

College Composition in High School

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

College Composition in High School

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This thesis addresses the challenges of improving written communication in urban high school students by implementing a College in the High School (CHS) English Composition I course as in-house dual enrollment. The motivation for this course came from seeing many students struggle with writing and college retention because of high school writing instruction that is more focused on standardized testing and formulaic structures. The course design is influenced by theoretical frameworks such as threshold concepts, WPA outcomes, and writing transfer theory to emphasize the development of rhetorical and critical thinking skills. The syllabus developed works within the student learning outcomes (SLO) provided by Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC), demonstrating alignment with a college level course, while meeting the needs of students at an urban public high school. By offering this CHS opportunity, the course aims to bridge the skill and motivation challenges between high school and college, combat academic stereotypes, and provide a foundation in writing that will benefit students across academic and future professional contexts.

Signature of Investigator _____ Megan M Tyson _____ Date 7/29/24

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Chapter 1: Overview

Introduction

Effective written communication is important in successful academic and professional settings. However, many students struggle with developing the skills necessary to communicate effectively in writing. The cause can be a number of reasons, including, but not limited to, high school teachers teaching to standardized tests, not knowing how to get started, formulaic structures of writing, or wanting an instant answer instead of working through a process (Warner 2018; Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015). In response to this ongoing challenge of effective written communication high school and college students face, this thesis explores the design and administrative approval implementation of a college-level English Composition I course to be taught in a high school setting as a dual enrollment course to better prepare high school students to become better written communicators and, in turn, better prepared for post-secondary education.

The class that will be created is English Composition I offered as a College in the High School (CHS) course through Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC) taught within the traditional high school setting by a certified high school teacher. This course gives students the opportunity to replace their English 12 credit requirement with a CHS English Composition I course to experience the rigor of a college level course and earn 3 college credits upon successful completion of the course. At the end of the course, each student will have the grade they earned on their high school transcript for their English 12 requirement as well as a college transcript from HACC they can transfer to their next institution or to continue at HACC. For the students' GPA calculations on their high school transcript, this class will count in the highest weighted category offered, the AP GPA scale. The standard GPA scale used is on a 4.0 weight, the Honors

GPA scale is on a 4.5 weight, and the AP GPA scale is a 5.0 weight. As a college course, the weight given to this class is much higher than the Standard GPA scale. In this case, a B in a course weighted on an AP GPA course is equivalent to an A in a Standard GPA course because a course on the AP GPA scale should be more rigorous or challenging, giving it more overall GPA impact and the chance for a student to have an overall GPA higher than a 4.0.

The curricular influence with this course will be writing/composition instruction as “FYC’s [First Year Composition] dual mission of helping students reconceive writing and transfer their learning to new contexts” (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015, 113). Writing is one of the skills most needed to perform well in higher education, but it is also the one this population of high school students seem to struggle with the most as writing demands so much more than memorization or the ability to recall. It is very easy to fill in the bubbles of a multiple choice test without giving it much thought, but writing an essay requires understanding a prompt, necessary content knowledge, writing skills, transfer, and, for some students, the ability to code switch or write academically in a language that is not their first or maybe even their second, and so much more. Part of the struggle here is when students are asked to write, they are unsure of how to approach the writing situation because they need to invent the writing context as Bartholomae discusses in “Inventing the University” (1986). As this course will specifically focus on writing, students will have the time and space to focus specifically on their writing and research skills that will carry them into their post-secondary education and transfer that learning to other areas of their academics or interests.

My interest in being able to offer and teach this course comes from seeing a large number of intelligent students leaving high school for higher education and dropping or failing out of college within the first semester or year. This is because “much of the writing students are asked

to do in school is not writing so much as imitation of writing, creating an artifact resembling writing which is not, in fact, the product of a robust, flexible writing process” (Warner, 2018, 5). Students will inevitably have to prove their learning in college in a written form, yet throughout high school, students are typically only imitating writing instead of actually writing. They are using formulaic writing, provided sentence starters that take away thinking, a process so scaffolded by their teachers that there is no room for students to experience the choices made while writing. They can explain what they said, but they do not know why they said what they said or why they made the choices they did. Students do not understand how to explicate their work writing within a discourse community, if and when they successfully produce meaningful situated writing. When writing gets more demanding at the college level and students have never really experienced writing, this is when college gets hard and grades start dropping. However, this course is influenced by the idea that with exposure to a composition course while still in high school, students will build a foundation of learning on writing and hopefully keep students enrolled in post-secondary education. As students become better writers, that can transfer into making students better academically across all subjects. As students understand their rhetorical choices, students “can convert tacit knowledge about the transfer of writing into explicit knowledge that can be taught, traced, or described; they might link seemingly dissimilar or contradictory transfer phenomena across disciplines for more theoretically grounded conclusions; they could generate new solutions or ideas about the transfer of writing knowledge by analyzing data for non-obvious similarities” (Bazerman et al., 2024, 6). The ability to write or know how to approach a writing situation can improve confidence in a student since writing is one skill that is used across content areas in high school and beyond. Writing is a cognitive process that “is best understood as a set of distinctive thinking processes which writers

orchestrate or organize during the act of composing” (Flower & Hayes, 1981, 366). While students are writing, they are constantly thinking about what choices they are making and evaluating what their next move is. Another area of interest for wanting to offer this course comes from teaching in an urban school and working with this population of students. As many of these students are or will be first generation high school graduates, college is something that students and their families are realizing is attainable. The students working through high school in my district have dreams and desires of combating the negative stereotypes and statistics unfairly placed on them because they come from low income/socioeconomic households and from a large urban public school with a low graduation rate known for fights, gang activity, and having their own in-house police force. Currently, students will purposefully avoid writing assessments or writing based classwork that is a paragraph or longer. This is because this population of students find writing to be intimidating and usually a negative impact on their overall grade. Part of this is because of a lack of teacher staffing in the K-8 level, so writing is easily overlooked in favor of reading. Because of all of this, the hope is this course will help these students bridge the gap between high school and college by making writing less intimidating, keeping them enrolled in post-secondary education to pursue their academic and career goals, and push toward high school graduation. This can be achieved by designing a composition curriculum for students focused on the Writing Program Administration (WPA) Outcomes designed to facilitate rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking, reading, and composing, process, and knowledge of conventions. “These outcomes are supported by a large body of research demonstrating that the process of learning to write in any medium is complex: it is both individual and social and demands continued practice and informed guidance” (*WPA Outcomes*

Statement, 2019). As students move out of this composition class and into others, they have the ability to use their composition learning to build their chosen content knowledge.

Purpose

One of the driving purposes in the curricular artifact is that whether or not high school students believe it, writing and understanding the choices of writing is a key skill for all areas of life, both academically and professionally. While not the complete focus of this curriculum, Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle's discussions on threshold concepts have influenced the design of this composition course. "To say that FYC will focus on threshold concepts, then, is to say that it will, in part, focus on misconceptions and work toward richer conceptualizations of writing. Threshold concepts connect as well with the mission of teaching for transfer because the threshold concepts of writing are general principles that apply across a wide range of writing situations, even as those situations vary widely" (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015, 105-6). The typical focus in high school English classes is reading and/or literature, writing is overlooked by the use of formulaic standardized writing with common and sometimes untrue writing rules. Writing is overlooked in favor of reading in high school English classes because the Pennsylvania state exam for English is literature based ("Literature Keystone"), not writing, even though the open-ended or text-dependent analysis writing portion is a large part of a student's overall score. Unfortunately, because of state testing, having a more writing-centered focus that includes instruction on writing process, rhetorically situated writing, writing conventions, and habits of mind in English class is something that most students do not get until college or even graduate school. Being able to understand why choices were made in a piece of writing changes the ability to be both a better writer and reader because there is another level of understanding behind that text.

