101)

Although fluent in English, she struggled a lot with reading and with writing to a certain extent. In our interaction below, Joy brings up for the first time her challenges with reading, which turned out to be one of the most consistent themes in her interviews.

J: I had like 3 year intense of English (uhum), English, yeah, so I’m kind of okay but I read, no, I have problem with reading. (Yeah?) Yeah…
L: Do you still have problems, you think, with reading?
J: Yes, I still cause like I don’t read a lot, in the test, ACT, the reading is “Oh no” [chuckling] (Interview 1)

As seen above, she appeared to attribute her lack of reading skills to the fact that she did not read much. In fact, she later added in our first interview that she did not like to read in her L1 either. In her words:

J: I, actually, I, I don’t, I don’t usually like to read, so [laughs]
L: Do you like to read in Thai?
J: [chuckles] No, no, that’s why [laughing]
L: You just don’t like to read?
J: Yes, that’s why is bad. [laughing] (Interview 1)

Despite the fact that she did not enjoy reading in Thai, Joy’s L1 literacy seemed to be strong, as it would be expected given her late age of arrival. She said she could read and write very well in Thai and that she often read online in her native language, in particular a teen website specialized in adolescent interests and issues. She also posted on social media (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) primarily in Thai, but sent text messages mostly in English because the keyboard and autocorrect function on her smart phone were not conducive to typing in Thai. The most reading she did in English outside of school was on social media and watching Korean drama – which she was “obsessed with” (Joy, interview 1) – with subtitles in English.

Her ACT score of 20 was the second lowest among the focal participants, and she considered it “really baaaad” (Joy, Interview 3). She added that she only scored well in math, but “failed” reading, English, and science because there was a lot of reading involved in these sections. Consequently, she was placed in EH101S (English Composition with the Studio component as described in Chapter 3) when accepted to the university, but she took the English placement test and was able to enroll in a regular EH101 section.

She seemed to enjoy writing better than reading (“Writing? Like […] I mean if I say I would say, like, my writing is better, a lot better than my reading.” Joy Interview 1), but she was not confident about her grammar and had friends and family, including her American stepfather, proofread every single essay she wrote for EH101. As she put it,

Actually when I wrote her essay for [EH101 instructor’s name], I have like people to check on my English, you know, grammar and stuff cause I’m not really good at that either. (Joy, Interview 1)

She would also meet with her EH101 instructor before submitting the rough drafts to ensure that she understood the goals of the assignments as well as after receiving the rough draft
back from the instructor to go over the teacher’s feedback. Her concerns about grammar seem to have been related just to writing, however, because she stated in her literacy narrative that she had learned that when communicating with people, grammar is not that relevant. In her words: “I gained my confidence in communicating in English by not being shy and actually talking to people. I would encourage people who want to go abroad that grammar is not what matters when you speak it, so do not be shy like I was” (Joy, Literacy Narrative, EH101).

Unlike reading and writing, math was Joy’s strength in high school and college, and she was considering majoring in accounting – although she was not ready to declare a major in her first semester yet. She took advanced placement (AP) math classes all through high school and excelled in calculus A in college; she made an A+ in the class, apparently with little effort, and tutored a Vietnamese friend of hers who was in the same class (the one she referred to as always making As in the introductory quote).

On campus, she was always accompanied by a core group of friends that included this Vietnamese student, who dated one of her cousins, her cousins, and Rachel, another generation 1.5 participant in this study. When I recruited the students during the first week of classes, Joy and Rachel were not friends yet, but they met a few days later in their biology lab class and became very close. Joy did not have a driver’s license at the time of the study because of her immigration status (she was actually granted her green card in the fall semester), so Rachel gave Joy rides, and they became inseparable. In fact, when I visited the university campus in the spring of 2014, I saw both Joy and Rachel in a classroom waiting for their EH102 class, which they were taking together. We talked for a few minutes, and Joy told me that she was going to Thailand for three months in the upcoming summer break to visit family and friends; she had not been back to her home country since she moved to the U.S. in 2009. Of notice, these close
friends of Joy we were all generation 1.5 students, and although I saw her talking to some American students during my classroom observations, I only saw her socializing with generation 1.5 students outside of class.

4.2.4 Rachel

“I can say I had to put lots of effort to get to where I am now as a reader and writer. I was lucky that I had teachers and family [parents] that supported me throughout my hard journey of learning a different language and becoming a better reader and writer. [...] Although it took me two years to learn all the basics in English, I wanted to prove to everyone who ever looked down upon me that I am capable to be like everyone else, fluent in English.” (Rachel, Literacy Narrative, EH101)

The only participant with a full academic scholarship for four years at the university, Rachel had been an outstanding student since middle school, but her accomplishments did not come easily, and she had to overcome many obstacles to become so successful. In our interviews and in her literacy narrative for the EH101 class quoted above, she explained how she had to work hard to learn English and to prove to her relatives that she could be fluent in the language and do well in her classes.

Moving from Hong Kong to the U.S. at the young age of eight, Rachel was not fully literate in Cantonese yet and had not begun to study English in her home country. Her parents had planned to follow other family members and move to the U.S. when Rachel and her big brother were a little older⁷, but when she was in second grade, an outbreak of SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) began in Hong Kong, and schools were closed for several months. Her parents then decided to speed up their move to the U.S., leaving Hong Kong soon after the SARS outbreak. Rachel had only been in second grade for half a semester then, but she was placed in third grade when school started in the fall in the U.S., thus missing half of her second grade education.

⁷ Rachel’s legal first name was a common American name, perhaps because of her parents’ intentions to move to the U.S. Her pseudonym is, thus, also a common name in America.
She took an ESL placement test on her first day of school in America and was placed in the most basic level, where she said she learned phonics, vowels, and how to spell words. She also read extensively in the two years of ESL she took in middle school. She explained:

We read a lot because, you know, like, she [the teacher] was, like, she said that that’s you know uh the best way to learn English so she made us read a lot of books (uhum). Of course we started, you know, like, in the bottom like Clifford (uhum) and all the books, you know, like, those are kindergarten books (yeah) and then start from there and then, you know, you get, you know, you gradually get like the books get harder (yeah), but I wasn’t, it was like the hardest book was probably like what normal or like Americans read when they are like in 1st or 2nd grade (uhum), and we would and that was like the hardest in 3rd grade you know and then I read like Junie B. Jones and everything so those were like I guess like the reading part how I learned how to read. (Rachel, Interview 1)

She further added in her literacy narrative that reading helped her learn English as a whole. In her words: “I read many books during my two years of ESL class, which helped me greatly in grammar, spelling, and the language overall” (Rachel, Literacy Narrative, EH101). Her ESL teacher was instrumental not only in Rachel’s reading skills development, but also in her understanding of the importance of enjoying reading.

She always said that you shouldn’t read books just to get them over with, but to take time and try to enjoy them even if you don’t like the book. Authors don’t write books without purposes, they write them with meanings that you may not appreciate, but there are certainly people who do. Also, if you don’t take time to enjoy a book, it will take what seems like an eternity to finish. (Rachel, Literacy Narrative, EH101)

The support of her teachers and family were, in fact, a recurrent theme in Rachel’s interviews and writings, as the introductory quote indicates. She emphasized that her parents always had “faith in” her that she would learn English and excel in school throughout her childhood, and as an adolescent in college they gave her a lot of freedom because they trusted her to study hard and make wise decisions. She still lived at home with them even though she had been awarded free room and board for four years with her academic scholarship. Rachel
explained that she did not feel comfortable around too many people she did not know, and thus preferred to live at home as seen below.

I’m not really like uh uh the person like a person that likes to stay on campus (uhum) like I don’t like to go events or anything like that (ok) […] I know a lot of people like I have a lot of friends that live on campus and then that’s why I didn’t choose to live on campus (oh uhum) cause I don’t know I mean like um I like people but not just like too many people (uhum) you know. I like it crowded with my family you know but like I don’t really like strangers […] I don’t know I’m just not that kind of socialized person  (Rachel, Interview 1)

Her dad, who had a college degree from Hong Kong and was a businessman, spoke English well, but the primary language spoken at her household was Cantonese since her mom did not know much English and because the family strove to maintain their ties to their culture and language. For example, they only watched television channels they subscribed to from Hong Kong, played Hong Kongese music, and cooked Hong Kongese food daily – including when celebrating American holidays like Thanksgiving. Rachel was not a Chinese citizen, however. She was born in Canada where her mother’s side of the family lived; her mother travelled to Canada to have Rachel and went back to Hong Kong when she was two months old. Rachel had a Hong Kong permanent resident card, and explained that she considered herself to be Hong Kongese, not American or Canadian, even though she had not been back to Hong Kong since moving to the U.S. and had both an American and a Canadian citizenship (she visited Canada twice a year with her family, spending most of her summer vacations there). Interestingly, although their heritage was Chinese (her parents were ethnic Chinese and also spoke Mandarin), she stressed that they were not to be considered Chinese, as the following excerpt illustrates:

I’m not trying to be rude but like the Hong Kong people like in Hong Kong they don’t like to uh be called Chinese (uhum) too much because like um it’s really completely different so we don’t, I mean, like, we are not racists. (Rachel, Interview 1)
Rachel’s daily exposure to Hong Kongese culture and to Cantonese appear to have sparked her interest for all things related to Hong Kong and helped her L1 literacy development. She pointed out that she actually read more in Cantonese than in English and followed the Hong Kongese online news every day. She said that she had read more books in English than in Cantonese, but her digital literacies were primarily in her L1, except for social media, which was in English. As she put it, “when I get on the computer, it’s usually like Chinese Cantonese. English is probably like Facebook, Twitter and like school assignments” (Rachel, Interview 1).

Her writing in Cantonese was not as developed as her reading due to her early age of arrival and the fact that text messages were the main type of writing she did in her L1. In her words, “I mean I write in Cantonese but then like I’m not very good at it because I only had like a few years of education there (uhum), so I can write it but I’m just gonna have to like remember try harder to remember. […] Sometimes I text my cousins or like my family in Chinese” (Rachel, Interview 1). She further mentioned that her limited writing abilities in Cantonese were somewhat of a concern for her because she planned to go back to Hong Kong after finishing nursing school to learn Chinese medicine. Her plan was then to come back to the U.S. and practice Chinese medicine here as explained in the excerpt below.

Um, actually I already have a plan um like I might, I might like right after I graduate from nursing school I might go back to like Hong Kong and I’m gonna study like Chinese medicine (Wow!) and I might go back there and it’s like a 6 year program […] then I might just come back it’s kind of like um they don’t, they don’t like, they don’t, um, what do you call it, like? (Recognize the diploma?) Right, it’s like a doctor, doctor but you can do like practice Chinese medicine here like acupuncture and everything (oh yeah) but other than that I mean like you’re not gonna be recognized as like a doctor. […] See, I’m not sure cause I mean like my writing is not as great as like reading and you know like talking (uhum) and everything. Yeah so I’m not sure if….I don’t know like […] you’re gonna have to know like a lot of the terms like Chinese terms and everything, so […] Yea like I might know it in English but I won’t know how to say it in Chinese or something. (Rachel, Interview 2)
Rachel read several books in English when growing up and valued the importance of reading in developing her literacies as well as in daily life as the following excerpt illustrates.

I finally realized if I wanted to stand out from other people, I had to be better as a reader and a writer. Some people don’t realize how important it is to be a good reader and writer, but we use reading and writing everywhere and everyday throughout our lives. Rachel, Literacy Narrative, EH101)

She admitted, however, that she did not like to read much and did not read as frequently anymore. Nonetheless, she still read various recent book series that were popular among teenagers, as seen below.

Nowadays, um, well, I read [pause] um I don’t read much because I don’t really like reading [laughs] or writing but like um I read when like I don’t like to read the books that I’m assigned, I like to go find my own books (uhum) and I read like Twilight and I read some of the Harry Potters (uhum) and everything and then Hunger Games and everything but I don’t like to read much. (Rachel, Interview 1)

She was not very fond of writing either, and her writing in English at the time of the study was limited to school assignments, text messages, and other online communications, such as e-mail and social media.

Although she did not enjoy social activities and big crowds, Rachel was very friendly when approached by people and quite chatty during our conversations. She did not seem to have a lot of friends and was usually quiet in her classes, but she participated in group-work with other classmates and talked to anyone who started a conversation with her. She became good friends with Joy, as previously mentioned, and Joy’s friends after Joy invited her to join their lab biology group during the first week of classes; they became the core group of friends I saw Rachel with during the fall. She told me in our final interview that they had tried to register for the same classes for the spring, and I actually saw her sitting with Joy waiting for a class just yesterday as aforementioned.
Very responsible and disciplined, she explained that never missed a class or had any tardies in any of her classes. She also promptly responded to my text messages and was always on time for our interviews, bringing with her all of her assignments and notes from lectures to share with me. A deep thinker, Rachel demonstrated critical analytical skills and thought processes in our interviews when discussing the reading and writing practices of her college courses (further discussed in Chapters 5 & 6), and developed study strategies that best accommodated her learning styles and busy work schedule as a waitress at her parents’ three restaurants. For example, she studied every night after getting home from work at 9:30pm because at that time there was nobody home to distract her, so she could concentrate more easily. She also took notes during classes, which she reviewed later along with reading her textbooks and study guides, and went to PASS sessions and math tutoring when she needed extra help. She pointed out, however, that she did not particularly like going to instructor’s office hours, perhaps because of her reserved personality, if she felt that she could “manage it” by herself (Rachel, Interview 2). She did, nevertheless, talk to them about exams and assignments after class several times and also e-mailed her instructors whenever she had a question.

Rachel, like Joy, was very humble about her accomplishments, always saying she was doing “okay” in her classes and maintaining that she did not remember her grades when I asked her during our interviews, even though I had seen many of her graded assignments in which she had made only As. Thus, when she sent me a screen shot of her final grade report from her university’s webpage, I was not surprised to see five straight As (in BIO119, EH101, FYE 100, MA110, Finite Math, SOC100, Introduction to Sociology). She also claimed to not recall her ACT score because she had taken it “a long time ago in 10th grade” (Rachel, Interview 3). Yet,
because of her full academic scholarship, her score had to be in the 34-36 range as stipulated by the university. When I brought this up, she agreed that her score had to be “somewhere in there”.

4.3 International Students

4.3.1 David

“I know that everyone keeps saying like ‘Oh yeah you’re an athlete, that’s tough’. I mean it is, I just thought that for me I’ve always been like that because I did that high school hockey back in Sweden (yeah), but it actually is a time management skill and so I think if I were asked or if my parents asked ‘oh what’s the hardest thing?’ or it’s just…it’s just essential to do the work in on time and like don’t just do the work, do the work like I’m here to learn, I believe like that’s one of the biggest reasons I moved here to get a degree to like get into a good position to get a work later in life (uhum) so uh do the work in time, on time and with a purpose.” (David, Interview 3)

David, a student athlete from Sweden majoring in business administration, gave the answer above to a question I asked him in our final interview about what he had learned in his first semester in college in the U.S. As the excerpt indicates, doing his work not only on time but also with a purpose (i.e., to learn) was an important philosophy he had developed. Diligent, disciplined, and self-motivated, David had learned the value of hard work and practice from an early age. He explained that he was not necessarily a bright student, and understanding and accepting this helped him develop strategies to overcome his difficulties. In his words, “I feel like it’s essential for me to prepared, eh, like overall I’m not a really smart guy, I’m more of hard-worker so that makes it like easier to me to understand that I have to prepare myself, I have to study for tests, I have to do my homework like on time” (David, Interview 1).

His strong work ethic was also applied to his English language learning, and he explained that, “the biggest key eh for me and for my English that I that I speak today and that I write and I read today is come from like my, my self-motivated practices” (David, Interview 1). His drive to learn new things, including English, was a recurrent theme in his interviews as well as in his
writings, and it seems to have been one of the main contributors for his language learning and academic success. In his words,

[I] started to practice English again on my own and that felt great. I found the drive to learn something that I know that I will be able to use in the future. The combination of hockey and my drive to learn English had led me to an opportunity of coming to USA to study and play hockey at a college, an opportunity of success. So after I figured this out, everything became so much easier, not the tests, but I became self-motivated. Instead of seeing all of the obstacles in English I saw the opportunity to learn something that I knew was going to help me in college. I have a lot to learn to be a successful student, but if I use that drive that I had when I was a child, and with the combination of meeting the dream of being a successful college hockey player, I have a good chance. (David, Literacy Narrative, EH101S)

David was the middle child in his family, and his older sister learned English before him in school in Sweden, which fueled his competitive personality with a desire to learn English too, as seen below.

[…] the drive to learn new things that drove my literacy in English. I kept trying to learn because it was fun. I am a sportsman, I love to win and I hate to lose maybe even more, so that was a reason why I tried so hard. I did not want to be less educated than my sisters, as my sisters and I competed hard with each other to learn the English language. (David, Literacy Narrative, EH101S)

His parents also spoke English, his dad better than his mom, and they sometimes communicated in English as a family when David was growing up, contributing to his language learning from an early age. “My family had found a new way to communicate with each other. We invented our own discourse community. I had learned far more English compared to other children in my age” (David, Literacy Narrative, EH101S).

As an EFL student, David said that he learned the four skills – reading, writing, speaking, and listening – in school in Sweden but attributed his language proficiency to practices he had developed on his own, such as watching television series and movies in English and reading online news and articles about hockey also in English. When he decided to come to the U.S. to pursue an education and at the same time play ice hockey (he explained that they do not have
college level hockey in Sweden), David took both the ACT and SAT tests, but not the TOEFL or any another standardized English tests. He did not recall his SAT score, but said his ACT score was 20. He also had to take a proficiency test when he first arrived on campus, just a couple of weeks before the fall semester started, but – unlike the other international students in the study – he did quite well on the proficiency test and did not have to take any ESL classes and was able to enroll in regular college classes. As an international student, however, he was placed into EH101S, with the studio component.

His English proficiency was undoubtedly the highest among the international student participants, and his fluency developed rapidly during the semester most likely because of his daily interaction with other hockey players and American roommates. He pointed out that his friends had noticed this language development early in the semester, saying “I’ve been here for a month and they [his “buddies”] keep telling me like sometimes they laugh at me because my English, because of my accent [chuckles] but then they keep saying that ‘you’re getting so much better than the first time you came here’” (David, Interview 1). Later on in the semester, David also began to notice his language improvement, as seen in the following excerpt.

Um, I feel like I’m thinking more in English and getting faster at it (uhum) like sometimes when I was like telling something to the guys like telling a story or telling them something maybe I’m struggling a little bit because it’s in my head, I see it so clearly but I can’t get it into words [chuckles] but like small like conversations answers and questions are more natural (uhum) and actually the other day one of my roommates said like ‘Oh that was a good pronunciation” because like I used to say like in different way so yeah I guess I see myself getting better. (David, Interview 2)

Friendly, funny, talkative, and charming, David made a lot of friends with American as well as international students. These were primarily people he had met at the dorm and his teammates. He explained that although he talked to his classmates, they did not socialize outside of class much, and he pointed out that this was a big difference from his experiences in school
back in Sweden. He made a point, however, to introduce himself to at least one classmate in every class he was taking in the fall as soon as classes started, so he could ask to borrow their notes since he could not always understand what the professors were saying, especially at the beginning of the semester. I indeed saw David requesting his classmates’ lecture notes during my classroom observations and talking to them about exams and assignment deadlines. In order to ensure that he was on the right track and understood the material taught in his classes, David also went to his instructors’ offices multiple times during the semester, especially to his EH101S instructor’s and his studio leader’s (according to his as well as his instructors’ interview answers and as also evidenced through my classroom observations and field notes).

Always very responsible and courteous, David responded to my text messages and e-mails promptly and was always on time and prepared for our meetings. He shared with me most of his assignments, which he had neatly organized in different folders. David was adamant about not accepting the small financial remuneration that I had offered all students, politely explaining that because his hockey team was part of the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association), he could not receive any gifts from anyone. I then suggested that he discuss the issue with his coaching staff to ensure that he could not accept the money for participating in the study. He told me that this was not necessary because he was happy to help and was not volunteering for the money. After much insistence on my part, he reluctantly agreed to verify with his coaches, but came back the following interview saying that they were not sure whether or not being remunerated for participating in a study qualified as receiving a gift, so David decided to not take the money. Knowing how busy he was with hockey and school, I told him that I felt bad for adding more to his already full schedule and wanted to compensate him for his time. He then reassured me once again that he was glad to be a part of the study and did not mind at all not
‘being paid’. In fact, he added that he enjoyed our conversations and that he was not that busy – even though he had practice on the ice five days a week (at 5:30 am), workout practice in the weight room three times a week in the afternoons, mandatory study hall hours, and two games every weekend.

As with our interviews, David was always on time and prepared for his classes as well. He never missed a class other than for away games (such absences were excused by the university) and had no tardies in any of his classes either. As he put it, “I never missed a class. I can’t afford that. I need to go to class” (David, Interview 3). He also did most of his readings before going to class even though reading in English was still somewhat difficult for him. Calling himself a “slow reader” (David, Interview 1), he explained that although he was used to reading websites and social media in English when he was in Sweden, the reading load in college was much heavier and much more academic, which he found overwhelming at first. In his reflection essay for EH101S, he described his emotions and experiences related to the readings in the course at the beginning of the semester as follows:

After the first class we got a syllabus, and when I saw all the work that was to be done and especially all the reading I almost went straight to my computer to book a one-way ticket back to Sweden. It just felt too much for me. I remember the first four maybe five weeks of the semester. I read every night. Even if it were only ten pages to read until next class in two days, I had to spend both nights until then reading because I was so slow at reading. (David, Reflection Essays, EH101S)

He also told me in our first interview that one of his expectations for his first semester in college was in fact to become a faster and better reader. In his words,

I wanna be better at writing, reading, uh especially reading because I think a lot of; I’ve noticed so far that I need to read a lot for classes (uhum), especially because sometimes they have teaching up on the board and stuff that I don’t understand and so I believe reading a lot in the books, so [...]yeah I wanna be better in reading, probably be faster in reading. (David, Interview 1)
As the excerpt above indicates, David was not always able to follow the lectures, and reading the textbooks, asking classmates for their notes, and talking to his professors, as previously mentioned, were strategies he had developed to offset some of his limitations. Although he was very hard working and dedicated, if David was not a naturally talented student in his L1, as he mentioned in the interviews, learning various subjects in his L2 seemed even more challenging for him, but he passed all of his classes in the fall, earning 2 As (in EH101S and FYE100), and 3 Bs (BLS 211, Legal Environment of Business, EDU 115, Effective Reading and Study Skills Techniques, and HIS100, World History since 1500).

4.3.2 Narushi

“I still have difficulties talking and writing in English, but I enjoy talking, chatting, and texting with someone who speaks English. Again, learning English makes me expand my possibility and my future. I would like to practice English more so that I can express my feelings and communicate with English speakers better.” (Narushi, Literacy Narrative, EH101S)

Narushi came to the U.S. from Japan at the age of 18 to study English and electrical engineering. He used a study abroad agency in Japan, and they recommended he apply to the university where the study was conducted. His TOEFL paper-based score was 567, and when he arrived at the university in the spring of 2013, he took a placement test at the ESL program and was placed in Level 5 for all courses – reading, writing, grammar, and speaking and listening. After successfully completing the ESL classes, he was able to register for regular college classes and began his electrical engineering major in the fall. Because of his international student status, he was enrolled in EH101S and was in the same class as David and another international student participant, Yu.

He explained that as an EFL student he did not have any writing classes in Japan and had very little exposure to speaking and listening. The primary English skill he learned in his EFL
classes, both at his high school and at a private language school, was reading with a focus on translation. In his words,

In Japanese education, I can say there is no class for English writing, very few numbers of classes for English speaking and listening, and a lot of classes for reading. With the previous education system, we just learned how to read English sentences and how to translate into Japanese. We were just required to understand sentences that are written in English. A lot of questions on our exams were required to answer translations. (Narushi, Literacy Narrative, EH101S)

When asked if he studied grammar in Japan, Narushi said “not so a lot” (Narushi, Interview 1). Yet, he explained in his literacy narrative for the EH101S class that because of the exam culture in Japan, English classes focused not only on reading and translation but also on correcting grammar errors. As he put it, “Learning English is mostly for the entrance exam for Japanese universities; such as correcting grammar errors, reading paragraphs deeply in order to be able to translate into Japanese” (Narushi, Literacy Narrative, EH101S). He was 17 years old when he wrote his first essay in English for a class in high school and did not practice writing again until his ESL classes in the U.S. He mentioned during our first interview that he wished the English classes in Japan had focused more on writing and speaking (“I prefer there is more there has more writing program in my high school and also speaking.” Narushi, Interview 1), and pointed out that the reading and writing load in the EH101S class was heavy. He said, “It’s [reading and writing] so a lot for me [chuckles] […]Uh I think I need to work hard in freshman composition” (Narushi, Interview 1). He also added that he did not like to read or write either in his L1 or in his L2, which was the reason that he chose to major in engineering.

Narushi was always on time for our interviews and although it would take him some time to respond to my e-mails (he was the only student participant who preferred to communicate with me via e-mail while all the others asked me to text them), he eventually replied to my messages, sending whatever information I needed. He shared with me some of his assignments,
but forgot to bring many of them. Narushi was polite but very quiet at the beginning of the semester, and I had to ask him several follow-up questions in our first interview in order to elicit more answers and information from him. The first classroom observations also confirmed his reserved personality, and I never saw him talking to any classmates or instructors. Outside of class, I often saw Narushi walking alone back and forth from his dorm, which was across the street from the English department. His roommate was also Japanese, and in our first interview Narushi said he only sometimes used English outside of class when eating with his Brazilian and Chinese friends at the cafeteria.

Narushi’s demeanor had changed quite a bit by our second interview, however, and he was more talkative and excited about school. I also began to see him talking to some classmates, especially international students in his EH101S class, and he seemed more comfortable talking to me and using English in general. In our first interview, Narushi mentioned that, having played baseball for 11 years in Japan, he was trying to join the university’s baseball team even if as a volunteer since the semester had already started. Suspecting his behavioral change might have been related to this, I asked him in our second interview if he had indeed been able to join the team. He confirmed enthusiastically, saying that he had “met 40 teammates” (Narushi, Interview 2), all American students, and made many new friends. He also added that the American teammates were very friendly and that he had noticed a significant improvement in his listening skills since the beginning of the semester. In his words, “my listening skill has been improved very dramatically” (Narushi, Interview 2). Nonetheless, he still felt the need to continue to practice English in order to be able to fully express himself in the language, as the introductory quote indicates.
The readings and writings for the English class were also still challenging for him, and he often visited his EH101S instructor’s office, asking for clarifications and help with writing assignments. He said in his reflection essay for the EH101S class: “I still need to develop my English skills not only speaking and listening but also reading and writing” (Narushi, Reflection Essay, EH101S). Compared to the EH101S class, Narushi said that the chemistry, calculus, and electrical engineering courses he was taking were easy. He explained that he did not do all of the readings for these subject-area courses, but focused on the most important concepts and formulas, which he was still trying to learn in English as seen in the following interaction.

N: Uh about the writing uh like definition or some yeah…definition or some formulas (uhum) yeah it’s still it’s still hard for me
L: Ok. Is it different from how you do it in Japan?
N: Oh no, it’s it’s almost the same but… I feel sometimes difficult about yeah… expressing in English. (Narushi, Interview 2)

In fact, learning specific vocabulary in English was a recurrent theme in his interviews as well as in his essays for the EH101S. In our first interview, he explained “I need to learn I need to learn uh… English of some yeah specific subject (uhum) and how to say in English or something” (Narushi, Interview 1). He also mentioned that the chemistry terms were difficult for him, and he had to intentionally memorize them. In his literacy narrative, he discussed some of his struggles with learning certain vocabulary words in English as seen below.

I struggled with the meaning of words. There are some words based on specific culture. Some of those words can be understood easily for people who grew up in the specific country or culture, but those words cannot be understood by anyone who grew up in other cultures. […]I struggled with words that came from English which are translated and used in different meaning. (Narushi, Literacy Narrative, EH101S)

He also talked to his instructors for these courses, both during their office hours and after class, whenever he had questions about any assignments or readings and went to PASS for math, which he thought was very helpful. He was in the same chemistry class as Jacob and also went to
the professor’s office to pick up his exams and try to understand what he had missed. Yet, he mentioned that he had seen most of the chemistry material taught in CH121 in high school in Japan, and the class did not seem as difficult for him as it proved to be for Jacob. Prioritizing “whatever was due first”, Narushi was able to do all of his work on time, and did not feel “stressed out” (Narushi, Interview 2) with schoolwork even after joining the baseball team as a volunteer. He could not play in the fall due to a shoulder injury but attended all meetings and helped as an umpire. He was also running sprints to stay in shape for the following baseball season.

Narushi said he tried to attend most classes as taking notes and listening to lectures were helpful for him, but he missed a few of his calculus classes because he often overslept when taking a nap after lunch. He did very well in his first semester in college in the U.S., earning two A+s (one in MA171, calculus A, and one in EE100, electrical engineering), three As (one in CH121, one in EH101S, and one in FYE100), and one A- (in CH125, chemistry lab).

4.3.3 Xue

“Uh I think I have many problems in writing like grammar uh, but I think I’m better than other Chinese students [chuckles] [...] Yeah I write very fast because when I have the writing uh writing ESL class last semester and final test is writing essay about what they give you and most of the student didn’t finish it, but I finished it 10 minutes early”. (Xue, Interview 1)

Xue, a Chinese student majoring in business administration, came to the U.S. at the age of 19 as a transfer student from a large English-medium university in China. He attended the Chinese university for a year, where he took English classes as well as “basic business” courses (Xue, Interview 1), before moving to the U.S. The Business School at the university in the U.S. had established an exchange program with the Business School at the Chinese university four years prior to this study, and Xue was part of the third cohort of Chinese transfer students. At the time of the study, there were about 75 Chinese students from the exchange program on campus,
and four cohorts had been at the university, with the first cohort having graduated in the spring of 2013.

Xue’s English proficiency was quite high, and with a score of 90 in the TOEFL iBT, he only took one writing course at the university’s ESL program. He explained that although his TOEFL score was sufficient for him to take college-level classes, his score on the writing portion was relatively low (i.e., “under 20”, Xue, Interview 3), so he was advised to take a writing course at the ESL program. He explained, “I come here uh the tea uh one instructor said maybe I have to take uh he suggest me to take the writing class because maybe my writing skill is a little bit lower than my other skill, so I did” (Xue, Interview 3). When compared to the other Chinese participant, described below, Xue’s overall English abilities and writing skills in particular were in fact more advanced, as he indicated in the introductory quote.

He said he began to learn English in elementary school in China and claimed to have written and read quite a bit in English in his EFL classes throughout the years. He further added that the language classes he took at his Chinese university and the ESL writing course he took in the U.S. were instrumental in helping him develop his writing skills, which – although “better” than that of other Chinese students – still needed improvement. He attributed his difficulties in writing mainly to the differences between Chinese and English rhetoric as seen in the following excerpt from his reflection essay for EH101S.

I had many problems [with writing], especially in sentence structure and organization. The most important reason is we have different ways to think and write in Chinese. For example, when we write Chinese articles, the teacher told us don’t put your thesis straight forward, because the readers will think your writing is too shallow. But in English academic writing, you have to let reader find your thesis clearly. I felt uncomfortable when I have to try to change my writing style, and I had a hard time to find a way to change it as well. (Xue, Reflection Essay, EH101S)
Xue was in the same EH101S section as three native-speaking participants in the study, and believed this course could help him improve his reading and writing skills, which would be needed in other courses in the future. As he put it, “I can improve my reading and writing skills yeah just like take the class [EH101S] and use it at uh another class (uhum) you have also to write the essay” (Xue, Interview 2). He also added the following in the reflection essay he wrote for his class:

But I can see where my problem is in Eh101s class. I made some mistakes in my essays, from those mistakes I found out that my biggest problem is organization and always use the Chinese ways to organize my sentence structure. […] after this semester’s class, I can feel the improvement about my writing skills. I know that I still have many drawbacks in my essays, but I have the confidence to try my best to become better. (Xue, Reflection Essay, EH101S)

Specific vocabulary in English was a recurrent theme in Xue’s interviews, and – like Narushi – he explained that learning academic words and specific terminology was one of the main areas he would have to work on for all of the classes he was taking in the fall. For example, he said in his first interview, “Yeah I think the vocabulary is the…the biggest part I have to work in” (Xue, Interview 1), and later on mentioned that he felt he was learning new words and improved in this area, as seen below:

Uh the class first the class beginning there are many new vocabulary uh like psychology many academic words I didn’t know but when the time goes by I can recognize it (uhum) and yeah so some uh like the words academic words it will show many times yeah. […] Uh like umm on the information system class we learned many just fundamental vocabulary uh concept. (Xue, Interview 2)

Xue seemed very reserved and did not talk much during our interviews. He was also not very prompt in replying to my text messages or e-mails, and during the entire semester I was afraid he would not show up for our interviews and drop the study. He came to all interviews, however, and shared with me most of his essays and e-Portfolio for the English class, but failed to bring any assignments from other classes.
During my classroom observations, I only saw him talking to other Chinese students a couple of times and saw him approach his EH101S instructor twice after class to ask her to read his essays and give him some feedback. He said he preferred not to go to instructors’ office hours and usually approached them after class if he had any questions or looked up information online if he did not understand the material covered in class (“if I had the difficult, I will just search it online yeah just find a way to do it” (Xue, Interview 2). He believed that leaving his dorm room to see an instructor while in the middle of studying “waste[d] time” (Xue, Interview 2). Other than these few the instances where I saw him talking to Chinese classmates and to his EH101S instructor, Xue was generally very quiet in class, including during peer-review sessions in his EH101S, and although he took all of his classes with other Chinese students, he normally came to class – usually late – by himself. The few times I saw him outside of class on campus, where he lived, he was also alone. This is not to say that he did not socialize with other Chinese students, however. He was most definitely a part of the in-group Chinese cohort, and mentioned in our interviews that he did not know many American or international students and that his friends were mainly Chinese students, with whom he only used Mandarin. In fact, his usage of English outside of class and schoolwork was limited to social media and some texting (e.g., with his former American roommate and me) and e-mails.

The Chinese students at the university had developed a very unique group relationship through which they supported one another by taking the same classes, exchanging notes, and studying and completing assignments together. One student, normally a student who was more proficient in English, would be responsible for taking notes for a given class (sometimes this student would be responsible for more than one class) and then would share her/his notes with the other students. In addition, these Chinese students worked on homework together and often
resorted to completed assignments from students from previous cohorts, and Xue was also a part of this group dynamic, especially for general courses not related to his major, such as psychology. For example, he did not purchase the psychology textbook and relied on the Chinese note-taker for that class for all of the lecture notes. He also resorted to the instructor’s PowerPoint slides posted online, but used the student’s lecture notes for more examples and explanation. These Chinese students also completed the psychology homework and take-home assignments together. Perhaps because of his higher English proficiency, however, Xue was not as dependent on the Chinese cohort as Yu, the other Chinese participant discussed below. For the information system and statistics courses Xue was taking in the fall, he did not rely on other Chinese students as much, doing the work primarily by himself. In addition, he seemed to have written his EH101S essay on his own as he felt his writing was better than that of other Chinese students.

Taking just four classes in the fall (EH101S, English Composition with Studio, IS301, Information Systems, MSC288, Business Statistics II, PSY101, General Psychology) and not working or being involved in any extracurricular activity, Xue said he did not feel busy and had plenty of time to study. Yet, he skipped several classes, especially English Studio where he almost reached the maximum number of allowed absences.

An only child, Xue said part of his motivation to do well in college was to not “let his parents down” – who were his “sponsors”, supporting him to study abroad (Xue, “About Me” Page, EH101S e-Portfolio). In our final interview he talked about his motivations as follows,

Uhhh it’s [his main motivation] it’s kind of from my family I think cause you know my parents spend a lot of money to send me here (uhum) so I have to do something but not just with my time here so that’s motivate me a lot. […] And I also think as long as you come here you should do something cause like self-motivate yeah. (Xue, Interview 3)
Self-motivation was also mentioned in his “About me” page on his EH101S e-Portfolio, where he stated that he “will try [his] best in college not only [to] not let [his] parents down but for [his] goals”, which included pursuing a master’s degree in the U.S. His final grades for the fall semester were one A (in MSC 288, business statistics) and three Bs (one in EH101S, one in IS301, and one in PYS101).

4.3.4 Yu

“This is my first year in American college. It was pretty hard to me. There were many blocks to me. Language, culture, habit, and so on, everything was change around me. It was my first time leave my parents, I really miss my family. The classes were stress.” (Yu, Reflection Essay, EH101S)

Yu was 19 years old when he moved to the U.S. from China as a finance transfer student, and – as the quote above indicates – his first semester of college classes at an American university seemed very overwhelming to him. Like Xue, he had attended the Chinese partner university for a year prior to coming to the U.S., but because of his IELTS score of 5.5 and his score on the university’s placement test, Yu had to take a full year of ESL classes prior to enrolling in college-level courses. He took levels 4 and 5 for all courses offered at the ESL program and was able to enroll for college-level courses in the fall of 2013.

Besides Mandarin, Yu said he spoke Taiwanese “because Taiwan is here and [his] hometown is just the other side” (Yu, Interview 1). He also knew “a little Japanese” (Yu, Interview 1), which he studied on his own because of some of his hobbies, namely playing video games and Anime. Given the exam culture in China, Yu said that he studied primarily grammar in his EFL classes since elementary school, and did not do much reading, writing, speaking or listening in English. He claimed he liked to read on his own, however, and when he was younger, he read the trilogy The Lord of the Rings both in Chinese and English. He explained that he first read the books in Chinese, but he did not believe the translation had been well done,
so he decided to read the English versions as well. He did not feel the same way about writing in English and said: “uhhh I don’t like writing, plus my skill is no good” (Yu, Interview 1). He also pointed out that he did not enjoy reading or writing in Chinese anymore because he “had too much homework” (Yu, Interview 1) when he was in China and felt burned-out.

In our first interview, he told me he decided to come to the U.S. in order to improve his English, a language that is “useful widely” (Yu, Interview 1), and because studying abroad was prestigious in China. As he put it, “Uh Chinese like to study abroad if if someone go to other country, they are easy to find a job yeah and get married because they think yeah ‘oh you are so cool’ [chuckles]” (Yu, Interview 1). On his “About me” page for his EH101S e-Portfolio, he added that he came to “America not only for studying, but also for extending [his] knowledge, meet different people and know various culture” (Yu, “About Me”, e-Portfolio, EH101S).

Yu was very insecure about his English skills, often saying that his English was “no good” during our interviews and expressing concern that he would not know how to answer my questions. Our interviews were the shortest among all participants, and he frequently had to ask me to repeat my questions and for time to think before answering them (e.g., “uh uh let me think. Can you let me think?, Yu, Interview 1; uh uh I… I let me think, Interview 2; wait let me think, Interview 3). His interviews were also characterized by many long pauses and a lot of turn taking as I had to constantly ask follow-up questions to his very short answers.

In addition, Yu was not always prompt in getting back to my texts (he never responded to e-mails), and because of his high stress level with classes and apparently with talking to me in English, I was almost certain he would quit coming to his interviews. Yet, like Xue, he came to all interviews and shared with me most of his English essays and his e-Portfolio. He did not bring any assignments for other courses, though.
Perhaps because of his difficulties with English and the fact that he was homesick (as indicated in the introductory quote), Yu appeared to be very dependent on the Chinese in-group. He took all of his fall courses with other Chinese students, walked to classes with at least one Chinese student, and always sat among several of them during the lectures. Although he was deeply integrated into this Chinese community, he seemed conflicted about the advantages and disadvantages of always being surrounded by Chinese peers. He said that he did not think his listening and speaking skills in English had developed much because he used “Chinese 80%” of the time, which he considered to be a “big problem” (Yu, Interview 2). In our first interview, he said, “you know there are too many Chinese student maybe my listening and the speaking is no good enough because too many Chinese student” (Yu, Interview 1). Yet, he stated that he did not want to dissociate from the group because they helped each other with their assignments. In his words, “if we separate, the homework is big problem [laughs]” (Yu, Interview 2).

When I asked him if he had been to PASS or seen his instructors for help, instead of his Chinese friends, he said that he had not because he did not think PASS was helpful and that talking to some of his instructors, not including his EH101S teacher, was “useless” (Yu, Interview 2). He was not able to explain why it was “useless”, however. He frequently went to his EH101S instructor’s office and asked her to read his drafts before submitting them, and he thought that this practice was very helpful.

Although he did not do the readings for his classes in their entirety, Yu said he “previewed” the chapters before going to class in order to learn more vocabulary and believed this was beneficial for his reading development as seen below.

My reading is also very improved I think […]uhh before I went to class I need to preview uh the uh the book (uhum) so every time I I saw the the word I didn’t know before, I’ll look up the dictionary (uhum) and I collect more and more word. (Yu, Interview 2)
At the beginning of the semester, Yu said he was not able to understand most of the lectures, especially music and accounting, and claimed that for this reason, he skipped several classes. Later on in the semester, he said he felt that his listening had improved some, yet he still did not think he was learning much from attending the music and accounting lectures and continued to miss many classes. He also had several absences in chemistry because he was doing well, and thus assumed that he did not need to be in the lectures. Even though he did not like chemistry, he claimed that his chemistry courses (both the lecture and lab) were easy for him because he “already study this knowledge in middle school” (Yu, Interview 1). Accordingly, EH101S seems to have been the only course the attended regularly.

When I asked him about the attendance policy in those courses, he said that the accounting and chemistry instructors did not take attendance and that for the music class, he would sign the attendance sheet and then leave. This (leaving shortly after class had begun) in fact happened during my classroom observations of both the music and accounting classes.

When I came in to observe the music class, Yu was already sitting in the classroom, and the instructor was also in the room getting his the computer ready. There was a sign-up sheet on the instructor’s desk at the front of the room, which students were signing as they came in. Right before the instructor began the lecture, Yu got up and left the classroom. Concerned that he had left because of my presence in the room (he had waved at me), I sent him a text message explaining that I was there to observe the class and the instructor as we had discussed in our interviews and that I could leave if he would prefer. He then responded explaining that he left because he needed to study for an accounting exam, saying “Sorry. I didn’t know you will come today. Because I have a exam in next accounting class. So I just sign my name on paper and go back for preparing. Sorry about that” (Yu, Text Message on 11/12/13).
A similar episode took place in the accounting class I observed, where Yu left the classroom right before the lecture began. At the beginning of class, he was watching a video on an iPad with another Chinese student as the instructor returned exams. When the instructor called Yu’s name and handed his test back, he put the iPad down, but began to talk to one of his Chinese peers in Chinese (there were about 15 Chinese students in the class, and they were all speaking Chinese to one another), apparently discussing the test and adding up his score. Once the instructor had returned all of the exams and gone over each question with the class, he asked the students to give him the tests back. Yu then returned the test and left along with another Chinese student. Watching the students get up in the middle of class and leave, the instructor announced: “Don’t leave! We are going to cover Chapter 11” (ACC201 Instructor, Field Notes, 11/19/13). Yu and his friend did not turn back, however.

Not surprisingly, Yu said in the interviews that music and accounting were the most difficult classes he had in the fall, and when I probed why he thought so, he said it was because he had not studied these subjects in China and because there was a lot of reading and concepts involved, but he did not mention his skipping class as a possible contributing factor. At one point in the semester, he wanted to give up on the music class and appeared to have accepted that he would have to take the class again since he only had failing grades on his first tests. He added that he had not developed any strategies to study for this class (“Uhhh for my music class I have I have no idea how to do” (Yu, Interview 2) and that his Chinese peers in the class also had failed the first exam. For accounting, he explained that he did not have to read all of the material or come to class regularly because of the assistance he received from his classmates and Chinese students from previous cohorts. In his words, “because uh I can uh we can… exchange our idea between the Chinese among the Chinese student (uhum) and other student from uh they study
they study the accounting in last semester… yeah they will teach us something” (Yu, Interview 2).

Given his apparent struggle with most of his classes throughout the fall and his seemingly less than diligent behaviors at times, I did not expect Yu to make very high grades in his first semester in college. Therefore, I was quite surprised when I received his screenshot of his final grades: one A (in CH101, introduction to chemistry lab) one B+ (in CH101), two Bs (one in EH101 and one in MU100), and one B- (in ACC201).

4.4 Native-Speaking Students

4.4.1 Aaron

“I am a very hard working, sociable, and easy going guy; I rarely lose my temper and do my best to avoid causing problems. My hobbies include singing, running, and relaxing with friends. Some of my pet peeves are laziness, being late, general hardheadedness, and people who take the elevator to go one floor.” (Aaron, “About Me” Page, EH101 e-Portfolio)

I believe Aaron’s self-description quoted above could not be more fitting for his ‘good old Southern boy’ personality. Laid-back, friendly, and very sociable, Aaron had a desire to get the most out of his college experience and got involved with different organizations as soon as he moved to campus from his small town in Alabama, where was born and raised. The only student participant in the study who was in a fraternity, Aaron said it was “a lot of fun” to “able to hang out with a bunch of guys that share[d] the same ideals” (Aaron, Interview 2). This fraternity was known on campus for being actively involved in the community, participating in fund-raisings and community-service campaigns, and had a reputation of attracting more serious students. In other words, this was not a ‘party’ fraternity by any means.

Aaron also joined the university’s Leadership Education and Advising Program (LEAP) as well as the Aspire Leadership Program in the fall and applied to be an Orientation Leader (OL) for the spring of 2014. The LEAP program focused on helping first-year freshmen
transition from high school to college by providing support and guidance through older peer mentors trained to be leaders at the university. Thus, as a freshman majoring in aerospace engineering, Aaron was paired with an upperclassman who was going to be his peer mentor for his first academic year at the university. In the Aspire program, 20 first-year students were trained every academic year to develop their leadership skills and learn how to network and become actively involved in student life at the university; Aaron was one of these 20 students for the academic year of 2013/2014.

A monolingual speaker of English, Aaron took Spanish in high school but added that he “didn’t really learn anything” (Aaron, Interview 1). His mom was his primary literacy sponsor during his childhood, and he said he learned to read and write from an early age, becoming a good reader and writer throughout school. In his words,

My mom taught me how to read and write very early I was reading good sized book by the time I was in 1st, 2nd grade (uhum). Um, I was always one of the top readers in my class throughout school, elementary to high school. (Aaron, Interview 1)

He did not do as much writing growing up until high school, but claimed that he was a good writer and did well in school. “I don’t really do a whole lot of writing as far as like English stuff until I got in high school and there it was mostly analytical essays and stuff. So… I’m good at it. […] I did well [in school]” (Aaron, Interview 1).

Although he read several books growing up and enjoyed reading books that interested him (“If I can find a good book I can get into, I love it.” Aaron, Interview 1), he explained that he stopped reading once he got to high school but wished he had kept his reading habits as seen below.