To be offered and posted on transcripts, all of this needs to be officially approved by submitting the complete syllabus to the English department chair at HACC's York campus (official college credit awarding institution) to ensure that the course design, assignment scaffolding, and assignment rigor meets the needs and requirements set by HACC for this specific course. If there is anything missing or anything that is not up to HACC's standards, they will send the syllabus back with feedback to make necessary adjustments. Through this opportunity to offer HACC CHS English Composition I and II, this sequence is the only ability for high school students to earn post-secondary education credits for English. Within the school, there is no competition with this course because AP English Literature and Composition typically does not have enough student interest for the building principal to allow it to run; it has not run in the past four school years (2020-2024 AYs) and course requests show that it will not run again next year (24-25 AY). For a course to run in an academic year, according to the building principal, it must have at least 10 students show interest in it by requesting it on their annual course request selection.

School Context

When designing this curriculum, there are a few factors at the high school level that influence the design, such as the fluctuation of student body, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

As stated in the William Penn Senior High School 2023 - 2024 School Profile:

William Penn Senior High School is a large, urban, public high school, located in the city of York, Pennsylvania. It serves a fluctuating 1,600 to 1,800 students grades nine through twelve; 96% of enrolled students are economically disadvantaged, meaning all students are eligible for the NSLP [National School Lunch Program]. The School District of the

City Of York is composed of eight grade schools, a K-12 cyber school, and one high school, serving a total population of over 41,000 residents.

The population of students can be at a disadvantage when it comes to their education because student access to resources and funding is a real problem. These high school students did not even have one to one devices until the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic shut down forced the district to find the funding to make it happen while their peers at the next district over have had that opportunity for their students for years. Before the pandemic closure, teachers were sharing class-set laptop carts to use with students. Technology had to be planned out well in advance to make sure a laptop cart was secured, which also included its own set of problems with sharing, projects running over, last minute substitutes, and more. However, once the COVID shut down forced one to one, every student had their own school-owned device they carried with them and had access to all day.

Because of factors like these, student-centered choices need to be made to create a curriculum that will benefit this student population. One of the main influences in this curriculum design is the transient student population, with students either moving between local school districts or between the brick and mortar high school building and the in-district cyber school. In many urban school settings, having a transient population of students or students who fall under McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act can be very common. “For many poor households, residential mobility is largely unplanned and unpredictable, and is often a result of family stress, inability to pay rent and bills, and poor quality or unsafe housing” (Penn State College of Education). This transience comes from students moving between types of schooling and districts due to families relocating for work, refugee families finding cheaper housing in cities, relocating for family reasons, custody and foster agreements, or being first generation

immigrant families in the US. Sometimes students will even move back and forth between countries for cultural or family needs. “One of the effects of this residential change is chronic student transiency, the non-routine and unscheduled movement of students from one school or school district to another. Evidence from research strongly suggests that frequent student movement has significantly negative consequences for mobile students because of academic and social disruption” (Penn State College of Education). When students are constantly moving like this, there are bound to be areas of learning loss or gaps that need to be taken into consideration. “Overall, some of the learning difficulties were linked to transience, with participating students describing inconsistent progression through the curriculum because schools do not work to a standard timeline for curriculum delivery” (MacArthur & Higgins, 2007, 22). As a natural extension of this research, students who constantly move between districts and schools, students are not getting a streamlined or linear approach to their learning. I could find no research on this, and I was unable to locate district specific data. These conclusions are based on the available data on nationwide student learning impacts, and transience statistics shared by the district. What they are getting instead is a choppy, inconsistent educational experience that is not fully educating them. These students are getting bits and pieces of the larger picture of a curriculum that was designed for a student to work with from start to finish. Because of this, transient students are subject to being more academically at risk because of “lower achievement levels, slower academic pacing, and reduced likelihood of high school completion” (MacArthur & Higgins, 2007, 25).

One of the places where this transient impact can be seen is in the SAT score report for the body of students this course is being designed for. As the SAT is a standardized test that students take nation-wide, this measures how this specific set of students performs against their

same-age peers. It is one way to measure the academic achievement of one school/population set against how students of the same appointed grade level are performing. The average SAT score for a student in this specific school is 880, while the Pennsylvania average score is 1119 and the National average is 1161 (William Penn Senior High School, 2023). This large gap in SAT average scores from the building level to the state and National average is reflective of the discrepancy in learning. When students move in and out consistently, they are missing the foundational skills needed to build upon them at higher levels. Additionally, the student population is also diverse in terms of ethnicity. The current population of the student body falls at 1% White, 6% Multi-racial, 40% Hispanic, and 53% Black” (William Penn Senior High School, 2023). As there is such a diverse student body population, there is a need for texts and assignments that appeal to different cultures and backgrounds. “Educators can play a significant role in student retention and success by choosing to utilize inclusive teaching strategies. Adopting these strategies often means intentionally moving away from how instructors were traditionally taught” (Hogan & Sathy, 2022, 5). By creating an inclusive environment, students will feel valued and safe thus increasing the chances of success and retention in post-secondary education.

Being able to implement this curriculum matters because every student, regardless of what school district their parents can afford to live in, should be afforded the same opportunities as any of their peers. Many times, students in more urban schools are stereotyped for not being as smart, or not caring about getting an education, or for having high dropout rates, or being at risk students who are unmotivated to perform academically. To combat these stereotypes, one of the building goals set by the building principal at my high school is to offer students more high level academic opportunities to create more rigorous pathways to graduation. Increasing the

academic rigor of a program leads students to more success in a few ways. “Rigor is defined as course practices and assignments that require students to demonstrate higher-order thinking about course content rather than just recall and recognition” (Culver et al., 2019, 612). Students are able to gain a deeper understanding of course material by moving past memorization and into critical thinking and analysis: “Critical thinking encapsulates cognitive skills such as analysis, evaluation, and reasoning that allow individuals to create and refine arguments” (Culver et al., 2019, 613). Students are able to develop essential skills for academics and life such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and more. Additionally, with more rigor comes the need for students to develop problem-solving skills to overcome new challenges. Problem-solving skills will help students when they are presented with a new writing task and are unsure of what might be asked of them. Offering a dual enrollment course on the home campus also allows for students who are already high achieving and need more of a challenge based or for students with Gifted Individualized Education Plan (GIEP) needs. Additionally, per the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Act 158 of 2018, high school students have five different pathways to graduation in which students are required to show evidence of earning their high school diploma. The Evidence Based Pathway accepts “successful completion of a concurrent enrollment or postsecondary course” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2019) as part of that evidence, which could be a dual enrollment course.

Because of the great diversity and factors influencing the school context, there is a lot that goes into consideration when designing a curriculum for this type of student body. Design choices need to be aware of a student body that is transient, comes from low socioeconomic households, and is racial diversity. These can be confronted by anticipating learning gaps to build foundational writing skills, using culturally relevant materials, and offering a rigorous curriculum

to challenge students to really develop their skills to prepare them for college or their post-secondary career.