Um, if I’d choose one thing to be different, uh, um, I kind of stopped reading as I got older and I really wish I hadn’t like I read a lot in elementary school and then once I got to high school I didn’t really read a whole lot, so…(Aaron, Interview 1)
When I asked him why he stopped reading, he claimed that he did not have as much time to devote to reading and that most books did not captivate his attention. As he put it, “I just I got involved in stuff and just didn’t really have time and there’s I just really can’t find books that hold my attention very well like I can start a book but if it doesn’t hold my attention then put it down” (Aaron, Interview 2). His social media practices might also have been a contributing factor, however. He explained that his writing and reading besides school consisted primarily of engaging in social media, and thus he was “used to reading the little short ones [sentences] and keep going” and could not keep his attention reading longer texts (Aaron, Interview 2).

Perhaps because of his outgoing personality, Aaron said he was in fact addicted to social media, especially Twitter and Facebook, checking the sites first thing and morning (“every morning I get up, check Twitter, check Facebook”, Aaron, Interview 2) and multiple times a day. He also “texted a lot” (Aaron, Interview 1), but started using e-mail more after coming to the university. He explained, “e-mail… uh I didn’t use it a whole lot until I got here and now I’m using it to communicate back and forth between different people that I need to you know” (Aaron, Interview 1).

Very respectful and in his best Southern manners, Aaron only addressed me as Ms. Luciana and called me “ma’am” more than 40 times in the interview transcriptions alone (not including our non-recorded interactions). He was in fact the only student to address me this way. Always punctual, he shared with me all of his papers for EH101 and e-Portfolio for the class but did not bring any assignments for any other classes. He responded to my text messages promptly and eventually also replied to my e-mails.

A “straight A” student in high school and with an ACT score of 29, Aaron said he expected “to get all As this semester” (Interview 1), but he also knew that finding a balance
between school and the different social activities he was involved in was not going to be easy. In his words, “But I’m also getting into a lot of social stuff so I need to find a good balance between that” (Aaron, Interview 1). As a matter of fact, Aaron hoped to develop better time management skills and study strategies (“One thing is uh time management. I expect I’ll be able to learn to get better in that um I wanna learn how to like structure myself better too like I like creating outlines for stuff but I don’t really stick to it very well.” Aaron, Interview 1), and he was also aware that he would need to work harder in college than he did in high school, as seen below.

Um one area I’m definitely gonna work harder on is studying like making good study habits (uhum). I never studied in high school and I still made straight As [laughs]. I have a feeling that’s not gonna happen in college (yeah). (Aaron, Interview 1)

His expectations proved true, and feeling “pretty busy” with his 15 credit hours, time management issues and creating better study habits became recurrent themes during our interview as Aaron struggled to juggle schoolwork with social events and a part-time job he took on in the middle of the semester. In our second interview around midterm, Aaron told me that he had just started working at a chain restaurant hosting and waiting tables, but he was still in training and said that he did not know whether the job would affect his studying yet. By our third interview at the end of the semester, Aaron had quit the job because he had found it difficult to manage working and going to school. He said he had plans to work with his uncle in the spring doing landscaping jobs on the weekends, but for just a few hours.

Being a part of various organizations, including his fraternity, was also time-consuming, and he explained in our second interview that he was still trying to learn how to find time for both school and socializing. He said, “I’ve gotta find time to hang out with my friends and yet still have to find time to study too and I’ve gotta find a way to balance that” (Aaron, Interview 2). His initial expectations of making all As had changed by midterm, and he was trying to
“shoot for As and Bs now” (Aaron, Interview 2). He had Cs in two classes (engineering, MAE111 and chemistry, CH121) at that point, which he was “really stressing out about”, but he said that he “still [had] enough time and [could] work on them pretty hard” (Aaron, Interview 2).

Aaron had been trying to develop study strategies since the beginning of the semester and found that studying at the library had been helpful. In his words, “I spend a lot of my free time like well if I’m not doing uh if I’m not in class or I’m not working or something I spend a lot of time at the library and and that’s how I’ve studied a lot so it’s really helped” (Aaron, Interview 2). He also went to the library with some of his friends for study sessions, especially for calculus, as well as to PASS also for calculus. He said that he did not exchange notes with classmates since he took his own notes in class, although I did not see him taking notes in any classes during my classroom observations, and he did not visit any of his instructors’ offices during the semester, except for mandatory conferences with the EH101 instructor. He said the only class he read for was the English class, and he never read the Chemistry textbook (“I don’t ever use it”, Aaron, Interview 2), studying primarily by reviewing the slides the instructor posted online. For his calculus class, he did the exercises at the end of the chapters but also did not read the book, and for the engineering class there was no reading involved (“None whatsoever”, Aaron, Interview 2) since the students were learning to use two engineering software programs on the computer.

By the end of the semester, Aaron had learned that he “had to cut back on some of [his] social time to add some more study time in to make up for that slack” (Aaron, Interview 3), and that in order to excel in college he was indeed going to have to work much harder that what he was used to. In his words, “In high school I was always one of the smart kids like I always at the top of my class so I wanna keep that up as I go and coming here everybody was top of their class
so I’ve got push myself that much more to be above average” (Aaron, Interview 3). His final grades, the highest among the native-speaking student participants, were: three As (one in CH125, chemistry lab, one in FYE100 and one in MA171, calculus A), one A- (in EH101), one B (in MAE111, introduction to computational tools), and one B- (in CH121).

4.4.2 Carrie

“My brother and I have always been compared to the rest of the children in the family. We are the only two children from my mother and father’s side who are trying to beat the odds. [...] We do not want to end up selling drugs or becoming an alcoholic like the rest of the family. [...] Our parents were our best example. [...] I used to hate the way I spoke because it was different from the rest of the family [...]. I used to be bullied for “talking like a white girl” [...] My grandmother even made comments about the way I spoke, but my parents were nothing less than proud.” (Carrie, Literacy Narrative, EH101S)

Carrie, an 18-year old pre-nursing student, placed a lot of emphasis on her parents’ support for her and her brother to succeed in school and life. She explained in her literacy narrative for the EH101S class that her mom and dad “were the only two in their families who tried to make a difference” for themselves and their children (Carrie, Literacy Narrative, EH101S). Always telling her that she needed to get an education and that “nothing should stop [her] from striving to achieve this goal” (Carrie, Literacy Narrative, EH101S), Carrie’s parents made sacrifices to send her to a private Christian school for her entire education, from kindergarten to high school. She mentioned that being middle-class, African-American citizens, she did not realize all the sacrifice her parents had made sending her to a private school until she got to college. Because of this upbringing, she talked “like a white girl”, a comment that “tore her down” during her childhood years, but her parents were proud that she spoke “grammatically correct” English, and now in college she was “proud that [she was] different [...] and someone who can continue to be that change in the family” (Carrie, Literacy Narrative, EH101S).

The private school Carrie attended was located in the same city as the university, just a mile from campus, and was a very small school (Carrie graduated high school with only 12 other
students). She said the university was “way different” (Carrie, Interview 1) from high school and although she believed that her former school cared for every student (“Each teacher wanted each student to be successful in everything they do; they helped them strive for the best.” Carrie, Literacy Narrative, EH101S), she recognized that she might not have been academically prepared for college, as illustrated in the following excerpt.

I feel comfortable with like it’s the making friends aspect but the academic part is gonna be a lot harder to keep my grades up because private school is just an easy go you know like an easy pass sometimes and sometimes I guess the teachers baby you and so it can be harder sometimes. It depends on the teacher but... yeah...it’s gonna be a lot harder to keep my grades up. (Carrie, Interview 1)

Carrie said she grew up reading a lot both for school and for pleasure. She was placed in advanced reading in 3rd grade, where she learned to enjoy reading, and by 7th grade she had started reading various book series, a habit she kept through high school. She did not like writing, however. She pointed out that now, starting college, she did not have much time to read anymore, and the last time she read a book was in the summer before classes started, when she read two books. At the time of the study, her reading and writing habits consisted primarily of social media (“every day, multiple times a day”, Carrie, Interview 1), Tumblr, and text messages.

Because she considered herself a good reader, she was quite disappointed when she learned that she had been placed in EH101S, with the studio component. In her words,

When I first found out I had to take English 101S, I was so upset. I wondered why I could not be in a regular English class like my friends and roommates. The first day we attended class and you [the EH101S instructor] had told us that we were in the class because of our ACT scores, I became even more upset. I know I did not have that high of an ACT score, but I had always been good in English during high school. (Carrie, Reflection Essay, EH101S)

Carrie’s ACT of score of 18 was the lowest among all student participants in the study, but, unlike the generation 1.5 students, she did not take the placement test to try to enroll in a
regular EH101 section. In fact, none of the native-speaking student participants who were placed in EH101S took the placement and seemed to be unaware that this option was available to them.

Carrie was very sweet, polite, and soft-spoken, and she quickly became good friends with her roommates at the dorm and made many friends through the organization Campus Crusade (CRU), which she joined at the beginning of the semester. She was also part of a mentoring program (perhaps LEAP, like Aaron) that she unknowingly signed up for in the first day of the FYE100 (First Year Experience) class. She explained it as follows:

[Chuckling] Uh surprisingly I didn’t even know I joined a club until I got an e-mail and I guess I joined it during the charger success type of thing where you sign up for a lot so I guess I signed up for some that I didn’t even remember (uhum). So I’m in a club where they mentor you and so I have a nursing mentor, which I’m pretty excited about ‘cause I know her and so that should be good. (Carrie, Interview 1)

Carrie asked to reschedule two of our interviews because she was so overwhelmed with schoolwork, but came to all three interviews and shared with me all of his English essays and e-Portfolio as well as her biology lab reports. During our conversations, she constantly expressed concern about her academic performance, and she in fact seemed to struggle throughout the entire semester to manage her time, develop study strategies, and do well in her classes. She regularly brought up that her classes, all of them, were “a lot harder” than high school, including basic algebra (MA004), which was a remedial or developmental math course. Only a couple of weeks into the semester, she assessed that PSY101, general psychology, was “so much harder” than she expected and was considering dropping the course as seen below.

I’m actually considering dropping psychology cause I haven’t been doing well in Psychology. I guess the teacher is a lot different from any of the other teachers here and she doesn’t give tests she just gives a whole of quizzes (ok) and then you have finally one exam so I don’t know if I can do that. (Carrie, Interview 1)

Sixty percent of the grade for this psychology section came from six different quizzes, but these were posted on the university’s student website and were to be taken at home over the
weekend. In addition, there was a final exam worth 20% of the grade, a journal article review 15%, and the last five percent came from participation and attendance. Her professor had a reputation of being a strict instructor, and so Carrie decided to drop the course a few days after our first interview. Because she had to have a psychology course for her pre-nursing major, she was planning to take PSY101 again in spring, but with an “easier” instructor (Carrie, Interview 2).

For the rest of the semester, Carrie took just four courses, namely BIO 119, EH101S, FYE100, and MA004. Except for EH101S, she continued to struggle in all of them, including FYE, first year experience. She often complained that she had been very busy, and the biology class became her biggest challenge as illustrated below.

I’m still trying to develop a better studying plan for biology (uhum) cause that’s the hardest class for me right now and I’ve made the same grade the past two tests and it’s not that good of grade (uhum) and I’ve been trying to like get a B. This past test and I studied so hard for it and I didn’t get a B. (Carrie, Interview 2)

When I asked her how she studied for biology, she said: “just reading over it, over and over again and then copying it down on a piece of paper” (Carrie, Interview 2). She read primarily the slides and study guides the instructor posted online and did not go to any PASS for biology nor did she try to talk to the instructor. She explained that she got lost when she tried to find the PASS session the first time and then gave up on going. Upon my asking whether she read the textbook or took notes during class, Carrie said that she did not but was planning to start engaging on those behaviors after observing a student in class doing so. In her words,

I’ve noticed um this guy that was sitting behind me whenever he’d [the Bio119 instructor] go over a slide and a certain thing he would go over he [the classmate] would always look at the textbook and then highlight what also what he’s talking about in the textbook (uhum) so I think I’m gonna try and do that next time a test comes up. (Carrie, Interview 2)
Yet, during my classroom observation of BIO 119 (after our second interview), Carrie showed up a few minutes late and sat at the back of the auditorium, in the same row I was sitting. The section had over 100 enrolled students, but only about half was present in class that day. She did not have her notebook or textbook open and was on her smart phone the entire class period; I also recorded in my field notes that I saw her looking at the slides only twice.

Admitting that she was “really bad at procrastinating” (Carrie, Interview 2), Carrie frequently brought up how her lack of time management skills was negatively affecting her studying. For instance, she explained that she was struggling with the math class as follows,

Um Math… it…uh [chuckles] we uh it’s kind of been harder because I think I’ve been spending too much time trying to hang out with friends and whatnot and so I missed out on the quizzes over the weekends and so. (Carrie, Interview 2)

By the end of the semester, Carrie seemed to be behind on all of her classes and not sure what course to prioritize first. When I asked her in our final interview how she was doing in her biology class, she said:

Uh this past test I was gonna study like a lot harder [for biology], but I guess I got caught up with trying to catch up with English, trying to catch up with FYE cause I thought FYE was so easy. […] Yeah and so I have a paper that I have to write I already wrote the rough draft right? (uhum) now the final is due cause she had to push it back, and so I have to write the final before or during thanksgiving break and so it’s just I didn’t know I totally forgot about all the stuff is due in FYE. (Carrie, Interview 3).

She then added in our final interview: “I’m not doing that good in math [either] but English is really the only subject that I’m doing good at right now” (Carrie, Interview 3).

Although she claimed to be doing well in EH101S, Carrie was regularly late for her EH101S classes and had several absences in her studio sections. Similarly, she also had many absences in her biology course. She explained, “I skipped biology sometimes, which isn’t good, but uh [chuckles] he had sent out the…what he talked about in class like the slides so I just figured I could skip, so I’ve skipped biology probably six times, a lot” (Carrie, Interview 3).
Carrie appeared to be genuinely upset about her grades in our final interview and expressed that she truly wanted to do succeed in school. However, it was clear that she lacked the discipline and study and time management skills needed to do well in her first semester of college, and her final grades reflected this. She made a B (in EH101S), a B+ (in FYE100), an F (in BIO119), and a U, unsatisfactory (in MA004).

4.4.3 Dalton

“Truth be told, I love working hard for a living, but I want to have more job security in the future. The next few years will be difficult, so hopefully it will insure a better future for my son and myself.” (Dalton, “About Me” Page, EH101S e-Portfolio)

At the age of 27, Dalton was the only non-traditional student in the study. He took a few required general education courses at two different community colleges after high school, but dropped out and went into welding. He had learned how to weld from his grandfather in a farm in Colorado, where he spent his summers during his childhood years. He had been a welder for over five years when he decided to go back to college and earn a degree so he could have a “better, stable job” (Dalton, Interview 3). Although he “actually really like[d] manual labor” (“cause I like working I don’t really like sitting at a desk, I’m all about [working], I just like feeling tired and it’s just better”, Dalton, Interview 3), he said his primary motivation to go back to school was his five-year old son, of whom he had sole custody, and he seemed determined to succeed, as seen below.

After high school I chose to go the Blue Collar route, and though I have taken classes here and there, I have yet to receive a degree. This time I am in it to win. I refuse to leave this school without a new career. (Dalton, “About Me” Page, EH101S, e-Portfolio)

Growing up in Arizona, he was homeschooled until 4th grade, when his family moved back to the city where the study was conducted. Dalton then went to a public school, where he was put back in 4th grade because of “social anxiety” (Dalton, Interview 1). He graduated high
school at another public school and then moved away for the first community college he attended.

Dalton explained that he did not read or write “as much as [he] should probably have” growing up because his mom, who homeschooled him, did not “really help much” (Dalton, Interview 1). Trying “not to get in the personal side of things” (Dalton, Interview 1), he did not go into detail as to why his mom did not help much with his literacies but explained that from a young age he was responsible for his own studying, getting up early and doing homework on his own before going outside to play with friends. He also added that he most likely learned how to read through animal books, as seen below.

The thing is it’s a miracle I learned to read really. I, I did a lot of, you know, I tried my best […] so mostly was probably through animal books (uhum) and things. I was really obsessed with animals and so I’d read a lot about you know National Geographic stuff and all sorts of things like that and that’s really where I think I picked a lot of it up starting from the pictures and then you know and going from there but yeah that’s probably where I got most of it. (Dalton, Interview 1)

As an adult, Dalton said he continued to read National Geographic and other “educational magazines”, but he did not do any writing besides school assignments. He explained that he used to write song lyrics when he was younger but had not written any in the past few years. The only participant who did not engage in social media, Dalton said he had “never had a Facebook or MySpace”, saying “I just yeah I just don’t care what people are doing in every second of the day really” (Dalton, Interview 1). He e-mailed and texted, but not very often. In fact, he never responded to any of my e-mails and took several days before replying to my text messages.

Dalton was not working in the fall but said he was very busy with school and taking care of his son. He did not spend much time on campus and because he was not very prompt in responding to my text messages, it was difficult to get in touch with him at times, and I was
afraid he would eventually drop the study. He never did, however, and came to all of his interviews, sharing with me his EH101S essays and e-Portfolio; he did not bring any assignments from other courses though.

Perhaps because he had not been in school for so long, Dalton was quite apprehensive about his courses and said his expectations were “just to make it through really. I mean just, you know, I think I think I’m doing all right, and I’d like to just keep on that track. I get kind of nervous, I’m a little anxious about things” (Dalton, Interview 1). He added that at the beginning of semester the only class he felt comfortable with was English, which he thought was “bizarre” because he “just felt horrible at English” growing up. In his reflection essay for the EH101S class, Dalton explained that he had “issues with writing since [he] was a child” and added: “I am actually pretty good at telling stories or even writing song lyrics. Trying to take a topic and give my opinion on it, or citing research about it, is what trips me up” (Dalton, Reflection Essay, EH101S). He did not remember his ACT score, but given that he was enrolled in EH101S, with the studio component, his score on the reading portion was probably low. Yet, like Carrie, Dalton did not take any placement tests and did not seem aware that he had this option. He also did not transfer any credits from the basic courses he had taken at the communities colleges, including English 101, but he was not able to explain why this was the case.

He said he enjoyed participating in the discussions in the EH101S class and doing the required readings. During my four classroom observations of EH101S, Dalton was in fact the student who participated the most in class, asking and answering questions and actively engaging in his peer-review activities. He was also engaged in his PSY101 class, sitting in the first row of the 100+ student auditorium and often answering questions posed by the instructor. He seemed
to be doing quite well in these two classes throughout the semester and had Bs on his English essays and As and Bs on his psychology assignments.

However, he found math and chemistry challenging since the beginning of the semester and said that the FYE100 class was “kind of driving [him] nuts, honestly” (Dalton, Interview 1). He seemed to think that the first experience class was too time-consuming, putting a strain on his already busy schedule. As he put it,

Just because, I don’t know, their whole deal is that you’re supposed to … it’s they’re supposed to help you kind of get used to, you know, making time for this and that and scheduling things correctly so you have time for things but at the same time they make you do all these extra things and you have to be here and then it’s like how I got my schedule set and you’re making me… you know worry about all that. […] It’s just hard to find, they have all these groups they want you to or social meetings (uhum) and you know I’ve got the sole custody of 5 year old son, so it’s like I don’t have time to go to this this (yeah) thing but I have to do it so. (Dalton, Interview 1)

Dalton’s concerns about the FYE class were a recurrent theme in all of our interviews, and when I asked him if the university did not offer an FYE course for non-traditional students, he explained that they did, but he was not sure why he was placed in a regular section, as the following excerpt illustrates.

I think I was supposed to be [in a non-traditional FYE class] I’m not sure how I ended up in regular FYE I mean they have a non-traditional FYE supposebly [sic] (uhum) but … I don’t know how I ended up in the other one but… I didn’t speak up about so I didn’t really say anything about it. (Dalton, Interview 3)

Majoring in mechanical engineering, Dalton recognized that struggling with math was “kind of bad” (Dalton, Interview 1) and explained that there was a lot memorizing and learning new terms in both MA112 and CH101, which he found difficult. He seemed disappointed at his performance in the math class, saying “it’s unfortunate, it is, but I used to be good at math. I’m not entirely sure what happened, I think years of neglecting my brain probably (Dalton, Interview 2).
Dalton struggled to make time to study at home and on the weekends because of the responsibilities involved in taking care of his son but also because he was not used to bringing work home with him. He explained this as follows.

With my son I end up kind of, I don’t know, basically I just [chuckles] cause I’m I’m used to the kind of separation of work and home kind of thing (yeah), you know, where you just come home and that’s that and now it’s like[…]you bring work home, you have to (yeah you have to), and so I’m really not used to that, you know, I’m kind of I get home and forget what I did that day basically and that’s….doesn’t work so yeah it’s kind of I gotta work on really going over things. (Dalton, Interview 2)

Along with time management issues, Dalton seemed to have faced challenges with organizational and studying skills during his first semester back in college. He unintentionally missed important assignments and was still trying to develop better study strategies. For example, he said the following about his math class:

I actually missed a… I missed a math homework somewhere somehow, which bothered me but then [laughs] kind of set me back a minute and then I started thinking I don’t think I missed a class somehow or another [laughs] I feel like I’m missing something (uhum) so yeah so I need to go over some things. (Dalton, Interview 2)

Similarly, in his chemistry class, Dalton forgot that he had an exam one day and consequently did not do very well on it since he was not prepared, as explained in the excerpt below.

Somehow I completely lost that [the exam date], and I was worried about it, I was worried about the test anyway but somehow missed the day I don’t know, so I didn’t do very well in that test [whispering]. I didn’t know until like I showed up and everybody had a calculator and pencil on them and I’m like ‘Oh no!’ yeah so. (Dalton, Interview 2)

He mentioned several times that he needed to “go over things more” and in our final interview he went on to say that he needed to find a different way to learn. In his words, “I think I need to work on a different way of absorbing the knowledge” (Dalton, Interview 3). He explained that he studied by reading his notes, instructors’ slides, and some of his textbooks, and did not study with classmates or go to any PASS sessions because he did not have time and that
would “involve juggling all sorts of other things” (Dalton, Interview 2). He did not see any of his instructors for help and did not visit the math tutoring lab either.

Further, because in math and chemistry “it all builds on itself” (Dalton, Interviews 1 & 2), Dalton was concerned that he had fallen behind on these courses, and his main goal became to just pass all of the courses he was enrolled in the fall. Especially because this was his first semester, he believed that being able to at least pass all of his classes would give him more confidence to continue. As he put it,

I just I really wanna pass [chucking] I really do just mostly because I’ve just kind of of I mean cause you’ve got this mental block when you’re doing badly, you know, it kind of goes downhill and your standards or something so it’s uh I just like to get through whether it’s you know high or low just to just to pass so next semester I’ll be like at least I can pass if nothing else I can pass. (Dalton, Interview 2)

Dalton never sent me his final grades and did not respond to the several text messages and e-mails I sent him throughout December and January. By the end of the semester, he was worried that he might not pass CH101 or FYE. Because he had not completed all the assignments in the first year experience class, he was afraid he would also have to take it again in the spring. In his words,

I’m worried about FYE because I didn’t get to do all the stuff but like I said she’s [the FYE instructor] kind of… I don’t know I think she’s kind of spacey about it and I just… missed something at the beginning, which was kind of an issue so I don’t know. I might be one of those people that have to redo that. (Dalton, Interview 3)

However, he said he was doing “all right” in English and psychology (he had Bs in both classes in our last interview in early December) and was hopeful to get a C- in math.

4.4.4 Teneshaa

“Reading saved my life! Growing up I had a really rough childhood [...] . I was the product of a convicted father and a party girl mother. My life was a living hell. I lived in a two bedroom apartment in the middle of a crime ridden neighborhood with my mother and my five younger siblings [...] . The more books I read the more inspired I was. [...] It was like I was in whole other universe when I read. Suddenly as I read the cracked chip walls of our apartment became giant
wvves of an angry ocean and I was the captain in command trying to steer our ship to safety, and
the closet was a magic portal to another universe where magical creatures dwelled, and the
space under my bed was where the wild things lived.” (Tenesa, Literacy Narrative, EH101S)

As the quote above indicates, Tenesa had a difficult childhood, and she appeared to have
learned to escape her reality by reading and dreaming of a different life from an early age. She
did not remember how she learned to read or reading as a young child (“I don’t even think I ever
had time to do my homework at home, so no I don’t remember any reading going on”, Tenesa,
Interview 1), until she realized that by reading she could be somewhere else. She explained, “I
realized you know I could be somewhere while reading. I don’t have to sit here and listen to all
the arguments and the fights and they playing around and you know it took me away”, Tenesa
Interview 1).

Tenesha was an 18-year old freshman majoring in biology/pre-vet who hoped to become
a wildlife vet and settle in Florida, where she would work at a “wildlife rescue hospital” because
“working with every day house pets” was just plain “boring” – but only after traveling and
working at zoos all over the world (Tenesha, “About Me” Page, EH101S e-Portfolio). She had
many plans like this for the future, and they changed quite a bit throughout the semester. In fact,
many of the stories she told during our interviews contradicted themselves and did not align very
well with information from her writings or with my classroom observations. Thus, by the end of
the semester, many of my interview questions were designed with the purpose of understanding
some of the inconsistencies I had observed.

This is not to say that Tenesa’s answers were fabricated per se, but – perhaps in order to
deal with the hardships in her life – she construed an image of herself and of her experiences
based on what she believed they ought to have been. To illustrate this, at the beginning of our
first interview and in her reflection essay for the EH101S class, Tenesa said she did not like
writing and was dreading taking English 101. However, later on in the same interview she said that all the reading she did growing up had shaped her as a writer and that she wrote poems and short stories and even considered writing a novel at one point. In her words,

I thought about writing a novel, I started one but then I have a little bit of ADD so I’ll just be all over the place so my mind wonders a lot I guess it came from reading you know [chuckles] yeah all the ideas just going so yeah I might do it one day though. […] I love poems like Haikus they are the funniest ones for me to write cause you know with the syllables you have to count and it can be anything it don’t even have to match but you just tie it in and it’s just awesome. Uh … I write…. I used to write these children’s stories for my baby sister like they’d be like short like maybe a page long and to help her to go to sleep or whatever and she would love them so I still have some of those. (Tenesha, Interview 1)

She was also very proud of being an avid reader and claimed to have over 40 books in her dorm room in our first interview. When I asked her later on in the semester about the books, she said she had read them all and had just gotten a few more; yet she could not remember the name of the books nor the authors, as seen in our interaction below.

T: I just finished a book called, what is that book called? [pause] Oh man! What is it called? I can’t even remember it… [pause] I can’t even remember what that book is called but
L: Do you remember the author?
T: I don’t, I don’t even know look at the author sometimes. (Tenesha, Interview 2)

She lived on campus with a roommate and supposedly with her older sister. In the first interview as well as in her literacy narrative, Tenesha said that her siblings were all younger (“They [her brother and sisters] were younger”, Interview 1; “my five younger siblings (four sisters, one brother”, Literacy Narrative, EH101S). Yet, in the second interview she explained that one of her roommates was her big sister (“My older sister, yeah she’s like a year older than me so she was up here before I was”, Interview 2), and in our final interview she mentioned that she and her sister were the only two in her family to ever go to college and that her sister was an inspiration to her. Tenesha said of her motivations to do well in college: “when I see her [the
sister] like she’s so mature like she bought her own car she just recently bought her an apt (wow!) like yeah she’s up there. She’s only 19!” (Tenesha, Interview 3).

Although very quiet in her classes, Tenesha asserted that she was “a friendly person” and had made many friends in her classes, at the dorm, and even at other colleges in town. In her usual ‘larger-than-life’ style, she added that these friends were from various ethnicities: “I’ve got some Asian friends, some white friends, black friends, Mexican friends” (Tenesha, Interview 2). She was indeed very outgoing and talkative during our interviews and always had a big smile on her face. She responded to my text messages promptly, but did not reply to e-mails, and she shared with me all of her EH101S essays and e-Portfolio as well as some biology tests.

Keeping in line with these inconsistent themes, Tenesha maintained that she had always liked and done well in math, yet she was enrolled in developmental algebra, MA004 – like Carrie. Her ACT score was 24, and she claimed that although she had been advised to take MA112 and regular EH101, she chose to take MA004 and EH101S as “refreshment courses” (Tenesha, Interview 3). Having taken AP biology classes in high school, Tenesha said she loved science and expected to excel in BIO119. Her main concerns about her first semester in college were related to developing study strategies because she had never studied before as seen below.

I’ve always struggled with studying I’ve never had to study in my whole life I have never studied for a single thing and now I know that because my grades were good if I actually studied it’s like I could do so much better (Tenesha, Interview 1).

Throughout the semester, she continued to bring up that she struggled with studying and recognized that she needed to create better study habits and study more (“I just have like realized that I have to put more effort into biology and studying”, Interview 2; “I know that studying is like a problem for me cause I’ve never studied like ever”, Interview 2; “I never had to study for anything so it’s like really hard to just okay you need to study so like I could tell myself I need to
study and then it would slip my mind so [chuckles]”, Interview 3). She had taken on a part-time job around midterm at a children’s clothing store for a “little extra pocket cash” (Tenesha, Interview 2), but explained that because she only worked eight hours at the most per week, the job was “not really making [her] much busier” (Tenesha, Interview 3).

Tenesha seemed to be doing relatively well in her English class, even though she missed several classes both in the regular lecture and in studio, and had made Bs on all the essays she brought to our interviews. She also appeared to be doing well in math (she claimed to have an A+ in the class) and was actively taking notes and paying attention to the lecture when I visited the class. While she believed FYE100 was “pointless”, she said she had gone to all events required and turned it all assignments. Her main struggle was with BIO119 because it involved a lot of memorization, which she found difficult and “boring”. She seemed to be taking notes and paying attention to the biology class I observed, but had Fs in the exams she shared with me. She said she studied by reading the textbooks but did not go to PASS or visit any of her instructors during the semester.

In our last interview (in the beginning of December), Tenesha told me that she had joined the National Guard that morning, which came as a surprise to me since she had not talked about it at all during the semester. Yet, she explained that her decision to join the reserves was not sudden. In her words,

T: Well... I have been contemplating it since my senior year in high school you know, extra help in school and a lot of opportunities that they offer and I’ve been getting a lot of opinions some con some pro but then I decided you know this is for me so...
L: So you’re gonna join in the spring?
T: Um... I just signed up and it said um my shipment day could be from anywhere from a couple of weeks to a couple of months and it’s like 10 days in Virginia I mean 10 weeks in Virginia for basic training (Tenesha, Interview 3).
She had already registered for her spring classes by our last interview, however, so it is not clear whether she would have to drop her classes. Like Dalton, Tenesha did not send me her final grades and did not respond to my text messages and e-mails after the semester was over either; perhaps she was in her basic training program when I tried to contact her.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have tried to bring the focal participants to life by sharing some of their remarkable stories and thus set the stage for the main findings presented in the next chapters. Chapters 5 and 6 will address the reading and writing practices of these students in their first semester in college while Chapter 7 will address other social academic literacies they experienced.
CHAPTER 5

READING PRACTICES IN COMPOSITION AND SUBJECT-AREA COURSES

In this chapter, I present the study’s main findings pertaining to the participants’ reading practices as well as their instructors’ perspectives and expectations. The research questions that guided the dissertation focus on ‘academic literacies’ as a social practice (Gee, 1991; Lea & Street, 2005; Street, 1984), a concept that works as an umbrella term for the various types of literacies students engage with in academic settings (Johns, 1997). Reading and writing practices are, nonetheless, two chief types of academic literacies in college and are thus examined separately in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively. Chapter 7 focuses more specifically on social aspects of the students’ academic literacies, such as challenges, strategies, and social interactions. With this being said, it is important to keep in mind that these different literacy practices are intertwined and cannot be completely divorced. Accordingly, while I have attempted to unpack the students’ reading and writing experiences into two chapters, some of the reading findings presented in this chapter might include connections to writing as well as to other academic practices, pointing to the inherently complex and contextualized nature of literacies.

Students’ reading experiences and perceptions are discussed first, followed by the instructors’ perspectives and expectations. In order to answer the research questions, the students’ experiences are framed in terms of student population (i.e., generation 1.5, international, and native-speaking), and the instructors’ perspectives are presented separately for composition and subject-area classes. Further, the results discussed here represent realities that all participants experienced to some extent. In other words, the findings reflect the experiences of the participants as a whole, although some students might have experienced certain practices or
events more often or intensely than others. However, students’ individual experiences that point to important exceptions in the data are discussed as well.

Finally, the quotes and interview excerpts included here were chosen because they best represent the findings in general and not just each participant’s own perspective or experience. Therefore, if a participant is not quoted for a given finding, this does not mean that her/his experiences did not align with the finding being discussed, but rather that other quotes were considered more applicable in the context.

5.1 Difficulties with Reading

All students across the three populations seemed to struggle with reading to a certain extent – regardless of whether they were aware of this or not – and read relatively little for both school purposes and outside of school. However, their challenges varied somewhat depending on whether English was their first or second language. In the next subsections, the unique experiences of the three distinct student populations are discussed.

5.1.1 Generation 1.5 Students

The four generation 1.5 student participants were aware of their difficulties with reading and, as mentioned in their profiles, they explained that they did not read often and did not like reading, as seen below.

I don’t read and write that much, to be honest. (Ian, Interview 1)

I’m not a big reader or writer or anything of that sort. (Jacob, Interview 1)

I, actually, I, I don’t, I don’t usually like to read […] but if I like just sit down and read by myself and have to take like focus a long time, and I look, like, what does this mean and things like that, yeah, is difficult (Joy, Interview 1).

I usually just read what I have to I mean like I usually don’t read more […] ‘cause I don’t like reading. (Rachel, Interview 2)
They attributed their difficulty with reading to the fact that they did not read often since they did not enjoy the practice as well as to the fact that English was their second language even though they were quite young when they moved to the U.S. (Joy being the exception), as illustrated in the following excerpts.

If someone asked me my identity as a reader or writer when I was in middle school, I would’ve answered “an infant” or I might not have answered his or her question because I wouldn’t have understand the question. […] summer reading books were always a pain in the butt in high school. I literally spent the whole summer looking up every word in the book on my little electronic dictionary. […] I still have troubles reading and writing. (Ian, Literacy Narrative, EH101)

I’ve had a struggle with it [reading] cause I’m actually a really slow reader from you know the transition between [German and English] that really hurts your reading speed um, but like I’ve been trying to like kind of, you know, read faster, you know, apparently people can like they like they don’t think about the word, cause like I almost think about every word so I could literally talk and read at the same speed (Jacob, Interview 3).

I remember the first day of EH 101; you [the instructor] asked everyone in class what we were most worried about in college. And my answer was taking this class (EH 101) since English is not my native language. I know that I am a slow reader and I most of the time cannot comprehend on what I have just read. (Joy, Reflection Essay, EH101)

Have you ever had to learn something new and struggled with it? I certainly did when I moved to the United States from Hong Kong when I was eight. I had to learn a whole new language, English. I can say I had to put lots of effort to get to where I am now as a reader and writer. […] I know people often say the younger you are, the easier it is to learn a new language, but I can tell you that it is not completely true. (Rachel, Literacy Narrative, EH101)

Jacob and Joy also considered their challenges with reading the culprit for what they perceived as low ACT scores (26 and 20, respectively). For example, Joy asserted about the ACT, “I only passed math, like the other things, English, Reading, Science, I fail [laughing] […] Reading and English, and the science, is a lot of reading too, so like my [score] oops.” (Joy, Interview 3). Likewise, Jacob pointed out: “that’s [reading speed] my main problem on the ACT and the SAT I never finished because I did never read it like even the math problems, I had trouble like finishing” (Jacob, Interview 2).
Although Rachel struggled with reading in English when she first moved to the U.S. at the age of eight and still emphasized that she did not read much because she did not enjoy it (“I don’t read much because I don’t really like reading.” Rachel, Interview 1), she was the only generation 1.5 student who appeared to have fully overcome most of her reading difficulties. For example, she was the only multilingual participant who did not bring up her reading speed in English as an issue. She was encouraged to read extensively in English throughout her elementary and middle school years, as explained in Chapter 4, and maintained regular habits of reading in her L1. These practices seem to have greatly impacted her reading skills and contributed, if not to her love for books, at least to her understanding of the importance of reading. As also reported in her profile in Chapter 4, Rachel believed that in order to be successful in school and life, one needs strong literacy skills.

While the other three generation 1.5 students did not appear to see reading as beneficial as Rachel did, they all seemed to have developed some strategies to cope with reading and for the most part tried to read for the classes in which they deemed reading was necessary as further discussed in the subsection ‘reading in college’ below.

5.1.2 International Students

Like the generation 1.5 students, the four international students in the study did not like reading in English and considered themselves very slow readers. For these students – who were still learning the language – reading in English appeared to be much more challenging, however.

I’m such a slow reader because everything is so new in English, um I read some in English of course like I said online and stuff (But it’s different?) yeah it’s academic reading stuff so it’s a little heavier […] because I’m like reading stuff and I, it’s frustrating cause I can’t understand and whatever […] so uh uh English yeah I wanna be better in reading probably be faster in reading. (David, Interview 1)

L: Uhum does it take a long time (N: yeah) to do those readings?
N: Yeah. So I sometimes… I cannot I cannot finish uh reading assignments to… yeah… understand fully. […] First the assignments is a lot but but it’s like I can do it and yeah… yeah… it is also tough to read and write and speak and listen English all of them are English. (Narushi, Interview 3)

As a non-native English speaker, English is a not an easy subject for me. (Xue, Reflective Essay, EH101S). Yeah I think it… it is at a high level you need to read and write well so you can understand well like what instructor is talking about eh so I need uh I think I need more time to um get used to it (yeah) I think yeah […] that’s that’s what I don’t think I’m not very good at reading […] I think I’m pretty slow. (Xue, Interview 3)

Uhhh a little difficult [the EH101S class] because I have to read something in class but I reading speed is too slow. (Yu, Interview 1)

They claimed to have read little in their EFL classes prior to coming to the U.S. as the primary focus of the English classes in China and Japan was grammar and translation of sentences and paragraphs for university entrance exams. Yu said the following in our first interview: “English uh teacher in China is no good, they just teach you how to finish the exam […] we just study a lot about grammar (Yu, Interview 1)”. Similarly, Narushi explained the following in his literacy narrative for EH101S:

With the previous education system, we just learned how to read English sentences and how to translate into Japanese. We were just required to understand sentences that are written in English. A lot of questions on our exams were required to answer translations. Learning English is mostly for the entrance exam for Japanese universities; such as correcting grammar errors, reading paragraphs deeply in order to be able to translate into Japanese. (Narushi, Literacy Narrative, EH101S)

David did not specify what his EFL classes emphasized, but explained that he did not read much in school but did some reading in English on his own instead, especially after he had decided to come study in the U.S. These readings consisted of online news and articles about hockey and sports in general. Yet, although David appears to have been more exposed to reading in English than the other three international students, he explained that reading for class was more difficult and time-consuming because of the academic style of the texts, as aforementioned,
a comment that also made by the other students. Their struggles with academic texts are explored in more detail in the subsection ‘reading in college’.

5.1.3 Native-Speaking Students

Unlike the multilingual students discussed above, the native-speaking students did not mention having any particular struggles with reading, and – as a matter of fact – they all said they enjoyed reading at some point in their lives. They were also the only students to talk about reading books for pleasure during the interviews.

If I can find a good book I can get into, I love it. (Aaron, Interview 1)

Whenever I could buy them [House of Nights book series] or whenever go to the library and get them. It was really good. And then I went through Twilight and… the Hunger Games series (yeah) and um my English teacher in 9th and 10th grade, he would give us books about the Holocaust and stuff and um I went through each book that he had and whatever book he was able to give us. (Carrie, Interview 1)

I still do quite a bit of reading, I like I like to read. (Dalton, Interview 1)

Actually I don’t think I would change it [her literacy story] at all because the situation that I grew up in it made me a stronger person as well as a stronger reader, you know (yeah), it really shaped the readings that I read. I would read anything thrillers, I would read magazines, TV guides, all… if it was a reading, I would do it [chuckles] and I would try to put myself there so yeah it really shaped me. […] I have over 40 books in my dorm room to this day [chuckles]. (Tenesha, Interview 1)

Even though these students did not bring up any difficulties related to reading and appear to have read in English more than the multilingual students, three of them were placed in EH101S, with the studio component, mostly likely because of their low ACT scores in the reading portion of the test. While Carrie recognized that her low ACT score was the reason why she was in EH101S, Tenesha claimed to have asked to be placed in EH101S because she wanted to have a “refresher” in English. I wonder, however, how she was even informed that taking EH101S was an option if the course had not been recommended to her. As for Dalton, though I do not have his ACT score, he had previously taken EH101 in two different community colleges
and was still placed in EH101S at the institution, which I believe is a strong indicator that his ACT reading score was also low. Aaron’s ACT score was higher, and he was enrolled in a regular EH101 class, yet he did not read often (other than social media) and claimed that books did not capture his attention any longer (“I just really can’t find books that hold my attention very well like I can start a book but if it doesn’t hold my attention, I put it down.” Aaron, Interview 1).

In addition, the native-speaking students had the lowest grades as a student population in the study, and the three students in EH101S (i.e., Carrie, Dalton, and Tenesha) faced many challenges in their classes. This apparent lack of awareness of their abilities versus their needs was a common trend in the native-speaking students’ data and is further discussed in Chapter 7.

5.2 Reading Practices and Digital Literacies

Here I present a brief report of the focal participants’ reading experiences outside of class at the time of study. Although an extensive discussion of digital literacies is beyond the scope of the study, the students’ primary literacy practices were digital and apparently quite limited to social media websites (at least in English) and for this reason they are included here.

5.2.1 Generation 1.5 Students

The generation 1.5 students explained that they read in English primarily for school, for classes where reading was necessary. They did not usually read extensively outside of class, and their reading practices in their L2 consisted mainly of social media and other websites in their L1s (online news for Rachel and teen websites for Joy). Rachel was the only student who mentioned having read a few books in English on own her during high school (e.g., The Harry Potter series, The Hunger Games series), but at the time of the study she said she only read in English when engaging with social media. Jacob also mentioned reading brief information
packets on different soccer teams that his coaches would give the athletes in order to prepare them for games. He explained it as follows,

    We are given packets here and that we have to read up. For example for soccer, uh, stuff that, you know, I guess, the, our coach goes out and scouts the other team and then comes back with, like, this stuff and like it tells us who the good players are or what to watch out for (uhum) and all that stuff and it gives us 5, like, 5 to 10 page paper not paper but (packet?) yeah like packet on the opposite team and how we would defend our goal against them. (Jacob, Interview 1)

Other than sending text messages to family members and sometimes reading online blogs, the 1.5 students did not read in their L1s very frequently either. Once again, the exception was Rachel who claimed to read more in her L1, Cantonese, than in English because she was very interested in Hong Kong – where she lived until she moved to the U.S. with her family. She religiously checked online news from Hong Kong, reading various websites daily.

5.2.2 International Students

    In a fashion similar to the generation 1.5 students, the international students said they did not enjoy reading either in English or in their L1s. They read in English primarily for class and when browsing the Internet and navigating social media sites, which they used both in their L1s and L2. Though they did not read much or often in their L1s either, they appeared to have more contact with reading in their native languages than the generation 1.5 students. For instance, they frequently searched for summaries online in their L1s of material learned in class and translated vocabulary and sections of readings into their native languages as well. These strategies are further explored in the subsection ‘reading in college’.

5.2.3 Native-Speaking Students

    Although the native-speaking students in the study seemed to enjoy reading more than the multilingual students, their literacy stories were quite different, as indicated in Chapter 4, and so were their relationships with reading at the time of the study. Carrie and Tenesha claimed to be
avid readers, having read several books for pleasure when growing up and during their high
school years. They were also the only two students in the study who mentioned continuing to
engage in more extensive print literacy practices, i.e., reading books, outside of school during the
fall. For instance, Carrie mentioned:

    I went to library actually just this weekend and um found a really cool book it’s called
    Creep uh but I don’t who it’s by but um it looked interesting and it’s about this guy who
    kills this girl that has an affair or something, it’s but um I just got it and I haven’t really
gotten any chance to read it. (Carrie, Interview 2)

Tenesha said she read at night before going to bed, which helped her go to sleep. In her
words, “I make time [to read for pleasure]. Like late at night when I can’t sleep, it usually puts
me right to sleep” (Tenesha, Interview 1).

Dalton often read educational magazines as an adult, and Aaron said he read extensively
as a child. However, Aaron explained that he did not read books very frequently anymore
because he [was] “used to reading the little short ones [sentences or posts] and keep going”
(Aaron, Interview 2) since he was always engaged with social media as well as text messages
(“Social media a lot! A lot of texting, uh, a lot of Twitter.” Aaron, Interview 1). Aaron did not
seem to read other websites frequently, though. For instance, he mentioned that he was a huge
college football fan, and when I asked him if he read online news about his team, he said that he
did not and only watched it on TV (“L: But do you read anything online [about his team]? Blogs
or news? A: Uh…Not really. L: Not really? A: Nah, I watch it on TV so…” (Aaron, Interview
1). Carrie and Tenesha also regularly read text messages and statuses on social media (“Texts,
social media, yeah like every day, multiple times a day, Carrie, Interview 1), whereas Dalton had
never really been on social media sites (“I’ve never had a Facebook or MySpace. I don’t care.”
Dalton, Interview 1), and these students did not bring up reading other websites either.
5.3 Reading in College

Needless to say, the amount of reading required in each class the students took in the fall varied considerably, and so did the participants’ reading practices. Their reading experiences in college are presented in the next subsections, followed by the instructors’ perspectives and expectations regarding reading in their courses.

5.3.1 Generation 1.5 Students

Despite their dislike for reading and the challenges they faced reading in English when growing up, the generation 1.5 students in the study – in particular Jacob, Joy, and Rachel – had developed a few reading strategies for their classes according to their individual learning styles and needs. Further, although completely fluent in English, these students brought up sometimes needing to look up the meaning of words they were not familiar with, and again their reading speed seemed to be a factor in how they handled the readings for their classes. The quotes below illustrate their general approaches to reading during their first semester of college.

I do look up words if I if I don’t know […] sometimes I will just skim through but uh I sometimes, I will just, I try to read every word and look it up if I don’t know it. (Ian, Interview 2)

Sometimes I try to like skim over it but then in the end I might have to even go back and read it again. […] actually here and there I’m starting to skip now like I’m trying I’m getting faster, like, I’m trying to skip the words here and there (uhum) which… it’s getting better but still not where I want it. (Jacob, Interview 2)

I just look at it and then I try to see like for a little bit make sense to me and then I just use dictionary if I don’t know that word and then, then like if they use how you say the things that like, expression? (uhum) Cause like sometimes in English I don’t know what that means, right? (Uhum, Right) so I just ask my friend like what does this mean or something like that. (Joy, Interview 2)

I usually just read the whole thing I mean like if it’s bolded or highlighted I’ll be like I’ll read it again[…]. But other than that I just usually read the whole thing, like I don’t take notes or anything unless I have to. […] I usually Google it [a word she does not know the meaning] cause I mean I always have my laptop open with me and then I just usually like just Google like the definition or what it means or whatever. (Rachel, Interview 2)
With respect to their individual classes, the four students’ reading practices and strategies appear to have been determined by how much they perceived they needed to read for each course. Their reading experiences in the specific courses are presented next and are organized according to the colleges the courses belonged to.

5.3.1.1 Liberal Arts

For their EH101 class, the generation 1.5 students claimed to do most of the readings since they had required reading responses in both sections in which they were enrolled. Joy and Jacob were in the same class while Rachel and Ian were in another section of EH101, and these courses were taught by two different composition instructors. The following are excerpts from the interviews when the students discussed their EH101 readings.

Ms. [name] makes us do discussion questions, which we have to read and they are called ‘Everything is an Argument’. So that’s pretty much every other day that we have to do, we have to work on homework, so we have to read and read the questions about the chapter and answer certain questions, so that’s a lot of reading. (Ian, Interview 1)

The reading I mean for English like for that class when you have to read you have to read cause like you are gonna talk about it the next day. (Jacob, Interview 2)

The only class I had like reading assignment was English so it’s like and because it’s just an article and I have to read it like analyze what they talking about. (Joy, Interview 2)

I usually read the who, I mean it’s not a lot to read so I usually just read everything and then cause I know a lot of people they read the questions and then they just like skim through the article like I can’t do that cause I usually like have to remember where I saw it so I usually read the whole thing and then I answer the questions. (Rachel, Interview 3)

They further added that the readings for EH101 were not that difficult and did not seem to struggle with the course ("I feel like the questions is really like, the questions are all yes, so it’s really easy to answer." Ian, Interview 1; “They [the readings] are easy.” Jacob, Interview 1; “That’s [the readings] not that bad.” Joy, Interview 2; “English is it’s, it’s pretty easy cause it’s just like write, we read an article from the book or like we read what we are supposed to read
like the chapters and everything, so it’s pretty simple.” Rachel, Interview 2). Joy and A+ in the
course, Jacob and Rachel made As, and Ian made a B+.

Ian was the generation 1.5 student who read the least for all classes, including EH101
where he did enough of the readings to write the response questions but did not seem to closely
read the chapters assigned nor do readings for which he was not held accountable. Specifically,
during the classroom observations of the EH101 class, I noticed that Ian did not participate in the
reading discussions that the instructor facilitated with the whole class nor did he contribute much
to group discussions of the readings. In addition, his composition instructor mentioned in our last
interview that she had noticed that his reading responses were not as developed as Rachel’s and
that he seemed to have read certain sections of the readings just to answer the questions. As she
put it,

Rachel is obviously a really great student, like I think based on her discussion question
answers, she was obviously reading all of the articles reading them very closely thinking
about them very critically [...] Ian was not, you know, he was definitely one of those who
was kind of giving very short discussion question answers and clearly probably not
reading them in great detail. (EH101S Instructor, Interview 2)

Ian also confessed around midterm that sometimes he simply “assume[d] and “just
guess[ed]” some of the answers to the reading response questions (Ian, Interview 2). While such
strategy might not be commendable or recommended, it seems to have worked well for Ian who
earned the completion credit for doing the reading responses.

Joy was the only other generation 1.5 student enrolled in another humanities course,
Spanish I (FL101S). She explained that they used a textbook for the course, but because it was
“basic Spanish”, there was not much reading involved in the class other than sentences and
paragraphs (“like it’s not gonna be like two pages of reading, it’s just like one paragraph of
reading, basic stuff.” Joy, Interview 2). The Spanish exams and homework she shared with me
consisted mainly of fill in the blanks and exercises with single-sentence questions and answers. Reading comprehension tasks were minimal and asked for content information about one or two paragraphs with five to eight very simple sentences. Joy added that Spanish was one of the easiest courses she took in the fall since she had already taken it in high school. She also believed that her being fluent in two other languages contributed to her success in the course. In her words, “you know, like, when people know two language already, yeah then the third one become easy to them, you know? (I agree), you know, yeah so that’s why” (Joy, Interview 3). She made an A in the class and planned to take other Spanish courses throughout her college years as she hoped to become fluent in the language.

Rachel was enrolled in a course in the social sciences, Introduction to Sociology (SOC100), and she described the amount of reading required in SOC100 as “extensive”, i.e., “20-30 pages for each class” (Rachel, Interview 1). She said she coped with it by reading the assigned chapters every evening after class and focusing on the various concepts and key terms presented in class. She also read the copious notes she took in class before the exams. During my classroom observation of the class, Rachel – as well as most students in the classroom – took notes the entire class period, and she brought a completely filled notebook for SOC100 to our last interview. I also noted that the professor’s PowerPoint slides contained a lot of text, with definitions of concepts and examples, and he gave the students a few minutes to copy the material before moving from slide to slide. The professor also presented lots of graphs and charts from research articles in the field that he pointed out to the students were not included in the textbook.

Rachel further explained that because the professor did not post his slides online and handed out a study guide with just key terms but without definitions, attending class and doing
the readings were imperative. In her words, “you have to read the book and then, you know, like read his lectures again [i.e., notes from class] and then, you know, like listen to his lectures and everything” (Rachel, Interview 3). In addition to reading the sociology textbook and notes, Rachel had to select and read a book from a list of four books the professor provided and write a book review by the end of the semester. She chose a book on “hooking up on campus”, which she believed was “the most interesting book” among the options she had (Rachel, Interview 2). She said she had purchased the book in the beginning of October but did not finish reading it until close to the due date because she did not like to read. She also shared that the book was not what she expected and was critical of it, as seen below.

It wasn’t as good as I thought cause like all the other ones I thought maybe a little boring and then this one was like I chose hooking up (right) and then I thought it was gonna be like um more interesting, but then I thought it was like really biased and everything cause she only like interviewed the people that supported her claim so I was like, you know, like you should’ve like interviewed someone like [from] the opposite side. (Rachel, Interview 3)

Rachel affirmed to have read the book in its entirety and gone back to it several times while writing the book review in order to include references and in-text citations in her review (“Cause like we have to have references from the book so like for each one you have to like cite it, in-text citations and everything so I have to like reference the book so I have to go back to the book.” Rachel, Interview 3). More details about her writing experiences with the book review are offered in Chapter 6. She earned an A in this sociology class.

5.3.1.2 Business School

Ian was the only generation 1.5 student enrolled in a course from the Business School, Principles of Macroeconomics (ECN142). Unlike Rachel’s experiences in sociology, Ian explained that he did not have the textbook for the macroeconomics class because it was not required and that the lectures and exams did not come from it. As he put it, “Macroeconomics I
don’t have the book because, um, my professor really doesn’t give out tests or quizzes based on the book, it’s really him, so I don’t have the book” (Ian, Interview 1). When I asked him if the professor covered the textbook material in class, he said: “I heard that it doesn’t relate to the book, but it’s really, I really don’t know how he gets his stuff from” (Ian, Interview 1). Later on in the semester, he asserted that he really did not think the textbook was necessary and added “you are perfectly fine without the textbook” (Ian, Interview 2). In fact, the course syllabus stated that, although helpful, the book was indeed optional as the following excerpt shows.

The textbook for this course is [title of the book]. This book is optional and as such it is only a supplement to class, not a substitute for class. We will not intentionally follow the book nor rely on it for questions or answers. It is, however, a useful supplement and most of the topics discussed in class are in the book. So, you can use the book to help your understanding of the classroom material. (ECN142 Syllabus)

As indicated in the quote above, although Ian did not seem aware of this, the material covered in class was also found in the textbook. In the interview with the ECN142 professor, he explained: “Everything I cover in class is in the textbook, but I don’t make my lectures from the book. They could use another textbook and still get the material” because the course main objectives were to address economic principles and concepts “about how to think about the world, not a list of topics” (ECN142 Instructor, Interview). Ian claimed that he took notes in the macroeconomics class and read them when studying, but he did not take any notes during my classroom observation, and his struggles with the course throughout the semester appear to indicate that he did not often engage in this practice (e.g., “That’s [macroeconomics] actually it’s really hard and I I really feel lost, it’s really confusing, cause you can’t actually memorize, you have to like understand and that for that part it’s really hard to understand cause, he moves very fast, he doesn’t like stop and goes over everything just moves really fast.” Ian, Interview 1). The professor did not use PowerPoint slides during my classroom observation, and his notes on the
white board consisted of graphs and equations. There were no definitions of key terms or any other form of writing provided, and his explanations of the different economic models provided were oral. Towards the end of the semester, Ian began to read study guides he got from PASS leaders and classmates, which he claimed helped him do well on the last exams and ultimately pass the course, albeit with a C.

5.3.1.3 Science

As expected, the generation 1.5 students claimed that the science courses they were enrolled in (i.e., biology and chemistry) as well as the math classes did not require as much reading as EH101 and sociology, described above. Ian, Joy, and Rachel were in the same section of BIO119, and their approach to reading in the class was generally similar even though their experiences and attitude towards the subject were somewhat different. Rachel had taken AP biology classes in high school and felt prepared for BIO119 while Joy and Ian were a little more concerned about the course because they did not like science (“I hate biology; it’s just a lot of memorizing. I hate science.” Ian, Interview 3; “’cause I’m pretty bad at science.” Joy, Interview 1).

The three students explained that their BIO119 professor covered the textbook material on her PowerPoint slides and study guides, which she posted online. The PowerPoint slides the instructor used during my classroom observation had quite a bit of text, including definitions and examples. There were also illustrations and graphs with written explanations. The students said they primarily read these resources, skimming the textbook at times. Joy’s interview excerpts below summarize their approaches well.

Um, in biology, I don’t really read the textbook, so I just study from the slides that she gives and the study guide, pretty much, I just use resources from the internet instead of textbook. (Joy, Interview 1).
I skimmed the book so like I didn’t read everything I just like skim, skim, and then try to go to the end of the chapter and do the exercise, that’s it and then most of the, um, most of the, things I got I study from her slide and study guide. (Joy, Interview 2)

The biology lab required a lab manual with exercises, which the students had to complete as part of their assignments. The lab class was worth 25% of the grade for BIO119, but passing the biology course was contingent upon passing lab as well. Joy and Rachel were lab partners throughout the semester and studied together for lab, “skimming and scanning” the manual and working on questions and lab reports together (Joy, Interview 2). They both complained about the lab teacher, a TA, quite frequently and said that because she was not very helpful, they had to rely on the manual to learn the material. In Rachel’s words, “we have quizzes and everything so we actually have to study the lab manual but other than that, I mean, we just learn from the manual we didn’t really like we don’t learn anything from her” (Rachel, Interview 2). Ian did not discuss his biology lab very often but mentioned that he did not do as well in it as he did in the biology lecture. These three students earned As in BIO119.

Jacob took chemistry (CH121) in the fall and faced some challenges in class due to a lower grade in the first exam as discussed in his profile in Chapter 4. He said that there was not much reading involved in the course other than the slides the professor posted online, and he used the textbook to do exercises at the end of the chapters. The PowerPoint slides the professor used during my classroom observation presented several definitions, concepts, notations as well as figures and charts. She also played videos in class related to the concepts from the slides and solved several equations on the board. Because of his low performance on the first test, Jacob explained that he felt that he had to do extra homework from the textbook to be better prepared, but this included solving problems and not necessarily reading the chapters. However, he also pointed out that understanding exactly what the questions asked was paramount to doing well on
the tests and ultimately in the course. After not carefully reading the questions on the first test, he began to pay closer attention to them and working all the exercises in the textbook in order to be familiar with all types of problems on the exams. He explained,

Understanding what the question asks of you when you have to do homework, trying to like figure out, but like for example there was one where there was a picture displayed, and I had to, I had to like had to get to grams in order to compute the problem, but then there weren’t grams in the problem so I couldn’t compute, but then I realized that they are giving me how many moles are in the picture, and I had to covert that into grams and then use it [...]It [figuring out what the questions is asking] might take some time but that’s why it’s good that we first have so many, so much homework so we can do that, figure it out and then later on have the test. (Jacob, Interview 1)

The four generation 1.5 students were all taking different math courses (i.e., MA171, MA172, MA110, MA112) in the fall and did well in these courses, making As and an A+ (Joy), with the exception of Ian who earned a C. They asserted that there was not much reading involved in these classes, and explained that they generally did not read the chapters in the math textbooks but concentrated on completing the exercises at the end of the chapters and doing the study guides provided by the instructors, though Rachel and Jacob explained that for some chapters reading was helpful as seen below.

I observed two math classes, MA171, calculus A (Joy’s class), and MA110, finite mathematics (Rachel’s class). Joy’s instructor did not use PowerPoint slides during my classroom observation and wrote on the black board the entire class time, explaining notations (e.g., L’Hôpital’s rule) and solving problems. Joy had both her textbook and notebook open and took notes during the entire class period. Similarly, the MA110 instructor wrote several rules on the board and solved several problems throughout the lecture in preparation for the comprehensive final exam. Rachel also took notes during the class and further pointed out that she had to read some chapters more closely because although numbers were the primary focus in
the class, reading and understanding certain problems were also important because of the various concepts introduced in the courses. In her words,

I mean like the reviews before we had a lot of numbers they were all numbers but then this is more like concepts cause we do like sets and set operations and everything and like matrixes and like those and matrixes have numbers but you know like you have to get the concept and there’s like um probability and everything. (Rachel, Interview 2)

Jacob also explained that for some topics in calculus B (MA172) there were more reading involved as seen below.

In my math class I’m still just reading the examples instead of reading like reading like every line, but I might have to read every like cause now it’s not just the math part now we have to like prove something or like solve or something so I have to actually read like every single thing in the chapter, but I’m not really just paying to the teacher, I’m paying attention to the book. (Jacob, Interview 1)

5.3.1.4 Engineering

Jacob was the only generation 1.5 student taking a course from the college of engineering, MAE111 (Introduction to Computational Tools). Jacob explained that no reading was involved in the class, which focused on two specialized computer software programs that engineering majors were to use in more advanced classes. No textbooks were required in this course, and he asserted that the only reading involved was instructions that came with the software programs. However, Jacob did not believe that reading the instructions was necessary. Jacob, who earned an A in the course, described the class as follows, “All that is, uh, it’s really not anything with reading or writing, all you’ve got to pay attention to the thing, what it is is you are drawing into the object and then you can make it 3 D by like pushing it out and then or like making it oval and like or wrapping it around and stuff like that” (Jacob, Interview 1). In fact, during my classroom observation, the PowerPoint slides the instructor used contained very little text and included primarily pictures of objects that had been ‘rendered’ through the software program the students were learning. The instructor showed the students several pictures and how
to incorporate moving pieces into the objects. He then showed the students the steps for creating an object on the program and told them to begin creating their own project in class (the class met in a computer lab).

5.3.1.5 FYE100

Finally, the four generation 1.5 students took the first year experience class (FYE100) in the fall, a course that was required of all freshman and whose instructors came from all the colleges at the institution. The generation 1.5 students were all consistent in their assessment that there was not much reading at all involved in the course. No textbook or reading materials were required, and the most reading they did was taking different surveys online and watching videos that sometimes had text. All four students made As in this one-credit course.

5.3.2 International Students

The international students considered themselves to be slow readers in English, as previously mentioned, and the amount of time it took them to read an entire text or chapter for class seemed to be almost prohibitive (e.g., David argued it would take him two to three nights to do just one reading for the English composition course at the beginning of the semester). They believed, however, that doing at least some of the readings was important to help them better understand the lectures and learn specific vocabulary; thus, they began to strategically select what and when to read by skimming the textbooks and focusing on PowerPoint slides and lecture notes. They also resorted to online translations and summaries in their L1s of the materials covered in their classes. The following interview excerpts illustrate their general approaches to reading during the fall semester.

I’m not a big believer in like if the chapters take long to read the whole thing, I like to to see okay this is this is what the test is gonna cover and this is the most important thing for me to learn because everything in this chapter is not essential (uhum). So I … I like to like read paragraphs and then maybe make a couple of notes or take a marker and mark it
eh so I think it’s [reading] it’s really important. […] I would never study before a test just to go over my notes. I always do some reading and some or even if it’s just on internet or in textbook I like to read before[…]well often when I look at textbooks I look online instead maybe for more clear maybe even if I read it, I’ll look it up in Swedish […]maybe not just translate word for word maybe more like if the topic is negligence in business law, I look up what that means in Swedish. (David, Interview 2)

I read the first the first sentence of the paragraphs and then…. And I… I read all sentences in the paragraph if I think the paragraph is important yeah. […] Uh yeah I usually underline. […]I’m trying to read what is the most important part (uhum) of the writing uh some articles (uhum ok) uh it’s still hard for me (Narushi, Interview 2)

I just uh not read everything uh when I find words I didn’t know, I will use translator to check it that’s […] just like skim. (Xue, Interview 1)

Y: No it’s impossible [to read everything for class] [chuckles][…]Even even though if I read a whole a paragraph, I will forget later yeah. Uhh maybe I will search the title on internet and get some summary.
L: Ok. What if you cannot find the summary?
Y: I just read by myself… read read read many times. (Yu, Interview 2)

As briefly mentioned in Chapter 4, two recurrent themes in the international students’ interviews were difficulty with understanding lectures and learning vocabulary. These students explained that they struggled to follow some of the classes because of the instructors’ fast delivery and use of vocabulary they were not familiar with, and that skimming the readings aided in comprehending the lectures as seen below.

I’ve noticed so far that I need to read a lot for classes, especially because sometimes they have teaching up on the board and stuff that I don’t understand […]I try to eh I try to read before class so I stay ahead a little bit um because sometimes when he [the history instructor] talks I didn’t, I don’t understand all the words I can’t connect all of them. […]you know for me it’s just some of the words because he uses like a little bit older language for me at least (yeah) so it’s hard. (David, Interview 1)

Reading before reading before the class is good for me […] to listen very well (Narushi, Interview 1)

I think it…it is at a high level you need to read and write well so you can understand well like what instructor is talking about. (Xue, Interview 1)
Before I went to class I need to preview uh the uh the book so every time I I saw the the word I didn’t know before (uhum) I’ll look up the dictionary and I collect more and more word. (Yu, Interview 2)

In fact, academic and subject-specific vocabulary in the texts seemed to pose a special challenge for these international students and became the major focus of their reading. They asserted that their primary goal when reading for class was to learn specific vocabulary needed for the various courses they were taking. Narushi said, “I need to learn uh… English of some yeah specific subject and how to say in English or something” (Interview 1). Likewise, Xue stated: “Yeah I think the vocabulary is the…the biggest part I have to work in” (Interview 1), and Yu explained that because there were specific vocabulary words he did not understand, he “need[ed] to read the book before class and then translate it to Chinese” (Yu, Interview 2). Further, David discussed the differences he had noticed between the registers of academic texts and colloquial language as seen in the following excerpt.

I’m trying to take in as much as possible that helps me in the way of like learning I guess and of course like academic like a lot of reading. I try to look up words that I don’t know what it mean. I mean maybe it’s like harder words that I don’t use in my speaking language so much but in the same way I think it’s uh I think it’s like yeah the reading […]I mean I can tell a difference from a text like this is more eh proper English or academic English or this is like student English (uhum) or obviously when like when I talk to my buddies is more of like (informal?) yeah exactly so that’s I think I see the differences. (David, Interview 2)

These reading practices seemed to have worked for the four international students and towards the end of the semester they declared that they had learned many new words and believed that their English in general had improved, as illustrated below.

Yeah just overall like my reading and writing has improved from like [the beginning of the semester] my English yeah oh yeah for sure. (David, Interview 2)

Yeah mostly I’ve learned is yeah English uh yeah of course I learned about chemistry and math (uhum) and electrical engineering but yeah….mostly I learned is English. (Narushi, Interview 3)
Cause uh the class first the class beginning there are many new vocabulary (uhum) uh like psychology many academic words I didn’t know but when the time goes by I can recognize it and yeah so some uh like the words academic words it will show many times yeah. (Xue, Interview 2)

My reading is also very improved I think [because…] before I went to class (uhum) I need to preview uh the uh the book (uhum) so every time I I saw the the word I didn’t know before (uhum) I’ll look up the dictionary (uhum) and I collect more and more word. (Yu, Interview 2).

Regarding specific courses, the international students’ practices varied somewhat depending on each individual student, but as a general rule they focused on important information from PowerPoint slides and study guides as well as on key vocabulary along with formulas and notations from their textbooks as explained next.

5.3.2.1 Liberal Arts

The international students claimed that most of their reading load came from the EH101S classes (e.g., “English class yeah the English class is probably most of the reading comes from.” David, Interview 1; “I think the English [reading] assignment [chuckles] is the most, yeah.” Narushi, Interview 1; “yeah about the EH class the reading is really long.” Yu, Interview 2).

David, Narushi, and Yu were in the same EH101S class while Xue was in another EH101S section.

Unlike the generation 1.5 students’ composition teachers, Xue’s EH101S instructor did not require reading responses and did not hold the students accountable for the readings in any other way, while David, Narushi, and Yu’s teacher tried to incorporate different types of quizzes throughout the semester. Consequently, although Xue claimed that he tried to skim all the readings, he did not seem to closely read the chapters and articles assigned for every class. The other three international students appeared to at least attempt to understand parts of the texts. My classroom observations of their EH101S classes revealed that they did not participate in the
readings discussions facilitated by the instructors, and only David actively contributed to small group discussions about the readings. Of course this could also have been related to the fact that as non-native speakers of English the students did not feel comfortable speaking up in class and thus their lack of participation might not be necessarily an indicator that they had not done their readings. Nonetheless, the instructors mentioned in their interviews that they also did not believe the students did all of the readings, as further discussed in the faculty’s perceptions section. The students pointed out, however, that for the rhetorical analysis and research paper assignments, they had to read the sources more closely in order to understand them and be able to write the essays (e.g., “Just like skim but if like literacy [literature] narrat uh review I still have to read it very uh word by word to try to understand what the author is talking about.” Xue, Interview 2). David and Narushi made As in the course, while the Chinese students, Xue and Yu, made Bs.

David and Yu were enrolled in two other humanities courses, namely World History (HIS104) and Introduction to Music Literature (MU100), respectively. They both struggled with understanding the lectures because of the instructors’ more academic and formal discourse, which they were not familiar with. The reading strategies they developed to cope with the courses were quite different, however.

David explained that he tried to skim the textbook before class in order to be better prepared for the lectures, but admitted that he did not read the chapters in their entirety (e.g., “I haven’t read everything.” David, Interview 2). As he put it, “I try to eh I try to read before class so I stay ahead a little bit um because sometimes when he [the history instructor] talks I didn’t, I don’t understand all the words” (David, Interview 1). The history instructor did not use any visual aids during his lectures other than writing key terms on the board at the beginning of the lesson, and the classes were teacher-centered. During my classroom observation, he lectured,
sitting down at his desk, for the entire class period. As David acknowledged in our interviews, the instructor’s delivery was indeed not very easy for a non-native speaker of English to follow since he lectured as if he was reading and used a rather formal registry, which David perceived as “fancy, old language” (David, Interview 1). The history instructor also made several sarcastic jokes, which I was not sure David was aware of since he never laughed or in any way reacted to the instructor’s humor. However, during our second interview, after my classroom observation of the class, David told me that he realized that the instructor used sarcasm, though he could not always precisely identify the jokes. In David’s words, “so sometimes I wonder like if ‘Is that a joke or is it not?’ [laughs] you know cause sarcasm is not [easy to follow]” (David, Interview 2).

David also said that he carefully read his and his classmate’s notes (his strategies of seeking peers’ help are further discussed in Chapter 7) before the history exams. In addition to exams, a book review was another major assignment in the history class. Though David waited “until the last minute” to read the assigned book because “it slipped [his] mind” (David, Interview 3), he did not seem to have any problems with the assignment, earning an A+ on it. He claimed to have read the book in its entirety since it “was not a long book” about “150 pages” (David, Interview 3) and did not think writing the review was a very difficult task (his writing experiences with book review are described in Chapter 6). David earned a B in history.

Yu faced similar but perhaps greater challenges understanding the music lectures (“I cannot understand what’s the teacher say in music […] because I don’t similar with the words.” Yu, Interview 1), and skipped many classes, claiming that he could not follow the lessons (“Actually, I didn’t go to music class very often. I cannot understand anything in the class” Yu, Interview 2). My classroom observation confirmed that the professor was indeed difficult to understand at times because of his use of a very high register that sounded almost like written
discourse. In fact, I recorded in my research journal that the professor looked down at his written notes several times while lecturing. He also resorted to expressions in foreign languages, such as Italian and German, in the class I observed when discussing opera singers Giuseppe Verdi, Giácimo Puccini, and Richard Wagner. Besides not offering translations to the foreign words he used, the professor also strove to pronounce these with target-like pronunciation, which could have contributed to the difficulty Yu experienced in understanding him.

Unlike David, however, Yu did not believe reading the music textbook was very helpful. In his words, “I think reading music book is not way to … it’s helpless [chuckles] because last time I read I almost read every wor uh page and it’s still useless, I still get D” (Yu, Interview 2). The professor did not post his PowerPoint slides online though, nor did Yu take notes in class, so he was at a loss on how to study for the course. As he put it, “my music class I have I have no idea how to do, I’m going to drop this class.” (Yu, Interview 1). Yet, he did not drop it and surprisingly earned a B in the class after failing the first two exams, as explained in Chapter 4.

David and Xue were enrolled in two social sciences classes, Effective Reading and Study Skills Techniques (ED115) and Introduction to Psychology (PSY101) respectively, which were the last two courses in the Liberal Arts for the international-student population. These classes appeared to have been easier for these international students to follow, and they did not complain about the instructors’ delivery. However, the students’ reading practices for the courses were quite different. David again said he tried to do most of his readings for the ED115 course, which included a textbook and a reading packet with supplemental readings compiled by the instructor. He seemed to be taking advantage of the content taught in the class and applying it to his reading strategies for his other classes as well. He explained it as follows,

I think actually, actually I’ve drawn advantage from one of my classes effective study skills she’s talking about reading skills and stuff and I noticed that I read too thoroughly
like I really read and like everywhere doesn’t make like the key point, so I’m not skimming through but I … try […] I try to read like more, quicker, faster maybe I still getting maybe I read it twice or whatever and so getting the main point instead of like reading every word. (David, Interview 2)

David added that he read the notes he took in class since the instructor did not use PowerPoint slides during her lectures. During my classroom observation, the instructor discussed the reading material and wrote several notes on the white board, which David copied down on his notebook. She also asked the students several questions during the lecture and had them participate in classroom discussions and surveys about stress level and susceptibility to stress. There were about 20 students in the classroom, and David was quite engaged, taking notes and asking a few questions during the lecture. His final grade in the course was a B.

The PSY101 class, on the other hand, had over 100 students and Xue did not actively participate in the lecture. He also did not own the psychology textbook as explained in Chapter 4 and was convinced that reading the PowerPoint slides and the notes his Chinese classmates took in class was sufficient to do well in the course. He believed this strategy “save[d] time” and was effective because the “slides have the most important parts” (Xue, Interview 1). His main concern was related to learning the various key terms and concepts in the course, and he believed that he could do so without the textbook. Yet, Xue was struggling with the class, especially with the first two exams. When I asked him why he did not do well on the tests since he thought he was prepared for them, he talked about the challenges involved with understanding the questions and examples, giving the following explanation.

Uhh maybe just can’t understand the concept like the question is uh example like a case and you you can, you have to understand what is going on in this and you have to know what concept is used in this question so sometimes eh maybe you misunderstanding the question yeah. (Xue, Interview 2)
Though his reading and study strategies might not appear to have been effective ones, as with Yu’s music class, Xue ended up earning a B in psychology despite his lower grades in the first two exams. Other strategies the students’ seem to have resorted to compensate for their struggles with readings and low performance on exams are discussed in Chapter 7.

5.3.2.2 Business School

Given the fact two international students were majoring in business administration, David and Xue, and one in finance, Yu, this student population took the most courses from the business school among the focal participants.

David was enrolled in Legal Environment of Business (BLS211) and expressed some of the same difficulties he experienced with the history course. He said he could not always understand the professor’s fast delivery during the lectures or her handwriting on the board, and she did not use PowerPoint slides or any other type of visual aid. He explained, “she literally reads out loud from the book and talks a little about it, so it’s the notes that I’m taking it’s pretty much as in the book, so I have hard [time] and it’s just his her tempo is so fast and I try to write she goes on the next topic” (David, Interview 3). To cope with this, he also borrowed some of the lecture notes from a classmate, as he did in the history class. He said the textbook was thick, and there was a lot material covered in the course. He skimmed the textbook, however, because he did not feel that he did needed to read the chapters extensively since the professor pointed to the sections in the chapters she covered during class and read them out loud. In his words, “for every class she go through like the whole chapter in the book so she has a book with her so like she says we are here now then she talks about that and then go to the next outline, rubric, or whatever” (David, Interview 2). He also looked up some of the content online in his L1 as previously mentioned and met with the professor and a tutor for extra help as further discussed in
Chapter 7. When I asked him what was the most difficult class he took in the fall, David quickly responded that it was BLS211 “by far” (David, Interview 3), and he was thankful to have made a B in the course.

Though this was Xue’s first year in college in the US, being a transfer student from a Chinese university, he was enrolled in one two-hundred level course, Business Statistics II (MSC288), and one three-hundred level course, Information Systems in Organizations (IS301). He said that there was a lot of reading involved in both courses but explained that he focused more on the instructors’ PowerPoint slides than on the textbooks: “[I] just look the lecture slides uh yeah and because they have the important parts” (Xue, Interview 2).

Xue added that although math was an important part of the statistics course, being able to read and understand examples and questions was also crucial. In his words, “statistic […] it’s more do with math things but yeah also need a lot of reading because uh is management science is so you have to also use in the specific example you also have to understand the question first” (Xue, Interview 3). My classroom observation of the class revealed that the professor’s PowerPoint slides presented indeed quite a bit of text, such as concepts and definitions comparing the variances of two populations and explaining sampling distribution and standard deviation. The slides also contained problems and examples, which the professor solved with the class by writing on a computer screen on his desk that projected his writings onto the PPT screen.

For the information systems class, Xue did not read the textbook much at all because he did not believe the lectures came from the book. Instead, he looked for summaries online of the topics the professor covered in class. In our second interview, he showed me a print-out of a summary he had found online for the information systems exam he had the following day (“This
is what I do review this for my exam tomorrow yeah I find it online and print it out.” Xue, Interview 2). When I asked if he was not going to read the textbook before the test, he responded: “No, just because in the class the teacher don’t always talk about the book, he just talk about the example uh the company uh what happened in now or something but he doesn’t follow the book but other point uh other knowledge is from the book” (Xue, Interview 2). Xue made an A in the business statistics course and a B in information systems.

Finally, Yu was enrolled in principles of accounting (ACC211), also a two-hundred level course. Like Xue, he was a transfer student from a Chinese university and had taken some lower one-hundred level business courses before coming to the U.S. Yu’s perceptions and practices pertaining to reading in accounting were somewhat conflicting, and his interview responses were inconsistent at times.

Specifically, in our first interview, Yu claimed that there was a lot of reading involved in the course and that he found the readings difficult because he had to learn the material both in English and Chinese. In his words, “you know I need to learn the knowledge after I go back to China. I study accounting here but after I go back to China I have to use the knowledge to uhhh so I have I study English version and I have to translate to Chinese” (Yu, Interview 1). When I asked him if accounting was different in China, he said that the content was the same but that the vocabulary used was different, which was why he tried to learn it in both languages (“knowledge isn’t different but name is different.” Yu, Interview 1).

Further, he mentioned that the accounting problems were very long and indicated that reading them carefully was important to understand questions well (“Y:[the problems are] very very long; I need to deal with many problems. L: Do you have to understand (yeah) what the question is asking first? Y: Yeah.” Interview 2). However, he later on explained that he did not
feel that he needed to do all the readings since he relied on other Chinese classmates and older cohorts for help when studying for the course as seen below.

Uh uh accounting I think I don’t need to read anything everything and because uh I can uh we can [pause] exchange our idea between the Chinese among the Chinese student and other student from uh they study they study the accounting in last semester yeah they will teach us something. (Yu, Interview 2)

In our last interview, he added that he could not understand the lectures (as with his music course), skipping many classes for this reason, but that he could read the textbook on his own. As he put, “for accounting I absent maybe many times […] because this class I don’t understand that teacher said in class, but I can read the book by myself very well.” (Yu, Interview 3). During my classroom observation of the class, Yu indeed left at the beginning of the lecture, right after having his test returned to him by the instructor as described in Chapter 4. Unlike with the music and history classes, however, I did not perceive the accounting instructor’s lecture as very difficult to follow. His delivery was clear, and his discourse was much more colloquial than those of the former instructors. He also wrote on the board and elicited questions and discussions throughout the lecture. Further, the instructor had the textbook open on his desk and pointed out to the students the pages where several important definitions were located. He also told students to pay close attention to charts and illustrations on certain pages and wrote important key terms on the board.

Though he missed several classes (he noted that the instructor did not take attendance), Yu claimed that accounting was the most difficult course he took in the fall because he “need[ed] to read a lot of words” (Yu, Interview 3). His final grade in the course was a B-.

5.3.2.3 Science

Narushi and Yu were enrolled in General Chemistry I (CH121) and Introduction to Chemistry (CH101), respectively, along with their corresponding lab sections (CH125 and
Both Narushi and Yu did not believe that there was much reading involved in the Chemistry course, or labs, and did not read the textbook very often.

Narushi explained that his professor (he was in the section as Jacob) posted her PowerPoint slides online, so he focused on reading primarily these slides. As he put it, “Ms. [Dr.] [Professor’s name] show some slides and then yeah… I mostly… read those slides and download it in my in my laptop and read it so these slides are just… just formulas in the slide. […] Yeah yeah I don’t read [the textbook] so much” (Narushi, Interview 1). During my classroom observation, the PowerPoint slides the professor used had not only formulas but also several definitions, concepts, tables, and figures. She also showed short videos and solved problems with the class on a computer screen that projected the writings on the wall. Narushi had his laptop open, on which he took some notes, and downloaded the slides from the course’s blackboard site during the class.

He further pointed out in our second interview that he used the textbook to look up specific concepts and definitions (“most of the part I don’t have to read read textbook all but yeah some concept concepts or definitions (uhum) I need to read it.” Narushi, Interview 2). By the end of the semester, Narushi perceived the course as very difficult and realized that he had to learn or “memorize” different chemistry laws and principles in order to do better on the exams. Although he had seen most of the material covered in CH121 in high school in Japan, his college professor asked for specific concepts and laws on the exams, which he had never needed to remember before, as seen in our interaction below.

N: […] a little bit a little bit need more need more effort in my Chemistry class because yeah… I have I have like 3 exams and it’s like 25 points (uhum) is my maximum is 25 and yeah and all 4 multiple choices (uhum) then there’s there’s like 2 or 3 conceptual questions (right) so I need to I need to memorize the name name of the law and yeah so. L: Was that hard?
N: Yeah it’s very hard for me. I…yeah… actually I learned I learned that kind of subject uh before.
L: In Japan?
N: Yeah in Japan but… I didn’t remember the name of Law and yeah the person.
L: Oh, so she asks for the names?
N: Uh no…uh there’s a name then blah blah so this [Law] means means and 1,2,3,4 (ok) so [chuckles].

Bringing up specific terminology again, Narushi said that the chemistry course was the most difficult class he took in the fall. He explained that he had to read the vocabulary needed for the class in the textbook since he did not always understand the lectures, as the following excerpt illustrates.

Uh….difficult class…let’s see…. I guess Chemistry is the most difficult because there’s a lot of terms (uhum) and yeah exam is yeah the most difficult. […] I some yeah I usually I often I often miss yeah…cannot listen cannot listen and understand, so I need I need to read my textbook to understand well. (Narushi, Interview 3)

Despite these challenges, Narushi earned an A in the chemistry class and an A- in the chemistry lab. He did not bring up his chemistry lab class much, though, and simple mentioned that he saw the lab instructor and talked to classmates when he needed extra help.

Introduction to chemistry (CH101) and its lab component (CH105) were the only classes Yu did not seem to struggle with in the fall. He said that he did not read much at all for either course because he found them very easy since he had studied the material covered in them in China, as illustrated in the following interaction.

Y: Uh chemistry class is easy because I already study knowledge in middle school
L: Middle school?
Y: Yeah
L: Wow! So it’s very easy?
Y: Yeah very easy!
L: Do you have a textbook?
Y: Yeah I have.
L: Do you read it?
Y: Uh I don’t, too easy.
L: You don’t need to read?
Y: Yeah, too easy. (Yu, Interview 1)
Throughout the semester, Yu insisted that the chemistry classes were easy because of the previous knowledge he had learned in China as the following interview excerpts illustrate.

The Chemistry class we don’t need to remember too much and compare to Chinese education in Chinese education we have to remember all… a lot. (Yu, Interview 1)

I don’t like Chemistry, but I think that the chemistry class is much easier so I can just know all the knowledge I studied it in Chinese I can translate it to [English]. (Yu, Interview 2)

It’s [chemistry] very basic knowledge. (Yu, Interview 3).

Yu also said that the chemistry instructor posted the PowerPoint slides used in the lectures online and that he focused on those when studying “because uh the content in the power point is the most important so I need to pay more attention [to them]” (Yu, Interview 2). He claimed that chemistry lab was the easiest class he took in the fall, and this was in fact the only course in which he made an A. He earned a B+ in the lecture (CH101).

Narushi was the only international student taking a course from the math department, calculus A (MA171), and his reading practices in this class were very similar to those he experienced in chemistry. He again said that there was not a lot of reading involved in the course, and he focused primarily on PowerPoint slides and used the textbook for specific formulas and definitions. He added that this calculus class was more like a review for him because he had already learned the material during high school in Japan (“Math is uh… we have already learned calculus like I think it’s A in my high school so […]it’s a review.” Narushi, Interview 1). At the end of the semester, he assessed calculus as the easiest course he took in the fall “because [he had] done it um in [his] high school” (Narushi, Interview 3) and earned an A+ in the class.
5.3.2.4 Engineering

Narushi was also the only international student taking a course from the college of engineering, Fundamentals of Computer, Electrical, and Optical Engineering (EE100). His major was electrical engineering, and this was his favorite course in the fall. As with calculus, he explained that this class was relatively easy for him because he had seen some of the content in high school, and his final grade was also an A+. In his words, “electrical engineering is is easy still easy for me in this semester” (Narushi, Interview 1) and “so like… in my high school there was like research project and then I I chose a project about electrical engineering then uh… yeah I learned some about some about electrical engineering at that class” (Narushi, Interview 2).

Again, his reading practices in electrical engineering seem to have been similar to those in the chemistry and calculus classes as he claimed that there was not much reading in this course and that he read primarily on PPT presentations, focusing on formulas from the textbook when needed (“I just I just see some yeah formulas [on the textbooks] and then yeah most most of those formulas uh we’re learning now is uh yeah is what I’ve already learned (ok) so yeah I just see the formulas.”, Narushi, Interview 2). During my classroom observation, Narushi had his textbook open and flipped through the chapters while the instructor explained different topics as if looking for the information in the book; he also took some notes during class. The instructor’s PowerPoint slides contained considerable amounts of writing, apparently taken from the textbook, which he read out loud before moving on to solving problems on the screen.

5.3.2.5 FYE100

David and Narushi were the only two international students enrolled in the first year experience class since both Xue and Yu were transfer students and did not have to take the
course. David and Narushi, like the generation 1.5 students, did not mention any readings that they had to do for the course and did not seem to have any problems with the course, earning As.

5.3.3 Native-Speaking Students

The four native-speaking students did not complain about difficulties with their course readings, and their reading practices varied quite somewhat depending on the participant, as further discussed below. Generally, however, these students – as native-speakers of English – did not bring up having to learn specific vocabulary as a challenge and although they acknowledged that they were not always familiar with some of the more academic words, especially in the English composition readings, they appeared to able to comprehend the gist of the readings from the context. Additionally, they did not mention using dictionaries or looking up the meaning of words online nor did they look for summaries of material taught in the classes as some of the multilingual students did. The following excerpts illustrate their general approach to reading when they engaged in this practice.

I try to at first like I go through it [a reading] one time and like skim it just try to get the main idea and then I go back and try to read it word for word to get the main like the finer details of it. (Aaron, Interview 2)

D: Uh if if I’m you know in a hurry at all, I’ll just go through the kind of side notes with you know definitions and words, and I’ll kind of scan through that if I’m in a rushing to get through a quiz or this that and other. But usually I read through the whole text, side notes and everything just case that’s where you find the hidden stuff you know. […] I sometimes take notes or define words that I think are gonna be important to learn and things like that.
L: And I remember you saying you have a pretty good vocabulary (D: Yeah). Do you ever encounter things that you don’t understand in your readings?
D: Here and yeah I mean there’s times where the you know….especially if it’s like these higher end English papers and things where it’s just like kinda they’re using big words for no reason kinda thing you know […] but usually I’ve got the general idea so it’s just [I] know what they are trying to say. (Dalton, Interview 2).

I read every word…well first I read I read paragraph by paragraph dissecting like I’ll read a paragraph and I’ll like write to the side similes and what they mean or a metaphor and how he used it or like the way he structured the sentence so. (Tenesha, Interview 2)
As discussed in Chapter 4, Tenesha appears to have construed a self-image based on how she wanted to be perceived by others, and some of her interview answers might seem somewhat overstated like the quote above. Though she claimed to read closely, she did not offer any examples of similes and metaphors she had used nor did she explain for what classes she engaged in such practices.

Carrie did not articulate specific reading strategies or approaches during the interview, perhaps because she did not read much for her classes. She explained, “Um…. I don’t have any concerns about the reading […] No [there are] not really many readings. You just take notes and take tests or quizzes off the notes” (Carrie, Interview 1)

As for their specific courses in the fall, though these students’ readings practices were somewhat diverse, as seen next, they generally did not read much at all for science and math courses but seem to have realized by the end of the semester that reading could actually have helped them do better in these classes.

5.3.3.1 Liberal Arts

Aaron was enrolled in a regular EH101 class while Carrie, Dalton, and Tenesha were together in an EH101S section. Aaron’s instructor (he was in the same section as Jacob and Joy) required reading responses, so he claimed to do all the readings for this class. As he put it, “I’ve done all the readings so far [for EH101], yes ma’am. Ms. [Instructor’s last name] has us do the reading responses where you kind of type out what it [the reading] was about and our thoughts on it and that’s been fun so far.” (Aaron, Interview 1). As this quote indicates, Aaron seemed to have enjoyed the EH101 readings and further added, “I’ve liked them. They’ve been kind of like personal stories from different authors and stuff. So it’s been interesting” (Aaron, Interview 1). He was the only student in the study who mentioned enjoying reading for EH101. Towards the
end of semester, his EH101 instructor substituted the reading responses for in class discussion of the readings (“She’s dropped that [reading responses] now and now we just talk about it in class like she gives us questions in class on the reading.”, Aaron Interview 3), but Aaron seemed to continue to do the readings. During my four classroom observations of the EH101 class, Aaron actively participated in whole class and group discussions of the readings, and on one particular day, I heard him explaining the reading to one of the students who had not read. He made an A- in the course.

The other three native-speaking students experienced very different reading practices in their EH101S class. Their instructor did not require readings responses, and the students were not held accountable for the readings in any other tangible way. The teacher went over some of the readings during her lectures, asking students questions as she wrote notes on the white board, and only Dalton among the native-speaking students in the study participated in the discussions. He said that he tried to do most of the readings for the class even if skimming (“I get the big picture but not so much the detail but yeah I think I got pretty good grasp everything we’ve talked about so […] yeah I’ve gotten everything [all the readings] done.”, Dalton, Interview 2). On the other hand, Carrie and Tenesha did not seem to read much for the course. Carrie, talking about the EH101S class, admitted, “we actually have been kind of behind in the readings so we haven’t had to, but even beforehand I did fall behind in the readings so I have to look on to other people” (Interview 2), and Tenesha explained that she understood the material because the teacher covered the readings in class, suggesting that she might not have done the readings on her own. In her words, “She [the instructor] goes over them [the readings] in vast detail like dissect every concept and you know it’s easier for you to see and you start picking up on it quicker” (Tenesha, Interview 2). Carrie earned a B in the class, and though I do not have
Dalton’s or Tenesha’s final grades, they earned Bs in all of the essays they shared with me throughout the semester.

Dalton was the only native-speaking student enrolled in a social science course, Introduction to Psychology (PSY101), and emphasized throughout the semester that reading the textbook was very important for the class. In our first interview, he explained: “Well, it’s, she doesn’t do, you know, a real lecture basically it’s just her opinion on the book, and so really if you don’t read you don’t get any of it because all that information is in there” (Dalton, Interview 1). Later on in the semester, he added: “Oh you definitely need the book in psychology […] ‘cause I mean the notes help but it’s you know she just kind of picks things out so it helps to actually look at where it came from and what’s you know basis of everything so” (Dalton, Interview 2). My classroom observation of the course supported Dalton’s perceptions. The PowerPoint slides the professor used contained several key terms and concepts and their definitions, along with charts and pictures. The various examples the professor gave during the lesson were not included on the PPT, and the students had to take notes of them, which Dalton did during the entire class. I also recorded in my research journal that she covered a lot of information during the lecture (e.g., encoding, types of memory, types of retrieval, levels of processing, models of memory, transferability, information processes, incomplete knowledge, among others), and I made the following note: “This is a lot of info. I don’t think students could do really well without reading the text and studying their notes” (Field Notes, PSY101, 10/14/13).

In addition to these readings, students in this section of PSY101 were required to do an article review assignment, for which they had to select and read journal article and write a report
on the article’s methods and conclusion. The assignment was described in the syllabus as follows:

**Journal Article** - This assignment introduces you to the structure of a scientific research article. You will be assessed on your ability to explain the basic research methods used and the conclusions. Select a source from your textbook by the deadline that provides an empirical research report (contains introduction, methods, results, discussion) found in a peer-reviewed journal (NOT book, newspaper, popular magazine, or website) available through the [Institution] library. Read the article and compose a minimum 1-page paper. Detailed information on this assignment will be posted on Angel. (PSY101 B Syllabus)

Dalton said he did not experience any problems reading the journal article or writing it (discussions in Chapter 6) and earned a 92 on his review. Again, he did not share with me his final grades, but he had Bs and As in his tests during the semester. This was the psychology section that Carrie was enrolled in the beginning of the semester but dropped by midterm.

5.3.3.2 Science

Carrie and Tenesha were in the same section of BIO119, Principles of Biology, and though they acknowledged that a lot of material was covered in class and that the textbook was “very thick”, they did not believe they were expected to read it (“Most people say that you just study the notes off of um what [the instructor] put on Angel.”, Carrie, Interview 1; “Reading the biology book…well he doesn’t expect us to.”, Tenesha, Interview 2). Carrie claimed to read the PowerPoint slides and study guides the professor provided (“the notes and the slides and his uh his pre-test exam uh example of a pre-test”, Carrie, Interview 1). However, the professor argued that he did not post his PPT slides online as discussed in the faculty’s perspectives below, but he added that if students asked for the slides, he would send the PPT presentations to the them. Thus, it seems that Carrie could have requested the slides (though I believe this is unlikely since she mentioned never reaching out to any instructor – as discussed in Chapter 7) or gotten them from classmates who had requested them from the professor. Tenesha explained that she
skimmed the textbook, focusing on the exercises at the end of the chapters (“I really just go over and skim over what I don’t understand in class and then like give myself like you know at the end of each chapter they have review questions, so I do those.”, Tenesha, Interview 2).