HACC Context

“HACC’s College in the High School (CHS) Program allows high school students to earn college credit for HACC courses that are taught by their high school instructors at their high school during the school day” (Harrisburg Area Community College, 2024). Through HACC’s CHS program, teachers at partnering high schools who have the appropriate qualifying degree, are able to teach entry-level (100 to low 200 level) college courses on their own high school campus after being approved through an application process. The minimum qualifying degree and experience required for teaching this HACC English Composition I course is Master’s degree in English (or M.Ed. in English education, MFA in English, MA in Linguistics, or MA in Humanities - including courses in composition and rhetoric). The types and number of courses in a specialized field is not specified by HACC’s hiring guidelines other than the desired degree required for specific courses.

At the beginning of the 2023 - 2024 school year, there were already four CHS HACC classes being offered to William Penn Senior High School students: CHS US History I, CHS US History II, CHS Algebra, and CHS Trigonometry. By student course requests, these CHS courses are filling over other similarly offered AP courses and AP courses in general. There are 12 AP courses offered to students (AP English Literature and Composition, AP Calculus, AP Computer Science Principles, AP Computer Science A, AP Physics, AP Biology, AP Environmental Science, AP Government and Politics, AP World History, AP US History, AP Psychology, and AP Spanish Language and Culture) as listed in the annual course guide when it comes to course selection. This past academic year, only AP US History and AP World History had enough

student interest to run (minimum of ten students based on building principal's requirement). These CHS courses are filling over the AP courses because students are awarded the college credit upon passing the CHS course while they need a 3 or higher on an AP test for a college to consider awarding them credit. As the district already has an agreement with HACC for the four other CHS courses on the high school campus, necessary steps to have this Composition I course be approved are minimal. The high school administration is on board with offering CHS English Composition I and CHS Composition II to students. These courses have been coded by the District Data Specialist in the LMS system and placed in the 2024 - 2025 course guide for school board approval. Currently, students enrolled in English 11 this past fall or actively in the spring (2023-2024 AY) now have the opportunity to be recommended for the CHS courses for their senior year provided they meet the prerequisite requirements set by HACC.

By course description, HACC CHS English Composition's course "emphasizes the composition of organized, clear, coherent, and well-supported essays, which features standard English conventions, effective style, and the appropriate use of research strategies and sources. Students develop the critical reading and thinking skills necessary to produce effective college-level writing that communicates to a particular audience, fulfills a specified purpose, and conforms to a given genre" (Harrisburg Area Community College Course Catalog, May 2023). Additionally, HACC CHS English Composition courses include the following course outcomes (copied from the Harrisburg Area Community College Course Catalog, May 2023):

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Compose essays suitable to various audiences and purposes using a systematic writing process
- Organize essays with well-supported, unified and coherent paragraphs
- Use language and mechanics for various writing situations or a given audience and purpose

- Explain the role of academic conventions and the value of various discourse communities
- Identify sources appropriate to a given assignment
- Read critically to understand, analyze and evaluate the ideas of others
- Synthesize and cite the ideas of others using the most current version of an established professional citation style

Both the course description and student learning outcomes show what HACC values in their English Composition I course for students. These will influence choices made in the curriculum designed for a CHS version of this same course as the rigor and expectations need to remain the same whether a student is taking this course as CHS or on campus.

Students will be able to register for and enroll in this class by having a minimum of a 3.0 GPA starting at the mid-point of their junior year, an SAT Evidence-based Reading & Writing (ERQ) or Critical Reading Score of 480 or higher, a PSAT Evidence-based Reading and Writing Score of 450 or higher, or successful completion of HACC's mandated placement testing if they do not meet any of the other previously listed criteria (*Placement Testing*, 2024). Having these criteria set in place sets a bar for where HACC believes high school students can begin to handle college-level work, and the high school offering the course must enforce these criteria.

Essentially, through these criteria, HACC shows what an academically capable and sound student skill set must be at the start and end of the course, thereby defining the college academic level. While the previous four CHS courses are not necessarily limited to a specific academic grade level or require students to take them in any specific order, based on HACC rules, the CHS English Composition courses will require students to take CHS English Composition I after the mid-point of their junior year and pass it with a C or higher before being eligible to enroll in CHS English Composition II (Harrisburg Area Community College, November 2023). If a student does not pass CHS English Composition I with a C or better, they can still earn their English 12 graduation requirement by earning a D in the course but will not be awarded the

college credit. However, if a student's cumulative GPA through HACC drops below a 2.0, they will be put on academic probation through HACC (Harrisburg Area Community College, 2024). The option of retaking the CHS English Composition I is not necessarily an option as my course will only run in the fall of an academic year. Students who fail the course will also have that failing grade reflected on their HACC transcript in addition to their high school transcript.

While Composition I focuses more on an overview of typical writing genres and building writing skills, Composition II “focuses on expository and argument writing. Students develop advanced reading, critical thinking and writing skills as they analyze and build arguments in various forms, using research as the basis for developing their own arguments” (Harrisburg Area Community College, May 2023). CHS English Composition II will then take the more generalized foundational skills students learned in CHS English Composition I and apply them specifically to expository and argument writing to expand and deepen their understanding of these two genres, as the skills needed for these two genres of writing are skills that are more commonly found in academic writing.

With the addition of CHS English Composition I and CHS English Composition II in the 2024 - 2025 school year, students will be able to take up to six different college courses directly in their high school and graduate with their high school diploma and up to 18 college credits to transfer to accepting colleges or universities.

Urgency Factors

It has felt like a long time coming to finally be able to offer this course to students next school year. Only one semester after finishing an M.Ed. and ITS PK-12, I was fully enrolled in this M.A. English program at Millersville University with the goal of teaching at least the CHS English Composition I course. It was in no way the plan to reenroll in grad school that quickly,

but between the building principal's ask for someone who was interested in teaching this course and me always looking for a way to work on my own skills combined with other professional options it could bring, I could not turn this opportunity down. However, with all of these positives, there have also been a lot of outside pressure to move through this M.A. program quickly in order to be able to offer this course to students as early as possible. As part of a building improvement plan, our building principal has made it part of his mission to offer more higher level courses to students while they are still in our care. Another pressure has been to help improve writing instruction throughout the entire school building. Writing is one of the weakest points in the building, but also one of the most misunderstood areas of learning by most. Writing offers academic skills for students to help them across all academic areas, as well as a knowledge creating activity (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015, 19). Through it all, it is exciting to be able to offer another in-house college course for students to give them more ways to prepare for their life after high school, especially one that can be tailored more to their actual educational background instead of a curriculum written on assumptions or generalizations. Writing is also one of the building's overall areas of academic focus as it is also one of the weakest areas of current student academics, but also one that every content area and student can benefit from. Through this M.A. program, I completed several Writing Studies courses that introduces scholarship on why writing is often overlooked in K-12 English education in favor of literature, how writing skills can lead to better students overall, and how students can learn more than writing by developing their writing skills. Writing and what is considered "good writing" is not a formula a student can plug their information into and have a solid piece they have ownership over. It is a process that takes time and practice to develop.

Chapter 2 of this thesis outlines the overview of the motivations, contexts, and theories behind this thesis. As many high school students struggle when it comes to writing, introducing a college-level writing course as a dual enrollment course for this diverse set of students can help not only help them become better writers and transfer that learning across subjects, but also better prepare them for college. The student population this course is being designed for is diverse in race, socioeconomic status, and of transient student attendance leading to learning gaps and more. Choices in this curriculum were made with those factors in mind, while also making sure the course is rigorous, on-par with the on campus version of this course, and will benefit them academically.

Chapter 3 of this thesis includes the course syllabus and an overview of the assignments. I start with a brief discussion of HACC specifics (like textbook selection, etc.). I include the syllabus that will be submitted to HACC to finalize the approval of this course. Finally, this chapter includes the research paper assignment and rubric.

Chapter 4 of this thesis reflects on the design decisions, briefly connecting the theory to the HACC context and the students likely to enroll in my class. Finally, Chapter 5 offers brief conclusions leading into the first semester teaching this course. While I know I will have more conclusions and more research after this first semester of instruction, I offer a few remarks on how this thesis is a demonstration of my learning in the MA English program.

Chapter 2: Literature Review & Pedagogy

What is Good Writing?

Good writing is hard to define because it is not just one thing. Good writing is a desired skill that takes time and practice. It moves beyond a “proficient” score on a standardized test and past filling in a formula. It is being aware of rhetorical situations and moves in individual writing and the writing of others. Good writing also means to be a good reader to analyze writing for its rhetorical pieces. There is a synthesizing and knowledge transfer between what is being read and what is being written in drafts and peer review. Good writers also understand that the rhetorical moves shift and change over different genres of writing. These are the separate pieces of writing that are addressed as building blocks in the curricular artifact and the CHS English Composition I course being designed.

Even though good writing has a complex definition, it matters because it is crucial in being able to effectively communicate ideas with others by developing rhetorical knowledge, as the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* points out, “is the basis of good writing” (2011, 6). Writing and understanding the choices being made in writing is something that follows students throughout their lives and turns them into critical thinkers and writers. Because of this, I focused this course design on teaching students the foundational ideas, concepts, and strategies to help build them as successful writers in their own process so they can apply their learning outside of my specific classroom, as “successful writers can adapt their composing processes to different contexts and occasions” (*WPA Outcomes Statement*, 2019). For students who take this course and then choose to continue their post-secondary education, good writing skills are especially important as their writing needs to “move past obvious or surface-level interpretations and use writing to make sense of and respond to written, visual, verbal, and other texts that they

encounter” (Council of Writing Program Administrators et al., 2011, 7). Regardless of the path chosen in their lives, good writing is a skill that will continue to benefit students as consumers and contributors of society.

Literature Review

Having a college education is a goal that is easy to attain for some, but not necessarily for students who come from low socioeconomic, multigenerational families where they are the first to graduate from high school, let alone attend college. One of the skills that will carry a student through their academic career is writing. Writing is so much more than just putting pen to paper or fingers to keys as it envelops so many other deeper analytical, synthesis, research, and organizational skills. At the same time, writing is also one of the skills employers and post-secondary educators say students cannot do. As John Warner points out in his book, *Why They Can't Write: Killing the Five-Paragraph Essay and Other Necessities*, today's college students are doing exactly what their K-12 teachers have trained them to do when it comes to writing, and that is why they “cannot” write (2018). In these situations, teachers will often use formulas for writing, which are usually adopted in order to get students to write by giving them a starting point and a solid scaffold. While these highly structured scaffolds help students to write by giving them a starting point and a solid outline of expectations, these structures take away the importance of students making choices in their writing. Formula writing, like the five-paragraph essay, is not conducive for students necessarily to understand what they are doing or why they are doing it, as writers communicating ideas with audiences. One of the focuses of bringing this CHS English Composition I course to high school students is to break those formula-driven habits and encourage students to refocus what they know about writing. Today's students, no matter where they are enrolled in high school, should have the opportunity to take advantage of

being able to experience a college-level rigor course before deciding to further their education or have the chance to enter college with some general education college credits already earned. One of the best courses a student can take before entering college is a composition course. If students enter college understanding the choices they make when writing and how to be a better written communicator overall, they are at an advantage when it comes to the rest of their academics. Being able to communicate well is a skill that is always expected by everyone, but is not necessarily taught by anyone outside of a composition course. Not only do the majority of colleges include a composition course as part of their general education requirements, but writing is a skill that will follow a student throughout their college career and into their professional lives.

Composition Pedagogy and Design

When building a course, it is important to take into account what the teaching and learning will look like. For students to learn, they need to find the information, lessons, and assignments relevant. Assignments and assessments need to be scaffolded in a way that builds off of previous learning and relates back to coursework while stretching students to take educational risks: “Scaffolding risk-taking might also help students willingly work outside their comfort zones” (Teagarden et al., 2018, 123). Even though composition courses can differ in name, overall approach, and design, at the core, the values of a composition course are similar with the goals of teaching students how to grow in their own writing (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015; *WPA Outcomes Statement*, 2019).

While high school and college are two separate entities, the transition in terms of writing, does not have to be so blunt. “The writing curriculum should not be severed between grade 12 and grade 13’...and that we must take steps to blur the false and reductive distinctions between

what our students need as high school seniors and as college freshmen. Until we do that, we will not reach the whole student” (Grayson, 2020, 57). With the addition of a CHS English Composition course, this blunt line between the end of one system and the beginning of another will be a little softer, giving students more confidence in their own academic abilities. Being a good writer, or at least understanding why choices need and should be made in writing allows students to become better students overall. Additionally, “the more successful programs take students’ developmental needs into consideration, helping dual-enrolled students work toward college-level expectations gradually,” (Tinberg & Nadeau, 2011, 716) which continues to blur the line between the hard stop and start of high school and college.

Making the jump from high school to college also means breaking the habits formed that may have been relevant to high school writing, but are no longer relevant to post-secondary education or the real world. As previously mentioned, Warner’s *Why They Can’t Write* explores the disconnect between high school writing and college or career writing. There are seemingly common “rules” and formulas taught to many K-12 students when it comes to writing instruction. “By trying to guide students toward ‘proficiency’ or ‘competency,’ we wind up providing them with rules and strictures that cut students off from the most important and meaningful aspects of writing” (Warner, 2018, 6). Unfortunately, performance on state and standardized testing is what many states and districts use to claim that their students are college and career ready. However, all of these rules and heavily formulaic scaffolding for writing can actually prohibit students from actually learning how to get started on their own and being able to have that productive struggle through figuring out their own writing process. “The five-paragraph essay as employed does not allow students to struggle with the important skills underlying effective writing the same way training wheels don’t allow nascent bike riders to

practice balance” (Warner, 2018, 29). The use of formulaic writing is good scaffolding for students learning something new. However, making these formulas seem like the only path to good writing does not give students the experience of the productive struggle they need to actually learn to write for various purposes and audiences.

The Adler-Kassner’s threshold concepts are an important influential piece of designing a composition course, as these are the concepts that are influencing choices and showing students how and why decisions are being made. “Threshold concepts of writing is critical for students seeking to develop as writers both in writing classes and, because of writing studies’ focus on the study of composed knowledge within specific contexts, within other courses” (Adler-Kassner et al., 2017, 19-20). Understanding these concepts make it possible for students to work their way through developing their own writing skills and processes to become not only better writers, but better in all academic areas. Additionally, there are various skills I want the students to learn and strategies I want them to try to help restructure their active views on writing. Many of these students are stuck in the mindset that feedback on their writing is purely meant as negative, writing cannot be shared with their peers because that can be considered cheating, a paragraph is specifically five sentences, and an essay can be absolutely no longer than five paragraphs. Much of what Linda Adler-Kassner notes through the threshold concepts breaks all of these myths and more. As a high school educator, a CHS course affords curricular space to design drawing from recent scholarship in Writing Studies. Instead of PK-12 standards informing and determining curriculum, I can put these scholarly ideas to work in ways that HACC recognizes as valuable.