Carrie and Tenesha felt confident about the course at the beginning of the semester and said they liked science as also evidenced by their majors (Pre-nursing and Biology/Pre-Vet, respectively). Carrie said, “biology, I’ve always liked science and learning about you know different organisms, and so that should be interesting” (Interview 1), and Tenesha thought that BIO119 was going to be a review of what she had learned in AP biology classes in high school. In her words, “I actually think my biology in high school, I had AP biology, so is [BIO119] really basically the same thing I learned, it’s just like refreshment so” (Tenesha, Interview 1).

After taking the first couple of tests, however, they realized that they had to study and read more in order to do well in the course. As they put it, “I guess next time I have a test in biology I’m probably gonna have to look at the book cause it was a lot different when we took the test” (Carrie, Interview 2); “Like with the biology, after this test I just took, I realized that I really need to start studying, you know. […] I really need to read and study” (Tenesha, Interview 2).

Carrie did not seem to have been successful at reading the textbook, however, and failed the course with an F. In the excerpt below, she blames her poor test-taking abilities for her low grades, but as the quote suggests, she still seemed to be just reading the PPT notes when studying for exams.

I think that might be what’s wrong with me too that I just can’t take tests because um when I was taking that biology test I could read it back and forth the notes back to her [her roommate] but then when I got to the test I got, I ended up getting a 48 and so. (Carrie, Interview 3)

In our last interview, Tenesha – who struggled all semester in the course – said that she had been “studying like crazy” by doing online exercises through an access code that had come
with the textbook. She did not send me her final grades, as aforementioned, and I never learned whether or not she was able to pass BIO119.

Aaron and Dalton took chemistry in the fall (CH121, General Chemistry, and CH101, Introduction to Chemistry I, respectively), and their reading experiences (but not necessarily other academic literacy practices) in these two chemistry courses were quite similar. They both said they did not read their textbooks and focused primarily on PowerPoint slides and doing exercises when studying for the exams. Aaron explained that his instructor’s slides covered the information from the book and felt that reading those sufficed (“Chemistry, um, I’ve got Mr. [Instructor’s last name], he does lecture slides pretty much straight out of the book, so I don’t really have to read a whole lot in that”, Aaron, Interview, 1). He later added that he skimmed these slides but never used the book: “I kind of like flip through the slides when I’m studying, reviewing[...] I don’t ever use it [the chemistry textbook]. My classroom observation supported Aaron’s claims about the PowerPoint presentations as the slides the instructor used for the lesson I observed included a lot of text and seemed to be a summary of the textbook chapter. The instructor later e-mailed me the PPT presentation he used for that lesson, and it contained 88 slides. Several of the slides had paragraphs like the one below.

Max Planck (1858-1947) proposed that light waves existed as discrete packets of energy, “quanta” in order to account for the “ultraviolet catastrophe” predicted by classical physics. The “ultraviolet catastrophe” arises from the classical theory for the energy emitted by an ideal blackbody governed by the Rayleigh-Jeans law. According to classical physics, the intensity of emitted light approaches infinity as the wavelength of the light approaches zero, hence the term catastrophe. (CH121 B PPT Presentation)

Dalton emphasized working on problems as well as reading notes for this CH101 class. In his words, “Just going over notes and practicing problems really it’s all it’s the only way I’ve figured out any way [how to study]” (Dalton, Interview 2). He also explained that there was not much helpful explanation in the book, as seen below.
But there’s really I mean except for the theorems and everything there’s not a whole lot in there [textbook] that you try to make it simpler I guess or anything yeah it’s just kind of yeah you get it or you don’t you know so… I’m obviously just going over problems. (Dalton, Interview 2).

Unlike their experiences in the chemistry lectures, Aaron and Dalton said they read more for the chemistry labs in order to complete the tasks in the manuals. In Aaron’s words, “I do have to read um the Chemistry lab, I have to do pre-labs for that and that’s quite a bit of reading (uhum) and I have to read the procedure and everything” (Aaron, Interview 1), and Dalton added that he was learning more in the lab portion than in the regular chemistry class (“I mean I’m learning quite a bit of chemistry honestly I take more out of the chemistry lab than I do of my chemistry class.”, Dalton, Interview 2). Aaron earned an A in the lab and a B- in the lecture, and Dalton did not share with me his final grades, but he brought up several times during the semester that he was worried about passing the course and had low grades in his exams until our final interview.

These two students were also enrolled in two math courses in the fall; Aaron took Calculus A (MA171), and Dalton took Pre-calculus Algebra (MA112). Again, they both asserted that there was not much reading involved in these courses, and their focus was on solving problems from the book and in the computer lab (“Math, it’s just doing problems in the book, I don’t have to read the instructions or anything.”, Aaron, Interview 1). Dalton also claimed that his math instructor herself told the class the book was not necessary since the students had access to all the chapters on the computers in their math lab. In his words,

For math and chemistry I don’t think you really need to read the book. I mean for instance my math teacher told us we didn’t need our book (Oh! Ok) yeah so which makes sense I mean she’s got everything in the computer and actually on that math lab they actually have a chapter thing where you can [read] chapter content I think that’s it you can actually look at the book on the computer (uhum) and so that’s pretty yeah you can by with that. (Dalton, Interview 2)
Though they were both engineering majors, Dalton struggled with his math course throughout the semester – as discussed in Chapter 4 – and was concerned about passing the class, while Aaron made an A in his class.

5.3.3.3 Engineering

Aaron was the only native-speaking student taking an engineering course, Introduction to Computational Tools (MAE111), and was in the same class as Jacob. Like Jacob, Aaron said that there was no “reading whatsoever” in the course but said that it was the most difficult course he took in the fall because of all the computer programming involved (“it would have to be my MAE class [the most difficult] because not so much the CAD part of it but MAT lab was kind of hard to pick up on for me; it was a lot of computer programming” (Aaron, Interview 3). He earned a B in MAE111.

5.3.3.4 FYE100

All four native-speaking students took the first year experience course in the fall, and going in the same direction as the generation 1.5 and international students, these students also stated that there was no reading involved in the course. Their assignments consisted primarily of watching videos and taking surveys for homework as well as attending events. The class did require some writing, however, which these native-speaking students seemed to resent as later discussed in Chapter 6.

5.4 Summary

In the first part of this chapter, the reading practices of the focal participants were presented, and although many of their experiences were idiosyncratic, some overall findings can be discussed. Specifically, the results reveal that, as a general rule, the student participants’ reading practices both for school and non-school purposes were rather limited. At the time of the
study, the students asserted that their reading practices involved primarily social media and only essential material for class.

Interestingly, all multilingual students (i.e., both generation 1.5 and international students) stated that they did not like reading in English (or in their L1s for the most part) and read more for class than for pleasure. On the other hand, the native-speaking students claimed to enjoy reading, and three of them said they read quite a bit outside of school when growing up, but did not seem to engage in their course readings as often or as much as the multilingual students. Furthermore, both multilingual populations acknowledged having difficulty with reading, in particular with reading speed and vocabulary – a concern that was not expressed by the native-speaking students. However, the extent to which the multilinguals struggled with reading seems to have differed according to their language proficiency. Having lived in the U.S. for a longer period of time and being further along in the language acquisition process, the generation 1.5 students faced fewer challenges with reading in English than the international students. Though they complained about being slow readers and occasionally had to look up the meaning of unknown words, the generation 1.5 students did not bring up having to translate entire texts or looking up summaries of the readings online as the international students did. Moreover, learning specific vocabulary was one of the major goals and concerns of the international students but was not mentioned by the generation 1.5 participants or native-speaking students.

In their college classes, the multilingual students appear to have developed ways to cope with their perceived reading difficulties, such as skimming and scanning, searching for summaries online (international students), and focusing on specific vocabulary from the textbooks and instructors’ PowerPoint slides. Such strategies were particularly important to help
the international students better understand the lectures, which they were not always able to follow – a challenge that was not mentioned by any of the generation 1.5 students or native-speakers. The native-speaking students did not discuss reading strategies as often, and only Aaron and Dalton seemed to read for the classes they deemed reading was necessary: English composition and Psychology (for Dalton). Carrie admitted to not read her textbooks much at all, and though Tenesha claimed to do some of her course readings, her grades and test performances might suggest otherwise.

Generally speaking, the 12 focal participants did not perceive the reading load in the science and math courses as very heavy, and most of them believed reading the instructors’ slides, study guides, and working out problems was sufficient to succeed in the courses. On the other hand, students taking social science courses (e.g., psychology and sociology) claimed that there was a lot of reading involved in their classes. For English composition, their reading experiences varied depending on the instructor. While all students acknowledged that there was quite a bit of reading in the composition courses, they seemed to read for these classes only when explicitly held accountable for the readings (e.g., through reading responses and essays contingent upon specific texts – rhetorical analysis, literature review).

In the next subsections, the faculty’s perspectives and expectations concerning reading in their courses are presented and compared to the students’ experiences discussed so far.

### 5.5 Faculty’s Perspectives and Expectations

In this section, the findings for the faculty participants are presented. First, the English composition instructors’ perspectives and expectations related to reading in their courses are presented followed by the results for the subject-area faculty. The descriptions of the
composition classes are more in-depth given the extensive reading practices in these courses, while the subject-area faculty’s perspectives are examined together.

5.5.1 A note on Identifying Multilingual Students

The perspectives of all instructors regarding the general student population are addressed, and specific discussions about multilingual students are also presented. However, it is important to point out that the majority of the faculty interviewed did not seem aware of the distinction between international and generation 1.5 students. Some of instructors mentioned that they had noticed that there was a ‘multilingual continuum’ with some students being more proficient than others, especially the ones who grew up in the U.S., but as a general rule, they seemed to be referring to international students when addressing multilingual or non-native speakers of English. When they acknowledge both populations, this is included in the discussions presented here.

5.5.2 English Composition Courses

The reading load in the English composition courses was heavier than in the subject-area courses included in the study, and both student and faculty participants were aware of this. However, the reading practices in the regular EH101 sessions and in the EH101S sessions, with the studio component, varied quite a bit as the students’ experiences described above reveal. Nonetheless, while the reading practices in these courses differed, the instructors’ perspectives regarding course goals and expectations, the importance of reading, and their perceptions of student needs were quite similar. The next sub-sections present the findings for the EH101 and EH101S instructors, respectively.
5.5.2.1 EH101

Two EH101 instructors participated in the study, one full-time lecturer and one graduate teaching assistant in the last semester of her MA program in English. All four generation 1.5 students were enrolled in these instructors’ classes, Ian and Rachel in the lecturer’s session, and Jacob and Joy in the GTA’s class. One native-speaking student, Aaron, was also in the GTA’s session.

Both teachers used the textbook *Everything’s an Argument* in their classes, but their curricula were somewhat different. The lecturer assigned the first six chapters (30-40 pages each) of the textbook for the first half of the semester, and then chose to focus on single readings (10-15 pages) from the back of the textbook for the rest of the semester. She believed that these latter pieces were more interesting to the students because they were relevant and applicable to their lives as these readings were more “pop-culture orientated rather than straight up rhet/comp papers” (EH101 Instructor A, Interview 1). She hoped that by being more interested in the readings, the students would be more involved in class too.

As previously mentioned, this instructor assigned reading response questions for every reading throughout the semester, which the students were to complete and submit online before class. She said that she expected the students to read both for comprehension and critically but was aware that a lot of times they would read mostly for comprehension in order to answer the discussion questions, so she would “push more critical thinking in class discussions” (EH101 Instructor A, Interview 1). Her primary goals for this English composition course were, in fact, not only to teach students how to write effectively, but also to help them become better readers. In her words,

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8 Instead of using pseudonyms for the faculty in the study, I have used letters (e.g., A, B, C) to identify the different instructors teaching the same courses.
My goal is to teach them to be effective writers, and I would say strong readers because I think, I find that a lot of them lack the focus to actually just sit down and like read an article or a book chapter. There's something about, I don't know, I think we are moving away from the written word so for them to me it's important that they can just sit down, spend you know 45 min reading something and actually analyze it and try to understand it. (EH101 Instructor A, Interview 1)

In our second interview at the end of the semester, the instructor explained that while she hoped that the students had become at least a little better at reading, she was not sure whether she had been able to achieve her goals to foster stronger and more critical readers, as seen below.

I think more and more they seem to connect well with visual text, they seem to do really well with documentaries or even with that Berkley bake sale, they read articles about it, but then there's also a 25 min radio show that they listen to about it, and they always, they just like the radio show better, they like listening, they like watching. So, I think that, you know, hopefully they've improved a little bit in their reading and writing areas, but I don't know. (EH101 Instructor A, Interview 2)

She trusted that the students did most of the readings, or at least scanned them because of the required reading responses, although she believed that the percentage of those who really comprehended the texts was probably 50% (“I know that they at least scanned the readings; as far as they really comprehending them, it's 50-50. Some had good, comprehensive questions others just scanned and gave basic answers.”, EH101 Instructor A, Interview 2). She was well aware that the discussion questions were pretty basic and that the students could skim the readings and still answer them, but her rationale for having these questions was that “at least they'd [students] have a general sense of the reading and then they're ready to contribute to class discussion” (EH101 Instructor A, Interview 1). The instructor also mentioned that the students’ main complaints were that the readings were too long (“I feel like if it's over a page, they complain it's too long, EH101 Instructor A, Interview 2) and that some of the more academic readings were too dense and that they could not understand them.
Concerning multilingual students, the teacher said that she believed their needs vary depending on where they were in the ‘multilingual continuum’, and while some students appear to struggle and need a lot more help, others do not seem to face as many challenges. She brought up specific writing difficulties that she has perceived multilinguals have (further discussed in Chapter 6), but said that because reading is more internal, it was difficult for her to tell if they need extra help. However, one area she believed could be more challenging for these students was critically thinking about readings. She explained this as follows: “maybe thinking critically can be harder for them, sometimes they read too literally, are not picking up on the nuances of the writing that native speakers do” (EH101 Instructor A, Interview 1). Regarding Ian and Rachel in particular, the teacher did not notice any apparent difficulties they faced with the readings even though the texts were heavily based on American pop-culture as she considered these students to be “very Americanized” (EH101 Instructor A, Interview 1). She also pointed out that they had done “work that [was] up to par with the other students in the readings responses” (EH101 Instructor A, Interview 1).

The GTA teaching the other EH101 session also used *Everything’s an Argument*, but she included supplemental scholarly articles on “what professional writers have to say about writing and digital media” and articles on “the study of literacy and what it means to read and write in today's world” (EH101 Instructor B, Interview 1). In addition to the textbook and to these scholarly pieces, she also used several student papers as readings because she believed that “the main thing in a writing class should be student writing” (EH101 Instructor B, Interview 1). She said that the students were required to read 20-30 pages a week and to post reading responses online before each class. For more “densely written articles”, such as “Deborah Brandt’s Literacy Sponsors” (EH101 Instructor B, Interview 1), she expected the students to get the gist of
the reading, but if they were reading fairly simple texts, including “student writing”, she expected them to have a more thorough understanding, and by the end of the semester she anticipated students to be able to dissect texts better.

The reading responses were required until November when the focus of the class shifted primarily to drafting and in-class workshops and peer-reviews. She explained that these reading responses, or reading journal as she sometimes called it, were her way of ensuring that the students were doing the readings. The students were graded for each response for every class, and in the responses they had to summarize the reading and then give their opinion on it. The teacher considered these reading responses very important and added that she “tried not using reading journals in the past, and it crashed and burned” (EH101 Instructor B, Interview 1). She further added that for this 101 section she taught in the fall, she would sometimes have students read their responses out loud in class if the students were not actively participating in class discussions. As she put it, “And when in doubt, if everyone is being quiet, you'll read your reading journal out loud and we'll start conversation that way” (EH101 Instructor B, Interview 1).

Her main goal for the course was, in her words, “a very general goal to make better thinkers and writers” because she did not believe that it was realistic to expect that EH101 could prepare students for the writing they would need in their entire academic career. She explained,

It's really crazy to think that the writing that we do in 101 is supposed to prepare them for their entire academic career because it's not realistic [...] so this idea that I'm making them better writers for all courses... but if I can make them better thinkers, I think, I've I've achieved my goal. (EH101 Instructor B, Interview 1)

She offered some more specific explanations related to her views on the different writing styles of various disciplines as well as on the five-paragraph essay, but these are discussed in
Chapter 6. At the end of the semester, she said she believed her goals had been at least somewhat achieved, as seen in the following excerpt.

I'd like to think that I'm looking at texts that are very prevalent in their lives, so they're thinking not only about academic writing but thinking about writings in their culture and their own worlds; they are applying academia to other aspects of their lives, so it's not just this triangle in the pie chart of their lives. [....] Hopefully, I taught them a little bit about audience. (EH101 Instructor B, Interview 2)

Like the previous EH101 instructor, this GTA teacher also believed that her students did most of the readings; unlike the perspectives of instructor A, however, the GTA said that her students did not have any complaints about the readings nor did she notice the students struggling with texts. She explained that because the focus of the regular EH101 class was different from the more “heavy, theory readings of EH101S” (discussed next), the readings in her class were more geared towards the students, so they “read a lot because it was easier and more interesting” (EH101 Instructor B, Interview 2).

Regarding multilingual students in English composition courses, she asserted that, based on her experience working with this population, there was definitely a language barrier that caused many challenges for these students. She said, “I was actually struck with how, I mean, ‘cause there's absolutely […] a huge language barrier there” (EH101 Instructor B, Interview 1). She discussed many of their difficulties with writing (see Chapter 6), and emphasized that, “as far as reading is concerned, the main issue is quite simply a language barrier” (EH101 Instructor B, Interview 1). She further explained,

I know I have some very very hard-working multilingual students who will spend hours and hours reading something that would only take a native speaker only maybe an hour maybe two to read and that's because the vocabulary like these scholars are presenting a specific set of vocabulary that doesn't translate well […] so a student can't use a dictionary and look up discourse community and understand what it means; they're actually having to think in English about that term, ‘what does this mean?’ in an English intensive conversation or an English intense study so that seems to be the main issues it's
just the language barrier, and some terms not translating well. (EH101 Instructor B, Interview 1).

The teacher was confident that the multilingual students in her class in the fall, including Jacob and Joy, did the readings and said that they usually do well in the reading responses. Talking about multilingual students in general (but perhaps thinking more specifically of international students since she sometimes used the term ELL – English Language Learner), she explained that these students’ reading responses were often quite articulate as the students engaged in conversations with her and with the text about what they understood or did not understand. In her words,

They usually do well in the reading responses if anything because my reading journals are very open to questions if there’s anything they don't understand they can absolutely talk about it, so a lot of their journal journals are ‘I understand this, but I don't understand this’, ‘I've tried to figure it out’, so honestly instead of giving me just ‘This is what the author said’ in a couple sentences, ‘I loved it because’, ‘I hated it because’, they are not giving me these generic answers; they are actually having a conversation, questioning the textbook because they don't understand it, which to be quite frank a lot of my native-speakers don't respond in that way because of the language issues, so it’s almost like the language issues make them better readers because they're having to wrestle with the text. (EH101 Instructor B, Interview 1)

She did not specifically discuss Jacob’s, Joy’s, or Aaron’s reading practices, other than mentioning that they were some of her best students and actively participated in group discussions, but talked about their writing in detail as discussed in Chapter 6.

5.5.2.2 EH101S

A full-time lecturer and a GTA in her first semester of the MA program in English taught the two sessions of EH101S included in the study. All international students were enrolled in these sessions, one in the lecturer’s class (Xue), and the other three in the GTA’s class (David, Narushi, and Yu). Three native-speaking students were also the lecturer’s session (Dalton, Carrie, and Tenesha).
The teachers followed the same curriculum and syllabus but approached reading and writing assignments somewhat differently in their classes. The textbook for the course was *Writing about Writing: A College Reader*, and the instructors brought in some scholarly articles as supplemental readings as well. The amount of assigned reading per week was 20-30 pages.

The lecturer explained that she had taught EH101S several times for the past 10 years and that the readings in the course had changed several times over time. At the time of the study, she still thought that they were “not quite where they should be” and that the students were reading texts that were above their level (EH101S, Instructor C, Interview 1). She explained, “[they] are being asked to read way too much for a first, kind of you're not prepared, let's throw you in the deep end kind of approach; it's overpowering” (EH101S, Instructor C, Interview 1). The readings listed below are from the EH101S syllabus and might be examples of the higher-level readings the instructor referred to.

- Barton & Hamilton, "Understanding Literacy as Social Practice"
- Swales, "The Concept of Discourse Community"
- Brandt, "Sponsors of Literacy"
- Grant-Davie, "Rhetorical Situations and Their Constituents"
- Haas & Flower, "Rhetorical Reading and the Construction of Meaning"
- Barton, "Evidentials, Argumentation, and Epistemological Stance" (EH101S, Syllabus)

The teacher explained that due to the complexity of the readings, she did not expect the students to really comprehend the material, and she did not have reading responses or quizzes in her class. In her words,

I don't expect them to know the material. I don't quiz them on the material because some of them are just struggling to get through a couple of paragraphs, let alone get to the main point and/or understand the complexity of it. I walk them through the articles I think have good points that they can apply to their writing. […] At this level, I still skim over some of the main ideas and try to focus on writing so they can learn how to write clearly, not memorize theory of pedagogy or something. (EH101S Instructor C, Interview 1).
She added that she sometimes did group reading discussions in class so the students could share what they read or “tried to read” and so that they “were forced to look at the text in some way” (EH101S Instructor C, Interview 1). However, as indicated in the block quote above, she did not believe in having quizzes to explicitly holding students accountable for the readings as she did not think such practices were effective in getting students to do their readings. As she put it, “Sometimes I just know that it doesn't matter if I was quizzing or not quizzing or doing some of the text or not, they don't care. So in some cases I just kind of let that go” (EH101S Instructor C, Interview 1). When or if students engaged in reading the chapters and articles, the teacher hoped that they were reading more critically but was aware that they were most likely still reading for comprehension. She pointed out, however, that by the end of the semester they should be able to read in both ways, or at least know that there are different ways of reading.

Her main goal for the course was to help students become critical thinkers, but her focus seems to have been primarily on students thinking critically about their own writing and not necessarily about others’ texts. She explained:

My main goal is to get them [students] to be critical thinkers, being able to analyze what their writing is doing, what they're doing and getting that across clearly to somebody else that could just pick up their paper and read it. They should be able to take that to any other class that they're taking if they remember to do that. (EH101S Instructor C, Interview 1)

In our second interview, she said she did not believe the students did much of readings throughout the semester, if they read at all, and that this seemed to be a recurring issue in EH101S courses. In her words,

I think they did very little of the reading unless I talked them through a particular article, they didn't really try too hard, um, and I don't know, this happens every semester with 101S that we start out with a lot of reading, and it's tough and they struggle and then we realize quickly they need help in very specific areas in the use of the readings and focusing on the drafts to the point to where literally at the end of the semester we are not
even talking about the readings anymore, it's just like you have work to do. So I think a lot of them didn't do it [read] at all. (EH101S Instructor C, Interview 1)

As far as multilingual students are concerned, the teacher had become aware over the years that there were differences between international and generation 1.5 students, although she did not use this terminology to refer to these populations, and in general she did not think generation 1.5 students really ‘qualified’ as non-native speakers. In her words, “I’ve learned that some are multilingual in a sense that they grew up in a bilingual home, and they are bilingual, but English is kind of their main language. So they kind of count but they don't count” (EH101 Instructor C, Interview 1). Thus, in her discussion of multilingual students’ needs, she appeared to be referring more specifically to international students.

She explained that she had noticed that international students often needed more clarification about writing assignments and that she had to be much more specific regarding instructions. She also added that assuming that these students are doing their readings, she believed they are much more thorough than native-speakers. She explained,

It's like they know they have to work a little harder, so they go through, I've noticed that a lot of them take notes, underlining or highlighting that kind of thing. The native-speakers a lot of times just skim through. It's like I know what these words mean, we'll figure out what that means in class. And they [native speakers] are a lot more lackadaisical in how they kind of actively read[...] I think when multi-language students are reading a text that's difficult for them, if they really come up again something that they just don't even get the concept, I usually get e-mails, ‘I was reading and I just really don't understand what this means. Are we going to over this in class?’ (EH101S Instructor C, Interview 1).

For this class in the fall, the teacher mentioned that the international students in her class might have done some of the readings at the beginning of the semester but most likely gave up on reading like the rest of the students. As she put it,

I think the ESL students probably at least attempted early on to do the readings a little, but more at first, and when they got to the point where they realized everybody was having trouble, they kind of fell back to the ‘Well nobody else is reading and I'm not gonna read either’, but the first couple that we did talk about, I did notice that there were
some, a couple of them had clearly gone in and like cause as I'm wandering through the
class I can see where they've made notations in their own language, they've translated
certain words, they've underlined things, so I know that those that were trying to read, at
least trying to get a handle not only the language but what it was about. (EH101
Instructor C, Interview 2).

She did not bring up Xue’s reading practices, but did mention that she believed Dalton
had done most of the readings because when she asked specific questions, he was usually one out
of just a handful of students that would give the right answer. She added, “so I think he [Dalton]
was one of the very few who was actually doing the readings and comprehending what he was
reading” (EH101S Instructor C, Interview 2). Finally, she emphasized once again at the end of
our second interview that she was “less and less enamored” of the readings and that she believed
visual materials would be more helpful for students, especially for non-native speakers.

The other EH101S teacher was in her first semester in the English MA program and had
not taught English composition previously, thus she used the same syllabus as other EH101S
instructors and tried to follow their schedules as much as possible. She explained in our first
interview that she was still forming her teaching philosophy and was experimenting with
different approaches, so the reading practices she implemented in her classroom varied
somewhat throughout the semester. Her class was assigned the same readings as the class
described above (i.e., readings from Writing about Writing and other academic articles), and the
teacher also expressed concern about the readings being too complex for the students’ level. In
her words,

I think they are very highbrowed, difficult reading for freshman students, not to say that
it's not a good idea to expose them to that because that's the type of reading they'll be
doing throughout their academic career, but I think my preference would have been to
kind of slowly immerse them in that, like maybe teach them the fundamental skills of
critical reading like what to look for and identify in an easier article before moving to
these very complex articles. (EH101S Instructor D, Interview 2)
The teacher did not require reading responses but gave quizzes on the readings throughout the semester, though not for every reading. The format of the quizzes varied as well. At first, she gave closed-book quizzes but after a few weeks she shifted her approach to allowing students to use their reading notes in order to encourage them to read, as seen below.

In the past it's been a closed book, ‘did you do the reading?’ type of thing, but now I told them they can use their notes, if the point is to help them remember it, then taking notes can help and motivate them to read and if you reward them by saying you can use your notes on the quiz, they may have more incentive to do it. (EH101S Instructor D, Interview 1)

As the semester progressed, she felt that the students were still not doing the readings like they should, so she implemented small group discussions in which the students were to “pick apart sections of the articles just so that I was assured that they were getting some of the information” (EH101S Instructor D, Interview 2). The different activities this teacher incorporated in her class to incentivize the students to read point to the high importance she placed on students being able to read well. In fact, she mentioned several times that she expected the students to learn to “pick apart readings” to “to pick out information from complex texts” (EH101S Instructor D, Interview 1). She articulated her primary goals for the course as follows:

The goal is twofold: we want them to be able to read critically, to actually pull out the argument and understand how it's supported, and secondly we definitely want them to become better writers. I want them to be able to develop their own argument, idea and support it. (EH101S Instructor D, Interview 1).

She later added that she covered some of the content of the readings in class, but focused her discussions on critically analyzing rhetorical strategies of authors as well as reading strategies and said: “my end goal is that they're learning how to read, not what they're reading” (EH101S Instructor D, Interview 1).

She believed that the students read the articles at the beginning of the semester but did not think they comprehended the pieces, and while the readings became easier and shorter after
midterm, she did not think the students read them. That is why she began to incorporate in-class group activities about the readings. The main complaints she received from students about the readings were that the readings were “long and boring and not entertaining”, and she mentioned that she had to remind the they were not “not looking to be entertained, [they were] trying to learn how to use the article” (EH101S Instructor D, Interview 2). She added, however, that if the readings were more interesting or related to the students’ lives, they would probably be more motivated to read them.

Concerning multilingual students, the GTA was the only instructor to openly talk about defining multilinguals first because she was aware that she had international students and generation 1.5 students in her class. It should be noted, however, that – as with the other faculty members – I had clearly explained the general purposes of the study, using the terminology “generation 1.5”. After stating that she had both student populations in her class, the teacher argued that the international students were still having problems with the language and had to translate readings as well as parts of her lectures. The generation 1.5 students were, on the other hand, “[her] better students. They are engaged, they are trying to understand” (EH101S Instructor D, Interview 1).

She further added that she believed that the international students most likely struggled with the readings, especially the more complex ones, because these were difficult across the board, and “the vocabulary was difficult even for native-speakers, so I think it was particularly difficult for them [international students]” (EH101S Instructor D, Interview 2). However, although the vocabulary in the readings might have been more challenging for the international students, the teacher pointed out that they had an advantage over native-speakers, as explained in the following excerpt.
Native-speakers’ problems are obviously not related to language, it's just the concepts are so new to them; they're resistant to learning something different. For instance, for the rhetorical analysis, we're looking at ethos, pathos, and logos, so it's like ‘Ugh, new words’, you know, ‘I don't wanna do it’. For the non-native speakers, everything is new so it's not that scary. (EH101S Instructor D, Interview 1)

She did not specifically discuss David’s, Narushi’s, and Yu’s reading practices but said that David was completely “integrated” and that “you can't really even tell in the classroom setting that he's not a native-speaker”, while Narushi was close to “complete integration”, and Yu still struggled with English and the class in general (EH101S Instructor D, Interview 2).

5.5.2.3 Summary

While the reading practices in the four English composition courses included in the study were somewhat different, the instructors’ general perspectives on reading and student needs seemed similar in many ways. First, all four teachers agreed that the amount of reading required in the courses was quite heavy though the readings for the regular EH101 classes appear to have been much more accessible to the students than those used in the EH101S sessions. As discussed above, the student participants’ own perceptions also corroborate this.

In addition, the composition teachers believed in fostering critical thinking and reading and saw course readings as an important part of the curriculum, perhaps with the exception, to a certain extent, of the lecturer teaching one of the EH101S sessions. Her articulated goals for the class did not specifically include helping students to become better readers nor did she explicitly hold students accountable for the readings. Nonetheless, the fact that she hoped to teach them “to be good analytical thinkers” (EH101S Instructor C, Interview 1) and her many concerns about the appropriateness of the readings seem to suggest that she also valued reading as an important aspect of academic literacies.
These instructors claimed to be well aware that the students (or most of them) would not read if they were not explicitly held accountable for the readings. And even with the different strategies they employed to ensure that the students would read, the teachers recognized that many students most likely briefly skimmed or scanned the texts, especially towards the end of the semester when writing assignments become more time-consuming. The student findings discussed so far also support these perspectives.

Finally, the instructors argued that non-native speakers of English faced challenges in the composition classroom. The teachers were also cognizant of the fact that the multilingual population was diverse and even though just one teacher used the terms ‘international and generation 1.5’ students, they seemed to recognize that ‘bilinguals’ and ‘ESL students’ were not part of the same student population. The instructors did not mention any difficulties or special needs of generation 1.5 students, and their discussion of multilingual students’ needs was regarding international students, who they believed struggled primarily because of language difficulties. Despite having struggles with reading in English, the composition teachers also pointed out that international students had some advantages over native-speaking students exactly because English was not their first language. For example, the teachers believed that these international students did more of the readings, read more thoroughly, and were not afraid to tackle texts that they were not familiar with since they were used to learning new things and new words.

The student findings discussed above seem to indeed support most of the composition teachers’ perspectives, though the international student participants appeared to be much more intimidated by unfamiliar vocabulary in the readings than the instructors perceived them to be. By the same token, the generation 1.5 students’ articulated dislike for reading in English and
their slow reading speed were not noticed by the composition instructors, or at least not mentioned in the interviews. As a matter of fact, even though the four composition instructors were aware of the distinction between international and generation 1.5 students (only one teacher actually used this terminology, but all four instructors talked about ‘bilingual’ students versus ‘non-native speakers’ or ‘ELLs’), they did not address needs or difficulties of generation 1.5 students, specifically referring to international students when discussing language-related issues they had perceived.

5.5.3 Subject-area Courses

As with the students’ experiences discussed in the first section of this chapter, the subject-area instructors’ shared perceptions and expectations are emphasized here, but unique viewpoints deemed particularly relevant in light of the students’ own experiences or of pedagogical implications are also reported.

5.5.3.1 Amount and Importance of Reading

As previously discussed, the students generally believed that most of their courses did not involve much reading or that they were not expected to do most of the readings, with the exceptions of their English composition classes and some specific social science courses for certain participants (i.e., sociology for Rachel and psychology for Dalton). In addition, most students focused on reading PowerPoint slides and lecture notes and some skimmed or scanned the textbooks, especially the international students in order to learn specific vocabulary and formulas.

The faculty’s perspectives on the amount and importance of reading for their courses were quite different, however. Regardless of the fact that the reading load in the subject-area courses varied considerably depending on the discipline, the instructors interviewed argued that
reading was very important for students to learn the material and do well in the classes and that students were in fact expected to read their textbooks, not only PPT slides. Of course, math courses required much less reading when compared to the other courses included in the study, but even the math instructors and the instructor teaching the engineering class on computer software programs (MAE111) – which did not require a textbook – agreed that reading the textbooks and tutorials (for MAE111) could be extremely beneficial. The following excerpts, in alphabetical order by course, illustrate this finding.

There’s quite a bit of reading. They need to read the chapters that we cover as well as the notes that they take during the lectures. [...] probably a chapter per class or a couple of classes. At the beginning of the semester, I encourage my students, you know, to read the chapter before they come to class so they’ll have an idea of what we’ll be talking in class. [...]my notes are supplemental to the textbook, but I do say unless I say otherwise, if it's in the book it's fair game. (ACC211 Instructor)

There’s quite a bit of reading. They are expected to read about 13 chapters from the book. That's what they have to read. And I find that that's really the downfall if they have trouble because I use slides, and I put the slides online so they can download them. Um, so they'll get the slides, and they'll take notes and then I give them a study guide and they figure that's good enough and that they don't have to read the book [laughs], and it doesn't matter how many times I tell them that's not true; they really have to read the book. (BIO119 Instructor B)

The chapters range from 50-100 pages [...]by reading the book, it just kind of gives you an idea of like, the lecture notes kind of come from the book people, so the cover the same, but they do reinforce each other [...] that's why I ask some questions that are a lot like the ones in the book to reward the people that read and also they do spend a lot of money on these things, so I try to at least make it not a complete waste of 150 dollars or whatever the books cost nowadays. (CH121 Instructor B)

If they were doing the readings, it would be about 20 pages per week, and it’s rather dense reading. (ECN142 Instructor)

The textbook is not that lengthy, but they are to read the chapters, and I tell them what chapters we are covering. I also bring in articles for them to read to supplement the textbook. (ED115 Instructor)

Well, they're expected to read the entire book but of course they probably do not do that. [...] We cover about 90% of the book, one chapter per class. [...] The textbook is pretty thick; the lab info is also in there. (EE100 Instructor)
Well, they are expected to read a lot [laughs]; how much they actually do is probably very little. They have to read the textbook and the book [*Night* by Elie Wiesle] for the book review. (HIS104 Instructor)

I encourage them to read the textbook. I do not work the problems out of the textbook, except rarely. Sometimes if it's a big wordy problem, I will work a problem like it because I don't want to spend all of my time writing the problem on the board, and then work the problem. But I encourage them to read it. It's good if they read it before I go over it. I guess what I'm saying is they need to be reading it because I'm not going to read it to them. And it has a lot of good information in it. (MA171 Instructor)

There are complete courses on CDs that students also have access to and that they can read through PDF files that explain in detail (the steps for the programs); there's more meat to them. (MAE111 Instructor)

The textbook is pretty thick, and some chapters are much longer than others. […] They have to understand what they read. (MSC288 Instructor)

It's more like 25 [pages a week] and that's how it breaks down pretty much, about 25 pages per week, it's all the textbook, so by the end of the term they are responsible for almost the entirety of the textbook. […] I tell them if you've read it once, you haven't read it, if you read it twice, you still haven't read it, if your read three times, you're getting there. And that I should not, my lecture should not be seen as a substitute for the readings, but a commentary upon them and an expansion of them; that's how I structure it. (MU100 Instructor)

They are expected to read about 40 pages a week in the textbook. For extra credit, I have them read a *New York Times* article and write a one-page reflection on it. […] For students who aren't as academically advanced, reading gives them that supplemental information to understand in a more robust way. (PSY101 Instructor A)

Most of the content [from the textbook] I cover in class but everything I assign them to read [about 30–40 pages a week] they are expected to know regardless if I cover them in class […] I feel like say a student just comes to class and doesn't read, I think they will do even worse [than students that just read and do not come to class] because a lot of it, I don't know, a lot of it is actually more complicated than they think it is, lots of time the students think that sociology is just common sense and that you don't need to read, well it turns out that you do have to read. (SOC100 Instructor)

As the quotes above also indicate, though the faculty valued reading, they were aware that students in general did not feel the same way about course readings and believed that most of the students simply did not read for class, as explored next.
5.5.3.2 Students’ Reading Practices

The subject-area instructors stated that they did not believe that, as a general rule, college students, freshman in particular, read for class. In their words,

And I assume that they are actually doing things like reading the textbook, which of course is a big joke. At this point it seems to be a feat to read a textbook. [...] But a lot of them just don't do it [read the textbook]. They don't think they have to. And it's like, they're like little dogs in a leash that don't wanna walk; they'll just sit there and dig in. They'll get really weird and feisty if you confront them on it. [...] They don't see why they should do that [read]. They just don't do it. Some of them just want to get a D, which is passing, which is pathetically stupid, but that's what they do. (BIO119 Instructor A)

The only problem [...] is that they haven't done it [read the textbook], that's it. They just skip it because they have the other resources. (BIO119 Instructor B)

It would be nice if students read the textbook. [...] but I honestly don't know that they do the reading, I honestly don't. (CH121 Instructor A)

Honestly, I don't know how many of them read outside of class. (ED115 Instructor)

The syllabus outlines the readings that they are supposed to do, but you and I both know that most of them do not do it. [...] the number one problem students have is doing the readings. (HIS104 Instructor)

I take it as a complaint when they ask me to put PowerPoint up on angel. It seems pretty clear to me that by asking that question, they're saying 'Instead of doing the readings, can you post the PowerPoint?' [...] it shows from the exams that students aren't reading. [...] in terms of assignments in the course, there's really only two on a regular basis and that's the readings and listening to the music examples that come with the compact disc set which is shipped with the required text for the class, so it's reading and listening, and I do this aware of the fact that it's generally, at least in my experience, not the preference of students their first couple of years in college to be assigned a lot of reading [...] and it is perhaps to my own detriment in terms of the apparent performance of the students in my class that I insist on making them read, it's not that much in the grand scheme of things, but they don't read. (MU100 Instructor)

This sentiment was echoed by the EH101/EH101S teachers, as previously discussed, but given the smaller class sizes and the objectives of English composition courses (e.g., to foster critical readings skills), these instructors were able to attempt to ensure that the students did the readings in more explicit and systematic ways (e.g., reading responses, quizzes, in-class
discussion). The other subject-area faculty, on the other hand, did not directly hold students accountable for the readings due to the large class sizes of most of the courses (e.g., the BIO119, CH121, and PSY101 classes had over 100 students per section.). The students were, nonetheless, tested on the material from the readings even if some of them did not seem to realize that and were mystified when they did not do well on the exams – as was the case with a few of the student participants described above.

Some of the subject-area instructors tried to encourage the students to read more and to be more engaged in class by not using PowerPoint or not posting their slides online. Their hope was that by just writing on the board or withholding the slides from the students, the students would need to come to class, take notes, and read the textbooks. The instructors explained this as follows:

I don't post them [PPT slides] online because I don't want them to just get those. I do that for my higher-level classes, but I won't do that for 119. If they ask for the slides, I'll send them to the student, but I don't just post them; otherwise they go stupid with it. They think they can do that and learn. 'Why should I go to class?' (BIO 119 Instructor A)

I do not do PowerPoint; I write my notes on the board [...] just because I want the students to take notes in their own hand; I think that helps you to learn if you're having to write down notes that I'm talking about. I know that can be hard in that you're writing a lot and fast, but I think that's more effective than you just printing out the notes in PowerPoint format and just listening to me read them off. (ACC211 Instructor)

I don't do PowerPoint; I write on the white board so students need to take notes. [...] I tell the students: the single biggest way you can do well in this class is to come to class. I mean, that is it. And that's the way it is with all classes and of course I tell them that and I give the same old lecture and they hear it all the time. (ECN142 Instructor)

One [international student] asked for the PowerPoint presentation to be put on Angel, which I do not do. I will categorically not do that because I believe that removes the need to come to lectures. And also it's not very helpful because the PowerPoint is just a distillation of the readings. (MU100 Instructor)

I do PowerPoint slides but I don't post them so they have to take notes. I've noticed some students just sit there, and they don't take notes, but a lot of students are furiously scribbling, so I think the majority of the students are at least trying. (SOC100 Instructor)
These were earnest attempts to engage students more and foster important study strategies. However, while some students might indeed have benefited from these approaches and not only taken more notes in class but also read their textbooks more, like Rachel in the sociology class, other students still seemed to not believe in reading or coming to class. For example, Carrie and Tenesha were both in the BIO119 section of the professor quoted above, who did not post his PPT slides online. Yet, they still did not actively engage in reading their textbooks, and Carrie did not take any notes in the class I observed. Likewise, Yu was in the accounting class of the instructor quoted above as well as in the music class of the instructor who was adamant about not posting his PPT slides online, but Yu still skipped many classes in both courses and did not seem to read the textbooks very often or extensively.

5.5.3.3 College (Un)preparedness

Students’ college readiness was not something I directly asked the instructors about, but it became a recurrent theme in the interviews with several of them. For science and math courses, which typically build on knowledge supposedly learned in high school, the professors were particularly adamant about how unprepared for their courses many students enter college. As they put it,

State science standards are a joke. About half of them [students] when they come here, don't know anything about anything, and that's how I teach the class; I don't assume they know anything because that's true. (BIO119 Instructor A)

The goal is to basically teach them high school chemistry; we basically don't go beyond 12th grade. So in any other part of the world, it's high school chemistry. [...] They are so trained in their high schools to just regurgitate what the teacher said and it doesn't work in chemistry, they have to think and those who can't make that step, they just crash and burn. (CH121 Instructor A)

Many students have seen some basic chemistry concepts in high school, such as atoms and molecules, but what they seem to be lacking is some of the basic mathematical skills,
not everyone, but some people don't know how to do logarithms and exponentials, algebra 2 stuff that they don't get much background in high school. (CH121 Instructor B)

Part of our course includes a review of what is essentially middle school to high school arithmetic because many of those in the nursing program have been identified as academically illiterate in even very very basic skills like dosages. Like they get 3 grams twice a day, how many grams do they get in a week. […] Strictly speaking, a finite course is not supposed to cover that, but here given the population, we have identified specific deficiencies and tried to address them. (MA110 Instructor)

Other faculty members also brought up that poor reading comprehension and skills seemed to be a problem for many first-year college students that impacted their performance on tests and their classes. They explained:

Actually, reading actually plays a role as well. I mean, I do have some students who just aren't, don't read well enough to pick up precisely what the question is asking. (ECN142 Instructor)

Some students are very bottom-up readers, so they just try to read everything and almost stuff it in their heads as opposed to looking at an outline and reading a section and going back to the outline and saying ‘How does this fit within the outline?’ So I think general reading comprehension, fluency is a bigger issue and the textbook expects it so, you know, they have figures they refer to and a lot students tend to skip figures they just reeead. And some of them just, you know, so I teach perception as well so it's like spatial trying to think about it as a landmark like this is the topic and you just need to know what's the most important is, that you understand the topic some of these details don't matter as much as the content. (PSY101 Instructor A)

Beyond that [doing the readings] it would be comprehension. Like for 20 years it has fascinated me on the book review, everybody is reading the same book and the different interpretations; there will be students who will write about how he [author of the book] held on to his religious faith and others that he lost his faith. It's quite remarkable, so um very different interpretations. […] comprehension and interpretation clearly there are students who are simply not good readers. And I've had students tell me that ‘I don't read’ or ‘This is the first book I've read’. I think ‘Why are you in college?’ You know? It blows my mind, why do you go to college if you don't want to read? It's remarkable; I don't get it. (HIS104 Instructor)

The History instructor quoted above further expounded on how he believed that the poor reading skills of some college students are a result of America’s declining education system and
how he – as a History college instructor – should not be responsible for teaching students how to read. In his words,

> Obviously that's a failure of American secondary education that something is going wrong here that students are not somehow taught to read well enough that they enjoy it. I think it has to do, in my opinion, my perception is that in this country we have a lot of functionally illiterate people. They can read but don't really comprehend what they read. I think maybe you are familiar with this, I'm sure someone must have studied this, but we need to improve reading comprehension and that's on the secondary and elementary level, you know, I can't, I can't have time to deal with that, I can't do it, it's not my job to teach reading comprehension, but I'm aware that it's a serious problem. And I see that on tests too that clearly there are, in some cases, they simply didn't comprehend the question. But it's very obvious that they just really didn't understand the questions; it wasn't so much they didn't know it, but they didn't understand the question. (HIS104 Instructor)

Similarly, one of the Chemistry professors (Instructor A) was German and especially disheartened by American secondary education, which in her view does a disservice to students who are going to college by leading them to believe that they can and should earn As in every single class and that they can be equally talented at all subjects. She specifically discussed Jacob’s situation and his preoccupation with making an A in her course (and in all of his college classes as discussed in Chapter 4), as seen below.

> Jacob is the perfect example from these screwed up kids from these high schools. He has a B. Um, what tells this boy that the world will stop spinning if he doesn't make an A? What's wrong about a B? Because he has never learned in these God-forsaken high schools that not everybody is talented at everything. And they should have learned before they come to college that there are subject areas in which you will excel in and others not, and he is actually, you know, one of the better students, he's very concerned about it, he's come to see me about his grade, but that is a student who is a very good student but who hasn't learned to deal with the scenario [when] it doesn't go as planned. He's so used to getting As in everything, I'm pretty sure he had a 4.0 before he came here, and nobody ever told that boy that's not what real life is. And that's actually to Jacob's disadvantage that nobody ever taught him that lesson. And how can it be that he went through 12 years of school and never found a course in which he was, you know, less talented? You know, if you're good in let's say he was good in math, physics, science, whatever, uh how about his art education, could he draw a picture? Or English? Or whatever. I know I was horrible in art! I can't draw pictures, and I got bad grades. And I learned 'Ah ha!' maybe the career as an artist maybe it's not for me. But this is not taught. These students are never exposed to their limits because we always just smooth over you know. Oh you got
a trophy for the ones who tried; nope, they are not trophies if you tried, they are only trophies if you win, but here we go again. (CH121 Instructor A)

The subject-area instructor’s perceptions of multilingual students’ needs were more diverse and are discussed next.

5.5.3.4 Multilingual Students

All 18 subject-area faculty members included in this dissertation had had some experience with teaching multilingual students at the university where the study was conducted as well as at previous institutions. They explained, however, that the number of multilingual students they had in their courses varied substantially every semester, and many of them did not feel that they had interacted with these students enough to be able to discuss any patterns in their reading or writing practices. Other instructors, on the other hand, seemed to have had close interactions with these students over the years and offered insights into the students’ academic literacy needs and experiences. As a general rule, the subject-area instructors’ perspectives presented below refer to international students as they addressed these students as ESL or non-native speakers and only four of them specifically mentioned multilinguals who could be generation 1.5 students. These four instructors (the two PSY101 professors, the MA110 instructor, and the MA004 instructor) called these multilingual students “bilinguals”, “first-generation American” or “American multi-cultural”, and – like the English composition teachers – they did not directly talk about these students’ needs, focusing rather on ‘non-native’ speaking students.

The instructors’ overall perception was that international students faced several problems with English, which were manifested especially in terms of understanding vocabulary (both during lectures and in the readings), reading comprehension issues as well as in their writing (further discussed in Chapter 6). However, these professors also pointed out that international
students tend to have strong mathematical and analytical skills that can sometimes help offset their reading comprehension problems. The following excerpts show these perspectives.

Sometimes especially Asian, Chinese, Indian students when they come here have a little better analytical skills but their reading and comprehension is probably a little less. […] In my class one could help off-set the other either way, so they can do fine in my class. Some students who may be struggling with the reading do okay because the analytics are simple to them, the graphs on the board make perfect sense to them and they can understand things through the math side and they can be fine because of that (ECN142 Instructor)

Certainly [chuckles] language is a problem, not all of them okay.[…] many of their questions are related to language, the understanding of statements, of the questions in homework assignments, especially [because] they do not have the first course here [transfer students from China], some of the basic terms in statistics they don't know. (MSC288 Instructor)

I think I mean yeah I think it's the English; the wording of the question is probably the hardest thing because even though they don't write back to me, they still have to read and comprehend the question. So that's the number one problem that I've seen with international students that where English is not their first language. They are pretty strong in the math, but taking sentence and converting it into mathematical forms that's where they tend to have the most problems. And I only ask 25 questions on the test, but still 25 questions in 55 minutes, it’s still a lot, you got 2 minutes per question. (CH121 Instructor B)

The content would probably be about the same [for international and native-speaking students] but difficulty more difficulty expressing content and also more difficulty on test essays comprehending what I have said. […] I think the ESL students, it's just more comprehension problems than the native-speakers. (HIS104 Instructor)

Yes, they face difficulties. The material is word problem heavy. The devil is in the details. I'd say that non-native speakers do have trouble, depending on this word choice or that word choice. For example, one student who does well on computation, but when I specify specific direction, has difficulties. (MA110 Instructor)

Some words do not translate well, so they sometimes have a hard time understanding. (MA004 Instructor)

Along with strong mathematical and analytical skills, one Biology and one Chemistry professor pointed out that international students often times do better in these courses than most
native-speaking students because of the solid science education they received in their home
countries (unlike their perceptions of American high schools as previously discussed).

I've always had the experience that a lot of them [multilingual students] whose English is
like the 3rd language or something do better in my biology classes than the native-
speaking Americans, which is kind of an embarrassing fact. But it is true. (BIO119
Instructor A)

In my 15 years teaching at [institution’s name] I’ve seen that multilingual students
normally do better in my chemistry classes than American students. [Talks about a
partnership the chemistry department has with Japanese universities] I never had a
[Japanese] student that was average or below. They have gotten a decent high school
chemistry experience in Japan. You can tell. (CH121 Instructor A)

None of the international students in the study were enrolled in Biology courses in the
fall, but two of them – Yu and Narushi – took Chemistry and indeed stated that these courses
(i.e., CH101 and CH121) were relatively easy when compared to their high school chemistry
courses in China and Japan, as previously discussed.

The Music professor and one of the Psychology instructors also explained that in their
experience some of the international students’ difficulties, with terminology and doing the
readings respectively, were challenges experienced by native-speaking students as well. They
explained this as follows:

It's harder to tell with reading [than with writing][…] there might be reading
comprehension issues in terms of the type of technical terms that we find in psychology
and so I'll have to explain those sorts of things, but that's not necessarily worse than what
I see with native speakers because psychology might be a new language for them all. And
I see that, I teach, I'm the bio psych person here, so I'll hear that from students who
haven't had any Latin in high school, and they'll come in and it's like ‘What language are
you speaking?’ I'm like this is biology, and so a lot of times it has more to do with their
major than their language background, so if they are an international student but they are
a biology major, they'll be fine. (PSY101 Instructor B)

And that's the main thing I've encountered with international students, I'm getting the
sense that their relative lack of proficiency in their 2nd or 3rd language is being used as
an excuse to not delve into the readings the extent they should. Now they are by no
means the only people in the class who are guilty of not reading […] And so it is by no
means just the international students who don't seem to grasp completely that idea that
they are really responsible for incorporating this admittedly difficult terminology. (MU100 Instructor)

While the students’ findings presented in the first section of the chapter do confirm that the native-speaking students also struggled with doing the readings, learning specific vocabulary was not a common challenge they brought up in their interviews. The international students, however, did in fact often show concern about vocabulary in their classes and course readings – a need that the subject-area instructors quoted above clearly noticed as well. In addition to technical or specific course terminology, two instructors – one Psychology professor and the History instructor – argued that everyday vocabulary could also present difficulties to international students and offered quite interesting examples of instances where not understanding everyday language caused problems to their students.

Even though the exams are multiple-choice, I do give them examples from every-day life that they have to pick out. For example, one of the things a non-native speaker had trouble with last test was this. I had ‘Imagine somebody's spinal cord is cut. What will they not be able to do?’ And the examples I give are ‘They will feel the pain in their toes, they'll not able to snap their fingers, they'll be able to wiggle their eyebrows.’ And I had students ask, ‘What is snap? What does wiggle mean?’ And those are vocabulary that are not specifically academic, but they are from everyday language that they are not familiar with, as soon as I do it, they know what it is. (PSY101 Instructor A)

I'll give you an illustration: this summer, I mentioned my Chinese students, one of the test questions was to identify the dynasty, the main dynasty that drove the Mongols out of China. One of my Chinese students came up and asked: ‘What does that mean? ‘The way it was worded it was ‘which dynasty was responsible for driving the last of the Mongols out of China.’ Well, he's a Chinese student, he probably knew it. But what does ‘driving’ mean? And I realized to him the only meaning he had for driving was drive a car so the Ming put the Mongols in cars and drove them to the border? And I realized ‘Oh!’ So he asked and I explained it to him. Of course it makes perfectly good sense that he wouldn't know, that's one of the difficulties, as you well know, one of the difficulties with translation, he did not know, that was the only meaning for driving that he knew, so naturally this didn't make any sense to him so. (HIS104 Instructor)

These quotes also show, however, that despite their initial difficulty with understanding the vocabulary in the test questions referenced, the international students asked for assistance and
that the instructors were willing to help. Chapter 7 explores in more detail students’ strategies (from the three populations) and the resources they utilized to navigate their first-year in college.

Another interesting observation made by the Psychology instructor quoted above (Instructor A) and by one of the Biology instructors (Instructor B) was that sometimes culturally-based examples might be difficult and at times frustrating to international students, as seen below.

Another example of literacy, yesterday for my memory lecture, I have an example that I have done in classes you know for the 5 years that I've been here, and I just want them to recall something from their childhood, So I will say: ‘Snow white and the 7 dwarfs’. Name the 7 dwarfs'; and I could just see and I knew that this was going to happen, but very culturally based and they all [Chinese students] look at each other, although some students have said oh yeah I've seen these Disney videos. [...] So this is something that I was curious and I was like it's hard for me because it works so well for, you know, American students and it's like for you, you know, I know and maybe what I should have said is, if you know in your own language, write it in your own language when I show you the examples. (PSY101 Instructor A)

I do popular trivia for attendance pop quizzes and I use a lot of pop culture like Star Wars, Star Trek and stuff, and they [international students] sometimes have problems with that, but they still get the points for being in class. But I’ve noticed that they get frustrated with that. (BIO119, Instructor B)

Finally, although some instructors mentioned that having strong mathematical skills was an advantage many international students have, as aforementioned, one Math instructor and the Business Statistics professor – who was Taiwanese – made the point that the commonly held stereotype that Asian students always excel in Math is not always necessarily true. In their words,

Very general, some [multilingual students] are very good with analytical skills, some are not; I don't see any patterns here, probably similar to other classes [...] the stereotype that Chinese or Asian students in general are always good at math is not true in this college. (MSC288 Instructor)

Years ago, if you had an Asian student in the class, you'd hear the students say that student is going to set the curve. You don't hear that much any more. And it's not so much true. I don't make the assumption anymore that they are going to be a good
student. I feel that they have become more Americanized over the last... I've been teaching over the past 23 years, and I've seen them become more Americanized. (MA171 Instructor)

These two instructors did not explicitly discuss generation 1.5 students in the interviews, but – in light of the Math instructor’s comment above – they could also have been referring to these immigrant students. The two international students in the study enrolled in math classes were Asian (i.e., Narushi and Xue) and earned As in their classes while Ian, a Korean generation 1.5 student, did not do as well in his math class, earning a C.

5.5.3.5 Summary

As we saw in the discussion of the students’ experiences, the reading load in the courses included in the study varied considerably depending on the discipline, with humanities and social science courses having a much heavier reading load than courses from any other field, followed by science courses, especially biology, as well as courses from the business school. The engineering and math and courses had the least amount of reading, respectively. This variation in amounts of reading might have led the student participants to believe that not much reading was involved in most of their courses, and the fact that many instructors used PowerPoint presentations in their lectures, coupled with the students’ general dislike for and lack of practice reading, could also have contributed to their general perception that reading was not very important in their first semester in college.

The subject-area faculty’s perspectives were quite different, however. Regardless of the amount of reading involved in their classes, the instructors argued that the course readings were important, and even professors whose classes required a minimal amount of reading valued the importance of reading in college. These instructors were also convinced that most freshman college students do not read, and all of them claimed to warn students at the beginning of the
semester that reading was essential or at least important. Additionally, several of them deliberately decided not to use PowerPoint presentations or not make their PowerPoint slides available to the students in order to encourage them to come to class, take notes, and read their textbooks. As previously discussed, this method appears to have worked for some of the student participants, but not all.

Finally, several of the subject-area instructors felt strongly about how unprepared many native-speaking students come to college, with deficits in their science and math education and poor reading comprehension skills – a problem they generally attributed to American secondary education. The native-speaking student participants indeed struggled with doing their readings and even though they did not articulate this, some of them appeared to also have had difficulties with reading comprehension, as indicated by their poor performance in many classes.

Regarding multilingual students, most subject-area instructors did not seem aware of the distinction between generation 1.5 and international students, and the ones who mentioned ‘bilingual students’ and ‘non-native speakers’ – like the composition teachers – did not bring up any difficulties that generation 1.5 students might have, and their discussions focused on international students only. This seems to suggest that these instructors believed that generation 1.5 students do not normally face language-related problems, or at least that they had not perceived language as an issue for these students. With respect to international students, though some of the instructors claimed to not have noticed any particular needs or difficulties these students might have, many others were aware that these students might face certain challenges related to language and culture. With respect to international students’ reading practices, the instructors specifically pointed out problems they have perceived these students having with vocabulary, both everyday and subject specific, and reading comprehension in general. As
detailed in the student findings, vocabulary and reading comprehension were in fact challenges that the multilingual participants faced, the international students more so than the generation 1.5 students – though these latter students also experienced difficulties with reading.

This chapter addressed the reading practices and perspectives of the focal participants in their classes as well as those of their composition and subject-area instructors. The next chapter explores the participants’ writing practices.
CHAPTER 6

WRITING PRACTICES IN COMPOSITION AND SUBJECT-AREA COURSES

In this chapter, the main findings for the focal participants’ writing practices in their composition and subject-area courses are explored along with the faculty’s perspectives and expectations regarding writing in their classes. Like in Chapter 5, the students’ experiences are presented first, followed by the instructors’ results. Also, as with the previous chapter, though the discussions presented here pertain primarily to writing practices, some crossover with reading might also be observed as these literacies normally walk hand-in-hand.

6.1 Difficulties with Writing

As with reading, the focal participants also claimed to not like writing and seemed to struggle with writing in English to a certain extent, but they did not articulate these difficulties as well or as often as they did for reading. The international students were the exception and frequently mentioned their challenges with writing in English throughout the semester, giving specific examples of what they believed their shortcomings were.

The students’ writing samples across the three populations revealed some struggles to fulfill the assignments as well as language-related issues, including in the native-speakers’ writings. Unlike their reading practices, however, the students’ writing deficiencies did not seem to affect their grades very much for two possible reasons. First, there was significantly less writing involved in the subject-area courses; secondly, the composition teachers admitted to being lenient graders – an assessment that I believe is fair based on the essays the students shared with me (which are presented in excerpts below). The three student populations’ experiences are explored in more detail next.
**6.1.1 Generation 1.5 Students**

As with reading, the generation 1.5 explained that they struggled with learning to write in English when they first came to the U.S. and that they believed they still could improve their writing abilities, as illustrated in following examples.

I’m not very good at writing; I expect to develop my writing skills as far as, um, like what to write, how to write grammars. (Ian, Interview 1)

I don’t know, I think it really depends it’s like I think I write not as well as like I should. […] so I want to learn the actual like I guess like how you are supposed to write like the actual correct way I mean not like the correct way but like another way of writing and um to learn just like, I don’t know, I think mostly I just want to learn how to write better. (Rachel, Interview 1)

However, they seemed generally more confident about their writing skills than about their reading (e.g., “I mean if I say, I would say like my writing is better, a lot better than my reading. Joy, Interview 1; “In English, I’m just kind of, it’s required, like, I already know, once I have, like, if I actually do want to write an academic paper, I know that I’m capable.” Jacob, Interview 1), and though they added that they did not enjoy writing, they did not express the same level of concern with their writing skills as they did with reading.

Even though Joy – whose English was not as native-like as the other generation 1.5 students given her late arrival age – believed that her writing was much better than her reading, she was still very self-conscious about her grammar and had people revise all of her essays before she turned them in (as further examined in the subsection ‘writing in college’). She believed, nonetheless, that her content was generally strong (“I can write, but like, not in a good grammar thing […] yeah, I think my idea about writing is fine.” Joy, Interview 3).

Table 6.1 below presents samples of the generation 1.5 students’ EH101 essays. Some excerpts came from rough drafts and others from final drafts because not all students shared their rough drafts. It is also important to keep in mind that although some excerpts say ‘rough draft’,
this does not mean that the students had not gotten feedback from peers and even the instructors themselves before submitting these first drafts; and this is true for the writing samples of all three student populations.

Language issues are in bold font, but my purpose in including these excerpts here is not to emphasize student errors, as many of them are in fact very minor, but to provide examples of these students’ writings. Issues of register might also be observed in these excerpts, but this aspect of their writing is not highlighted given that the examples are presented out of context and without more information about the assignment. However, in the second section of the chapter, the instructors’ perceptions of the focal participants’ writings are addressed and some of them bring up register and content concerns while other focus more on grammar.

Table 6.1 Generation 1.5 students’ EH101 essay excerpts

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<th>Participant</th>
<th>Essay’s excerpts</th>
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| Ian         | - Environment and family shape **you of** who you are especially in the early ages of your life; **it** structures your lifestyle in every way you can think of: how you eat, talk, read, and write. […]The significance of having appropriate environment and family is **a major** for it will build a firm foundation that will eventually shape your characteristics as both a reader and writer you are today […]Although my family has **influenced me greatly of who I am** as a reader and writer […]**It took me a while for me** to even call myself […]I experienced **[the]** downside of reading and writing in high school. (Literacy Narrative, Rough Draft)  
- **[The]** Majority of people do not know the difference between sex and gender, some may not even know if there **are** any difference. (Definition Essay, Rough Draft) |
| Jacob       | - My parents decided that we **are** going to move to a country unknown to me. […]They both **are [were]** things I could understand. (Literacy Narrative, Final Draft)  
- The main problem is that people say you can do the same thing **in visa-versa**. […] You would have to run the search application **that take[s]** a long time. […] You need to know exactly where to put anything, because anything **relation** to a certain piece of information […] what type of program or data the items is. (Evaluation Essay, Final Draft).  
- That is why when you have an injury […] **but** you continue to work that injured part, other muscles around it become sore because **it is** trying to support that injured part. (Definition Essay, Rough Draft) |
Some say homework is one of the reasons that separates their family apart. [...] Some students say that the teachers want to kill them by giving a lot of homework because the students have not suffered the students enough at school, so they want to suffer the students more at home. [...] This article appeals to ethos to show the authors’ credentials. [...] On each slide has a text and a related picture talking about him becoming a teacher [...] For this text, the author uses ethos by saying he is involved in the area of the study, in the other word, he is in the Education Program at the university. And this text also appeals to pathos by incorporating his personal struggle in the video, [...] and I have to agree with her because it creates an enthusiastic tone for the text. (Rhetorical Analysis, Rough Draft)

On each slide has a text and a related picture talking about him becoming a teacher [...] For this text, the author uses ethos by saying he is involved in the area of the study, in the other word, he is in the Education Program at the university. And this text also appeals to pathos by incorporating his personal struggle in the video, [...] and I have to agree with her because it creates an enthusiastic tone for the text. (Rhetorical Analysis, Rough Draft)

| Joy | - Some say homework is one of the reasons that separates their family apart. [...] Some students say that the teachers want to kill them by giving a lot of homework because the students have not suffered the students enough at school, so they want to suffer the students more at home. [...] This article appeals to ethos to show the authors’ credentials. [...] On each slide has a text and a related picture talking about him becoming a teacher [...] For this text, the author uses ethos by saying he is involved in the area of the study, in the other word, he is in the Education Program at the university. And this text also appeals to pathos by incorporating his personal struggle in the video, [...] and I have to agree with her because it creates an enthusiastic tone for the text. (Rhetorical Analysis, Rough Draft) |
| Rachel | - However, companies often take advantage and created advertisements that are offensive to some people. [...] Social roles and identities between female and male have been different since humans existed. [...] How women are portrayed in the media and advertisements even though women are always the main focus in the whole advertisement and looked up upon by ordinary people. [...] In other words, there are many aspects of being the perfect ideal women that is presented in the in the advertisements. [...] What is considered to be innocent and appropriate for female[s] [...] There are also arguments that specific depictions make about what it means to be a woman and a man [...] They don’t live in a world where their bodies are always criticized and judged like women do. (Rhetorical Analysis of an Ad., Final Draft) |

| 6.1.2 International Students | The international students did not enjoy writing either and were very anxious about their writing abilities in English. They were concerned about the EH101S at the beginning of the semester and asserted that they needed a lot of help to become better writers in their L2. They indeed visited their English instructors and studio leaders several times during the semester. The excerpts below illustrate their perceptions about their own writing skills and the composition course. |

| | I think I’ll have to work hard on my writing, obviously my English well, for the English class it’s, it’s pretty obvious I wanna be better at writing. (David, Interview 1) |
| | Uh I think I need to work hard in freshman composition. [...] So it’s most important for me now right now. [...] I’m worrying about freshman composition [chuckles] because it’s for English speaker so... Uh... we we are so like international students need to study very hard maybe harder than. (Narushi, Interview 1) |
| | Uh I think I have many problems in writing like grammar. (Xue, Interview 1). I used to be afraid of failing a [the EH101S] class because my writing skills cannot reach the college level. (Xue, Reflection Essay, EH101S) |
Uhhh I don’t like writing, plus my skill is no good. I worried yeah [about the EH101S class]. (Yu, Interview 1)

These students also explained that they did not do much writing at all in their EFL classes in their home countries, and in most cases they had not written an essay in English until coming to the U.S. and enrolling in the ESL program or in EH101S, in David’s case. The exception was Xue who said that, as a transfer student from an English-medium university in China, he was used to writing in English (“yeah I write a lot [in China] because uh we have English class every day.” Xue, Interview 1). However, this writing could have consisted of taking notes and exams because in his reflection essays for the EH101S, he asserted that he had not learned how to write academic essays in English until the writing course he took at the ESL program at the university here. The students discussed their EFL writing experiences as follows:

I didn’t write that much in English on my own but close to nothing. […]we don’t have that much English literacy writing stuff in Sweden […]I mean, we had writing assignments in English class (uhum) not big papers, but like […] paragraph and yeah letters. (David, Interview 1)

In Japanese education, I can say there is no class for English writing […]. There are some questions that make us write one or some sentences on the exam, but not a paragraph. (Narushi, Literacy Narrative, EH101S)

I thought my writing has to improve a lot after I came here, so I took ELP [English Language Program] writing class last semester. In this class, the instructor had taught me some skills that can use in academic essays. But before [that] semester, I still only had slight knowledge about how to write English academic essays in college level. (Xue, Reflection Essay, EH101S)

Because I studied in China before, so I was not familiar with American writing method. (Yu, Reflection Essay, EH101S)

Furthermore, the international students were the only participants who discussed parts of their writing processes in English during the interview or in their essays for the composition classes. Perhaps because of the metalanguage these students had developed during their English learning experiences and of the self and language awareness they had gained as language
learners, they were able to articulate their L2 writing practices. In addition, the fact that these students had most likely written essays in their L1s in high school might have contributed to some of their comparisons between writing in their L1s and L2, as seen below.

I have always been that kind of person who just writes. I do not think about grammar until I have finished at least the paragraph. I have tried to learn exactly why “that word fits in that sentence”. But I do not know why, I just know. If I write a sentence with a perfect grammar, it is not because I have stopped before every word and corrected it in grammar wise, it is most likely because I just have the feeling for what suits in that sentence. (David, Reflection Essay, 101S)

There are mostly no similarities between Japanese and English. The grammar is completely different. […] As I started to write an essay [in English], I found that there are some differences that are the structure of the essay. In Japanese essays, we usually put our opinions and results at the end of the essay. On contrast, in English essay, opinions and results are put at the early part of the essay. I got confused with this difference. Next I struggled with the meaning of words. There are some words based on specific culture. (Narushi, Literacy Narrative, 101S)

At first, I had many problems, especially in sentence structure and organization. The most important reason is we have different ways to think and write in Chinese. For example, when we write Chinese articles, the teacher told us don’t put your thesis straight forward, because the readers will think your writing is too shallow. But in English academic writing, you have to let reader find your thesis clearly. I felt uncomfortable when I have to try to change my writing style, and I had a hard time to find a way to change it as well. But I can see where my problem is in Eh101s class. I made some mistakes in my essays, from those mistakes I found out that my biggest problem is organization and always use the Chinese ways to organize my sentence structure. So that’s made my essays always confusing to others. (Xue, Reflective Essay, EH101S)

[How I write] Depend depend on what I read sometime I will maybe simulate the the writing style. Yeah I think my writing skill is still Chinese still. I uh when I see other classmate’s paragraph I can feel ‘oh this is written by American or native English speaker’, but every time I saw my paragraph I think it’s from Chinese [laughs]. (Yu, Interview 1).

Though the generation 1.5 and native-speaking students also had to write reflection essays (except for generation 1.5 students Ian and Rachel) and literacy narratives for their composition classes, they did not address specific challenges they had noticed or overcome in their writing practices. Table 6.2 presents excerpts of the international students’ EH101S essays.
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<th>Participant</th>
<th>Essay’s excerpts</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>David</strong></td>
<td>- When special events were coming up, like birthdays, Christmas or something that just made the day a little bit more special. Because we were children’s[,] we always curious about […] At the time our uncle were living in South Korea and when he came home for big holidays[,] he always had a big load with new movies. Because <em>I</em> am two years older than my younger sister[,] I started to learn English in school earlier than she did. But when I have an English class in school or learn something in English[,] I ran home not to mom or dad […]. (Literacy Narrative, Rough Draft).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- We want <em>to</em> be more educated and so we can use the technological revolution in the best way possible. Jacobsen and Forste states in their research that students […] People and especially young people nowadays spend a lot of time […]. (Research Paper, Rough Draft).</td>
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<td><strong>Narushi</strong></td>
<td>- This difference makes slight divergence that makes it difficult for me to understand American culture and thinking. When I wanted to talk about outlet in <em>my</em> English class in Japan, […] There are some English words that are used in different meanings in Japan, just like sushi in Japan and that in the U.S. have different images. (Literacy Narrative, Final Draft)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- In the 21st century, technology has been rapidly. books including textbooks are being a piece of electronic data. Some words that came from internet slang had become formal words. Internet literacy is not a simple literacy that just needed to be able to read and write on the internet. but now, by using the internet, people can search for <em>everything</em> in any language, in a very short time. (Research Paper, Rough Draft)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Xue</strong></td>
<td>- I believe that his first intend audiences are those immigrants like him […] I choose this article because of the author’s childhood experience[s] and his attitude about reading make me feel respectful for him. Sherman was not thinking in this way, he think he was smart and arrogant. So he started to read more books to improve him and let people know that Indian is not stupid as people’s expectation. He can do it because of his hard working, and also because of his belief[s]. The author want[s] to tell us […] (Rhetorical Analysis, Rough Draft).</td>
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<td>- Whatever you are play sports by yourself or watch a sports game, beside[s] the sports games, the sports psychology plays a significant role behind it. Sports psychology perform[s] a <em>wild</em> range of tasks related to sports literacy and education. It is also include client counseling. Without motivation, anything else are useless. (Research Paper, Rough Draft)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Yu</strong></td>
<td>- He emphasizes the importance of reading in whole paragraph and reminds it over times. He was a poor children who lived in an Indian reservation and was surrounded by people who never accept[ed] advance[d] education. But his father loves for reading and he loves his father[,] so he decided to loves reading as well. (Rhetorical Analysis, Rough Draft).</td>
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|            | - After about thirty years development, today video games industry shows its huge Market potential. But nowadays the graphics are more and more similar with movie and even better. The improvement of video games is not only indicates
by graphics, but also exhibit by storyline, music and various ways to play. […] Although most parents still think video games is bad for college student[s] and it is waste time. […] I think video games both have positive and negative, it depend[s] on how you take advantage of that. (Research Paper, Rough Draft)

### 6.1.3 Native-Speaking Students

The native-speaking students did not like writing and felt rather insecure about their writing at the beginning of the semester because English had not been one of their strengths in high school (except for Aaron as discussed below). They did not clearly articulate what their potential problems might be, however.

I didn’t like writing [in high school]. (L: Do you like writing now?) Uh… not really no. […] Um for English [composition] I guess I expect to learn how to write better papers cause I haven’t been that well writing papers. (Carrie, Interview 1)

I was always just felt horrible at English. (Dalton, Interview 1)

I never really thought I was a good writer so I just tried to stay away from that. (Tenesha, Interview 1)

However, after writing their first essays for the English composition classes, the native-speakers felt that their writing was apparently much better than what they had believed, as seen in the following excerpts.

Surprisingly I got a B on this one, on the first one. (Carrie, Interview 1). I actually expected that I’d come into the English class making a whole bunch of Cs because we didn’t write a lot in high school […] but I’ve actually made Bs and then this past paper she said it was basically an A and um I just have to do some more research on it. (Carrie, Interview 2)

English honestly I do [feel confident] which is bizarre […] but I guess I wasn’t really bad, but but I like to participate in class. (Dalton, Interview 2)

But now that I see that I’m really good at it [writing], I do like it, yeah. (Tenesha, Interview 1)
Aaron’s experiences with writing were quite different, however. He came to college confident about his writing skills and took a placement test to try to place out of EH101 and take the English honor class, which he was not able to accomplish. In our first interview, he said:

A: I’m good at it [writing]. Whether or not I like it and ehh depends on the subject, so…
L: But you did well in school?
A: Yeah, I did well. (Aaron, Interview 1)

Table 6.3 shows samples of the native-speaking students’ EH101S essays.

Table 6.3 Native-speaking students’ EH101S essay excerpts

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<th>Participant</th>
<th>Essay’s excerpts</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Aaron</strong></td>
<td>- Not everyone has the personality to be an outgoing, sociable person, but sometimes an introvert can go through an experience that changes them, pushes them to become a sociable and outgoing leader. [...] He was a very outgoing person, not afraid to goof off every once and a while, but we had a lot in common, [...] (Literacy Narrative, Final Draft).</td>
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<td>- Love is used to illustrate the interpersonal relationships the form between strangers, friends, family […] (Definition Essay, Final Draft).</td>
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<td>- Angell mentions that “a version of this article first appeared in The Huffington Post.” By saying this, she shows that she had been recognized in a major scholastic newspaper. [...] Two articles in particular analyse the flaws […] The second section revisits past political occurrences […] points of tension and conflict between […] (Rhetorical Analysis, Final Draft).</td>
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<td><strong>Carrie</strong></td>
<td>- sacrifices that I did not understand until now; where we did not even have enough money to send me to private school. […] I have always wondered why the school I attended all those years, cared that much about every single student. (Literacy Narrative, Rough Draft).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- His intended audience were children and or teens […] Teaching him[Self] how to read sparked an interest […] but it is the kid who has the ability to make a difference for his self, his future, and other children. (Rhetorical Analysis, Rough Draft). Depending on the experience of the nurse, they may go through psychological stress. (Research Paper, Rough Draft).</td>
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<td><strong>Dalton</strong></td>
<td>- : from subsidizing the power bill with solar or wind power, to moving to Alaska to live like a mountain man. [fragment] […] by someone using a solar lamp in their driveway, to someone having solar panels installed on their roof for powering their home. […] One can dig their own well and use their own septic tank. […] Whatever you choose to do needs to compliment your surroundings. (Research Paper, Final Draft)</td>
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<td><strong>Tenesha</strong></td>
<td>- When the word literacy is thought about [,] it is usually referenced to humans, because we [,] as humans [,] like to think that only ourselves are literate. Communication comes in many different forms []; there is verbal, body language,</td>
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written, and even the expressions you wear on your face is a form of communications. [...] Animal communication is one of the most magnificent things to witness, if you know what is going on. [...] Animal communication through pheromones is so precise that there has never been a reporting of one animal being confused by the scent of another animal, how mind blowing is that! [...] Although the smells are similar, the moth’s pheromone is multi component which means it has many more chemicals that make up that scent. (Research Paper, Final Draft)

6.2 Writing Practices and Digital Literacies

Because the focal participants’ writing experiences outside of school were very similar across the three populations, these findings are presented together here. If the students’ reading practices were rather limited, their writing practices were even more so. All 12 students stated that the primary types of writing they engaged in outside of school purposes were text messages and writing posts on social media. They explained that they did not write any blogs and usually did not write e-mails outside of school purposes or communicating with their sports teams for Jacob, David, and Narushi. Their texting and social media literacies were quite prevalent for most students. Albeit not always necessarily extensive, social media writing is still a form of writing, but the focal participants seemed to have perceived that it was not as seen in the following excerpts.

I don’t really do a whole lot of writing. [...] Social media a lot! A lot of texting, uh, a lot of Twitter. (Aaron, Interview 1)

I don’t write much besides school purposes [...] I text, social media, yeah like every day. (Carrie, Interview 1)

I write statuses on Facebook, texts [...] I don’t really tweet that much; I don’t know how to work Twitter. (Tenesha, Interview 1)

I don’t do a whole bunch of writing [...] but I do tweet a lot if that counts. I text a lot. (Ian, Interview 1)

I do [text] a lot. [...] Most of them [posts on Facebook and Twitter] I post in Thai but sometime I post in English too. (Joy, Interview 1)
Then writing I, you know, like basically just text and like tweets, Facebook posts [...] those are basically the only ones. (Rachel, Interview 1)

L: Besides school assignments, how much do you write in English?
N: Oh mostly never no. [...] just text and social media. (Narushi, Interview 1)

Ummm…yes like send e-mail, send text, text yeah just like that. (Xue, Interview 1)

L: Besides school, how much do you write in English?
Y: How much?
L: A little bit? A lot?
Y: I think just just a little bit. [...] text, social media, yeah. (Yu, Interview 1)

Dalton, David, and Jacob were a bit different in that they did not engage in texting and social media as much as the students quoted above. As mentioned in Chapter 5, Dalton – the only non-traditional student in the study in his late twenties – might be an example of a generational divide as he had never had a social media account such as Facebook or Twitter and did not text very often. He was the only student who did not own a ‘smart phone’, and it took him quite some time to back with when I texted him to schedule interviews. David and Jacob said that they were on social media and sent text messages, but they did not seem to engage in these practices as often as the other participants. As they put it,

I mean when I have spare time maybe after practice or but I’ll use it [social media] more like when I’m waiting on something, waiting for class, I have 5 minutes or I’m waiting for practice or for the ride back and you just go on your phone, Twitter, Instagram. (David, Interview 3)

I text. I don’t really tweet or use Facebook, I just kind of text, but rather I usually rather, like [...] text message for me it’s just a quick communication, but if you wanna talk to somebody, like, there’s people who have a complete conversation on the phone [texting], I’m like just call the person [laughs] yeah I just end up calling people instead of texting them. [...] (L: So do you read what other people post on Twitter or Facebook?) Here and there when I get bored and I got nothing to do, like when I’m waiting or something. (Jacob, Interview 1)

David and Jacob were the only student athletes participating in the study, and I wonder whether their involvement with sports and commitment to their games and teams might have
been related to their less frequent use of social media and texting. The next subsections explore in more detail the focal participants’ writing practices in their fall classes.

6.3 Writing in College

The participants’ experiences with writing in college varied according to the courses they were taking, but in general they did not have many writing assignments in their first semester of college, writing primarily for their composition classes. A few subject-area courses required reviews and reports, as further discussed below, and a small number of courses had essay test questions. The majority of student participants also did not engage in note taking during lectures, relying on instructors’ PowerPoint slides or other classmates’ notes to study. Their writing practices according to each student population are examined next.

6.3.1 Generation 1.5 Students

Despite the fact that they realized that their writing could and should be improved, the generation 1.5 students did not demonstrate much concern about their writing assignments in the fall. Even Joy, who had every paper she wrote proofread by friends, said she was not very worried about the composition class. The only writing assignment that caused Joy, and to some extent Rachel, preoccupation was the second biology lab report they wrote together as further discussed below. The students also did not generally take a lot of notes in class, with the exception of Rachel. Their writing experiences in each class are presented in the next sections.

6.3.1.1 Liberal Arts

As expected, the generation 1.5 students claimed that the class they had to write the most for was EH101. In addition to writing reading responses every week, they had four major essays in both classes (again Jacob and Joy were in one section of EH101 while Ian and Rachel in another one). None of them seemed concerned about these assignments, but their practices in
writing the paper were quite different. While Jacob claimed to write the rough drafts right before they were due, Joy explained that she wrote her essays ahead of time, so that she would have time to ask her friends to read over them. She would then submit the papers to her instructor before the deadline in order to get her feedback as well.

Actually, when I wrote her essay for [Instructor’s first name] I have like people to check on my English, you know […] I told you I kind of wrote the essay ahead of time [laughing] and you know like how I worry about English, right? (Uhum) So I wrote, I try to write it, I mean do it ahead and then my draft to [Instructor’s first name] and then like ‘[Instructor’s first name], is this something that you want?’ Like that. (Joy, Interview 2)

It took me like actually like an hour and a half to 2 hours to write it [the literacy narrative]. […]I’m not, like, the papers for writing [composition], it’s just, well, I just wrote for that, she said it already looked pretty good, and it looked like I really tried on for something that I just kind of whipped up. (Jacob, Interview 1)

Ian did not comment on his writing practices for the EH101 essays, but – as discussed in Chapter 5 – he did not spend much time writing the reading responses, and his teacher mentioned that he was not prepared for their conference as that his first drafts were not always complete. Rachel also did not directly discuss the processes she engaged in when writing her essays, but she always submitted her papers on time or in advance and had very complete and polished drafts according to her instructor.

Again, Rachel turns in rough drafts that are basically complete first versions of her final draft and Ian was a mix. He turned in a rough draft that was pretty complete and there were a couple of drafts that were very, very incomplete, but he turned in all of his papers and thoroughly revised his drafts…since they were so incomplete at first. […] Rachel was prepared for the conference at the end of the semester; Ian was not. He needed a lot of reminders and was not aware that there's a participation grade and asked me if it was on the syllabus. […] but he's really nice and was not accusatory. (EH101 Instructor A)

Ian, Joy, and Rachel said that the literacy narrative was the easiest of all the essays they had to write for EH101 because it was about them, and they had a lot of interesting stories to tell about their English learning experience. As they put it,
Easiest paper? I will say the first one [the literacy narrative]. That was that was the easiest of all because it was the first one so we could, um, write about whatever we wanted to write about yourself, so that was easy. (Ian, Interview 3)

The first one [the literacy narrative] was the easiest. That one was easier cause like it was about me (uhum) so I could write like it was opinion based, so I could write like what I felt you know [...] yeah so like I could write like I was gonna write a lot more but she said you know like ‘you don’t need it’.(Rachel, Interview 3)

I ended up exceeding the page requirement for this essay [literacy narrative] because there was so much to write about because it is my own experience, so I knew exactly what I was writing. [...] And I figured that I like to tell my story to other as well from this assignment. (Joy, Reflective Essay, EH101)

Jacob, however, said that he was not as comfortable with writing in less structured genres in which he had too much freedom to write. Thus, he considered the evaluation essay – a type of research paper – the easiest paper he wrote for EH101 since he could follow certain steps when writing it.

The easiest….probably the evaluation essay just because I know exactly like I had a really good idea of it already, and I could do something like I usually compare two items like I did about technology which is usually what I do any way [chuckles], so basically I just put what always do any way into a paper. [...]It’s weird, like, it’s hard to adapt again to like a more free writing style you know cause I’m used, cause I’m a math guy, like, do this, do that [...] I like formats, I like to know how to do it instead of like being completely free with it, you know. (Jacob, Interview 3)

For Jacob and Joy, the most difficult essay they wrote for EH101 was the rhetorical analysis, though their attributed their difficulties with it to different aspects of the assignment. Joy found reading and understanding the article and then having to analyze it quite challenging while Jacob struggled more with the structure of the paper, as seen below.

Um, [the most difficult essay was] the rhetorical analysis probably cause I just couldn’t really get a grasp on it, I couldn’t, cause I always write more like, uh, research paper style (uhum) and like she’s even written that in the comments like everything looks like a research paper (uhum), like I’m trying to get away from that but it’s just it’s just something I couldn’t get like the hang of it. (Jacob, Interview 3)

L: What was the most difficult essay you wrote for EH 101?
J: Oh, the rhetorical [analysis]. […] Yeah [laughs] I was like uhhhh, I don’t know… [laughs] […] because like, I think is because of the one I pick too, like, the essay, the, you know? (the scholarly text?) yeah, it’s like, you know, like I’m not good at reading, right? So I have to like read and understand what they say in the thing (uhum), and then like I don’t really understand what they are trying to do, but I just try like, ok, they do statistics, so then I say okay, they have statistic information, that how they do it, so I just kind of say that in my essay. […]Yes, that’s hard. (Joy, Interview 3)

Ian and Rachel did not have to write a rhetorical analysis of a scholarly article in their composition class and said the research paper was the most difficult essay in their opinion because of the challenges involved with citation formats and findings relevant and suitable sources. They explained this as follows,

I would say [the most difficult is] the one I’m doing right now [the evaluation research paper] […] the MLA style, research paper, since this one it’s 5 pages, the length is longer and we can choose our topic and just following the MLA style format. […] it has been difficult to find sources (yeah) because we can’t use Wikipedia (right) and there are some sources that we can’t use, so, so it’s kind of hard to find really. (Ian, Interview 3)

I think it’s the final one [the most difficult]. ‘Cause ok like um we had 3 topics (uhum) and then I chose diversity for my first one or like as my original one cause she said, you know, like you should pick it as soon as possible, and I picked that one and I like did research and I could not find any research like any resources at all, well I mean I found maybe 1 or 2 or something and I needed 5 at least, and like I couldn’t really like reference them, you know, like it wasn’t exactly what I wanted, so I was like ‘Oh my goodness!’ you know, so I told her about it and when we had the conference (uhum), which was 2 days before it was due, and I was like you know I don’t think I can write like a whole like at least 5 pages on diversity […] so I was just like I don’t know, you know, like ‘how I should do this?’ and then so she was like maybe I should just switch the topic and I was like I might go ahead and do that so I switched it like 2 days before so I had to finish the paper, um, I finished it on Thursday and it was due Friday, so I was like ‘Oh my goodness!’:. (Rachel, Interview 3)

As for teacher feedback, the four students claimed that they received some feedback on their EH101 essays and appeared to find it helpful. Ian and Rachel did not expound on what types of feedback their teacher provided while Jacob’s and Joy’s comments indicate that their instructor focused on content and organization, not on grammar, including on Joy’s papers. The instructors’ own perspectives regarding their feedback practices on the focal participants’ essays
as well as excerpts of their actual feedback are presented in the second section of the chapter. The quotes below illustrate how the generation 1.5 students perceived the comments they received on their papers.

She does [give feedback], about one sentence or two. (Ian, Interview 1)

J: She did and like added some comments stuff like that and so it’s just the same thing she just kind of wrote feedback, uh, she wrote two comments in and then she wrote at the end of the paper you know how I should change it, what edits I should make in there.
L: Uhum, were the comments related to grammar or local problems or more like the organization…?
J: Um, it was just like, uh, the problem was like I kind of wrote a little bit away from the assignment, so I had to go back to it and write about you know a certain aspect of the task
L: Ok, so more like the content?
J: Yeah. (Jacob, Interview 2)

L: Um, have you had any feedback from your professors on your assignments? On your written assignments?
J: Totally from [EH101 instructor] because I ask her [laughing] to revise my essay (yeah)
L: What types of feedback does she give you?
J: Um, like, she give the idea, how to extend this, this, this, and stuff (uhum), you know, just like peer-review (yeah), uhum
L: So like content, your organization (uhum), how about like grammar, does she give you some feedback too?
J: Oh, she, I don’t think she really cares about grammar because, um, and before I turn, I turn the draft to her I have my friend check the English, so, [chuckles]. (Joy, Interview 2)

She gives a lot of like really good feedback (uhum) so we can write like for the rough draft so we can write like a better one for the final draft […] yeah I mean like I find her feedback very helpful [chuckles] (Rachel, Interview 1). I think I need to like may have to like work on she said it [the final research paper] was good and then like there was stuff that I need to change like maybe some words and everything so. (Rachel, Interview 3)

At the end of the semester, Ian and Rachel felt that EH101 was the easiest course they took in the fall, and though Joy and Jacob did not mention composition as the easiest for them (Jacob said it was MAE111, an engineering class, and Joy said it was Spanish), they believed to have improved their writing and seemed to enjoy the class. In their words,

I’d say English [was the easiest]. English because for other students they say that English is really hard (uhum) like my friends that they get really bad grades. It might be Ms.
[Instructor’s last name] that is very understanding, her personality and way of teaching (uhum) and I really like how we just discuss in class and we just share ideas. Uh, so I like the teaching, the way that Ms. [Instructor’s last name] teaches her class (uhum). So, I mean, it’s, it’s easy, she makes it easy (yeah, ok) she makes it easy for us to follow the steps and to do everything on time, and stuff like that so very well planned and organized. So I’d say her class [was the easiest]. (Ian, Interview 3)

English [was the easiest]. Um, like, we did discussion questions and we just read and I thought those were kind of easy cause I like that kind of stuff like I like to read and then like answer question like it helps me understand it, right, and then like it wasn’t too hard like the questions or anything so it was it was pretty good you know and then like the papers weren’t too hard (uhum) so like I could write them and everything. (Rachel, Interview 3)

I now believe I have improved greatly in revising my papers. […] Truthfully, I never really revised my papers. The only thing I really changed from the rough draft to the final draft was grammatical errors and things like that. […] The positive from this is now I know how to properly revise my papers. Also, I can write in different styles now. While my writing style may still reflect that of a research paper, it has definitely improved from the beginning of the semester. (Jacob, Reflection Essay, EH101)

You [her EH101 instructor] have helped me become more confident more especially when you showed my first journal reading to class, and other students voted that mine was the best one. I was proud of myself that I could write better than some of the native English speaker. However, the first article really helped me overcome my fear of writing; the ideas are more important than grammar. (Joy, Reflection Essay, EH101)

Spanish (FL101) was the other course in the humanities in which Joy was enrolled. She claimed that there was very little writing involved in the course, especially at the beginning of the semester, as the homework assignments and tests consisted mainly of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, and matching questions. By the end of the semester, she explained that she had to write a couple of paragraphs, as seen below.

J: For Spanish, we wrote the composition (uhum), and, um, you know, I’m really good at Spanish, so like, I only, I got a 95 on it [laughing] because I misspelled one word! [laughing]
L: Was it a long essay?
J: Nah, she just like, she want us to write 150 words, I think (yeah). And it’s not hard because, like, I’m only in Spanish 1, like, so…
L: Right, so it’s more basic.
J: Yeah, so it’s gonna be like where are you from, how old are you, or something like that. (Joy, Interview 3)
The last course in the liberal arts college for the generation 1.5 students was Introduction to Sociology (SOC100), which Rachel was taking. She explained that there was not any writing involved in the exams as they were all multiple choice, but she took copious notes during the lectures, as mentioned in Chapter 5, and also had to write a 5-7 page book review for the class. She did not seem to struggle to write the book review and added that the instructions on the syllabus provided the direction and guidelines she needed to complete the assignment.

Umm it wasn’t as hard as thought because it has to be at least I think 5-7 pages (uhum) and um he gives you like uh sections, there’s 5 sections and then you have to do you have to like do all you have to answer all of the sections (uhum) and as long as you answer them I think it was like it wasn’t too hard cause I thought the length was gonna be hard (uhum) cause 5 pages of you know like one book review (uhum) of like just one book (right) I thought it was hard but then it wasn’t as hard as I thought. […] ‘cause he was like he gives you like how many paragraphs you should do, so it wasn’t like 5 paragraphs it was like for each section one section the 1st section was like 1-2 paragraphs (uhum) then the second was like 3-4 and everything, so he gives you like how many paragraphs you should have at least so like as long as you do it, you should be like at least 5 pages. (Rachel, Interview 3)

6.3.1.2 Business School

Ian claimed that there was not any writing involved other than taking notes in the Macroeconomics course (ECN142), which he claimed he “had to do” (Ian, Interview 1). However, during my classroom observation of the class, he did not take notes. The exams in the course had a combination of multiple choice questions and word-problem questions with graphs and models that the students had to understand and calculate. However, no more than one sentence or two were needed to explain the graphs, according to the professor.