The *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* offers the eight habits of mind which “refers to ways of approaching learning that are both intellectual and practical and that will support students’ success in a variety of fields and disciplines” (Council of Writing Program

Administrators et al., 2011, 1). Using these habits of mind when designing this course, they will give students exposure to these habits as they are key to their development as college-ready writers and students. These will also benefit students academically overall because these skills are transferable to their other areas of academic needs and interests. While it is very common for K-12 students to be introduced to and use different formulas for writing, those formulas have their time and place. At one point, they served a purpose of helping students get organized, push them to more than one point, or get them to expand their response. However, it is key to remember that “standardized writing curricula or assessment instruments that emphasize formulaic writing for nonauthentic audiences will not reinforce the habits of mind and the experiences necessary for success as students encounter the writing demands of postsecondary education” (Council of Writing Program Administrators et al., 2011, 3). Inauthentic formula writing is not helpful in breaking the bad “because the teacher said so” (Warner, 2018, 4) habits that many students take with them to college. The habits of mind can help students with critical thinking, analysis, transfer, and metacognition, which are all skills important to writing as well as academics overall.

The pedagogy and design influencing the choices in this curriculum are focused on creating a smoother transition between high school and college or career. Because of this, there is a focus on growing students as writers instead of having them continue to rely on the “bad habits” and formula-based writing they typically become accustomed to. As a whole, this course is meant to prepare students for college-level writing by focusing on their skills as writers and critical thinkers.

In-house Dual Enrollment

The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), the Two-Year College English Association (TYCA), the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), and the College Section of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) have come together to create a joint-statement based on their observations of the increase in the number of high school students taking an FYC course as dual enrollment. In the creation and publication of this statement, both high school and college instructor voices are weighted equally in to combat the challenges and inconsistencies in FYC as dual enrollment courses when designing curriculum based on the groups represented in this statement. Through their research, it has been found that FYC as dual enrollment has benefits, but also comes with challenges and consistency issues. Because of this, this joint statement was created to combat these findings in order to help with these issues:

To support the CWPA Outcome Statement means the curriculum of a first-year composition is writing, and thus, the content should include assignments and activities for students to learn about writing, including rhetorical concepts and practices central for success as writers and composers across digital and print formats. These include rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking, reading, composing practices, processes (strategies to develop writing projects), knowledge of genre conventions, and reflection. To learn these concepts and practices, students should create projects that respond to a variety of rhetorical situations across multiple genres so that they become versatile writers capable of responding to different writing situations expected in college. Writing assignments should also include attention to the process(es) of writing including drafting,

peer reviewing, revising, editing, and reflecting. (Conference on College Composition and Communication, 2019)

Within their research while creating this statement, Elisabeth Barnett's article, "Building Student Momentum from High School into College," shared there are specific skills and knowledge that students need before they enter college, and dual enrollment courses can support developing those skills and provide opportunities to become more college-ready than their peers (Conference on College Composition and Communication, 2019).

As "the research in the field confirms our experiential understanding that students will experience writing very differently in college than they did in high school and explores how these differences complicate the transition from writing in high school to writing in college" (Crank, 2012, 51), the curriculum presented in this thesis provides students the ability to experience a college-level workload and rigor in the familiar space of their high school before going straight into a full college course load. This is especially helpful for students who are still unsure if they want to commit to fully going into college because they are unsure if they can handle it. Taking a college-level course for free is a relatively low risk activity for a student who is unsure of attending college. They get to experience a college class in the safety of their own high school while earning both the high school required credit for graduation as well as college credit. A student here has the ability to drop the course and be placed into an English 12 course if they find it is not the right fit for them. Even if a student chooses not to go to college, taking this course specifically will help the student become a writer and reader. Skills that are learned through learning how to write transfer to other areas of academics and life. When students learn about writing, they also learn how to be a better reader, analyzer, and thinker of everything around them. These skills can be applied to their professional as well as personal lives. If they do

decide to attend college, taking a course like this in high school will prepare students not only for college and being better writers, but also to better know and understand how to contribute to their chosen academic field. As this is a college course being taught in a high school setting, there is more flexibility available to students in the amount of time they get to spend in the physical classroom working on their coursework as well as how much face time they have with their instructor. While a typical on campus college course meets either three times a week for 50 minutes each, twice a week for 75 minutes each, or once a week for 2.5 hours, students in CHS setup meet five times a week for 80 minutes each. That is over 6.5 hours in a week in comparison to a typical 2.5 hours a week. Additionally, a typical college semester runs for about 15-16 weeks, and again, since this is in the high school setting, the course would run for 18 weeks.

It is also important to note, for the purposes of designing this curriculum for students, background is important in how that transition from high school to college will be. As Sarah Swofford points out in her article regarding high school's influence on undergraduate writing development, "understanding where students come from, even in the broadest strokes, should also inform theories of writing development that we build" (2019, 257). Curriculum designed for students in this specific high school setting will be different from the "typical" college composition course as there is knowledge of student background. Their needs are known, which will help design the curriculum, and help students in applying their composition learning in other content areas. Additionally, knowing student backgrounds and offering this course in-house can provide agency for students, as Anne-Marie Womack points out in her article on universally designing composition classrooms, "agency, for all students, comes from access" (2017, 500). Having access to in-house college courses can make all the difference for students economically

and academically. Plus, concerning CHS courses, HACC is on the side of following a student's building-level paperwork (IEPs, GIEPs, 504s) through the classes, which gives students another layer of agency through access.

As dual enrollment courses are steadily making their way into the high school setting, it is important to remember that “to critique dual enrollment is to be against students’ opportunity to go to college, to gain the confidence that they are capable of college-level work, to be adequately challenged in school, to go to college for a lower cost and thus take on less student debt” (Ratliff, 2019, 292). It is imperative for all students, and especially for students who come from more urban settings as those who will benefit from the creation of this specific composition course.

Social Justice and Identity

Two of the major influences in this curriculum design will be through overarching assignment themes of social justice and identity. Personally knowing the school context and student population, these are students who are directly impacted by many social justice issues as BIPOC students. Using topics that personally impact students will allow “metacognition allows students to be introspective and self-reflective about the new skills and knowledges they are acquiring in the classroom while, at the same time, cultivating critical capacities to read and intervene into social justices” (McCoy, 2020, 29-30). When students are personally connected to topics, the learning process becomes much easier. Through a social justice approach, these students are able to use real-world issues pressing their communities to learn and deepen their writing skills all while learning about their own identity and personal beliefs. Additionally, “racial literacy has been offered as an equitable, critical pedagogy with which to introduce FYC

students to academic literacies and prepare students to interrogate sociocultural ideologies and their own positionalities as members of a hierarchical society” (Grayson, 2021, 260).