6.3.1.3 Science

Besides taking notes during class, the four students explained that there was no writing involved in either of the Principles of Biology (BIO119) sections they were enrolled (Ian, Joy, and Rachel) or in General Chemistry I (CH121, Jacob). The exams were all multiple choice for
both courses, and the online homework assignments were also in multiple-choice format. In their words,

   Biology, um, we she posts like her presentations online so you don’t really have to write anything for it, and then we don’t do a lot of writing in biology either except the exams and um notes and so we don’t have to write a lot for biology. (Rachel, Interview 1)

   In chemistry, it’s just, it’s just tests [...] uh, going in the class, and just kind of doing the problems, really writing down in the keyboard, typing like the equation or something like that or like a word here and there to say like what it is. (Jacob, Interview 1)

   The biology lab required more writing, however. The students had to write two reports as well as write notes about the procedures completed during class on their lab manuals. The lab reports caused Joy and Rachel some anxiety because of how their lab TA graded their work. According to these students, the TA did not make her expectations clear and then penalized the students for certain writing style issues without explaining how exactly they could be improved for the next reports. In other words, she took off several points for writing problems but did not provide feedback on how these issues should be addressed. For example, on their first report, which Joy shared with me, Joy, Rachel and the other group members made a 76 out of 100, and the only comment related to their writing offered by the instructor was “scientific terms please”. She wrote this comment on the margin where she had underlined the following phrase: “the samples were left alone for 30 minutes.” She also marked an ‘X’ next to the word ‘References’ on the references page, and underlined one more phrase on the report (without any comments this time): “the final concentration of the […]”. There was one comment about the content of the report that read as follows: “This is not used here. The bromocresol green assay is followed for determination of serum albumin.” The following excerpts illustrate Joy’s concerns about the lab reports and the TA.

   L: Are you concerned about the research paper or any other assignments that you have coming up?
J: Yes, the lab report. Oh…[laughs] probably gonna bring my GPA down a lot […] like, she’s so picky, like I show you right now.
L: So you are more worried about how you’re gonna write (yes, right) it or the content?
J: How I’m gonna write it. […] And then like, she [writes] this or that, maybe the next page [we are looking at her report]. I don’t know how she grade it. Like, for this, she said use scientific word. I’m like, what is it gonna be? I don’t know. (Joy Interview 2)

The chemistry lab did not require reports, and Jacob explained that he only had to write down answers to the procedures on the lab manual.

As expected, the students asserted that there was not much writing in the math courses they were taking in the fall either. They primarily did homework problems and exercises from the book, which consisted of numbers and very few words, and some students took notes in class.

Math it’s just uh we actually turn in homework like every Tuesday, and then we have a quiz every Thursday and then you know we just take notes and then other than that we don’t write a lot cause you it’s just math you know. (Rachel, Interview 1)

6.3.1.4 Engineering

For the engineering course Jacob was taking (MAE111), there was no reading involved, but the students were to write three short reports (i.e., 1-2 page) about their final projects. The first report worked as proposal to explain what object they were planning to render through the software; the second was a progress report to show where they were with the project, and the last one was the final report on the project. Jacob did not have any concerns about the written reports but explained that he had run into a problem when creating his object on the software program and was going to talk to his instructor about it.

6.3.1.5 FYE100

Though the students did not have to do any readings for the ‘First Year Experience’ class, they were required to write a 5-page report about three events they had to attend throughout the semester. This writing assignment seemed to irritate the generation 1.5 students who were unsure
of how to fulfill the 5-page assignment with information from the events. The rubrics provided by the instructors appear to have been quite detailed, but the students still struggled to come up with things to write about. In their words,

I have a 5-page essay due next week for that class (uhum), so I don’t know what to write about. (Ian, Interview 2).

L: So, do you have any concerns about the assignments that you are expected to do?  
J: Uh, just the FYE, I don’t know how I’m gonna write that much on that little information [chuckles] cause, it’s only like, it’s only 3 events, and like volleyball game you can, I mean, I guess I will have to look at the stats like and see exactly what happened and just try to remember, but I mean you can’t really write much about that.  
L: Does she or he, does the instructor give you any like samples or instructions or anything?  
J: No, we weren’t given any samples. All we got was we got a rubric sent to us (ok), so we can follow, it’s like make this paragraph, like it’s this paragraph, this paragraph, this paragraph all 4 to 5, I mean, like 4 to 10 sentences to each, so it’s like you have to least write 4 sentences on each thing like event and then explain it or something like that. (Jacob, Interview 3)

L: How is the FYE class going?  
J: [Sighs] you know, like, they expect me to write 5 to 6 pages about the events I attend, right? (uhum) And then the rubric he give is like describe the behavior of the people and the situation, I’m like, uhhhh [laughing] how I supposed to write it in 5 pages? [laughing] Cause like, mostly the behavior, from the rubric, like behavior, I write in 2 sentences and then I just summarized what I did (uhum), and then one event has to be academic, right, and then I went to the lecture so I just like summarized what is this talking about. (Joy, Interview 2)

Despite their concerns, they all made As in the class. The following subsections present the writing experiences in college of the international student participants.

6.3.2 International Students

The international students demonstrated more concern about their writing assignments, especially the EH101S essays, and seemed to struggle with those much more than the other student populations. They also faced more challenges taking notes in class as they could not always understand the instructors or write fast enough to keep up with the lectures. Most students, with the exception of Yu, took notes in English during lectures because they did not
“have time to translate” (Xue, Interview 1). They would translate any words they did not understand afterwards when they had more time. They coped with these difficulties by visiting their EH101S instructors and studio leader several times throughout the semester and borrowing lecture notes from other students. Their specific experiences and practices in each of their classes are addressed below.

6.3.2.1 Liberal arts

According to the students, the amount of writing involved in their EH101S classes was much more extensive than what they had ever experienced in EFL classes in their home countries or in the ESL writing courses at the university, and was the course for which they wrote the most in the fall. Both EH101S sections in which they enrolled required four major essays and an e-Portfolio to be completed by the end of the semester. In this e-Portfolio, the students were to revise two essays of their choice, out of the four major ones, and upload them on a personal Google site with an ‘About Me’ page and a ‘Reflection Page’. For the reflection page, they wrote an informal reflection essay or letter to their instructors about what they believed they had learned during the semester. As aforementioned, the four international students seemed quite concerned about the English essays and class and saw their instructors for extra help throughout the semester, whether at their offices or after class. The quotes below show this apprehension.

I can say I’m nervous to do [the assignments] wrong. (David, Interview 2)

I’m worrying about freshman composition. (Narushi, Interview 1)

L: Do you have any concerns about the writing assignments for EH101S?
X: Yeah I think it…is at a high level you need to read and write well. (Xue, Interview 1)

Y: I worried…yeah
L: About which one [writing assignment]?
Y: Everything [chuckles].
The research paper was the most difficult essay for three students, David, Xue and Yu, because of the challenges involved with incorporating sources and data (some students opted to collect their own data for the project) as well as with the length of the paper for some of them. Narushi, however, found the rhetorical analysis to be the most challenging essay and could not fully understand the assignment’s requirements and purposes. In the students’ words:

D: It’s gotta be the research essay [the most difficult]. Not because of the like length of it more like combining all the sources and the…. Just, for example, the she wanted me to um put it my own voice, my own opinion more in the body which I didn’t think I was allowed to just until the conclusion and stuff like that I don’t know (uhum) so that’s that’s hard but I’m learning new things.
L: What topic did you write your research paper on?
D: Em I have social media influencing students.
L: Was it difficult to find sources?
D: No, it was a lot, but it was not hard but it was … it was more difficult to find the right ones (ok) that I thought…had an impact on my topic and stuff. (David, Interview 3)

N: [The most difficult] it’s it was like rhetorical analysis, uh that was hard.
L: Why do you think that was the most difficult?
N: Uh first of all, I cannot I cannot make sense like uh….what should I write, so then yeah I ask I ask Ms. Ms. [Instructor’s last name] (uhum) again and again [chuckles]. (Narushi, Interview 3)

L: What was the most difficult essay you wrote for EH101?
X: Uh… I think it’s the research paper.
L: Yeah?
X: Yeah
L: Why?
X: It’s you have to do a lot of research and it is […] it’s the longest one too yeah […] it’s it take time. (Xue, Interview 3)

L: What was the most difficult essay you wrote for EH101?
Y: Um research paper
L: Why?
Y: Uh…. I revise many times revise it uhhhh…. wait let me think
L: Yeah sure.
Y: [long pause] I spend a lot of time for research (uhum) and uh […]Yeah uh organizing my data and I don’t I don’t know how to put my data into my paper (ok) so I confused. (Yu, Interview 3)
Not surprisingly, these students also thought the literacy narrative was the easiest essay, like the generation 1.5 students, because of the more unstructured nature of the narrative genre and the fact that it was autobiographical. Yu was not able to articulate why this paper was the easiest for him, however. As they put it,

D: Probably literacy narrative [the easiest essay]. Probably not at the time but now that I think back, it was more like telling my story, it was more like a yeah free writing (yeah) and not so strict it had the guidelines. (David, Interview 3).

N: The literacy narrative [was the easiest], yeah right.
L: Why do you think so?
N: Because the yeah it allowed me to write the difference between Japan Japanese and English yeah, and then I can write about yeah being international student so there’s a lot of topic to write [laughs]

X: Easiest one is the first essay uhhh
L: The literacy narrative?
X: Yeah yeah the literacy narrative because it’s just write about yourself. (Xue, Interview 3)

L: Which paper was the easiest?
Y: Uh first one
L: The literacy narrative?
Y: Yeah.
L: Why do you think that was the easiest?
Y: I don’t know, just I just think it’s easy. (Yu, Interview 3)

Regarding the EH101S instructors’ feedback on their writing, the international students simply stated that they received some feedback but did not explain how much or what types of comments were offered. Because they visited their instructors about their essays throughout the writing process, some of the feedback was most likely offered via oral discussions and might have been quite extensive given the numerous occasions the students sought the instructors’ help. This could have made it difficult for students to remember or articulate the types of feedback they received on their papers.
Though these students showed concern about the EH101S class and the essays throughout the semester, they did not think this was the most difficult course they took in the fall. In our final interview, they pointed to different courses as the most challenging ones (e.g., Psychology, Chemistry, Accounting), and they all managed to make As or Bs in EH101S. David and Narushi made As and Xue and Yu made Bs.

History (HIS104) was the other humanities course David was enrolled in, and he perceived it as “not having that much writing” (David, Interview 1), but the exams had essay questions, and the students had to write a 4-5-page book review as well as take notes during class. As mentioned in Chapter 5, David could not always follow the history lectures and though he took notes during class, he also asked an American classmate to for his notes. After every class, David would remind the classmate to e-mail him the notes (this student typed the notes on his computer during class), and David used both his and the classmate’s notes when studying for the exams. David had also told the instructor at the beginning of the semester that he was going to borrow notes from his classmate because he was an international student and could not always understand everything during the lectures. He visited the instructor before the exams as well in order to ask questions and make sure he was prepared for the tests, and the instructor told him he would not be as strict as far as language issues were concerned when grading David’s writing. In David’s words,

The history teacher said to me, said to the class before the test ‘Yeah I want you guys to write eh the essay’, because we had two essay questions as the topic, eh ‘I want you to write in like a grammatical correct English’ or whatever but yeah but then he said to me like ‘I won’t like grade you or judge you on that’, eh but obviously I did did my best so I don’t know, he hasn’t said anything about it. (David, Interview 2)

The instructors’ perspectives on student writing in general and on David’s writing in particular are discussed below in the section on faculty’s perceptions. Regarding the book
review, David was not concerned about writing it and explained that if the instructor’s guidelines were not sufficient, he would look for other resources to help him write the review, as seen below:

L: Do you know how to write a book review? Do you have some guidelines to follow?
D: Not really, but I guess I can um like go to student success center (uhum) or look it up online. OWL of Purdue or something, um, so I’m not concerned about like how to get it done just like concerned about getting it done in time. (David, Interview 2)

After he had written the review, David said that the teacher had provided some instructions (“he told us to tell uh what the author is saying like um more like […] a summary and then um how the author is saying […] and then my opinions about the book”, David, Interview 3), and he did very well on his review, earning an A+.

The last courses in the liberal arts college for the international students were Effective Study Skills (ED115) and Introduction to Psychology (PSY101), in which David and Xue were enrolled, respectively. According to David, there was not much writing involved in ED115 other than taking notes and small homework assignments that consisted of fill-in-the-blank questions. He was able to follow the lectures for this class and take his own notes. He explained,

ED 115 [The Study Skills Class], she talks and takes notes sometimes on the board, and I found her actually pretty good talker because she is easy to understand, she always explains herself, and so I can take notes and like take it in that way. (David, Interview 2)

Though the tests for the course had a combination of question types, such as multiple choice, matching, true/false, short answers, and fill-in-the-blanks, it did not include much writing as the short answers required a couple of sentences at the most.

For PSY1001, there were no essay questions on the exams, which were all multiple-choice, but his instructor did give some small homework writing assignments for extra credit. Xue sometimes completed these extra-credit exercises but not always. In these short
assignments, the students had to write a paragraph or two, at the most, providing personal examples related to the concepts learned in class.

Sometimes he she will put it post it [homework assignment] on angel and yeah very simple question like uh like the extra credit too he uh she give us or she lets us uh write the like unfamiliar food (uhum) you can eat around the States and write it uh write a food and say what it taste and use the concept uhh from class yeah. (Xue, Interview 2)

Note taking was also important in the class as a lot of material and examples were covered in every lecture. Xue explained that the class was very fast-paced, and he sometimes borrowed notes from classmates (i.e., his Chinese friends).

The class is very fast, and you have to take notes on your slides so if you miss a class you will miss many thing, but you can borrow other notes to fill in. (Xue, Interview 2)

6.3.2.2 Business school

For the Legal Environment of Business (BLS211), David said that there were essay type questions on the test as well as a 1-2-page summary case report due at the end of the semester. He did not seem concerned about the writing assignments or the essay questions on the exams, and reading and fully understanding the material taught in class were the biggest challenges he faced in this course. Taking notes during the lectures was also important for him, but he could not always understand the professor’s writing, so he would copy his classmate’s notes when needed (“she [the professor] talks a lot, she writes on the board sometimes, um, but her handwriting is not that good so I can’t, but I got my buddy, he sits right beside me so I can see what he’s writing.” David, Interview 2).

Xue explained that for the Business Statistics II (MSC288) there was not much writing involved at all as the homework was done online on a specific software program in which they entered data, and the exams involved primarily plugging numbers into formulas (“Uh it’s [the exams] very easy only word and she uh he just give you the formula and you just put the number
into it and it’s pretty easy.” Xue, Interview 2). For Information Systems in Organizations (IS301), there was more writing since the students had to create a group business plan for a product or service of their choice that they believed would be lucrative. Xue was concerned about this project, especially since it had to be presented in front of the class at the end of the semester for the class to vote for the best plan (“I have to make up a business project in information system class and have to do the presentation at the end of the semester, so I think it’s a big concern for me yeah.” Xue, Interview 2). He did not explain whether the exams for the course included essay questions or if he took lecture notes, but for homework assignments he said they had to do labs with a software program for the class.

Finally, for Principles of Accounting, the only writing required was a sentence or two in homework assignments as the exams were all multiple-choice and there was no other written assignment or project in the course. According to the instructor, taking notes was also an important part of the class, but Yu did not engage in this practice when he came to class, which was not very often as discussed in Chapter 5.

6.3.2.3 Science

The writing in General Chemistry I (CH121) and Introduction to Chemistry (CH101), in which Narushi and Yu were enrolled respectively, was minimal and limited to notes students took in class since all exams were multiple-choice, and the online homework assignments consisted of selecting items with the computer mouse. Narushi was taking some notes during my classroom observation of CH121, but I did not observe Yu’s class and he never mentioned whether he took notes for this class. The writing in the lab portions was also limited to filling in information in the manuals from the procedures done in class and no reports were required for either class (i.e., CH125 and CH105).
As expected, Narushi claimed that the only ‘writing’ involved in his math class, Calculus A (MA171), was numbers. He explained that they had to turn in quizzes every class, but these did not involve any word problems, just equations and formulas, and the exams followed the same pattern.

6.3.2.4 Engineering

Narushi was the only international student taking an engineering course (EE100 – Electrical Engineering), and he explained that he was not concerned about the only writing assignment in the course (i.e., a three-page report on a final project), but was a bit anxious about creating the object he had proposed because he had attempted to develop the same project once while in high school in Japan but failed to assemble the circuits needed then. Thus, he said he was going to make sure he looked up YouTube videos on how to assemble the object and if he still had any questions, he would consult with the instructor before submitting his final project and report.

6.3.2.5 FYE100

Unlike the generation 1.5 students’ perceptions about the FYE 100 class and the experiences of the native-speaking students, discussed below, David and Narushi did not complain about the First Year Experience course or about the 5-page report they had to write for the class. They did not express any concern about this writing assignment and mentioned, in a very matter-of-fact way, that they had submitted their reports and made As in the course.

6.3.3 Native-Speaking Students

As aforementioned, three native-speaking students, Carrie, Dalton, and Tenesha, began the fall semester concerned about the English composition course, but they became much more confident about their writing after receiving their grades for the first assignments. They generally
did not take notes in class and claimed that the amount of writing in their subject-area courses was minimal, the exception being Introduction to Psychology and FYE100. Their writing experiences in each class are presented next.

6.3.3.1 Liberal Arts

The three native-speaking students enrolled in EH101S (Carrie, Dalton, and Tenesha) did not have to write reading responses or complete any other type of homework or in-class assignments involving writing, so the four major essays along with the e-Portfolio were the only writings they did for the course. On the other hand, Aaron wrote reading responses for every class until the last four weeks of the semester and engaged in other in-class short writing activities throughout the semester in his EH101 section. He also wrote four major essays and created an e-Portfolio for the class.

Like the majority of the other students in the study, the three native-speaking students in EH101S considered the literacy narrative assignment the easiest essay as seen below.

The literacy narrative [was the easiest]. [...] I guess cause it’s kind of like telling a story (uhum) basically about just something that how you came to learn read and different stuff and so it was easy to tell that story. (Carrie, Interview 3)

Yeah that one [the literacy narrative] was better and easiest. Probably cause I just told a story which I’m good at stories. (Dalton, Interview 3)

The literacy narrative [was the easiest] because it’s like a story of my life of how I gained my literacy (uhum) so it’s really easy to do. (Tenesha, Interview 3)

Aaron, however, found the literacy narrative to be the most difficult essay he wrote for EH101 precisely because of the more flexible nature of the narrative genre. Like Jacob, Aaron seemed to prefer writing more structured or straightforward papers in which he had steps to follow. Thus, he found the definition essay the easiest one. In his words,

L: Which one was the most difficult essay you wrote for EH 101?
A: Probably the literacy narrative
A: The first one?
L: Yeah
A: Why?
L: Because like … I’m I feel like I’m good at writing like technical essays like giving facts and stuff and just talking about myself in an essay it’s just kind of weird (uhum) like I didn’t really know how to do it so I just kind of….ran with it I guess but mine wasn’t even really a literacy narrative technically. I still gotta go back and add some some small details and stuff to make it one.
A: The easiest…[pause] probably the definition essay because like I said I’m good at doing facts and stuff and the definition essay is just here’s the word, here’s how it needs to be changed or whatever, it’s very straightforward. (Aaron, Interview 3)

Carrie and Tenesha claimed that the research paper was the most difficult essay they wrote for EH101S because of the work involved with finding reliable sources and properly incorporating them in the paper, while Dalton explained that the rhetorical analysis was challenging for him most likely because of the difficulties involved in analyzing a scholarly article, in particular the one he chose. As they put it,

L: Um, what was the most difficult essay you wrote for EH 101?
C: The research one. This last one has been the hardest.
L: Why do you think that is?
C: It’s just uh I mean it was easy, but it was just a lot of work and I’m, I procrastinate a lot, so once it comes time to do, that’s when I always do my work it’s when the night before and so it’s just I have to print out tons and tons and tons of um information and then I have to go highlight everything and put it into the report and it’s just a lot of work.
(Carrie, Interview 3)

L: What was the most difficult essay you wrote for EH 101?
T: The research paper.
L: Why?
T: I don’t know… it’s like having to work in the information that you get from the sources without plagiarizing (uhum) and then without basically copying word for word trying to put it your own words and stuff and then finding credible sources you don’t want just like Wikipedia or something. (Tenesha, Interview 3)

L: Uh, ok, what was the most difficult essay you wrote for the English 101 class?
D: Probably well….I don’t know… probably the research paper, but I’m thinking maybe the rhetorical analysis I think was the yeah definitely.
L: Why would say so?
D: Well, just because… I didn’t [laughs] I didn’t do so well, well I don’t think I did well, but I don’t think she [the instructor] really thought I did that badly… but I really didn’t, I
don’t know, I don’t well just like…explaining somebody else’s work or I just can’t put it down on paper I guess.

L: Which reading did you analyze?
D: Oh, it was… Deborah Brandt I think it is…
L: Sponsors of Literacy or something like that?
D: Yeah, yeah Sponsors of Literacy.
L: That’s, that’s not a very easy text to tackle.
D: Oh yeah, it was a horrible choice [laughs]! It was a horrible choice ‘cause it was funny, ‘cause I picked it, I don’t know why I liked when I read it or something, but then I kinda hadn’t read through it in a while, and then I went to read it to write the paper and I’m like ‘Wow! This is [laughs] this is a lot more than what I could have done’.
L: Well, it’s a good article.
D: Yeah, it was good really just…
L: but it’s very scholarly and long!
D: Yeah, that’s the thing I think with my paper mostly, with the issues that I just touched on, yeah, I didn’t really get into the entire because there was a lot. (Dalton, Interview 3)

With respect to teacher feedback, the native-speaking students said they received comments on their essays from their instructors, but they did not explain what types of feedback they were given. My interaction with Aaron below is a good example of how they were not able to articulate the types of comments they received on their writing.

A: Um…when we submit on angel, she’ll [the EH101 instructor] like go through it and read and make comments on the side of the document and then she puts it back on angel for us to review, so.
L: Ok, so she uses like the Word comment function on the side?
A: Yes ma’am.
L: And what are the comments about?
A: Uh… A little bit of everything.

In general, the native-speaking students were not very concerned about the essays they wrote throughout the semester and claimed that English composition was the easiest course they took in the fall, though the three students in EH101S began the semester insecure about their writing abilities.

The easiest class is probably English just because Haley makes it so fun, so. (Aaron, Interview 3)

Um I’m doing good in English […] English is really the only subject that I’m doing good at right now. (Carrie, Interview 3)
L: And which one was the easiest class?
T: English.
L: Easier than math?
T: Uhmm
L: Okay.
T: That’s a shock isn’t it? English is my worst subject. (Tenesha, Interview 3)

Introduction to Psychology, PSY101, was the other course in the Liberal Arts that one of the native-speaking students, Dalton, was taking. He explained that taking notes during class and a final article review were the only types involved in the course since all exams were multiple-choice and the online homework quizzes did not include any short or long essay questions. He asserted that he always took notes in class, and in my classroom observation he was in fact actively taking notes, as mentioned in Chapter 5. At the beginning of the semester, Dalton expressed some concern about the article review assignment because the professor’s expectations appeared to be quite strict regarding writing style and format, which he claimed to be his weaknesses. He explained:

We have…. we have a kind of….what do you call it? Have a research paper kind of thing we do I think the middle of October or something and I think it’s gonna be interesting, but I don’t think, it’s not long, it’s just one of those things where you really have to follow the format, you know, she wants it’s all professionally written, you know, scientifically right, so I think it’s gonna be more about how you do rather than what you say (ok) and so that’s what I think it’s going on because she’s been pretty upset about how people [laughs] put things in there but uh so […] my problem is that the format, so a lot of times well just because it’s like you know […] I mean if I have all the directions it’s fine, but it’s like if you don’t just know how you’re supposed to do, it it’s kind of hard just come up with that you know. (Dalton, Interview 1).

In our second interview around midterm, Dalton mentioned the style format of the article review again and added that he was going to show the professor his draft before the deadline in order to get some feedback from her and ensure that he was on the right track.

The psych thing it’s a little bit different, it’s APA obviously which is different […] she is really picky[…] [giggling] so I definitely need to get a draft to show her before it’s due
cause I’m sure it will be wrong. [...] but she is she’ll definitely tell me if it is (yeah) so so
that would help, she’s pretty blunt about things which I like. (Dalton, Interview 2)

The professor was in fact very particular about writing assignments and did not tolerate
language or formatting issues in student papers as further discussed in the instructors’
perspective section. Dalton did quite well on the article review, however, making a 92 on the
assignment.

6.3.3.2 Science

According to Carrie and Tenesha, the only writing involved in Principles of Biology
(BIO119) was taking notes during class, which only Tenesha claimed to do (“We write a lot of
notes.” Tenesha, Interview 1). The exams were all multiple-choice and there were no other
assignments in the course. The lab class did require some writing: two lab reports (3-6 pages
each) and filling out the lab manual. Tenesha did not bring up the lab reports much during the
interviews and did not share them with me, but Carrie voiced some of the same concerns as Joy
did about how the TA graded her reports. She was not sure why she made a D on it as the TA
had not written specific comments on the paper. In Carrie’s words,

C: I just got a lab report back and I’m sorry I forgot to bring that one
L: Ok, that’s fine I can get it from you next time.
C: Ok. We just got a lab report back and she only wrote numbers and on the last page she
just said that I have to… she circled a couple of words and said to talk about first person
or past tense.
L: To not use first person?
C: Yeah and that’s about all she wrote and I got a 63 and so I don’t know what I did
wrong
L: There’s no rubric or anything?
C: There’s a rubric but she didn’t talk to anybody personally about what they did wrong
(ok) she wrote numbers. (Carrie, Interview 2)

She did bring both lab reports to our last interview, and there were indeed only numbers
by each section of the papers and no comments at all, not even the one about first-person and
past tense that Carrie mentioned in the interview-quote above. Carrie only brought the reports
and not the rubrics, though, where this comment could have been written. She and her group made a 67 on the first report, not a 63 as she mistakenly recalled during the interview, but they made a 95 on the second one, and again there were no comments on the second report either.

For General Chemistry I (CH121) and Introduction to Chemistry (CH101), Aaron and Dalton explained that the writing was limited to taking notes in class since the exams were all multiple-choice and homework assignments consisted of solving problems. Dalton pointed out, however, that writing the answers in the correct format was important. In his words,

Yeah, pretty much [problems] although there’s still, you know, you still gotta remember what I am saying? The…[…] the format and everything and, you know, how you write everything like form and everything, and there’s still a lot of things that you have to memorize and whatnot. (Dalton, Interview 1)

The chemistry labs did not require reports and the tests were practical, hands-on experiments, but the students had to fill out the lab manuals for pre and post labs. Aaron explained, “For [chemistry lab], we do pre-lab and post-lab, it’s like uh just small questions what you expect when this happens? It’s just short simple answers, not a whole lot of writing.” (Aaron, Interview 1).

Aaron and Dalton also asserted that though they had a lot of homework in their math classes (i.e., MA171 and MA112, respectively), the writing was minimal if any as the problems consisted primarily of numbers. Likewise, Carrie and Tenesha said that there was no writing involved in their MA004 course, and the modules they had to complete for the class every week had equations and number problems only.

6.3.3.3 Engineering

Though there were three short reports required in the Introduction to Computational Tools (MAE111), Aaron never mentioned these writing assignments during our interviews, but
did say he was struggling with the computer programming aspect of the course and how he had
to seek his fraternity bothers’ help towards the end of the semester.

6.3.3.4 FYE100

The native-speaking students were the focal participants who seemed the most concerned
about the First Year Experience class and who complained the most about the course (with the
exception of Aaron). In general, they did not see the purpose of taking the class and appeared
apprehensive about the 5-page report they had write by the end of the semester. The following
excerpts illustrate their feelings towards the course.

Uh…. I’m gonna say FYE doesn’t count cause that’s just one credit. (Aaron, Interview 3)

I don’t like FYE [laughs]. […] I it’s just…because I feel like when you’re coming into
college you can either have a choice of getting into the first year experience or not getting
into the first year experience, and you don’t really need a class to teach you how to get
into a first year experience, and so I think it’s kind of and then the whole paper that you
have to write, I don’t like that you have to write a 5-page paper about the events that you
have been to. (Carrie, Interview 1).

‘Cause I thought FYE was so easy […] and so I have a paper that I have to write. I
already wrote the rou rough draft right? (Uhum) Now the final is due cause she had to
push it back, and so I have to write the final before or during Thanksgiving break […] it
was a 5-page report but everybody started complaining so she pushed it back to 3
pages. (Carrie, Interview 2)

FYE is driving me crazy ‘cause I actually have to write a paper on 3 different social
events that I went here so [laughs] I actually have to go at some point go to something.
[…] I have not been to anything. It’s just, I mean, I understand what they are trying to do.
They don’t want a bunch of you know depressed, friendless people running around, you
know, they want them to go out and meet people [laughs]. I don’t you know, I’m not
really… a campus student, you know, that needs to have that or…. (Yeah) So it’s kind of
pointless I guess. […]Well [laughing] honestly I’m slightly worried about FYE […]
that’s what bothered me in the first place just I was like you know I’d better not fail
because you know it’s like you shouldn’t have to take it in the first place, but it’s it’s a
little worries me but I don’t know I think I’m just gonna go to a couple of I mean I think
basically they’re not looking for something especially for that paper or anything. (Dalton,
Interview 2)

I kind of feel like, I mean, I get the concept of it but it’s kind of pointless to me. Cause…
it’s like redundant like we do the same thing for it like I get like she’s trying to get it’s
good for the students that’s not open, you know, or outgoing just like laidback or like bored (uhum), but you know I’m I talk to people so I’m friendly. (Tenesha, Interview 1)

Well, she’s she’s [the instructor] a hands-on teacher, but I just it’s just the class. […] Like you can force them [students] to do it [get involved], but it’s not they’re not gonna have fun. (Tenesha, Interview 2)

Aaron made an A in the course, and Carrie was the only student in the study (whose final grades I have) who made a B.

6.4 Summary

In the first part of the chapter, the focal participants’ experiences and perspectives regarding their writing practices in their first semester in college were presented. Overall, the students did not enjoy writing, and their writing practices outside of school consisted of text messages and posting on social media. By and large, their academic writing practices were limited to the composition classes as most subject-area courses required minimal amounts of writing, the exceptions being Introduction to Sociology (SOC100), one section of Introduction to Psychology (PSY101), and World History I (HIS104).

The international and native-speaking students began the semester concerned about the English composition classes while the generation 1.5 students were more confident about their writing skills, even though they believed they still needed to improve their writing. The native-speaking students became less worried about the class after receiving their grades for the first essay and did not seem to struggle with the course throughout the semester. The international students, on the other hand, continued to find the course challenging and visited their instructors and studio leaders several times during the semester to get extra help with and feedback on their essays.

The international students also appeared to be much more aware of their limitations and strengths than the other two student populations and were the only group of students to reflect on
their writing processes more openly. However, the generation 1.5 students discussed the teacher feedback they received on their papers in more detail than the international and native-speaking students perhaps because they had had previous school experiences with getting feedback on their writing as ESL students. Another possible explanation could be the fact that the international students sought and received more feedback, both oral and written, than the generation 1.5 students, making it difficult for them to isolate the various types of comments they were given.

Finally, with respect to taking notes during lectures, the majority of the students across the three populations did not seem to take extensive notes for most classes (though many claimed to do so in the interviews, my classroom observations suggested otherwise), with the exception of David and Rachel who engaged in note taking for every class they took in the fall. When the international students did take notes, they normally did so in English but could not always keep up with the pace of the lectures and often asked to borrow classmates’ notes (the Chinese students seemed to have borrowed notes from other Chinese students only).

In the next subsections, the findings for the composition and subject-area faculty pertaining to the writing practices involved in their courses and related to the focal participants are discussed.

6.5 Faculty’s Perspectives and Expectations

The composition instructions’ perspectives and expectations regarding writing practices are examined first in this section, followed by those of the subject-area instructors. As in Chapter 5, the findings for the composition teachers are explored in more detail, and the results for the subject-area instructors are presented as overarching emerging themes.
6.5.1 English Composition Courses

As expected, the amount of writing required in the composition courses was much heavier than that of any other course the students were taking in the fall. Though reading responses and quizzes differed from class to class (as explained in Chapter 5), the number of major essays assigned was the same in the four sections included in the study (i.e., two EH101 and two EH101S). The types of essays varied somewhat depending on the instructor, but all four classes required four major essays and worked with a draft system, in which students were to write rough and final drafts for each essay. The ‘literacy narrative’ essay was the first assignment in the semester for all four classes and was the only essay that was required in all composition classes on campus. The writing practices and instructors’ perspectives in the four sections that the focal participants were enrolled in are explored below.

6.5.1.1 EH101

In the EH101 section in which Ian and Rachel were enrolled, the other three essays the instructor assigned, besides the literacy narrative, were a definition essay, a rhetorical analysis of an advertisement from a magazine, and an evaluation essay that followed a research paper style. The instructor explained that she gave her students rubrics and handouts with guidelines for each assignment as well as some student samples for certain essays so that they would better understand her expectations and how to write the essays. She believed that the rhetorical analysis of an ad was a popular assignment with students because they enjoyed looking for ads that interested them and normally had a lot to talk about in their essays. However, she perceived the literacy narrative essay as the easiest for the students to write and said that this was the assignment that had the highest grades because she was also more lenient when grading it since this was the first essay students wrote in college.
She pointed out that the main difficulties students in general seem to have with writing assignments in composition courses are related to generating ideas for the assigned topics and writing in a more academic and cohesive way. In her words,

Grammar seems to be an issue they're still dealing with. [...] Informality has become a problem with them, you know, conversational language ‘so, like’, I always blame the texting. [laughs] So teaching them to have a more academic tone to their work is important. [...] A sense of cohesion and flow is also something they struggle with. [...] Reaching paper length [is another difficulty], a lot of times they seem to kind of struggle with generating ideas and generating their thoughts to the extent that the paper requires. They don't seem to struggle with the actual topic, they understand what they need to do, but get confused as to again how to do it in a way that is academic and how to do it in a way that's gonna meet the requirements of the paper. (EH101 Instructor A, Interview 1)

Concerning the writing of multilingual students in particular, the instructor said that she thinks that their needs and difficulties vary according to their proficiency levels and that she has implemented a “sliding scale for how [she]’d grade their writing” in the past (EH101 Instructor A, Interview 1). She added, however, that she did not notice any non-native patterns in Ian and Rachel’s writing and explained:

They [Ian and Rachel] are very strongly grammatically, syntax, style, flow. Sometimes there’s an unnatural sound to the writing [of multilingual students], but they didn't have that. I don’t think I’ll have to treat their writing in any different way from the native speakers. (EH101 Instructor A, Interview 1)

In our second interview at the end of the semester, the instructor mentioned that Rachel's papers were all strong, and that she had As in all of them. She also said that Ian’s and Rachel’s best essays were the literacy narrative because they both had a strong connection with reading and writing in English. She made the following comments regarding Ian’s essays and writing practices:

If Ian focused on improving his writing, he could really really write good papers, you know, I think to some degree with students like him it's not a matter of being able to do it [...] there's a tendency to do the least amount of work you can to get by. And I get that, you know. I did that in my college classes too. (EH101 Instructor A, Interview 2)
Regarding responding to student writing in general, the instructor explained that she normally tries to focus on cohesion and content as well as “plagiarism and sources” and not to get “wrapped up in small scale stuff because that would make the grading go on forever”, but she said that she does touch on some grammar and mechanics “because of all the text messaging and digital literacies” (EH101 Instructor A, Interview 1). She added that she did not feel that she had to give different feedback on Ian’s and Rachel’s essays and that regarding register issues, their writing was more formal than that of the native-speaking students (“If anything, they sound more formal.” EH101 Instructor A, Interview 2).

To illustrate this teacher’s feedback practices, Table 6.4 shows the comments she provided on two of the commented-on essays that Ian and Rachel shared with me.

Table 6.4 EH101 Instructor’s feedback on Ian’s and Rachel’s essays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Participant</th>
<th>Teacher Feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Essay: Literacy Narrative</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>Marginal Comments:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Because it will or because it can rather than ‘for it will’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. ‘We may’, keep same group context or use ‘you’ instead of ‘we’ earlier on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Life is the biggest source of affection</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Paragraph at the end of essay:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Your essay was really good and captivating! I am always interested in learning about how people learn English since English is already my first language. Your essay flowed really well although the intro does have a bit of a bumpy start. There were a few grammar errors but it does not affect the flow of the paper very much. Your thesis is the last sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Essay: Rhetorical Analysis</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Marginal Comments:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. However,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. ‘take and create’—keep the verbs in present tense here, and then give a transition to show that the ad you’ll be discussing is from the past: But companies often take advantage and create ads that are offensive to some people. This is nothing new—an example is the…etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. 1860’s in America,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. discriminated against</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Soap. The ad features</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. explain your argument here in more detail—what exactly do you mean? Explore further, perhaps in a new body paragraph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. used in the ad are</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| | 8. even though the ad is from the past, you’re discussing it in the present; because of this, I think the essay would flow better if you changed ALL the
In the EH101 section in which Aaron, Jacob, and Joy were enrolled, the instructor’s main goals for the course were to help students become better thinkers and writers, as mentioned in Chapter 5, and in order to achieve these goals she was “teaching them different types of writing and tearing down pre-conceived notions of what the dreaded college professor expectations are and having to tear down the barrier from the 5 paragraph essay is” (EH101 Instructor B, Interview 1). In discussing unrealistic expectations that English composition courses are to prepare students to learn how to write for their academic careers, she added:

I mean, you have engineering students, I mean, you have science majors that are going to be writing actively in the passive voice and even though I'm not like a passive Nazi, I'm not going to slash it every time I see it, that's not what my discipline prefers, so and then honestly like I'm asking them to write a narrative about their life, and they're actively using ‘I’ and in some classes that's just not going to fly like in History it doesn't fly, and engineering or science ‘I’ doesn't come in to the perspective, so this idea that I'm making them better writers for all courses is unrealistic. (EH101 Instructor B, Interview 1)

She explained that in her course the students wrote every single class whether responding to readings, doing peer-review activities, or working on essays in class. She commented on the focal participants’ reading responses, saying that Jacob’s reading responses were usually two paragraphs, one summary and one with his opinions about the reading, and he followed this format throughout the semester. She said that Aaron and Joy, on the other hand, experimented more with the responses and presented their thoughts about the readings in different ways and formats.

The other three major essays, besides the literacy narrative, she assigned for the course were a rhetorical analysis of two articles, an argumentative definition essay, and an evaluation essay that also followed a research paper style. The students also had to create an e-Portfolio by
the end of the semester where they were to upload revised versions of two essays of their choice along with an ‘About me’ page and a reflection essay. The instructor gave her students rubrics, assignments prompts with guidelines as well as various samples, so they would be better prepared for the assignments. She explained,

I believe in modeling, so I never give students an essay without 3 or 4 samples. […] it's the beauty and burden because it can help them see what good writing is and how to approach certain topics, but they can end up relying too much on it. (EH101 Instructor B, Interview 1)

The instructor asserted that Jacob’s best essay was the definition because of the short and straightforward nature of the assignment. As she put it, “it can be short, sweet, and straight to the point and that's the way he likes to write” (EH101 Instructor B, Interview 2). For Joy, the instructor found her best paper to be the literacy narrative “because we can hear her voice and she's pulling you through every aspect of the story” while Aaron's best paper was evaluation essay given his “very strong authorial tone pulling me through the paper” (EH101 Instructor B, Interview 2).

The instructor seemed to be very familiar with each of these students’ needs and writing styles and pointed out that she intentionally assigned them to specific groups for peer-review activities and workshops for the research paper according to their individual differences, as seen below.

Jacob was the leader: ‘this is what writing is’; he would challenge his peers, he was the manager of peer-review in his group, always, in every group he was in. […] Jacob is always super on top of things, but writing is not necessarily this rigid activity, so I tried to pull him away from that mindset. I put him in groups with creative writers to help move him away from formulaic writing. […] Joy always had more questions, and often read the papers out loud for students who were not comfortable reading theirs, and they would make fun of her but in a nice, friendly way, ‘You are not pronouncing that right at all’, they would tell her, and she would say 'So teach me how to say that!'; always working on her English, in whatever group she was in, always asking about her grammar ‘cause she was really, um, insecure about her grammar, which I never really noticed during the semester, so she would always ask like very specific questions. […] Joy’s topic [for the
evaluation essay] was learning English and other languages; she was kind of the scholar of the group; they didn't have anything to say about her paper because they felt that her paper was so high and she really drove the conversation, she always had um, she's really interested in learning English and improving her writing, so when she notices things in other people's writing, she's always really quick to say 'I really like how you do this' or even 'How do you say this? ‘Is this a figure of speech I'm not familiar with? [chuckles] those kinds of things. [...] Aaron was in the music group. He was more laid-back, always engaged, but laid-back, his groups were always laughing. (EH101 Instructor B, Interview 2)

Regarding the needs of multilingual students in general, the instructor claimed that she had noticed that these students’ major problem was related to vocabulary but not necessarily not knowing it as much as knowing how to use it. She explained: "I hate to say lack of vocabulary because I feel like they have a very strong vocabulary; it's sometimes just not knowing how to use it, like a word is fine on its own but not knowing what context to use it” (EH101 Instructor B, Interview 1). She also said that these students sometimes have difficulties with incorporating evidence from texts and with “hanging quotes” and further added, “I think they [multilingual students] have some of the same struggles native-speakers have with writing: getting their argument across” (EH101 Instructor B, Interview 1). Concerning Jacob’s and Joy’s writing, the instructor said she had not noticed any non-native patterns in particular, but she was aware that Joy was self-conscious about her grammar and knew that she sought the help of other people before submitting her papers.

She [Joy] always has native-speakers comment on her papers before she submits them, so she has friends that really go through her essay before I even look at them, so it's kind of interesting, she edits her grammar before I help her with revision, which I mean that’s just her writing process, so before she sends me something, she wants to make sure the language is as clear as possible; she's more comfortable having the grammar down pat before we move on to revisions. (EH101 Instructor B, Interview 2)

With respect to her feedback practices, the instructor explained that on first drafts she provided very little comments in the text and wrote mainly on the rubrics and also wrote a short letter for the students at the end of the papers. She said she was not a grammarian and did not
comment on grammar if she could understand the paper. Her primary concerns were the argument, ideas, and organization, and she felt that “if you over-respond, too much in-text comments, you're forming the students to write like you want and not develop them as writers” (EH101 Instructor B, Interview). However, she said that she had adapted her feedback to “ELL students” in the past by writing very detailed and extensive comments in order to try to be “robust and crystal clear”. She explained that she focused on language issues even less when grading these students’ papers and tried to concentrate on the argument of the paper.

I almost had like a different mindset when I approached certain papers. When I have a native speaker, like I said, I'm not a big grammar person any way, but it was almost just because of the vocabulary and the language issues, it's like putting on a different kind pair of sunglasses when I read an ELL student's paper versus reading a native-speaker's paper. ELL I'm really because I know they don't have most of them don't have the comprehension of our vocabulary, so what I'm really looking at is just very broadly in a first draft what is the argument here what are they going for. (EH101 Instructor B Interview 1)

Though Aaron, Jacob, and Joy shared with me all of their final essays for the EH101 class, and many rough drafts, they did not give me the versions with the instructor’s feedback, and thus I do not have any samples of her actual written feedback.

6.5.1.2 EH101S

The essays required in both EH101S sections were the literacy narrative, a rhetorical analysis of an article read in class, a literature review, and a research paper that included the literature review essay. The students were also required to create an e-Portfolio with the same elements as the e-Portfolio in the EH101 class of Instructor B (i.e., two revised essays, and ‘About me’ page, and a reflection essay). The lecturer teaching this EH101S course said that she made sure to go over the assignment prompts and rubric with the students and to show them examples as well. She also expected the students to use the studio and read their textbook and
composition guide when writing their essays. The difficulties she perceived that students in general have with the writing assignments were:

Getting started always; they struggle with knowing what they wanna do and thinking that I have a pre-conceived notion of what a paper should look like. I tell that if their idea is good, they should write it because at least they're writing. [...] Sometimes they just don't get the assignment and are afraid of saying I don't get it. (EH101S Instructor C, Interview 1)

She did not say which essays were the best ones for the focal participants in her class (i.e., Carrie, Dalton, Tenesha, and Xue) but mentioned that the literacy narrative was the most successful assignment in the semester because the students in general had something to start with, and even if they did not critically talk about their literacies as required, they “had things to talk about” (EH101S Instructor C, Interview 2). As for those four students’ participation in class, she explained:

Dalton always participated in class. Tenesha, I'm not sure what happened but near the end of the semester maybe two-thirds through, her attendance started dropping off, and I'm not sure why and she used to be really good about letting me know, so… when she was there, she was paying attention, but she wasn't as actively adding to discussion or anything as she had a the beginning of the semester. Carrie was pretty much the same level of interaction the whole semester. Much more quiet than Dalton, he's dramatic I think sometimes, and Xue I think not so much during class discussion but over the course of the semester became much more, he was one of the ones who would come ask me specific questions at the end of class [...] when he was paired-off to do peer review or in a small group, he did speak more to whoever was looking at his paper; in particular if it was a small group, he still seemed to stay very quiet, but when he was on one-one, he seemed to talk more and he made more effort to come and speak with me about his work than he did at the beginning of the semester. (EH101S Instructor C, Interview 2)

Regarding multilingual students, the instructor said her main goal was to ensure they comprehended that she would take the time to try to understand their essays, but other people might not. In her words, “I can see what you're trying to say, but your sentence structure in these areas are a mess here that somebody in a another situation, a couple of semesters down the road, they're not gonna take the time to read that” (EH101S Instructor C, Interview 1). She added that
multilingual students ("ELL students") seem to have complex ideas and try to also write long and complex sentences that are difficult to understand because they might not have the grammar and syntax knowledge to structure such sentences. Thus, she had always told students: “to try to write simple sentences, and that can be frustrating for them. It's not that you're dumbing it down, but you're making it clear. I focus a lot on clarity” (EH101S Instructor C, Interview 1). The teacher also discussed specific patterns she claimed to have noticed in Xue’s writing, as seen in the following excerpt.

Xue's writing, it’s the typical subject-verb agreement, uh, articles and prepositions that just kind of get scrambled around; he did, um, he's another one that I think he reads a lot of pop-culture stuff, and he was starting to put in phrases that I think that he was hearing or reading other places that sometimes work and sometimes it was like okay, ‘you're kind of implying there what I don't think you want to imply’ or whatever, but I did notice that he did start looking at sentence structure a little bit more um it might have been the clarity thing too not only was he making sure that the sentences were clear, but the ideas were kind of linking together. (EH101S Instructor C, Interview 2)

Concerning her feedback practices, the instructor explained that first she commented on places on students’ essays where she stumbled as a reader and then responded as a teacher second, making sure that the students could clearly communicate their ideas. She admitted to be “old school” and to like having students’ papers in her hand in order to:

Write things, and circle things, and make comments on how they can improve their writing and mark recurring errors, like with an ELL student when there are article issues or tense agreement, I'll mark those and explain what it is and tell them to look for it throughout the paper. I like to draw pictures, diagrams to try to show them what they're supposed to be doing with the writing. (EH101S Instructor C, Interview 1)

She further explained (as also seen in the quote above) that she sometimes focused more on language issues and sentence structure on multilingual students' papers than she would with native-speakers to show them that these are issues they need to work on while with native-speaking students she focuses more on the ideas and content. She believed that “ELLs most of
time have the ideas, but it's just the language that can be an issue.” (EH101S Instructor C, Interview 1).

Table 11 presents some of the instructor’s written comments on essays that Carrie, Tenesha and Xue’s shared with me. Dalton did not show me any drafts with the instructor’s feedback. All markings for Carrie and Tenesha on their rhetorical analysis drafts are included in table because there were only nine and thirteen, respectively. However, there were fifty comments and markings on Xue’s draft (nearly every line had some type of feedback on sentence level issues), so only ten have been included in Table 6.5. Since the instructor handwrote her feedback on hard copies of the students’ papers, in some instances she simply crossed out words or phrases, so this is illustrated below by underlined words. Any added punctuation or words the instructor provided are included in brackets.

Table 6.5 EH101S Instructor’s feedback on Carrie’s, Tenesha’s, and Xue’s essays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Participant</th>
<th>Teacher Feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Carrie</strong></td>
<td><strong>Essay: Rhetorical Analysis</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>In-text comments:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. audience were [is] children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Teaching him [self] how to read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. wanted to learn_(_(Alexie 364)[.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. “saves their lives”<em>(</em>(Alexie 365)[.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. The way Alexie structured [s] his article with different pathos and logos made [kes] [use present tense]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. his [m] self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. the different pathos [identify these moments] makes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Explain how this lead to an emotional connection with the audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. I was lucky” ”<em>(</em>(Alexie 365)[.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Comments at the end:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Needs a conclusion! Explain pathos via analysis of examples!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organization and clarity could be compared to early comics Alexie learned from.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tenesha</strong></td>
<td><strong>Essay: Rhetorical Analysis</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>In-text comments:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. My rhetorical analysis will be written on the a Literacy Narrative by Sherman Alexie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. uses pathos, metaphoric diction [,] and _ethos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. in his class willing to answer question [s]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. by [I] indians and non- [I] indians alike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. How does this build pathos?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. surcomb [sp]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the other section of EH101S in which David, Narushi, and Yu were enrolled, the instructor assigned the same four major essays and the e-Portfolio, but she also incorporated reading quizzes and reflection essays that the students were to write in class. The reflections were short pieces of writing (i.e., just a couple of paragraphs) about readings or projects they had worked on, and her purpose to have these was “to get them comfortable writing by hand in class so they can prepare for essay tests in the future” (EH101S Instructor D, Interview 1).

The teacher said she gave students specific instructions for each essay on what she was looking for, went over the rubric with them, and also presented websites (such as Purdue’s *Online Writing Lab*) in class with recommendations for different essay genres, including...
narratives, rhetorical analyses, and research papers. She perceived the main difficulties of all
students with the assignments being related to grasping the concepts from the readings and
discussed in class, such as literacies, discourse communities, the rhetorical triangle, and applying
them into their essays. She said David’s best essay was the literacy narrative, while Narushi’s
was the research paper because he was passionate about his topic and collected data and included
graphs in his essay. She said the following about Yu’s papers, “Yu’s were all about the same
quality. I’m not sure if he just doesn’t like to write or if it’s a language struggle” (EH101S
Instructor D, Interview 2).

The fall semester was the first time the instructor taught composition, and she had not had
any previous experiences working with multilingual students. She explained that she had
underestimated the “ESL students” in her class. As she put it, “because they were quiet in class,
I assumed that they were not following, but their writing was much better than I expected”
(EH101S Instructor D, Interview 1). She added that these students had incorporated in their
writing terminology covered in class (e.g., discourse community, literacy event) while in the
native-speaking students’ essays the concepts were implied.

As a novice teacher, she explained that her biggest challenge that semester was providing
feedback on student writing. She struggled throughout the semester with how much and what
types of feedback to give as well as what types of issues to focus on, especially on the
international students’ essays, as seen below.

I feel compelled to help them [students in general] with grammar even though we are
supposed to help them with global aspects of their writing. […] I feel like if they’re not
getting some attention with that grammar, then I’m not really doing my job because
nobody else is doing it either. So, although I’m not grading them on their grammar skills,
I am marking their grammar, especially for the non-native speakers. Most of mine have
had enough exposure with English that their syntax looks correct. I do have one student
that is all kind of mixed up, I mean, at some point I can't correct everything on the page
so I've given notes on okay, we use articles in front of... and an article is ‘a/an’, the
definite article is ‘the’, so I'm trying to give notes so that they at least they can go back
and see rather than you have an error a grammar error here what is it and how to fix it, so
it's very time-consuming but I am doing that, even though I'm not evaluating that and I'm
evaluating whether they actually did what the assignment asked and are fully developing
their thought, so their assessment is not with the technicality, their assessment is really
with ‘Are they getting the big picture?’ (EH101S Instructor D, Interview).

By the end of the semester, she said that she was still trying to learn how to best approach
corrective feedback, but claimed to not be marking the students’ essays as comprehensively as
she was initially because she was worried it was “stressing them out.” Instead, she began
marking one or two errors and telling the students to look for the rest on their own, so they could
focus more on global issues. She also mentioned in the last interview that she provided more
indirect feedback throughout the semester, but learned in her linguistics class that “perhaps direct
with explanation might have been better” (EH101S Instructor D, Interview 2). She provided
handwritten comments on the first essay and switched to electronic feedback using Microsoft
Word’s comment function for the second essay, but went back to handwriting for the last two
assignments.

Table 6.6 illustrates some of the instructor’s written comments on David’s and Yu’s
drafts only, as Narushi did not share with me any versions with her feedback. As with Xue’s
essay mentioned above, this instructor provided feedback on almost every line on these two
international students’ essays, and only ten of them for each student are presented in Table 12.
For the feedback examples on David’s essay, underlined words or parts of words represent what
the teacher crossed out in the hard copy of his paper, and words in brackets represent what she
wrote on the draft. For Yu’s essay, she used electronic comments, which I copied into the table.

Table 6.6 EH101S Instructor’s feedback on David’s and Yu’s essays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Participant</th>
<th>Teacher Feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>David</strong></td>
<td>In-text comments:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because of we were children’s, we
Time went by and we grew, [connect w/ ‘and’ or end sentence and start another] my older sister started to learn
my uncle were [ uncle was vs. uncle were]
Because that I am two years older than my sister [,] [think about natural pauses when you speak to help you punctuate] I started to learn
who wanted to know what gift you were [I was] [talking about you not me]
I did not wanted to be less
We have invented our own discourse community in our own discourse community.
I would leave for school at seven in the morning and come back
my team got a pro [spell out professional] contract

Comments at the end:
Work on transitions.
I tried to mark most errors and provide comments to help you to improve. Let me know if you have questions.
If I were to assign a grade today, it would be an A. To keep this A, incorporate the suggested revisions. Good job!

Yu

In-text comments:
1. Include the author’s name in the parenthetical citation UNLESS you mention the author’s name in the sentence.
2. Capitalize the first letter of the first word of each new sentence.
3. Be sure to put a period at the end of each sentence. (.)
4. Child (children is plural – more than one child)
5.Unclear.
6. use “an” if the next word starts with a vowel.
7. You were previously talking about logos. Although a logical argument does seem to make the author more credible, explain this to me.
8. Further explain this. Remember, pathos is emotion. How is he appealing to the reader’s emotions?
9. Fragment – keep this with next sentence.
10. Verb agreement

Comments at the end:
Good job. Review the comments, and let me know if you have any questions.
If I were to assign a grade today, it would be a B. I suggest you meet with someone at the Writing Center or meet me in office hours to work on some of the grammar mistakes. You are doing a great job conveying your message. Keep up the good work.

6.5.2 Subject-Area Courses

Overall, the amount of writing required in the subject-area courses included in the study was more limited than the amount of reading. Some instructors claimed, however, that they would like to have more essay questions on their exams but that such goal was not very realistic given the large class sizes they taught. The following excerpts illustrate this perspective.
I used to have essay questions on the exams when I first came here but not anymore. I'd rather do it that way, but there's only so much time. We have very large classes - anywhere from 60-170 students in [BIO]119 and [BIO]120 in one section. (BIO119 Instructor A)

Unfortunately because of the class size, 100+, it's not feasible to have essays questions like I'd like to do. (CH121 Instructor B)

They don't write very much in my class. There are no writing projects in the course or anything. I have 83 students, which is, you know, that doesn't mean I couldn't do it, but I haven't. I mean, it would be work. (ECN142 Instructor)

As expected, faculty from the humanities and social sciences – e.g., History, Psychology, and Sociology – assigned more extensive (i.e., four to five pages) writing assignments, such as book and article reviews. The History (HIS104) and Sociology (SOC100) instructors also had long essay questions on their exams. Nonetheless, many instructors from other fields also included some small writing assignments in their courses. For example, the Electrical Engineering (EE100) instructor had the students submit a three-page report (which included figures and graphs) about a final project the students were to develop for the course, and the Mechanical Engineering (MAE111) instructor also required three brief, one to two pages, reports about the main project the students were working on in class. Although I did not interview any of the Biology Lab TAs, the BIO119 instructors explained that two lab reports (6-12 pages for the whole packet) were also required for the lab sections.

Furthermore, the instructors from the humanities and social sciences who did not assign longer pieces of writing still incorporated some writing tasks in their courses. To illustrate, the Music (MU100) instructor required a short, two-page report on a recital the students had to attend. Psychology (PSY101) instructor A (instructor B assigned an article review) had several extra-credit homework assignments that involved students writing one to two paragraphs, and the Study Skills Instructor (EH115) included short answers on her exams.
Though the instructors who assigned more writing assignments in their courses claimed that content was the most important aspect of students’ papers, they appeared quite concerned about grammar, spelling, and punctuation and emphasized that they expected well written pieces from their students. The History instructor, in particular, considered form even more imperative than content. These instructors believed that ‘good writing’ with accurate grammar was essential for communication and thus felt that they needed to correct sentence-level problems on the students’ papers in order to help them learn how to write better. In their words,

In general, the biggest difficulty [of students] is basic grammar and spelling; the easiest way to get a good grade is to have somebody proofread your paper, and they still won't do it, but because many of the mistakes are obvious, you know, when we do our own reading, we see what we think we wrote, and so I always tell them so the biggest problem is people not having somebody else proofread their paper and they make mistakes that I think in many cases they would not make; it wasn't ignorance, they just didn't catch it. But also there are a number of students who are deficient in basic writing skills, basic English grammar and spelling and there aren't necessarily the foreign students either. So those are the problems I see. When I'm grading, well, first of all, ‘Do they have a basic grasp of English grammar and vocabulary and punctuation?’ Secondly, of course I may I say that’s first because if you can't communicate clearly, it doesn't make any difference how good the content is, so secondly it would be the content, that it meets the goals outlined in the syllabus. So the first would be form, second would be content. That's really the way I grade. […] Especially in grading the book reviews, now the test essays are little bit different, and I'm not as particular; the essays are supposed be done in complete sentences and so forth, but I don't go through them with a fine-tooth comb, so those I look more for content like either they got the main point or they didn't. (HIS104 Instructor)

I look at vocabulary, grammar. I do look at the grammar, I do. I mean I always care about that because communication skill means a lot to me in general, and I, I've just noticed as I age, I think all generations believe this, but it's just my turn since I'm over 40 now, and I think gosh the grammar and syntax is getting pretty bad in general um and the fact that it's at the college level is pretty deplorable and so. I, you know, I don't want them to think that there's any way to hide in proper grammar and composition, so I'm not above grading. I grade pretty leniently, the main place where that's coming from is um the main focus of the grade like I say the instance of technical terminology from the course. I'm looking mostly for that and some level of insight into the music beyond ‘I liked that part, I didn't like that part.’ Um, but a well-crafted sentence that's nice, but if there are egregious problems in grammar, I'll point it out to them. You know, if the people can't get ‘there’, ‘their’, ‘they're’ straight, if they can't get their ‘apostrophes’ straight and stuff like
that, I'll point it out, and I'll grade out a little for that, but mostly things related to content of course. (MU100 Instructor)

I expect them as college students to have some writing ability to be able to write a paragraph legibly and incorporate some information. [...] another thing it's just the common the grammatical and punctuation. [...] also lots of students have problems learning how to cite information properly. [...]When I’m grading their writing, the first thing is whether they have met the requirements [...], secondly it's whether they are accurate in terms and concepts [...] when the writing, the first thing is whether they have met the requirements [...], secondly it's whether they are accurate in terms and concepts [...], and then the last thing is whether they clearly express what they are trying to say, that their grammar and punctuation and spelling doesn't get in the way of what they're trying to communicate, so those are the big things and every time I say I'm not gonna do this, but I always end up grading like an English teacher because I want them to know and to improve the next time, and I feel like that if I don't mark really blatant grammatical, punctuation and spelling errors that they are just gonna do that again, these things don't affect their grades much but I can't bring myself to give a perfect score to a paper that even content-wise is awesome if, you know, the writing is terrible I just can't do that because I feel like that gives them the wrong message. [SOC100 Instructor]

I emphasize to them that just because this isn't an English class, it doesn't mean you can ignore proper grammar, spelling, sentence structure, etc. So I encourage them to see me with a draft early so that I can, as I tell them, I'm not grading it but if you're really off track you wanna find out early and then if you see me early enough then I can pick out the little things. ‘Did you realize you have a sentence fragment here? Uh data is plural; it needs ‘were’ not ‘was”, so those types of things. [...] Just because you're in a class that's not in the English department does not mean you can ignore good writing skills, so that will have an impact on their grade not as heavily as I do on my upper level classes, but I do want a well written paper, good writing. I will not tolerate sentence fragments and things like that. So they have to have rather few and rather minor types of grammatical errors for that A [...] I have seen pretty poor writing that I could not in good conscience give a D, and it's clear that these students, frankly you look at some papers and you think ‘What are they doing in college?’ I haven’t seen a paper this bad from, you know, middle school students. (PSY101 Instructor B)

These instructors were from the humanities and social sciences, and the faculty from the engineering school were much more lenient in terms of grading local issues and form. For instance, the Electrical Engineering instructor said the following about his grading of students’ reports:

I don't look for grammar, I don't look for spelling, basically I'm looking for ‘Did they cover the sections that I told them to cover? And ‘does it explain what I expect it to explain?’ Like, if it's a power supply, ‘Did they talk about taking the power from the outlet and what you have to do to it before it comes out?’ [...] And I tell them it's more of
a boxed approached, um, all the nasty details aren't required, but in general this is how it works, and that's what I look for if they did that. (EE100 Instructor)

Similarly, the Mechanical Engineering instructor, who was Brazilian\(^9\), explained that he did not grade the students’ English, especially since he was not a native-speaker himself, and focused primarily on the content of the reports. He did add, however, that he would tell the students that they should strive to have polished papers by using the spell check function of their writing software. As he put it,

I don't get into the English side that much, right? You know, and being Brazilian my English is pretty decent, and I write pretty well, but no I don't don't worry too much anything on the English side. I just look for the content. Did they explain why he's doing this? Did he explain how he's gonna do it? Did he explain what he's doing? Just look for that. […] But I tell them to pay attention to grammar and spelling because you have the spell check, right? So at least do that. But some students don't. (MAE111 Instructor)

With respect to multilingual students, some instructors claimed that they had not noticed any patterns in this student population’s writing (“I couldn't sit down and tell you based on reading this, that this must be an international student, I don't see that.” EE100 Instructor; I don't know if I'd be able to say how their writing is different from those of native-speakers. I haven't made any systematic observations.” SOC100 Instructor), while others argued that these students usually have more grammar and writing problems than most native-speaking students.

Obviously on average native-speakers are better, but there are some native speakers who are inferior to the foreign students, but on average of course the native-speakers write better than the foreign speakers. I think many ESL students, in my opinion, their mastery of English is not adequate for college level classes and how that happens I don't know, and I’m not on that part of it, but I think, I estimated based on their tests, I bet the summer I estimated that my Chinese students probably didn't understand more than a third of what I said in class. (HIS104 Instructor)

As far as writing with non-native speakers, mostly is the grammatical issues uh a lot of times I think it's because of the nature of [university’s name] um the the issue isn't an

\(^{9}\) The MAE111 instructor and I talked to each other in Portuguese before and after the interview, but once I began recording and asking him questions, we only used English. Thus, the excerpts quoted from my interview with him are not my translations, but his own utterances in English.
ability to grasp the concepts but the communication, but on the other hand, sometimes I'm surprised in that my international students or non-native speakers will be paying more attention to trying to write the paper and getting help for it than my native speakers who come from rural high schools that had horrible English teachers, and so they're the ones who you know, you have to point out ‘this is a sentence fragment’ because they can't see it [...] With the international students it's not so much sentence fragment but the grammatical structure of a sentence; I notice that with the German language background and with, in Spanish we [the instructor was of Hispanic Descent and also spoke Spanish] have other things like that. (PSY101 Instructor B)

The Psychology professor quoted above also explained that she normally offered international students extra help with their writing, and, in a similar fashion, the Mechanical Engineering instructor said he encouraged international students to go to the writing center and get extra help with their writing. In their words,

Now, if I am aware that there is a language barrier, I try to encourage my international students to see me and they'll shyly come and say 'I'm ESL my English isn't' too good’, so okay so you need to come see me early so I can work with them on grammar a bit and hopefully they'll learn to correct those thing so that's the best advice I give. (PSY101 Instructor B)

On the first day of class, I always ask them to raise their hands if English is not their native language because they need to understand me and they need to write reports, and I do that just to let them know if you can't, you need to go see the English department, they have some writing? (yeah) and they also have like tutoring (writing center?) yeah the writing center, so I tell them you gotta go there 'cause you're gonna get bad grades on these reports if you can't communicate, and you know even though we don't focus on the grammar or on the English, you know, it's good for them any way so we scare them a little bit. (MAE111 Instructor)

The MAE instructor also mentioned that Jacob did not raise his hand on the first day and that he could not tell by reading his reports that he was not a native-speaker of English. The instructor came to find out later that he was German because Jacob told him one day in class when they were talking about soccer.

6.6 Summary

This chapter explored the writing practices of the focal participants in their first semester of college as well as their instructors’ perspectives and expectations regarding writing in their
courses. As expected, the students did most of their writing in the fall for the composition classes, where the international students struggled the most among the three student populations. However, they sought the help of their instructors and studio leaders and did well in the courses just like the generation 1.5 and native-speaking students. In the subject-area courses, the primary writing genres assigned were reviews (on books and articles) and reports (on class project, labs, and music recitals). The focal participants who discussed their writing assignments for these courses did not seem to have had any problems completing the assignments, with the exception of the Biology lab reports – which became a concern for Joy and Carrie.

Although some students claimed that the subject-area instructors’ main concern was with content and that they did not seem to care about grammar, most of the faculty members who required writing assignments in their courses claimed to be quite intolerant of grammatical and punctuation mistakes. The composition teachers, on the other hand, claimed to focus primarily on content and organization when responding to student writing, although the actual written feedback of the instructors presented here might suggest otherwise. These instructors explained that for international students they might give more feedback on sentence-level issues, and in general they seemed more familiar with and aware of the writing needs and difficulties of multilingual students than the subject-area instructors.

In the next chapter, the social aspects of the focal participants’ academic literacies, such as strategies they developed and resources they utilized throughout the semester, will be examined.
CHAPTER 7
SOCIAL PRACTICES AND ACADEMIC LITERACIES

In this chapter, the focal participants’ social practices related to their academic literacies are investigated. As discussed in Chapter 2, the term ‘academic literacies’ in the present study does not refer to reading and writing practices only, but also to socio-academic behaviors, attitudes, skills, and strategies utilized for dealing with the demands of higher education. Thus, while some of the strategies and skills the participants used that are discussed in this chapter are related to reading and writing practices, others pertain to general behaviors and resources they used to negotiate their academic work.

Many of the findings presented here have already been illustrated in Chapters 4-6, but they are framed as one unified discussion in this chapter. Specifically, the strategies the three different student populations developed, or failed to develop, in order to cope with their classes as well as the resources they drew on to navigate their first semester in college are discussed. The students’ trajectories within their populations were quite similar, but any exceptions are also acknowledged. The faculty’s perspectives are not presented separately in this chapter since most instructors did not discuss social aspects of students’ academic literacies. However, some professors made relevant observations about certain students, and these are included in the findings below.

7.1 Generation 1.5 Students

As indicated in the discussions presented in the previous chapters, the generation 1.5 students appeared to have developed some effective social and academic strategies throughout their school lives, which they brought with them to college. These students seemed quite aware of their weaknesses and strengths, and they were able to successfully develop study skills and
resort to the resources available to them in college. Ian’s trajectory was somewhat different from the other three students, as previously discussed, since he was not as diligent in his first semester of college as the others were. Nevertheless, this generation 1.5 student was still able to get help from his peers and professors and though he struggled with maintaining good study habits throughout the semester, he managed to pass all of his courses in the fall.

Specifically, the generation 1.5 students who faced challenges with reading (i.e., Ian, Jacob, and Joy) all claimed to skim and scan their course readings, and Ian mentioned – for example – that he read the EH101 reading questions first and then looked for the answers in the texts. Another example of developing strategies to cope with their difficulties can be observed in how these generation 1.5 students approached their writing assignments. When they struggled with writing assignments, they sought the help of friends and of their instructors. For instance, Joy, who had the most difficulties with writing or at least who felt that way about her own writing, wrote her essays ahead of time in order to have different people read them and give her feedback, especially on her grammar. She also shared her EH101 papers with the instructor before they were due to get more of the instructor’s feedback. This EH101 instructor also pointed out that Jacob approached her when he needed clarification or direction with his papers (“If Jacob is not sure about an assignment or he doesn’t understand, he’ll send me something beforehand, and I will comment on it and send it back to him.” EH101 Instructor B, Interview 2).

When Jacob did not perform well on his first Chemistry test, he went to the professor’s office to discuss the exam with her and what he could do in order to improve on the second test. He also began to study with a Chemistry classmate whose major was chemical engineering and developed his own strategies to work out more problems from the textbook, as seen below.

I really like those PowerPoint slides, I always review all of those before the test and then I do like now […] ‘cause you only have to do like 30 problems now I do like 100. You
only have to do 10 per chapter, and um I usually only did those, but now I’ve just done like I’m almost done with all of the homework, so I’ve done instead of like just 30% of like the homework of like what’s due, like, you know, that you have to do, so you get a 100 on it, now I’m like doing all of it, doing all that extra work. (Jacob, Interview 1)

Even Rachel, who never complained about having difficulties with any of her classes, visited the math tutor in the math department when her MA110 class began to become “hard” towards the end of the semester. She also studied with Joy and other friends at the library for BIO119 and went to PASS (Peer Assisted Study Sessions) for her biology class. The generation 1.5 students were in fact the students that attended PASS the most among the three student populations. All four students went to a couple of sessions for at least one class. For instance, Jacob went to PASS for chemistry and math (even though he had mandatory study hall given his student athlete status), Joy went for biology and math, Rachel for biology as aforementioned, and Ian went for biology and for macroeconomics once he realized he was not doing well in this course. He also kept in touch with the PASS leader for macroeconomics and got study guides from him via e-mail, which he said “helped [him] a lot” (Ian, Interview 2). Ian also relied on his classmates for some of the ECN142 homework that he did not do on his own, as explained in his profile in Chapter 4.

The generation 1.5 students seemed to not only feel more comfortable with using the resources offered at the institution, such as tutoring, PASS sessions, and instructor’s office hours, but they also appeared to be more aware that these resources and opportunities were available to them. For example, although three of them were placed in EH101S because of their ACT scores, these students found out that they could take a placement test to try enroll for the regular EH101 course, and all of them took and ‘passed’ the test, and thus were able to enroll for the EH101 classes they took in the fall. They also visited their academic advisors when deciding what courses to enroll in for the spring semester and told me that they talked to senior peers about
what specific instructors to take. In addition, they went to the website ‘rateyourprofessor.com’ to read reviews about the instructors before signing up for their classes.

Furthermore, these students generally claimed that they did not feel very busy in college even though three of them had jobs and one was a student athlete. Ian was the exception to a certain extent because although he did not complain about his classes being overwhelming or about his workload in college, he did feel that his job in retail “got in the way” of school (Ian, Interview 2). The students also did not perceive their first semester in college as very different from high school with respect to their classes. The primary differences they noticed involved the greater flexibility of class schedules and the fact that they had both more freedom and more responsibility in college. The following excerpts highlight these perspectives.

Well, time management, so, nothing is really scheduled, um, and nobody really forces you or tells you what to do, um so that’s a big difference, I guess, um, and…Assignments…I really couldn’t tell. I guess the classes are bigger, um, but [Name of high school] high school really tried to make the environment close to college, so, it’s very similar. (Ian, Interview 1)

Well, I went to private school and like it was, basically it’s already a top level and really doesn’t feel that different [in college] other than I’m by myself, it’s the same academic standard, actually, so […] Like, you got different times, and like if you can, like if you finish something early, like a test, you can just leave early, instead of waiting and sitting there. I like it more, because you are more flexible cause if you can finish something earlier, or it’s just, it’s not all in one time period, I like how I can spread it all. […] Well, I have got plenty of time […] Actually, it’s been easier than expected. I thought it was gonna be like a lot more like a lot harder. […] it’s just kind of work from this time and this time and then you’re done, you can relax the rest of the day. (Jacob, Interview 1)

All right. So, in high school, the teachers are like college is gonna be tough, like you’ll have to do this, do that, but now I’m here, I’m like this is just basically I repeat high school again [laughs out loud]. Like, basically, you know, I don’t know, this is just first semester, so I, I think it’s pretty much the same in high school, but I think it’s better cause you don’t have a lot of classes like in high school it’s like I go like 8 hour in high school, but here I can choose what I want to take (right) and what hour I want to leave and come […] you have like choices like you want to go there, I think, you can manage your time yourself. (L: Do you feel very busy?) No, not at all, in high school I feel busier. I did. But here it’s like okay, I do this, I do that, I do this. But you know, this is the first semester (right, that’s true), so I cannot really tell it. (Joy, Interview 1)
Uh, well, college, the, uh, class time is shorter and then you get to pick your schedule and everything [...] Um well because like they’re [college classes] going faster, and so like you have to read on your own before you go to class or, you know, after you go to class so and then like the texts are basically about the same [as the ones from high school] but then they just go faster, so it isn’t really harder or anything. [...] It’s not really [harder] because I think they [readings], I mean, I took AP classes, which was like advanced placement, which is like college classes (uhum) so our books are basically the same as regular textbooks. (Rachel, Interview 1) Yeah [not that busy] I mean like I’m actually only taking 14 credit hours, but then next semester I’m doing 16 credit hours so that’s gonna get busier. (Rachel, Interview 2)

Of course this was just their first semester in college, and their classes were mostly likely going to become more challenging as they advanced to higher-level courses as Joy and Rachel also acknowledged in the quotes above. Nonetheless, the generation 1.5 students’ transition from high school to college appeared to have been rather unproblematic, and their first semester in college was quite a successful one, in particular for Jacob, Joy, and Rachel.

7.2 International Students

Understandably, the international student participants faced some language-related challenges in their first semester in college as they were still in the process of learning English. However, these students also appeared to have brought with them transferable abilities from their countries, which seemed valuable for their college experiences, such as analytical skills and content knowledge of certain science courses, including chemistry and math. Though their first semester in college in America was certainly more challenging than that of the generation 1.5 students described above, the international students were learning to develop strategies and to utilize the resources available to them in order to cope with their difficulties. Some of students resorted to strategies that were more successful than others though, as further discussed below.

These students visited many of their instructors’ offices for assistance with assignments and exams also and to let the faculty know that they were international students and, therefore,
might have some limitations due to language issues. Interestingly, this was especially the case for David who made a point to introduce himself as an international student to every instructor he had in the fall even though he was the student with the highest English proficiency among the international student participants. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 6, the four international students sought extra help from their EH101S instructors and studio leaders with their writing assignments throughout the semester. They mentioned these visits during the interviews and so did the composition teachers, but I also observed them, from my own office, coming to talk to these instructors and studio leaders (GTAs) several times and documented these visits in my research journal.

Moreover, the international students were the only student group in the study who consistently borrowed lecture notes from other classmates since they could not always understand the classes or write down information fast enough to keep up with the lectures. Narushi seemed to be the more independent one and though he admitted having difficulties with following his classes at times, he did not mention asking for other students’ notes. However, in the EH101S classes I observed, he appeared to be reading and copying information from his peers’ notes. As with his professors, David made sure to introduce himself to at least one American classmate in every class he was enrolled in and specifically asked if his peers could share their lecture notes with him throughout the semester. It is important to point out, however, that though this Swedish student borrowed notes for all classes, he still took his own notes for every class as well. In contrast, the Chinese students Xue and Yu relied solely on other Chinese students’ lecture notes and did not appear to take notes themselves as mentioned in Chapters 5 and 6. These two students missed many classes, especially Yu, because they trusted their Chinese peers to provide them with the material presented in class. David’s history instructor had
a large cohort of Chinese students in the summer of 2013 and had also noticed this dynamic in his classroom. In his words,

I bet, the summer I estimated that my Chinese students probably didn't understand more than a third of what I said in class. Now what helped, the only reason, how they got by, I had a good Chinese student who took good notes and she e-mailed her notes to all the Chinese students, without that I'm not sure most of them would have passed and they did okay. I bet they couldn't understand more than a third of what I was saying, I mean they are obviously bright students or they wouldn't be there, they just don't have the English skills necessary for college work in many cases. (HIS104 Instructor)

The “good Chinese student” mentioned in the excerpt above happened to be in my EH101S in the fall as well as in Xue’s PSY101 class (the instructor told me her name), and she was still ‘in charge’ of taking notes in both classes and sharing them with the other Chinese students. She had attended two years of high school in the U.S., when she lived with an American host family, and her English skills were indeed very advanced. As discussed in Chapter 4, Yu also mentioned in the interviews that senior cohorts of Chinese transfer students passed down their works (notes as well as assignments) to new cohorts and that they always studied and did everything together. Relying on a Chinese peer more proficient in English for their lecture notes and on older Chinese cohorts for help with completing their assignments and studying was certainly successful in helping Xue and Yu pass their classes with relatively good grades (As and Bs). However, this strategy might also have done a disservice to these students, in particular Yu – whose English proficiency was considerably lower – as they did not appear to be improving some of their L2 skills and might not have learned as much as they could have from their courses had they made more of an effort to study on their own.

Xue also attended PASS for PSY101 but “just a few times” because of a schedule conflict with another class (Xue, Interview 3), and Narushi went to PASS regularly for his math class (Calculus A). Yu did not attend PASS because he did not think that it would be helpful, and
no PASS sessions were offered for the classes David was taking, but he set up tutor visits for his business class (BLS211) with the help of the professor. David explained that he also asked for his roommates’ help when reading and studying for class if he did not understand the vocabulary in the texts because the roommates could actually explain what a given word or sentence meant in the context rather than just providing a definition like dictionaries. As he put it,

I always say ‘Hey I need help’ maybe a word or sentence and because they [roommates] always get mad because they think it’s just one word, and then they have to read maybe the whole paragraph to understand, yeah so they’re like ‘Oh this is such a time wasted so’ [chuckling]. But they yeah they’re really helpful. I use yeah pretty much every night I read something I say, ‘hey what’s this word?’ because maybe when if I check it up in the translator and then it doesn’t give me, I don’t understand this so any way so they can they can […] they can explain more (uhum) what it means than just the word. (David, Interview 2)

When registering for their spring classes, the international students talked to peers, academic advisors, and went on ‘rateyourinstructor.com’ like the generation 1.5 students. Again Xue and Yu pointed out that the friends they consulted with were Chinese students, and Yu added “I ask some old Chinese student, they give us suggestion which which teacher is better which teacher is easy to pass” (Yu, Interview 3).

Going in the same direction as the generation 1.5 students, the international students did not complain about feeling too busy in the fall, though this semester was certainly challenging for them. David explained that he did not feel overwhelmed in the fall despite the fact that he was a student athlete but recognized that future semesters might be different (“I’m doing good. […] I don’t, like, later on I’ll have more, I have to take more credits, and it will be harder or more difficult courses.” David, Interview 2), and Narushi said that he was not “so stressed out” with his classes (Interview 2). Similarly, Xue said that he could “handle” the coursework and did not feel super busy (Interview 2), and Yu mentioned that he was not really busy in college and
pointed out that his Chinese high school was much more demanding (“But before come here is really busy.” Yu, Interview 1).

In fact, all four students argued that the high schools in their countries were quite different from college in the U.S. On the one hand, David and Narushi claimed that there were more homework and assignments in the American university than in their high schools in Sweden and Japan, respectively. On the other hand, Xue and Yu stated that university classes were easier and required less work than their Chinese high schools. The students explained:

I think when I talk to my buddies back home, I always keep saying that you have a lot of homework here. In Sweden we, yeah, we have that too we have like homework stuff, but it was more like um what do you say…um, well, first in your class you get like a syllabus and they say oh we have a test on this day, we have a paper has to turn in on this date, and in between that, it was pretty much um on my own responsibility, and of course we had homeworks, but not this much as here. (David, Interview 1) I think it’s because when I had a homework in Sweden, like I think just the amount of homework is more here, but when I had a homework in Sweden, I could do it in like if I spent really an hour at night, I would be done with it, and here I have to spend more time with it because it’s English and maybe it’s something I’m less familiar with it. (David, Interview 2)

Yeah there are a lot of assignments here, yeah it’s the biggest change… and… Uh…I like… I like the system of office hour uh so yeah I prefer university. (Narushi, Interview 1)

I think uh in China high school is very busy and we have class the whole day uh uh you know…there they don’t have so much uh free time to use and […] so but but I think right now I have, I’m relaxed because not that busy but course and schoolwork is still difficult for me because it’s in English. (Xue, Interview 1)

Y: Uh I think American college is a little bit … a little….uh…easier than Chinese […]because Chinese student…Chinese high school student have to spend spend uh about 18 hours one day to study, you know, because Chinese it uh too many people they have to comp compete
L: compete yeah
Y: compete…yeah so… they have to work harder than other people to to have a chance to go to the college; yeah it’s very difficult. (Yu, Interview 1)

Despite the challenges the international students faced in their transition to college in the U.S., they attempted to develop strategies to overcome their limitations as seen above. They also
utilized the resources available to them at the institution (the Chinese students to a lesser extent, however) and were not afraid to ask for their instructors’ help when needed. The four students also had a successful fall semester and earned only As and Bs.

7.3 Native-Speaking Students

Unlike the other two student populations, the native-speaking students in the study did not appear to have come to college with very strong study habits or academic skills. As discussed in their profiles on Chapter 4, these students stated that they were going to have to learn how to better manage their time and how to study because they felt that they had never really studied before, as illustrated in the following excerpts.

Um… one area I’m definitely gonna work harder on is studying, like making good study habits. I never studied in high school and I still made straight As [laughs]. I have a feeling that’s not gonna happen in college. (Aaron, Interview 1)

The academic part is gonna be a lot harder to keep my grades up because private school is just an easy go, you know, like an easy pass sometimes and sometimes I guess the teachers baby you, and so it can be harder sometimes. It depends on the teacher but… yeah…it’s gonna be a lot harder to keep my grades up. (Carrie, Interview 1)

I think I need to work on a…different way of…absorbing the knowledge because I I just need to go over things more, you know, with my son I end up kind of…I don’t know… basically I just [chuckles] cause I’m I’m used to the kind of separation of work and home kind of thing (yeah) you know where you just come home and that’s that and now it’s like….it’s not away […] you bring work home you have to and so I’m really not used to that, you know, I’m kind of I get home and forget what I did that day basically and that’s….doesn’t work (yeah) so yeah it’s kind of I gotta work on really going over things. (Dalton, Interview 2)

Actually that’s another thing that I’ve always struggled with: studying I’ve never had to study in my whole life; I have never studied for a single thing and now I know that. (Tenesha, Interview 1)

Throughout the semester, these native-speaking students struggled with coursework, time management, and how to best navigate their college classes. In general, they did not have clear study strategies and though they seemed truly concerned about succeeding in their courses, they
were at a loss on how to study to improve their grades (Aaron was the exception as further discussed below). At times, the students said they needed to study more, but they were typically not able to articulate very specifically how they were planning to study, and their strategies did not normally involve seeking other people’s help. Moreover, even though Carrie and Tenesha claimed to study by reading, as seen in the interactions below, the rest of the interview data, classroom observations, and artifacts indicate that they in fact did not engage in much reading for their classes as discussed in Chapter 5.

C: I’m still trying to develop a better studying plan for biology.
L: And how do you study?
C: Um, just reading over it, over and over again. (Carrie, Interview 2)

T: I just have like realized that I have to put more effort into biology and studying.
L: How do you study?
T: I just read the um I read the book. (Tenesha, Interview 2)

L: How do you study for math and chemistry?
D: Just going over notes and practicing problems really, it’s all, it’s the only way I’ve figured out any way. (Dalton, Interview 2)

In addition, these students did not take full advantage of the resources available to them even though they needed help with their classes. Specifically, these native speakers did not visit their instructors’ office hours other than for mandatory conferences with the EH101S instructor, did not attend PASS or tutoring, and did not exchange notes with classmates. They also did not seem very aware of some of the opportunities offered at the institution, such as the placement test for EH101 classes. Three of the four native-speaking students were placed in EH101S due to low ACT scores, but they did not take the placement test to try to enroll in regular EH101 classes as the generation 1.5 students did. In fact, the three native-speakers never even mentioned the placement test during our interviews. In a similar vein, Dalton was placed in a regular FYE class for traditional students even though there was a non-traditional section for students like him,
which did not require as much involvement with on-campus events given the non-traditional students’ busier lifestyles. However, Dalton only found out about the non-traditional FYE course around mid-term when it was too late to switch classes.

Aaron was the exception among the native-speaking students, as not only did he appear more academically prepared for college, but he also began to develop strategies once he realized he was not doing as well as he had expected in his classes. For instance, he started attending PASS for his calculus class after midterm and studying with his friends before exams (“I’ve had a couple of friends like we’ve gotten together and had like study sessions, like we’re actually having one tonight at the library for Calculus”, Aaron Interview 2). He also asked for his fraternity brothers’ help with the MAE111 class because he was struggling with the final project for the course, as mentioned in Chapter 6. By the end of the semester, he had recognized that he might have been spending too much time socializing and decided to reduce the amount of time he spent with friends in order to have more time to study. In his words, “I’ve had to cut back on some of my social time to add some more study time in to make up for that slack” (Aaron, Interview 3).

When registering for the spring semester, Dalton and Tenesha did not talk to their advisors or to peers about what instructors or classes to take, and they did not go on the website ‘rateyourinstructor.com’ for recommendations as the generation 1.5 and international students had done, either. Aaron also said that he did not think about checking this website, but he did talk to his LEAP mentor, who helped him choose the best classes for his freshman year, and to “a couple of [his] upperclassman friends who kind of suggested what teachers to take” (Aaron, Interview 3). Carrie was the only native-speaking student to go on ‘rateyourinstructor.com’ to look at reviews of instructors, though she claimed that the reviews did not help her with the
biology professor she had in the fall since she failed the course (“I thought it was helpful with Dr. [BIO 119 instructor’s name], but uh no [chuckles] not then […] because I got the worst, I got the hardest teacher or the hardest professor.” Carrie, Interview 3). She also tried to enroll for the same classes as her roommates for spring.

Finally, all native-speaking students, including Aaron, appeared to have felt busier than the other two student populations throughout the fall semester (“It’s 15 hours so…I stay busy, yes, ma’am.” Aaron, Interview 1; “I have been so busy.” Carrie, Interview 2; “[I] just wait until he [his son] goes to bed, that’s usually what I do, which is why I end up up till 2 in the morning a lot of times, yeah so that’s tough yeah.” Dalton, Interview 2 “Well, I do feel a little busy.” Tenesha, Interview 2). Carrie lived on campus and did not work, and Dalton also did not work, but he had full custody of his five-year old son. Aaron worked at a chain restaurant for just a couple of weeks and chose to quit the job because he found it challenging to juggle school and work. Tenesha was the only native-speaking student to keep the part-time retail job that she took on after midterm, where she worked on the weekends for about eight hours a week. Some of the students also claimed that college was different from and more difficult than high school, as seen below.

Uh….it’s [college] not as relaxed as I thought it would be, like it’s really starting to pick up now with all the tests and assignments and things. (Aaron, Interview 2)

It’s [college] way different…cause coming from a private school where cause I’ve never been to public school; this is super public and everything is different but I’ve always had people outside like friends outside of my private school that kept me kind of like in public areas so I wasn’t a sheltered kid, but um it’s definitely different it’s a lot different, more people, way more people, and everybody is more outspoken than they were in high school so […] the classes um it’s like 60 people instead of just 10 people in each class, and the teachers are a lot more outspoken […] assignments, yeah it’s A LOT harder. (Carrie, Interview 1)

People are so different; it’s a lot of different people you don’t have to worry about … fitting in, you know, you get to do your own thing be your own person you know […]
I’m more… what’s the word I’m looking? I’m more…[pause] like I’m more active in class you know (uhum) I connect with the teachers and the students and I’m talking, chit-chatting […] and another difference between college and high school is that I have to study [now] yes… [laughs]. (Tenesha, Interview 1) Uh high school it was more hands-on, I learned better that way with worksheets cause now I realize that I have to study and I’ve never studied before (ummm) so that’s a difficulty for me. […] It’s all you, like they took the training wheels off. (Tenesha, Interview 2)

Even though the native-speaking students did not have language barriers to overcome, their transition from high school to college seemed more difficult than that of the generation 1.5 students and international students. They did not appear to have brought with them from high school many of the academic skills and strategies needed to successfully navigate their first year of college and struggled to learn these in the fall semester. Aaron was an important exception, however, and his trajectory in the fall semester indicates that learning to develop strategies and to capitalize on resources available to students can be powerful tools for college success. It is true that Aaron did seem more academically prepared for college to begin with, but he also appeared to experience many of the challenges the other native-speaking students faced at the beginning of the semester. However, through his academic socialization with classmates, mentors, and fraternity brothers, he was able to get the help he needed for his classes and did quite well on his first semester in college. Unfortunately, the other three native-speaking students did not appear to have developed many effective strategies and had the lowest grades among the three student populations in the study.

7.4 Summary

In this chapter, the social aspects of the focal participants’ academic literacies in their first semester in college were explored. As we saw above, and throughout the findings presented in this report, the generation 1.5 students in the study appeared to be advancing in the path to full academic socialization, as they quite successfully employed strategies and drew on various
resources during the fall semester. After immigrating to the U.S. from their home countries, these students explained that they had to overcome different obstacles during their primary and secondary education in America, and they seem to have learned from these past experiences not only how to study better but also how to get the help they needed when they needed it.

Similarly, the international students faced challenges in their first semester in college due to issues related to language and possibly culture, and these limitations appeared to have driven them to seek assistance from peers and instructors. By developing strategies and resorting to different resources, these students were also able to successfully pass all of their classes in the fall with As and Bs.

The native-speaking students, on the other hand, did not appear to have had any problems with making good grades throughout their primary and secondary school years, and – perhaps for this reason – they had not been pushed to develop some of the tools necessary to succeed in college. When they first arrived at the university, they seemed anxious about the workload as well as about creating good study habits and time-management skills, as they were aware that they had not studied very hard in high school. However, only one of the native speakers, Aaron, appeared to have learned how to create effective study strategies and to utilize the resources available to him; and he was the only native-speaking student participant who succeeded in all of his classes in the fall semester.

The next chapter concludes this dissertation by placing the main findings presented in Chapters 5-7 within previous literature on academic literacies and by acknowledging the study’s main limitations and suggesting directions for future research.
CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

When I set out to pursue this dissertation, I was motivated by the desire to understand more fully the academic literacy experiences and needs of two different populations of multilingual undergraduates (i.e., generation 1.5 and international) in order to help advance our knowledge base of these populations and ultimately better serve these students. To that end, I decided to include in the study not only generation 1.5 and international students but also native-speaking students since research on academic literacies of multilingual students in our field has not typically compared generation 1.5 and international students’ experiences to those of American students.

My purpose in comparing the multilingual students’ experiences to those of native speakers was to better understand how the needs of generation 1.5 and international students differed from those of American students in order to offer implications to help these multilingual students succeed in college. Implied in this goal was the underlying assumption that the native-speaking students would face fewer challenges in college than the multilingual students given that they had lived their whole lives in the U.S. and attended American schools, and thus would not experience potential language or cultural barriers as their L1 was English and they were familiar with the American education system. Consequently, another assumption was that the multilingual students would be at a possible disadvantageous position because of their language-learner status. More specifically, the fact that the generation 1.5 students might not have very strong L1 literacies and that the international students are still in the process of acquiring their L2 has been shown in the literature to be potential hindrances to academic literacy development and college success, as discussed in Chapter 2.
However, these anticipations were, in fact, far from being corroborated. As described throughout the dissertation, though the generation 1.5 and international students faced some challenges in their first semester of college, these students succeeded in all of their classes and appeared to be more academically socialized than their fellow native-speaking classmates. As the findings presented in the previous chapters indicate, the native-speaking students were not necessarily ‘college-ready’ just because they were not language learners, and their first semester in college was actually less successful than those of the multilingual students, as further discussed below.

In this final chapter, I first summarize the study’s major findings and place them within the literature on academic literacies in the field. I then discuss some pedagogical implications and conclude the chapter by acknowledging the study’s limitations and suggesting directions for future research.

8.1 Discussion of Major Findings

Duff (2008) argues that one of the strengths of case studies is that “they can sometimes provide counter-evidence to existing theoretical claims” (p.45), and Stake (2005) explains that multiple-case studies, like this dissertation, present both “redundancy and variety” (p.446), each of which is important, and can be similar and at the same time dissimilar to previously reported studies. Stake (2005) further adds that both the commonalities and differences that are generated by a new case study are to be embraced as they advance knowledge in the field and help readers conceptualize new findings. In his words,

As reading begins, the case slowly joins company of cases previously known to the reader. Conceptually for the reader, the new case cannot be but some variation of cases already known. A new case without commonality cannot be understood, yet a new case without the distinction will not be noticed. […] Researchers seek ways to protect and substantiate the transfer of knowledge. (Stake, 2005, p. 455)
Accordingly, in this section I summarize the study’s major findings by revisiting the research questions and highlight how they parallel and differ from previous research on academic literacies.