Another important aspect of designing a curriculum for a brand new course is to remember who it is being designed for and what those students should be able to get out of it. “Discovery is thus different from mere application or reproduction, because it requires responsive, embodied investment in tensions and conflicts that ultimately define the boundaries of disciplinary practices” (Heard, 2014, 321). To foster student learning and get them invested in their learning, students need to work through topics that are not just replication or application of skills, but allow for discovery of themselves through topics they care about to learn about writing. Bringing in social issues that students are facing is one way to add a layer of inclusion for students. Instead of glossing over these differences and injustices students face, they can be embraced and used as a learning tool to show how all cultures and people are accepted.

Chapter 3: Curricular Artifacts

The syllabus and final assignment included in this chapter is representative of the pedagogical and design choices made. While HACC requires the use of a textbook from their approved list of acceptable textbooks, students will have supplemental OER materials to fill out their course readings. The textbook, *Everything You Need to Know About College Writing* by Lynne Lerych and Allison DeBower Criswell, was chosen because the book contains solid information in academic language on the desired topics listed, but in a way that is not visually intimidating to students. This textbook will be provided to students by the school district as a classroom copy book; students may use it for the course but the books are ultimately school property. OER and other digital materials will be delivered through Google Classroom, the district's chosen LMS. HACC uses D2L but does not require CHS courses to be administered through it. While HACC requires that a textbook from their approved list is used within the course, I chose to supplement with OER materials because no textbook is a perfect fit. While the chosen textbook does a good job at addressing topics and key terms, I still want students to be exposed to different perspectives and readings of similar topics so they can build connections and synthesize knowledge. OER is also great to use because of cost and accessibility reasons as this course is being taught in a high school and being paid for by the school district; there is absolutely no cost to eligible students who choose to take this course. As one of the goals in offering this course is to help the transition between high school and college, this textbook offers both the academic language and a presentation that feels more inviting visually. The syllabus/course is structured in a way to start with foundational skills and terminology that builds and applies these skills throughout the course. The course will ultimately culminate in portfolio work that will allow students time to revisit and have the chance to rework their writing pieces.

“The portfolio offers a tool of authentic assessment as well as an opportunity for students to be reflective practitioners. Portfolio implementation and evaluation has become a feature of many university departments” (Lombardi, 2008, 7). This will provide students the opportunity to apply new learning to previous writing assignments, see their personal growth, and have space to reflect on their own growth as a writer. The final portfolio assignment will also include a reflection piece, as reflection allows for deepening understanding, building knowledge, and learning from personal mistakes.

The research essay assignment is included to show the building of skills and assignments throughout the course. In this final essay assignment for Composition I, students are able to choose their own topic of interest based, ideally, on a social justice issue. Students will first explore this topic through their annotated bibliography assignment due prior to starting the research essay. For the research essay, students will practice, strengthen, and apply their skills from the beginning of the course as well as build off of a previously completed assignment. Through this research assignment, students will work on part of the WPA Outcomes, such as “use composing and reading for inquiry, learning, critical thinking, and communicating in various rhetorical contexts” and “use strategies--such as interpretation, synthesis, response, critique, and design/redesign--to compose texts that integrate the writer's ideas with those from appropriate sources” (2019). This research essay will not only expose them to a new genre and rhetorical situation of writing, but will also force them to even deeper evaluate sources pulled for their annotated bibliography, digging deeper into the quality and type of research that either is or is not appropriate for building their new literacy skills. Researching and writing about their research is without question one of the skills that will be used in the actual college setting, so building up to this point throughout the semester will show students how far they have come.

Choices that were made in the curricular artifact, CHS Composition I syllabus, were based on the big topics that students need to understand or be exposed to in order to be successful entering the college academic world. The decisions of what emerging high school to college student writers need to be exposed to is influenced by Adler-Kassner's discussion on the threshold concepts, Bartholomae's ideas of students inventing their contexts, Warner's killing the five paragraph essay and rule breaking, the WPA Outcomes, and more. All of these serve as foundational stepping stones for students to learn about writing and then developing their process as their own. The first portion of the course was designed around building background on chosen syllabus topics before having students apply these topics to their own writing. Students will also create their own chapter/reading notes to not only prove their reading but show understanding, which will also allow for seeing instances of struggle and an area for feedback. Students will then apply their learning to different types of writing/essays while still reading and working through readings specific to those formats. At the end of the class, students will have built in time for portfolio work where they will be able to revisit and reflect on their writing throughout the semester to see their areas of personal growth and where improvements can still be made.

Syllabus



Harrisburg Area Community College ENGL 101 Syllabus

Instructor: Megan Tyson

Campus: York

Location: William Penn Senior High School

Office Hours: M - F 2:09 - 3:00 PM or by appointment

Classroom #: E105

Email Address: tysonmeg@ycc.k12.pa.us

Phone: (717) 849-1218 x 1166

Class Meeting Times: M - F 8:00 -

9:20/80 minute block schedule

(Delays/inclement weather schedule posted via Google Classroom & District communication)

Course Name: English Composition I

Course Reference Number: 231301

Term & Year: Fall 2024

Credit Hours: 3.0

Required Textbook(s):

Lerych, Lynne, and Allison DeBoer Criswell. *Everything You Need to Know About College Writing*. 1st ed., Bedford/St. Martin's, 2015.

Chapters from:

[Driscoll, D., Heise, M., Stewart, M., & Vetter, M. \(Eds.\). \(2021\). *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing, Volume 4*. Parlor Press.](#)

[Driscoll, D., Stewart, M., & Vetter, M. \(Eds.\). \(2020\). *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing, Volume 3*. Parlor Press.](#)

[Zemliansky, P., & Lowe, C. \(Eds.\). \(2010\). *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing, Volume 1*. WAC Clearinghouse.](#)

[Zemliansky, P., & Lowe, C. \(Eds.\). \(2011\). *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing, Volume 2*. WAC Clearinghouse.](#)

Additional supplemental readings provided by instructor when necessary

Catalog Description

Emphasizes the composition of organized, clear, coherent, and well-supported essays, which features standard English conventions, effective style, and the appropriate use of research strategies and sources. Students develop the critical reading and thinking skills necessary to produce effective college-level writing that communicates to a particular audience, fulfills a specified purpose, and conforms to a given genre.

Prerequisite: Placement through the College Testing and Placement Program or completion of ENGL 007, 051 or 057, or ESL 070 with a grade of C or higher; ENGL 003 is a pre- or co-requisite.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Compose essays suitable to various audiences and purposes using a systematic writing process
- Organize essays with well-supported, unified and coherent paragraphs

- Use language and mechanics for various writing situations or a given audience and purpose
- Explain the role of academic conventions and the value of various discourse communities
- Identify sources appropriate to a given assignment
- Read critically to understand, analyze and evaluate the ideas of others
- Synthesize and cite the ideas of others using the most current version of an established professional citation style

COURSE INFORMATION

Instructional Methods and Rationale

“HACC’s College in the High School (CHS) Program allows high school students to earn college credit for HACC courses that are taught by their high school instructors at their high school during the school day” (HACC). While this course does replace your English 12 credit, one of the goals is to mirror the pace, workload, and rigor of a college level course. Successful completion of this course earns students a HACC transcript and 3 college credits. These credits can transfer to additional colleges or universities upon your enrollment. Even though this class is taught at William Penn, academic and instructional choices will be made that mirror those of college professors.

Essays

Font for all assignments needs to be accessible and consistent: Calibri (11 pt), Arial (11 pt), Lucida Sans (10 pt), Times New Roman (12 pt), Georgia (11 pt), 1 inch margins all around, double spacing.