8.1.1 RQ1. What are the similarities and differences in the academic literacy experiences and needs of undergraduate generation 1.5, international, and native-speaking students in first-year composition classes and subject-area courses?

As far as similarities are concerned, the findings revealed that all three student populations presented some difficulties with reading and that their reading practices were in general rather limited both outside of school and for school purposes. At the time of the study, with the exception of two native-speaking students who claimed to still read books for pleasure, the students explained that their reading practices for non-school purposes did not include print literacy and that their digital literacies consisted primarily of social media. Of course, the lines between print and digital literacies are becoming more and more blurred as print literacy is migrating online, and e-books and other types of readings that were traditionally just found in print literacy (e.g., newspapers, magazines, scholarly journals) are increasingly available online. Additionally, longer and more web-based types of reading, such as blogs, have also become increasingly widespread. However, though some multilingual students navigated websites other than social media for non-school purposes (e.g., sites on teen issues, online news, computer games), usually in their L1s, they claimed that this online reading was not extensive. The exceptions were Rachel, who checked online news on websites from Hong Kong daily, and David, who claimed to have read sports news online, especially about hockey, in English before moving to the U.S. in order to improve his reading skills. The other students argued that they did not engage in much extensive online reading other than social media, not even blogs or sports
news. Despite the fact that reading and writing for communication are probably more common now than they ever were before social media and that by checking Facebook and Twitter numerous times a day, the focal participants were engaging in much more reading than what they estimated, the length and register of Facebook posts and Tweets are very different from other types of more extensive readings, such as news articles and blogs, not to mention academic readings. In other words, the participants’ reading practices outside of class seemed to be limited to reading for communication and social purposes and not ‘reading-to-learn’ practices.

Regarding writing, the students’ practices outside of school at the time of the study were also similar across the board in that the focal participants’ primary engagement with writing was via social media and text messages – another example of literacy practices for communication and social connections but not necessarily for ‘writing-to-learn’ purposes. In their college classes, the majority of the focal participants did not engage in note-taking and generally did not seem to struggle with writing assignments in their courses, except for the international students in the composition classes as further discussed below. This study also indicates that there were important differences concerning the students’ academic literacy practices across the three populations.

First, unlike the three Russian-speaking generation 1.5 students in Riazantseva’s (2012) study who were avid readers, the generation 1.5 student participants in this dissertation as well as the international students claimed to not like reading (in their L1s or L2) and considered themselves to be slow readers. On the other hand, the native-speaking students did not acknowledge having any limitations with reading (though their ACT scores and performance in college classes suggest otherwise) and actually said that they enjoyed reading when growing up,
which could have been simply a socially acceptable response and not necessarily an accurate representation of their reading practices.

Further, the international students mentioned that vocabulary was their primary challenge with reading, whereas the generation 1.5 and native-speaking students did not bring up lexical concerns. As reviewed in Chapter 2, recent research on the writing of international students has shown that lexical knowledge is in fact among the main linguistic needs of these language learners (e.g., Crossley & McNamara, 2009; 2011; Myers, 2003; Nakamura, 2010) and that they display “less-connected lexical networks than L1 writers” (Crossley & McNamara, 2009, p. 132). In addition, McNamara (2010) suggests that, given their advanced fluency, generation 1.5 students tend to have greater lexical facility, flexibility, and intuition. The results of the present study show that the international student participants also experienced difficulties with lexical knowledge when reading in English – a finding that reinforces the well-established connections between reading and writing (see Belcher & Hirvela, 2001; Hirvela, 2007) and that lends support to Andrade’s (2009) claims that reading load and vocabulary are among the main difficulties international students face in higher education.

Moreover, the reading practices of the three student populations in their composition courses were directly related to how they were held accountable for the readings. In other words, in the classes that required reading responses or quizzes, the students made an effort to at least skim the readings though a couple of students read them closely. The readings for the EH101S classes and for one section of EH101 included journal articles that seem to have posed more challenges to the international students and to Joy (the generation 1.5 student with the oldest arrival age) because of the highly academic level of vocabularies of these texts. Similarly, the refugee college students in Hirano’s (2011) study also struggled with readings that were not from
textbooks. The native-speaking students in the present study did not bring up any concerns or difficulties with these texts for the composition classes, but two of them – Carrie and Tenesha – did not seem to be doing their readings and Dalton, who was in the same class as these two students, mentioned that the vocabulary in the texts were indeed complex but that he personally believed that he had a high vocabulary and was able to understand the gist of the readings by the context even if not all words.

Regarding the subject-area courses, even though the three student populations generally did not seem to read extensively for their classes and to rely largely on PowerPoint slides and study guides from their instructors, the generation 1.5, to a certain extent, and in particular the international students claimed to skim and scan their textbooks more often that the native-speaking students. The international students also pointed out that “previewing”, to use one of the Chinese students’ expression, the textbook before classes was helpful for them to better understand the lectures and to learn vocabulary. The international students were in fact the only participants to mention challenges with understanding lectures and professors’ jokes and examples due to difficulties with listening skills, a finding also reported in Andrade (2009).

In Hirano’s (2011) investigation of seven refugees’ academic literacies in first-year college, she also found that the student participants normally relied on supplementary materials, such as study guides and PPT slides, instead of doing their courses readings, a strategy that was also reported in Leki’s (2007) four-year multiple-case study of four multilingual students’ reading and writing practices in college (there were both international and generation 1.5 participants in her study, though the author did not specifically group the students into different populations).
With respect to differences in their writing practices, the generation 1.5 as well as native-speaking students seemed more confident about their composition classes than the international students throughout the semester. Even though three of the native speakers were rather self-conscious about their writing skills before the semester started, they became much more confident once they received their first graded essays from their composition instructor and considered the English composition course to be the easiest course they had in the fall semester. Similarly, the generation 1.5 students did not have any problems with their compositions courses and even Joy, whose English was not as native-like as the other generation 1.5 students given her late age of arrival (i.e., 16), felt confident about the course despite believing that she needed to have her drafts proofread by native-speakers before submitting them. She was in fact the only focal participant in the study to earn an A+ in EH101.

Additionally, the three generation 1.5 students who had been placed into EH101S classes (with the studio component) before classes started, took a placement test offered by the university and enrolled in regular EH101 sections. As also discussed in Chapter 2, Friedrich (2006) and Holten (2009) argue that generation 1.5 college students tend to reject their placement in ‘ESL’ classes, and although the EH101S section was credit-bearing and was not labeled as an ‘ESL’ course, it was not a mainstream English composition course either, and all international students were in fact required to take it, which could have contributed to Ian’s, Jacob’s, and Joy’s desire to not be placed in the course. The three native-speaking students who were taking EH101S did not seem to have been aware of the placement test and did not try to register for a different section of English composition.

The international students’ experiences in the composition courses seemed much more challenging. Besides not being used to writing in English, as they did not have much writing in
their EFL courses at home, these students were still in the process of developing their overall language skills and were anxious about the composition assignments throughout the semester. They were also the only students in the study who articulated, during the interviews and in their literacy narrative and reflective essays for the EH101S classes, specific linguistic and rhetorical struggles they had faced with writing papers in English. Cross-linguistic influence (also known as L1 transfer) of rhetorical and morphosyntactic structures has been extensively documented in the writings of international students as we saw in Chapter 2 (e.g., Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Hinkel, 2002; Jarvis, 2010; Jarvis & Pavalenko, 2008; Leki et al., 2008; Reid, 1992).

Nonetheless, despite their struggles with the composition courses, the international students coped with these limitations and successfully passed their classes (with As and Bs) by seeking their instructors’ and studio leaders’ feedback throughout their writing processes. By the same token, the refugee students in Hirano’s (2011) study and the multilingual students in Leki (2007) were also very proactive in getting help with their college writing assignments.

In the subject-area courses, the amount of required writing was much more limited than that of the composition classes. This finding is not surprising as research in the field has repeatedly shown that the amount of writing done in entry-level undergraduate courses tends to be minimal, though certain majors require more reading and writing assignments than others (Hirano, 2011; Johns, 1991; Leki & Carson, 1997; Leki, 2007; Moran, 2013; Reid, 2001). Furthermore, the types of assignments the focal participants were required to write for the subject-area courses (e.g., book reviews, lab and project reports, essay questions) were rather distant from the nature of the essays found in the composition courses, which included genres like narratives, rhetorical analyses, and research papers. This has also been reported in the literature as a common reality in composition and subject-area courses in American universities.
(Bridgeman & Carlson, 1984; Carson, 2001; Leki, 2007; Leki & Carson, 1997; Melzer, 2003; Reid, 2001).

For most subject-area courses included in the present study, the only type of writing the students were expected to engage in was note taking, while for some courses they had to write reports and project proposals as well as answer essay questions on exams (i.e., Biology Lab, Electrical and Mechanical Engineering, First-Year-Experience, History, one section of Psychology, and Sociology). Overall, the focal participants did not engage in note taking very often, especially when PowerPoint slides from classes were made available online. Two students were the exception: Rachel and David, who both took notes for every class they took in the fall. David also resorted to his classmates’ lectures notes like two other international students did, Xue and Yu, because they could not always follow the lectures, as previously discussed – a challenge that was never brought up by the generation 1.5 or native–speaking students.

Of notice was the fact that the two Chinese international student participants did not borrow notes from American students or classmates of other nationalities, relying solely on other Chinese classmates for lecture notes and help with their classes. In contrast, David and Narushi socialized with American peers as well as with students from other nationalities, especially since they were involved with the university hockey and baseball teams, respectively. These two international students claimed to notice a great improvement in their English skills, including listening and speaking, by the end of the semester while the Chinese participants reported some improvement in their English skills but realized that only associating with other Chinese students had a negative impact in their second language development. Andrade’s (2009) study on the adjustment of international students to a private higher-education institution in the U.S. revealed that although intercultural interaction fosters English development, the students tended to remain
within their own linguistic groups (according to Andrade, 62% of the respondents were Asian, 28.9% were from the Pacific – she does not explain specifically which countries – and 9.1% were from other countries).

Furthermore, generally speaking, the focal participants did not seem to struggle with the writing assignments they had to do for their subject-area courses in the fall semester, as previously mentioned. This was also the case with the participants in Hirano’s (2011) study. Of the writing assignments for the subject-areas courses listed above, only a couple of tasks appear to have concerned some students: the biology lab report and the final report for the FYE class.

Regarding the more social aspects of their academic literacies, the generation 1.5 and international students seem to have been more academically socialized than the native-speaking students in their first semester of college, learning to negotiate their literacies by utilizing coping strategies and drawing on different resources available to them. Specifically, the generation 1.5 students had developed some effective reading and study strategies, such as skimming and scanning texts, studying with peers, seeing instructors during office hours and after class, and attending several PASS sessions and tutoring. The generation 1.5 students were the participants who attended the most PASS sessions among all focal participants. Likewise, the international students also brought up skimming and scanning texts, looking up summaries of material online, borrowing classmates’ lectures notes, studying with peers, seeing instructors during office hours and after class, getting help on essays from instructors and studio leaders, and attending some PASS sessions and tutoring.

On the other hand, the native-speaking students did not seem very aware of such strategies and though they experienced challenges with several courses in the fall semester, only one of them, Aaron, began to develop effective study strategies and to draw on some of the
resources offered by the institution. At the beginning of the semester, Aaron had expressed concern with developing good study habits and time management skills, like the other three native-speakers, because he argued to have successfully managed to earn As in high school without having to study hard – a claim also made by the other native speakers. However, as the fall semester progressed and his performance on exams was not what he had hoped for, Aaron started to attend PASS and to study with his fraternity brothers and some classmates. It is important to point out that Aaron appeared to have been the most ‘college-ready’ native speaker in the study as he had the highest ACT score among the native-speaking students. He also joined different leadership and mentoring organizations for freshman students from the beginning of the semester. He said he did not visit any instructors, however, nor did he mention specific reading or writing strategies he had developed. Similarly, the other native-speaking students did not seek their instructors’ help, did not attend tutoring or PASS, and did not bring up studying with friends or specific reading and writing strategies, either.

Although these findings substantiate L2 writing research that affirms that international students generally succeed in U.S. post-secondary settings (Belcher, 2012; Leki, 1992; Leki et al. 2008; Reid, 1997), they do not seem support common claims about generation 1.5 students’ lack of study, reading, and writing skills (e.g., Blanton, 1999; Friedrich, 2006; Harklau, Loosey & Siegal, 1999; Harklau, 2000; Roberge, 2002, 2009). While some accounts of generation 1.5 students navigating their first year of college have reported struggles and failures (e.g., Blanton, 2005; Harklau, 2000; Spack, 1997; Vásquez, 2007), others studies – like this dissertation – show success stories and point to important tools and strategies these students use to persevere and negotiate their academic literacies (e.g., Hirano, 2011; Leki, 2007; Riazantseva, 2012). Specifically, the coping strategies and socioacademic relationships that the generation 1.5 and
international students as well as Aaron developed were instrumental in their success in the fall semester and echo the findings of Hirano (2011), Leki (2007), and Riazantseva (2012). In these studies, the authors argue that the academic success of their undergraduate participants (refugees, multilingual students – including generation 1.5 and international – and generation 1.5, respectively) was intrinsically connected to the strategies they developed and the support they received from family, instructors, peers, and tutors – important ‘mediators’ from the perspective of sociocultural theory (see Johnson, 2009). As Leki (2007) explains – “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” (p. 262).

As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the main difficulties with developing an overarching framework for generation 1.5 students’ literacies stems from their very diverse backgrounds and past school experiences. For example, research has shown that generation 1.5 students who come from middle-class families with high academic expectations and “strategic parental investment in their schooling, [enjoy] successful educational experiences in the U.S.” (Riazantseva, 2012, p. 185). This also appears to have been the case with the generation 1.5 students in the present study. As detailed in their profiles in Chapter 4, three out of the four generation 1.5 student participants talked about their parents’ support and positive influence on their academic journeys and also mentioned that at least one of their parents had college degrees, spoke English well, and had successful careers as business owners and as a company executive; and these were in fact the three most successful generation 1.5 participants: Jacob, Joy, and Rachel. Ian’s family situation, on the other hand, was different since his father still lived in S. Korea, where he worked to provide financially for the family in the U.S., and Ian’s mother did not speak much English at all.
However, it should be noted that Ian claimed that his mother encouraged him to keep a journal in Korean during his childhood years so that he could maintain his L1 skills, and thus one could argue that she also fits the profile of academic literacy supporter even if she was not a highly proficient English speaker. Ian’s progress in the fall semester was, nonetheless, the least successful of the generation 1.5 students, as described throughout this report.

8.1.2 RQ2. What literacy expectations and goals for generation 1.5, international, and native speaking students do composition teachers have and how do they see themselves attempting to help their students meet these expectations and goals?

The composition instructors’ main goals were to help all students develop critical thinking and reading skills and to become better writers, with a focus on clarity, register, and audience. They expected that students in general would not read for their courses unless explicitly held accountable to do so, although they did mention believing that international students were more hard-working and more likely to read on their own. Thus, the composition teachers in this study either designed reading responses and quizzes to try to ensure that students were reading, as was the case with three instructors, or simply accepted that the students were not doing the readings and did not hold them accountable for them, which was the approach of one of the teachers. The specific reading needs they believed international students had that differed from those of generation 1.5 and native-speaking students were related to comprehending vocabulary in the texts, though a couple of instructors mentioned that having to wrestle with the readings could give these students an advantage over native speakers who often seemed to read too lackadaisically.

With respect to writing, the instructors also did not appear to notice any differences between generation 1.5 and native-speaking students and specifically stated that they had not
noticed any non-native patterns in the four generation 1.5 students’ writing. In contrast, they anticipated international students to have more language-related problems in their papers and argued that they adapted their feedback for these students, commenting more on grammar and local issues, and some teachers admitted being more lenient when evaluating these students’ writing. The exception was one of the instructors teaching EH101, who explained that because the language issues in international students’ writing tend to be so prevalent, she would adopt a different set of lenses and normally choose to focus only on the ideas they try to express and not on the language. Several composition instructors in Matsuda, Saenkhum, and Accardi’s (2013) study also reported either providing more feedback on sentence-level language issues or adopting a different set of expectations when grading the writing of international students.

Furthermore, the composition instructors mentioned that the international students sometimes appeared to have more difficulty understanding the assignments, and although the instructors did not appear to modify their lectures to meet these students’ needs, they met with these students individually whenever needed to clarify expectations and assignment purposes. These teachers were in fact very accessible to the international students who visited their offices several times during the semester for help with their papers, and Jacob’s and Joy’s instructor also offered feedback on these students’ drafts any time they asked for it, in particular Joy. Though these composition instructors had experience working with multilinguals, they did not have formal training or education on how to teach these students (some of the teachers had read a few articles related to L2 writing and had discussions about L2 writers in their linguistics and rhetoric/composition classes, but none of them had a degree in applied linguistics or TESOL or extensive training in L2 writing), and it is thus not surprising that they might not have been able to clearly adapt their teaching and responses practices to the these students’ needs. Similarly, in
Tardy’s (2011) study on language ideologies and practices in her own First-Year Writing (FYW) program, she found that only five of the 59 instructor participants had any formal education or training in working with multilingual students, and she argued that for this reason “many (if not most) teachers have a limited set of strategies for supporting multilingual students, whether through practices that explicitly incorporate their multiple languages or through English-medium practices that support second language development” (p.645).

In the present study, the composition instructors’ willingness to offer extra help to the multilingual student participants show their awareness of and preoccupation with some of these students’ needs, and it was certainly instrumental in the multilingual students’ success in their English composition courses. These findings again echo Matsuda et al.’s (2013) claims that although some of the composition teachers in their study did not report adapting their practices in any way to attend to multilingual students’ needs, many others were willing and in fact enthusiastic about spending more time working with these students.

8.1.3 RQ3. What literacy expectations and goals for generation 1.5, international, and native speaking students do subject-area instructors have and how do they see themselves attempting to help their students meet these expectations and goals?

The subject-area faculty’s expectations and goals regarding reading practices in their courses were quite different from those of the student participants. While the instructors valued reading and believed that students need to read the textbooks and assigned readings in order to learn the material and do well in the classes, overall the students did not seem to place the same importance on doing the courses readings. There were exceptions to this, as previously discussed, but even for the international students who looked at vocabulary and formulas in the textbooks, reading PPT slides, study guides, and notes seemed to be the preferred route for the
focal participants. These practices still involve reading of course, but they did not seem to be as valued by the instructors as reading textbooks and other materials that offer relatively more in-depth coverage. As the Music instructor explained, the PowerPoint slides were simply distillations of the readings and in order to fully understand the material, he believed that the students needed to closely read the textbook chapters.

However, the students’ reading practices, or lack thereof, was no surprise to the faculty members as they were aware of the general student population’s preference for skipping readings and relying on other resources to study, and many of them seemed rather jaded and resigned to this fact. As discussed in Chapter 2, Arum and Roska (2010), Gallik (1999), and Hendel (2004) also reported that college students engage in much less reading than what is expected by faculty.

A few of the instructors in the present study tried to encourage the students to read and come to class by not using PPT slides or providing completed study guides to their students while others purposefully did not post the PPT slides used in class online.

Concerning the three distinct student populations investigated in the study, many instructors argued that international students typically face more challenges with vocabulary, both academic and every-day language, and with general reading comprehension, including exam questions. Some of them did mention, however, that many native-speaking students also struggle with reading comprehension, and various instructors discussed the lack of college and academic preparedness of many American students. The subject-area instructors did not bring up specific difficulties of generation 1.5 students, although some realized that there was a difference between ‘bilingual’ students and ‘non-native’ speakers. However, like the English composition instructors, they did not bring up any special needs of generation 1.5 students, and seemed to liken them to native-speaking students.
With respect to writing practices, most of the subject-area faculty also claimed that they believed in the importance of writing, and the ones who did not have writing assignments or essay questions in their courses attributed it to the class sizes and the logistics involved in grading the work of over 100 students. They believed that international students (again, generation 1.5 students were not mentioned specifically and did not seem to have been included in these claims) need extra help with their writing, as they tend to present more language problems than native-speaking students. However, these instructors also claimed that several native-speaking students have many grammar and spelling problems in their writing as well.

The majority of instructors who required writing assignments in their courses expected not only good content from their students but also polished and grammatically correct texts. This expectation seems quite different from previously reported findings in which subject-area faculty tended to overlook language issues since their main concern was related to content (e.g.; Hirano, 2011; Johns, 1991; Leki & Carson, 1997; Leki, 2007; Santos, 1988; Zamel, 1995). However, these previous studies focused on multilingual students, and the reported instructors’ expectations might have pertained just to L2 writing.

In this study, even though the subject-area instructors placed a high emphasis on language issues, they also seemed to be more lenient towards international students’ writing. The faculty appeared to be willing to work with the international students outside of class and to not grade them as severely on language issues. For instance, though David’s History professor was categorical about the importance of grammatically correct writing, he told David and me that he was not going to be as strict on grading David’s grammar since he knew English was not his first language. Similarly, the Psychology professor who required a journal article review in her course explained that she always told her international students to come to her office with drafts of their
papers so she could help them with their English. The fact that Xue and Yu had low grades in all of their exams in Psychology (Xue) and Music and Accounting (Yu) until the finals and then passed these courses with Bs might also suggest a certain leniency towards grading the work of international students. Even though the Psychology, Music, and Accounting instructors did not discuss adjusting their standards or grading criteria for international students (as some of the other subject-area and composition instructors openly acknowledged), during our interviews they brought up some of the needs and difficulties they had observed of international students in general and of these students in particular and were aware that these participants were not doing well in their courses. In a study on international students’ adjustment to American higher-education institutions, Andrade (2009) also found that some professors accommodated their grading for non-native speakers with lower English proficiency even if they did not always acknowledge this practice. Similarly, in a synthesis of studies examining international students’ transition to college in various contexts, such as the U.S., Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, Andrade (2006) argues that it is a common practice for faculty to modify their teaching approaches and adjust their grading standards to meet the needs of these students.

In sum, both composition and subject-area faculty were quite aware of some of the limitations native speakers and well as international students brought with them to post-secondary education, though they did not seem as familiar with the needs of generation 1.5 students. While the instructors did not seem to modify their lectures or course materials to the needs of international students, they seemed willing to adapt their grading and were generally accessible to this student population outside of class. The main disconnect between faculty’s expectations and students’ perspectives was related to the importance of course readings, and even though the instructors seemed legitimately concerned about students not doing the readings,
at times their teaching practices appeared to have been rather conducive to this practice (i.e., of skipping readings). In other words, several instructors provided students with many ancillary resources, such as PPT lecture slides, study guides, sample responses to assignments, and designed assessments based heavily on these materials. Considerations related to these findings are explored in the pedagogical implications subsection below.

8.2 Summary

After observing these three student populations navigating their academic literacies in their first semester of college and talking to faculty members about their expectations regarding students’ reading and writing practices in their courses, I have come to the conclusion that although language and academic knowledge are important aspects in developing successful academic literacies, they were not the central factor in predicting or determining the focal participants’ college success, at least in their first semester of college. The findings reported here clearly show that the most successful students were the ones who developed effective strategies to cope with their difficulties and who drew upon resources available to them through the university. I thus join Casanave (2002) and Hirano (2011) in arguing that “the name of the undergraduate [writing, in her context] game” (Casanave, 2002, p. 41) and of “negotiating academic literacies in first-year college” (Hirano, 2011, p. 269) might indeed be ‘academic survival strategies’. I further posit that the generation 1.5 and international students might have been better acquainted with these academic survival strategies, as the findings indicate, in all likelihood because of the experiences they had faced as language learners.

While this might not be true of all multilingual students in higher education as discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, the generation 1.5 participants in this dissertation appear to have learned to take advantage of resources and to seek the help of peers and instructors through
their school years in the U.S. where they needed extra support as they learned English, and thus entered college equipped with these socio-academic tools. Similarly, even though the international student participants had not attended American high schools, as language learners in the U.S., they seemed aware of their strengths and limitations and were comfortable with seeking help when needed. The native-speaking student participants, on the other hand, explained that they had not learned how to study hard in high school because they were able to make good grades without much effort, and – given their apparent lack of socio-academic skills in the first semester college – they also appear to not have needed to seek much help during their secondary education, coming to college relatively unprepared to negotiate the academic literacies of higher education.

8.3 Pedagogical Implications

Much of the research in the field of applied linguistics has focused over the years on investigating the needs of multilingual students in order to offer support for these students to succeed in their language learning and academic endeavors. Nevertheless, the findings of the present study indicate that multilingual students, both generation 1.5 and international, are not the only students who might come to postsecondary institutions in the U.S. with certain deficiencies pertaining to their academic literacy skills and that native-speaking students also need assistance in navigating the academic literacy demands of higher education. This is not to say that multilingual students do not need help in specific areas of their academic literacies for the data reported here show that they certainly do, but the results from both students’ and instructors’ perspectives revealed that the native-speaking students who participated in the study also presented difficulties with academic and social skills in their first semester of college. Some of the challenges faced by the three-student populations were rather similar, whereas other
difficulties were particular to each population; thus, the pedagogical implications discussed here have various layers.

First, issues pertaining to students’ reading and writing practices were ubiquitous and deserve explicit attention from educators, researchers, and postsecondary institutions. The present study suggests that the student participants were not engaged in extensive reading (i.e., texts longer than a few short sentences) outside of school, either, as their main reading consisted of social media posts. In addition, their writing practices were also limited both in college and for non-school purposes, and texting and writing posts on social media were the main types of writing the students engaged in outside of class (it should be noted that they claimed to read more than write on these sites, however).

While a detailed discussion of digital literacies is beyond the scope of the study, the fact that most student participants reported reading and writing primarily social media posts and text messages might have had an impact on their ability to concentrate on and understand course readings, as Aaron suggested about his own reading experiences, as well as on their writing skills, as also mentioned by one of the composition teachers, as seen below.

[Her goals for the course] are to teach them to be effective writers and I would say strong readers because I think, I find that a lot of them lack the focus to actually just sit down and like read an article or a book chapter. […] I also touch on some grammar and mechanics things because of all the text messaging and digital literacies, sense of cohesion and flow is something they struggle with, informality has become a problem with them, conversational language […] teaching them to have a more academic tone to their work. I always blame the texting. (EH101 Instructor A)

It should be acknowledged, however, that researchers like Warschauer, Zheng, and Park (2013) point out that digital literacies have in fact enabled students and young people to read and write in interactive ways and for communicative purposes like never before. As they put it,

Whereas reading was previously often a solo and passive activity, students now have many more opportunities to write about what they read. At the same time, the increased
amount of written interaction that young people participate in throughout the day, through texting, chatting, forum postings, and blogging, also enhances their engagement with the reading of texts (p. 828).

These authors further argue that their “recent research suggests that students improve in so-called traditional literacies as well [by engaging in digital reading and writing practices]; that is, how to comprehend what they read and how to write well-structured essays” (Warschauer, Zheng & Park, 2013, p. 828). It should be noted, however, that in their own research projects that these authors describe, the students were actively engaged in carefully designed digital reading and writing tasks in the classroom (e.g., visual-syntactic text formatting and blogging about passages read by teachers), in which they seemed to read and produce much more text than what the focal participants of the present study appeared to engage in when browsing social media sites.

Furthermore, as the faculty interviewed argued, students in general do not seem to be doing the kind of reading that they as instructors value (i.e., textbooks and other assigned course readings) in college, at least in lower-level courses, even though the students do engage in some reading practices, such as PPT slides, study guides, and lecture notes. Although some of the faculty attempted to curtail the problem of students not doing the course readings by not providing students with lecture PPT slides or study guides, most of the instructors made these resources available to students, and the majority of the focal participants in the study were still able to succeed in many of their classes without reading their textbooks. This is certainly a testament to the strategic skills the students had developed and, from their perspective, undoubtedly a successful approach to passing college courses. From the perspective of the instructors, however, they did not believe that students in general seemed to be fully learning the material or developing the analytical skills the professors had hoped they would.
Accordingly, an immediate implication that can be drawn from these findings is that if we, as educators, truly believe in the importance of reading not only for the learning of course material but also for the development of critical thinking and writing skills of students in general as well as for the development of multilingual students’ overall language skills, then we must design courses in which readings are indispensable and explicitly hold students accountable for doing these readings. Specifically, to encourage and foster academic reading practices, university faculty – as a normal part of the instructional routine – should consider using frequent assessment procedures that are premised upon students having actually completed assigned readings, such as quizzes, tests, written assignments, and even take-home exams that cannot be completely successfully unless one has read the materials assigned.

As evidenced in Chapter 6, the focal participants explained that they at least attempted to do the readings for the composition courses that required reading responses, even if skimming sections at times, while they did not read for classes where they could “get by” without having to read. Joy’s reflection about the reading responses in her composition class are very revealing of the importance of having students interact with texts by not only reading but also summarizing and analyzing them. This generation 1.5 student, who was a self-proclaimed slow reader and who faced comprehension problems when reading in English, had the following to say about her experiences with EH101 reading responses:

When I first heard that we had to read and write the journal reading for this class, I was really nervous. And it took me at least one and a half hour to finish reading the first journal reading; “Rose, Rigid Rules, Inflexible Plans, and the Stifling of Language”. I did not understand everything in the article but I knew enough to write a summary. And it was easier to do the journal reading with the procedure you [the EH101 instructor] gave us. I think that helps me to comprehend a little bit more about what I read. You have helped me become more confident more especially when you showed my first journal reading to class, and other students voted that mine was the best one. I was proud of
myself that I could write better than some of the native English speaker. (Joy, Reflection Essay, EH101)

Needless to say, large class sizes pose a real problem for instructors teaching general education survey-type courses in that they limit how much writing and how many assignments these teachers are able to assign and grade. Nonetheless, designing assessments that are more directly contingent upon course readings and withholding supplementary resources from students outside of class might be useful strategies in fostering increased reading practices. For instance, Rachel explained that for her Sociology class there was no way around doing the readings and taking notes in class since the professor did not post his PPT slides and included questions on the exams that came straight from the readings. Of course, Rachel was an exemplary student and would most likely have done the readings regardless. Still, while such practices of attempting to hold students accountable for readings in more explicit and immediate ways might not work for all students, they are certainly not detrimental to anyone and seem to encourage at least part of the student population to read.

Regarding specific needs of each student population, the study revealed that although the generation 1.5 student participants still struggled with reading and to a lesser extent with writing, they performed well in their classes and seemed comfortable and integrated in their mainstream English composition courses. Previous research on generation 1.5 students has suggested that these students should be placed in special composition sections for multilingual students as discussed in Chapter 2. However, the findings of the present study indicate that allowing these students to choose whether to enroll for mainstream or multilingual composition courses might be the best approach. Although these students might still be required to take a placement test, as was the case with the generation 1.5 student participants, depending on their ACT or SAT scores, if they are able to successfully pass the test and believe that they are equipped to handle the work
in regular sections of English composition, there seems to be no reason to stop these students from taking these courses as Doolan (2011; 2013) has also argued elsewhere.

On the other hand, the international students’ language related difficulties in their first semester in college were understandably more prevalent than those of the generation 1.5 students, and placing them in composition courses tailored for multilingual students might indeed be the most appropriate policy. While the EH101S instructors who participated in the study did not have formal training in working with international students, they were cognizant of the fact that these students tend to need more help with their writing and were available and accessible to the international focal participants throughout the semester (much like the instructors in Matsuda et al., 2013). Further, these international students expressed concern about their writing abilities during our interviews and seemed rather nervous about the composition course. Thus, being enrolled in sections with other international students appeared to ease some of their anxiety.

Another finding regarding the international student participants that deserves specific attention from applied linguistics researchers and instructors was the evident struggle and concern these students had with vocabulary – involving both academic and everyday language – manifested in challenges with reading and writing tasks, understanding lectures, and communicating in English. Second language acquisition is of course a lifelong process and even though international students arrive in college in the U.S. with some knowledge of English (and many with quite advanced English proficiency), to expect these students to fully master their L2 in just a semester or even a few semesters in college is not realistic. Thus, learning the vocabulary needed for the academic literacy demands in college should understandably take international students quite some time. Yet, teaching these students some tools to help them
develop more effective strategies when it comes to learning specific terminology for college classes seems imperative. Much has been published on the issue of L2 vocabulary in the field (see Chung & Nation, 2003; Coady & Huckin, 1997; Nation & Chung, 2009), and a discussion of this literature could certainly be helpful in composition courses for multilingual writers. In addition, I believe that training international students, and all student populations for that matter, to become genre analysts could be a great place to start helping them to become more familiarized with the discourse of various disciplines and ultimately with the English language as well (see Johns, 1990, 1997, 2009a, 2009b).

With respect to the native-speaking student participants, the seemingly inadequate study and socioacademic skills they brought with them to college appear to stem from deeper and long-standing issues in American secondary education as contended by the faculty interviewed in this study. Though the state of primary and secondary education in the U.S. is beyond the scope of this dissertation, these findings show that these students might face challenges with academic literacy demands in higher education and could use help learning to negotiate these. Therefore, although it might not be college faculty’s job to teach these students basic reading and writing skills – as some of the instructors argued – being aware of these students’ struggles with academic literacies, professors’ and postsecondary institutions’ efforts to offer these students help with developing study strategies and pointing students to resources available to them are certainly timely.

Finally, the resources offered at the university where the present study was conducted (e.g., PASS, tutoring, writing centers, studio sessions) and the faculty’s willingness to meet and work with the multilingual student participants were undoubtedly important contributors to these students’ success and are examples of the “institutional structures” (Leki, 2007) also found in the
supportive environment of Hirano’s (2011) setting and that other postsecondary institutions should strive to implement.

A word of caution with offering help to international students is in order, however. Although providing students in general and international students in particular with resources and various support systems to help them succeed in college is definitely a commendable practice, the fact that two of the international student participants were able to not only pass their classes but make only As and Bs – even though they skipped many classes, did not engage in note taking, and relied heavily on older Chinese cohorts for help with assignments and exams – might be worrisome in my opinion. Seeing international students overcome language and culture-related difficulties and thrive in their classes is certainly inspiring; yet, observing international students with apparently not very diligent practices, like Xue’s and Yu’s, still succeed in classes that they were failing throughout the semester could raise concerns about the assessment rigor of some instructors when it comes to working with multilingual students. My concern with such practices has more to do with the message that they might communicate to these international students than with issues of fairness. As one of the English composition instructors argued, some of her international students had been “the hardest-working students [she had] ever had, tenfold” (EH101 Instructor B), and I wonder whether we might be teaching these traditionally conscientious and diligent international students to take the easy way out by not holding them to standards that they are certainly capable of achieving.

8.4 Limitations and Future Research

The first and foremost limitation of this dissertation is that the findings reported here are inherently bound to the context investigated and only represent the realities of the participants included in the study. Nonetheless, although case studies hardly allow or aim for generalizations,
it is my hope that this contextualized multiple-case study will help shed some light on the academic literacy practices and needs of the three student populations investigated by providing a detailed account of the participants’ first semester navigating the literacy demands of higher education. As Duff (2008) explains,

> The assumption is that a thorough exploration of a phenomenon [e.g., students negotiating academic literacies in college] […] will be of interest to others who may conduct research of a similar nature elsewhere. Other readers may simply seek the vicarious experience and insights gleaned from gaining access to individuals and sites they might not otherwise have access to” (p.51).

Still, any attempt of transferring the findings and implications from this study to other settings should be made with caution and in light of the contexts discussed here.

Furthermore, though I believe that examining the experiences of twelve focal participants allowed me to gain a better understanding of the three distinct student populations as a whole, it certainly limited the amount of data I was able to collect from each participant as well as the level of detail of my analyses and how much information could be included in this report. In other words, depth was sacrificed for breadth.

Lastly, the present study took place during only one semester, and while the findings reveal important insights about the focal participants’ academic literacy practices, they provide but a glimpse into the beginning of these students’ college experiences. How these students fared after their initial semester at the university is a question that this dissertation cannot answer, but one that could certainly increase our knowledge about the three student populations’ academic literacies.

Accordingly, future studies that examine students’ college careers throughout the four years of their undergraduate programs could offer a more complete picture of their academic literacy practices and experiences in higher education. As Rogers (2010) explains about the
development of writing, “longitudinal studies in particular with their emphasis on change over time and across contexts have proven a particularly appropriate method in understanding writing development” (p. 365). I further contend that longitudinal case studies of other aspects of academic literacies and not just writing, such as reading and sociacademic skills as investigated in the present study, could also offer insights into the development dimensions of these literacy practices.

An example of such a longitudinal study is Leki’s (2007) four-year investigation of four multilingual students’ academic literacy practices in higher education. Leki’s (2007) work did not include native-speaking students, however, and a comparative longitudinal study of generation 1.5, international, and native-speaking students would help us better understand how these different students continue to develop their academic literacy practices throughout their degrees, and how or whether their needs and experiences change (and what factors influence potential changes) in higher-level courses, where they are exposed to different academic genres of reading and writing and move toward more discipline-specific knowledge. In addition, Leki’s data was collected in the 90s when digital literacies in general and social media in particular were not as ubiquitous in academia and society, and thus future longitudinal studies that look at the impact of digital literacies in those three student populations’ academic literacy practices in higher education would certainly be welcome.

Finally, a more in-depth comparative exploration of generation 1.5, international, and native-speaking students’ digital literacies in general and use of social media in particular could also help advance our knowledge on these students’ overall literacy practices and language development and on the ways these digital literacies interact with the development of higher-
order thinking skills and analytical reading and writing – theoretically fundamental prerequisites for success in academia.
REFERENCES


Hirano, E. (2011). *Refugees negotiating academic literacies in first-year college: Challenges, strategies, and resources.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA.


APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Consent Form (Faculty)
Georgia State University
Department of Applied Linguistics
Informed Consent

Title: “Academic literacy experiences of undergraduate students: Students’ and Instructors’ perspectives”

Principal Investigator: Diane Belcher, P.I
Luciana Junqueira, student P.I.

I. Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to investigate the different types of academic literacy practices native-speaking students, international students, generation 1.5 students, who graduated from U.S. high schools, are exposed to in composition classes in college. You are invited to participate because you are an instructor at UAH and have either international or generation 1.5 students in your class, who will be the focal participants of this study. Participation will require approximately a total of 2 hours of your time in the course of a semester. Your participation will also involve allowing the second researcher to observe and audio record up to four of your classes and sharing with the researchers copies of artifacts you give the class, including student writing (with students’ written permission).

II. Procedures:

If you decide to participate, your class will be observed and audio recorded (with a digital recorder) up to four times teaching one of your courses this semester (the one in which the focal student participants are enrolled in) for the entire course of the semester. You will determine the day the researcher should come to your class. You will also be interviewed by the second researcher up to two times during the semester: at the beginning, and end of the observations for 30-60 minutes. In the interviews, you will be asked questions about your teaching practices and your thoughts on native-speaking, international, and immigrant students’ language learning and about academic literacies. All recorded materials will be transcribed and analyzed by the researchers and the audio files as well as the transcriptions will be saved in the researchers’ computers protected by passwords. Pseudonyms will be used and no personal information will be disclosed in order to protect your privacy and identity. If you choose to participate in the study, you will be a gift card for a coffee shop as a small token of appreciation.

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 may learn more about your teaching and your students’ language learning backgrounds and, as a result, develop self-reflexivity and more informed teaching practices. Overall, we hope to gain information about what academic literacy practices international and immigrant students are exposed to in different composition classes in college and whether they have different literacy needs. We hope that the study will help us better understand how these students learn to read and write academically in college. It is also our hope that the study will contribute to the fields of language teacher education as the role of teachers and literacy practices of international and immigrant students’ academic literacies is under-investigated in applied linguistics. In addition, it is our ultimate goal to contribute to teaching and language learning and to promote students’ learning.

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. Diane Belcher, P.I., and Luciana Junqueira, student P.I., 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 and/or the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)). We will use pseudonyms rather than your name on study records. The information you provide will be stored on password-protected computers, which only the researchers will have access. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact Diane Belcher, P.I. at 404-413-5200 or dbelcher1@gsu.edu or Luciana Junqueira, student P.I., at 205-534-7434 or ljunqueira1@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

__________________________________________
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

___________
Date
APPENDIX B

Biographical Information Survey for Multilingual Students
(Adapted from Doolan, 2011)

Please take 3-5 minutes to answer the following questions. Circle one answer or fill in the blank.

1. What is your name? ___________________________

2. How old are you? __________________

3. With your family (or in the house where you spent most of your childhood), do/did you regularly speak a language other than English? Circle your response.
   Yes   No (If no, skip to question #10 and continue)

If yes, what language? Circle or fill in the blank:
Spanish   Korean   Chinese   Vietnamese   Hindi   __________

3. In this language, other than English, how many years of formal (school) education have you had?
   None   1-2 years   3-4 years   5-8 years   More than 8

4. Inside of the home, what percentage of your time do/did you speak the non-English language?
   0-15%   16-30%   31-50%   51-75%   76-95%

5. Outside of the home, what percentage of your day do you use this non-English language?
   0-15%   16-30%   31-50%   51-75%   76-95%

6. How old were you when you started learning English?
   1-2 years old   3-4 years old   5-7 years old   8-16 years old   17 years+

7. How many years of formal (school) education have you received in the United States?
   1-2 years   3-4 years   5-10 years   More than 10

8. Did you graduate from high school or get your GED? Yes No

9. Think about your abilities in your non-English language. How would you rate your abilities? Check one box for each skill (reading, writing, listening, speaking).

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<th>Very limited</th>
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10. Think about your abilities in English. How would you rate your abilities? Check one box for each skill (reading, writing, listening, speaking).

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Thank you for completing this survey

******Please STOP here and wait for more instructions******
APPENDIX C

Consent Form (Students)
Georgia State University
Department of Applied Linguistics
Informed Consent

Title: “Academic literacy experiences of undergraduate students: Students’ and Instructors’ perspectives”

Principal Investigator: Diane Belcher, P.I
Luciana Junqueira, student P.I.

I. Purpose:
You are invited to be part of a research study. The purpose of the study is to explore the different types of reading and writing practices undergraduate students experience in college. You are invited to join because you are a freshman student, taking an English composition course this semester. Participation will require a total of about four hours of your time during one semester. Your participation will also include giving permission to the second researcher to observe and audio record your classes once a week, with your instructors’ permission, and to have access to copies of your written work for class.

II. Procedures:
If you decide to be a part of the study, the second researcher will interview you up to four times during the semester: for 30-60 minutes. In the interviews, she will ask you questions about your reading and writing experiences outside of school and in school too. You will also give permission for your instructors to share your written work with the researchers. All audio and written data will be saved in the researchers’ computers protected by passwords. Your name and personal information will not be used in order to protect your privacy and identity. If you choose to participate, you will be given a small compensation of $40.

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. You may learn more about your reading and writing experiences and how they impact your writing skills in college. Overall, we hope that the study will help us better understand your college reading and writing experiences. in college and how to best provide support for students like you.

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 that you would have.
VI. **Confidentiality:**

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Diane Belcher, P.I., and Luciana Junqueira, student P.I., 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 and/or the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)). We will use different names instead of your name on study records. The information you provide will be stored on password-protected computers, which only the researchers will have access. Your name and other facts about you will not show when we present this study or publish its results. You will not be identified personally.

VII. **Contact Persons:**
Contact Diane Belcher, P.I., at 404-413-5200 or dbelcher1@gsu.edu or Luciana Junqueira, student P.I., at 205-534-7434 or ljunqueira1@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

_______________________________  _____________________
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent  Date
APPENDIX D

Interview Guide for Students

**Multilingual Students** (Adapted from Leki, 2007 and Hirano, 2011)

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. From your experience in college so far, how is college different from high school or from college in your country?
9. 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):
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 3 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 have 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)

**Native-Speaking Students** (Adapted from Leki, 2007)

Background information (1st interview):

1. Do you speak any languages besides English?
2. Can you read and write in this (these) language(s)?
   If yes,
   a. Tell me about your experience learning this language.
   b. How well can you read and write in this language?
4. Tell me about your school experience (what school(s) did you attend, etc.)
5. Tell me about your experience learning to read and write. 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?
6. Are there any literacy events that stand out from your literacy history?
7. Besides school assignments, how much do you read and/or write? For what purposes?
8. From your experience in college so far, how is college different from high school?
9. 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):

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 3 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 have 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 Composition Faculty
(Adapted from Ferris et al., 2011 and Yigitoglu, 2011)

(1st interview)
1. Please briefly describe your background and experience as a writing teacher. Do you have any specific experience or training in working with ESL (international) or multilingual student writers?

2. What have been the greatest influences on your development as a teacher? Language learning experiences? Past teaching experiences? Teacher training/development courses? How about specifically in relation to teaching multilingual writers?

3. Can you please explain the types of writing classes that you teach?
   a. Who are your students?
   b. What are their goals?
   c. Is this the first time you are teaching this class?

4. Do you have (m)any ESL/multilingual students in your classes? Do you think that their needs as writers differ from those of monolingual (native English speakers) students? If so, how? How about ESL (international) and generation 1.5 (immigrant) students, do you think that their needs as writers differ? If so, how? Do you adapt your teaching strategies in any way with those students, and if so, how?

5. How do you view literacy? What are some important aspects of academic literacies in your opinion?
   a. Please describe how you feel about the literacy needs of multilingual students.
   b. What are views on reading-writing connections?

6. Describe your philosophy or approach to teaching writing.
   a. 8. What do you look for in evaluating writing?
   b. What do you believe is your role as a teacher of L2writing? (e.g. role model, coach, etc.)

7. How would you say your philosophy or approach has been formed? Has it changed over time?

8. Can you tell me about a successful writing activity you’ve recently done in your class. Why was it successful?

9. Can you tell me about a writing activity you’ve recently done in class that you felt was not really successful?
10. Describe a paper that you remember was unsuccessful.

11. Describe a paper that you remember was successful.

12. What do you hope to have accomplished by the end of the semester? Or what do you hope your students will have learned over the course of the semester?

(2nd interview)

1. Have your perceptions about international and generation 1.5 students changed over the course of the semester? If so, how? If not, why not?

2. Have you adapted your teaching practices or approaches to different students’ needs this semester? If so, how? If not, why not?

3. Have your views on literacy or the academic literacy needs changed over the course of the semester? If so, how and why? If not, why not?

4. Please describe the most or one of the successful activities this semester.

5. Please describe the most or one of the unsuccessful activities this semester.

6. Please describe a paper that you remember was successful.

7. Please, describe a paper that you remember was unsuccessful.

8. Have you experienced any changes in your philosophy or approach to teaching writing over the course of the semester?

9. Did you accomplish in this class what you had hoped for at the beginning of the semester? Do you think your students learned what you had hoped for them to at the beginning of the semester?
APPENDIX F

Interview Guide for Subject-area Faculty
(Adapted from Leki, 2007 and Hirano, 2011)

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 generation 1.5 students and international students with 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 generation 1.5 students and international students with 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?