- Narrative Essay: 2 - 4 pages
- Reflective Essay: 2 - 4 pages
- Research essay: 5 - 7 pages

Annotated Bibliography

- 8 - 10 sources
- Sources from the last 5 years

Final Portfolio Project

- Resubmission of revised drafts of all previous essays
- Reflection essay on personal revision process and learning

Chapter Notes and Journals

- The goals of Chapter Notes are to respond assigned readings, ask questions, show learning
- The goals of Journals are to reflect on their learning weekly, ask questions

Course Sequence and Assignments

In the event of school activities and/or schedule changes, assignments dates are subject to change by the instructor.

Week	Topic Overview	Assignment
1	Rhetorical Situation and Moves	Introduction to the course, syllabus, class introductions Chapter 1 - The Writing Process is a Journey <i>and</i> a Destination What is Academic Writing by L. Lennie Irvin

		Reading HW, chapter notes, journal
2		Chapter 2 - The Writing Situation: Context is Everything Exigency: What Makes My Message Indispensable to My Reader by Quentin Vieregge Reading HW, chapter notes, journal
3	Reading Academic Writing	Chapter 3 - Reading and Writing: Two Sides of the Same Coin How to Read Like a Writer by Mike Bunn Student choice academic article for reading like a writer Reading HW, chapter notes, journal
4	Synthesis and Knowledge Transfer	Chapter 10 - Analytical Paragraphs: A College Student's Best Friend The Importance of Transfer in Your First Year Writing Course by Kara Taczak Reading HW, chapter notes, journal
5	Drafting and Peer Review	Chapter 8 - Draft and Draft Again: Give Your Ideas Room to Breathe Chapter 12 - Levels of Revision: One Step at a Time Reading HW, chapter notes, journal
6	Narrative Essay Writing	Narrative Essay draft due I Need You to Say "I": Why First Person is Important in College Writing by Kate McKinney Maddalena Weaving Personal Experience into Academic Writing by Marjorie Stewart Reading HW, chapter notes, journal
7		Narrative Essay peer review Narrative Essay due Storytelling, Narration, and the "Who I Am" Story by Catherine Ramsdell Reading HW, chapter notes, journal
8	Reflection Essay Writing	Reflection Essay draft due Reflective Writing and the Revision Process: What Were You Thinking? by Sandra Giles Reading HW, chapter notes, journal
9		Reflection Essay peer review Reflection Essay due What's That Supposed to Mean? Using Feedback on Your Writing by Jillian Grauman Reading HW, chapter notes, journal
10	Annotated Bibliography	Annotated bibliography draft Peer review Chapter 21 - Choosing and Using Sources: Do It Wisely Effectively and Efficiently Reading the Credibility of Online Sources by Ellen Carillo and Alice Horning Reading HW, chapter notes, journal

11		Annotated bibliography due Creating, Using and Sharing Information in Research Communities by Cassie Hemstrom and Kathy Anders Reading HW, chapter notes, journal
12	Research Essay Writing	Research Essay draft due Peer review Annoying Ways People Use Sources by Kyle D. Stedman Reading HW, chapter notes, journal
13		Research Essay due
14	Portfolio Work	Portfolio work
15		Portfolio due Finals

Final Essay Assignment & Rubric

Research Essay Assignment Sheet

Assignment Background & Objectives

For this assignment, you are going to write a research paper on a social justice issue that you have faced personally, your community faces, or how your future career will impact social justice issues. You may choose to use the topic from your Annotated Bibliography or a completely new topic. As writing is a knowledge making process, this assignment should create new learning for you. This assignment is also meant to revisit and practice skills learned in weeks 1 - 5 of the course.

Assignment Requirements & Tips for Success

- 5 - 7 full pages
- Double spaced, font choice from options in syllabus, 1" margins
- The choice of APA or MLA is yours (Which would your career/profession value? Be consistent with whichever you decide) and References/Works Cited should come after the last typed page
- Consider your audience, purpose, and position on this topic as it relates to you/the topic

Assignment Evaluation Criteria

- Follow the assignment length and requirements listed above
- Valuable, credible sources
- Integration of direct quotes and paraphrasing

Research Essay Rubric

	Exceeds Expectations 4	Meets Expectations 3	Approaches Expectations 2	Not Meeting Expectations 1	Not Present 0
Spelling & Grammar	No spelling and/or grammar mistakes	Minimal spelling and/or grammar mistakes - doesn't distract from overall essay	Minimal spelling and/or grammar mistakes - distracts from overall essay	Noticeable spelling and/or grammar mistakes	Unacceptable spelling and/or grammar mistakes
References or Works Cited Page	Proper formatting on References or Works Cited page	Minor formatting errors on References or Works Cited page	Formatting issues References or Works Cited page	Major formatting issues References or Works Cited page	No References or Works Cited page
Citations	Citations are accurate and consistent to chosen format	Citations are mostly accurate and consistent to chosen format	Citations are somewhat inconsistent and consistent to chosen format	Citations are inaccurate and inconsistent to chosen format	Citations are missing
	8	6	4	2	0
Organization	Logical and effective organization with clear transitions between ideas	General organized structure with some transitions present between ideas	Unclear or confusing organization with weak or missing transitions between ideas	Lacking clear organization with transitions absent from essay	Poor or no organization to essay
Focus/ Thesis	Essay is clear, focused, and arguable; consistently addresses thesis	Essay is generally clear and focused; mostly addresses thesis	Essay is unclear or underdeveloped; essay strays from thesis	Essay lacks focus; thesis is unclear or missing	No thesis or focus
Analysis & Argument	Strong logical reasoning; analysis goes beyond summarizing sources	Mostly sound reasoning; some analysis beyond summarizing sources	Weak or flawed reasoning; analysis mainly summarizes sources	Unclear or unsupported reasoning; lacking analysis	No reasoning or analysis of sources
Research & Evidence	Uses a variety of credible and relevant sources; well integrated and effective in supporting thesis	Uses a mix of credible and relevant sources; most evidence supports the thesis	Uses some relevant sources; lacking credibility or successful integration	Uses few or irrelevant sources; research does not support thesis	No credible or relevant sources; no research integration
Style	Writing style and voice matches in-class writing style and voice		Writing style and voice mostly matches in-class writing style and voice		Writing style and voice does not match in-class writing style and voice
TOTAL	____/52				

Chapter 4: Reflection

Influence of Design

The design and creation of this syllabus and course have been influenced by a lot of research and self-reflection on what and how students who are preparing for college should know regarding writing so they are set up for success. The 8 habits of mind are crucial skills, learned through writing, that students can carry with them academically. “Students who come to college writing with these habits of mind and these experiences will be well positioned to meet the writing challenges in the full spectrum of academic courses and later in their careers” (Council of Writing Program Administrators et al., 2011, 2). Much of this reflection comes from the writing courses I have taken throughout the M.A. program and everything learned about writing. Every student who wants to attend college should be able to, and have the tools to set them up for success, regardless of where their parents can afford to live. This specific high school student population sometimes sees college as a big, unattainable task. One of the main goals of this course is to help squash that belief to better prepare students for the next steps in their academic careers.

Within the syllabus itself, theoretical influence shows up in the big concept ideas of each specific week. While it may not be obvious directly in the syllabus, these influences will show up in the lived curriculum students experience in the classroom. This syllabus was designed to front-load students with new academic vocabulary and break any bad habits in regard to writing that may have already been formed. Weeks 1 and 2 of the course are focused on Rhetorical Situation and Moves. Here, the influence for this comes from the threshold concepts, specifically Concept 1: Writing Is a Social and Rhetorical Activity, and John Warner’s *Why They Can’t Write*. Concept 1 helps to understand why writing is hard and all of the deeper choices that need to be

made than what can be seen on the surface, while Warner focuses on breaking what students have been previously taught. These weeks are meant to introduce students to what writing actually involves, myths about why they “can’t” write, and how to combat what students already know about writing. Week 3 is focused on Reading Academic Writing and influenced by the WPA Outcomes focus on critical thinking, reading, and composing. This makes sure that students are exposed to reading diverse texts for meaning. Week 4 is focused on Synthesis and Knowledge Transfer and was also influenced by the WPA Outcomes as this statement focuses on what students should be able to do at the end of their composition course. The skills learned in a composition course should be able to transfer throughout academic areas because students should become better critical thinkers and readers on top of improving their writing skills. Week 5 is focused on Drafting and Peer Review, which was influenced by the threshold concepts, specifically Concept 4: All Writers Have More to Learn. Writing is something that needs practice, and therefore something that all writers have more to learn about. Within Concept 4, there is a focus on failure and revision in writing, which can be explored through drafting and peer review. After week 5 of the course, students will continue to work with these skills through applying those skills to different genres of writing.

Bridging the Educational Gap

As Grayson pointed out in her 2020 article, high school and college does not have to be a completely separate educational system from the K-12 model students have grown up in. Through the implementation of this course, it will allow students to hopefully bridge the gap between high school and college, which can make that official transition easier for students. The mention of college can be scary to students because it is something they have never experienced and are not always sure what to expect, especially if they are going to be first generation college

students. However, by successfully taking and passing this CHS course, students will have already experienced a college-level course and learned more about writing, as one of the chief complaints is that when students enter college is they cannot write. It is not that students cannot write, it is that they are not prepared to write at the collegiate level or within specific discipline areas. For students taking this course, they will have that exposure and know how to better handle writing across content, knowing the choices they can make, and how they should approach different genres of writing.

Adler-Kassner's discussion of threshold concepts are a huge influence of this course because knowing the choices being made in specific situations makes all the difference in being able to write for the necessary purposes. Understanding these concepts will allow students to better understand their content and help in their learning process. As college students are learning information that is relevant to their future career or profession, the better they are able to learn and retain that information, which better prepares them to enter their chosen career field once graduating college. While still in the high school setting, students can still use what they have learned about writing to help them across their other classes.

Student Population

Knowing the student population is another influence on this course as knowing the population allows for the course to be designed specifically for this group of students. These are students who are looked at like they are not able to perform well academically by society standards solely because of where they attend high school. The students know the stereotypes placed upon them and, more times than not, want to break them. But, by knowing the actual population of the school and the curriculum their English teachers should be following, it gives an advantage of knowing what is or is not being taught in terms of writing, which unfortunately,

most high school English classes are structured to be more literature based than writing focused. As the students taking this course will be in their senior year of high school, their first three years of high school English have informed choices made specifically for this course and this set of students. Additionally, within the LMS, student past academic performance can be seen as well, showing how they have performed throughout their high school years. This composition course can be tailored to educational wants and needs with direct contact with their English teacher from the previous year(s). Another benefit of knowing the student population is knowing their preferred learning style, which is usually hands-on and they prefer paper over working fully in a digital space.

Another part of wanting to offer this course to students is based on building their confidence and get a head start on their college credits, all of this at no cost to the student. Again, the idea of college can be intimidating to this population of students being first generation high school graduates. Through offering this course in the physical high school building, students are able to experience college, in the comfort of their own high school, before fully committing to a full college academic workload. Students in this case have another benefit as they are able to take as many of the CHS courses the high school can offer at no cost to them at all. This is able to happen in our district because of Title I funding, which “is a 100% Federally funded supplemental education program that provides financial assistance to local educational agencies to improve educational opportunities for educationally deprived children” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2024). Because these students are not always able to take advantage of dual enrollment through traditional means, Title I is able to provide the funding to allow students to dual enroll without the financial burden.

Self-Reflection through Social Justice

Being seniors in high school, students are starting to figure out who they are and what they want to be in the world. They are deciding on whether or not to go to college, immediately start working, join the military, learn a trade, or any of the other unlimited options available to them. During their last academic year of K-12 education, students will have a lot of choices in figuring out who they are and what they want their future to look like. Their lives until this point have had heavy influence from their families, friends, teachers, coaches, school community, and more, both positively and negatively. But the questions remain; who are they and what do they actually want out of life? Through a social justice approach, students will be able to learn about themselves and what they truly care about. The assignments outlined in the syllabus are going to take on themes of social justice issues they have faced personally, issues they have seen first-hand in their community, future career choices, or how they could impact their local community's social justice issues through their future career.

However, as they are still seniors in high school, this CHS Composition course will be scaffolded in a way that still makes sense to who they are actively as students. At this point in their academic careers, students are still figuring out the transition between high school and college. This could be a student's first attempt at a college-level course. As these students have most likely never taken a class focused solely on writing, the overall design of the course is meant to build knowledge about writing upfront before students dive into fully exploring their skills and processes as a writer. Reading notes will have generalized guided questions so they are able to help structure their own notes on reading a reading chapter by getting what the text says as well as making their own meaning and connections from the text. Assignment sheets from the various essay assignments will have criteria outlined with the addition of guiding questions for

students to use as a way to structure their own writing without obviously giving them the answer. This will get them to build connections between reading assignments and actual practice of skills. Essay assignments are worked into weeks where students have read about or worked with a skill so they are able to apply that new learning to their writing. Giving students a chance at the end of the course to revisit their own work and see their growth through reflection will show students their own improvement and how they have grown as a writer.

Goals, Hopes, & Expectations

While I think this is going to give students great exposure to college writing expectations, with my ultimate hope of this course helping students bridge the gap between high school and college easier, I think students will struggle with this class. But I want that struggle to be a productive struggle in that I hope they struggle through learning to write so they can ultimately write to learn moving forward in their academic careers. Unfortunately, as discussed before, the English curriculum as it was just rewritten is still very much literature focused, mostly due to the district's want and need for proficiency on the Literature Keystone. Each unit within each grade's curriculum ends with a writing piece, but the overall focus on the unit comes back to the literature. That being said, there is a great lack of explicit writing instruction within these units, so there is without doubt going to be academic struggle once students realize this is a writing class and not the 12th grade version of the English class to which they have become accustomed.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

All students, regardless of physical or economic barriers, should have access to the same opportunities. Creating an English Composition I course within the high school setting will help set students up for success in their academic futures. This class will make it easier for students to bridge the gap between high school and college by working with and practicing the skills they will need through best practices, current research, and the act of writing to learn. Regardless if a student chooses to further their education after high school, this composition course will improve overall writing skills and effective communication moving forward.

As I move into my first semester teaching this course, I expect to collect data and observations on the curricular structure and how it supports students successfully completing the writing assignments. I expect to revisit the curricular structure and readings before I teach the course a second time to ensure the readings meet student learning needs. Mostly, I look forward to working with students in a college level course, excited for the challenge of supporting developmental growth and writing practices growth that will serve student needs as they transition to graduation, then college.

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