

For-Profit Colleges as Literacy Sponsors: A Turn to Students' Voices

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband Scott Krywko, and to my parents, Tom and Diane Tucker.

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ABSTRACT

For-profit colleges and universities (FPCUs)¹ have become increasingly popular in the United States recently, with first-time undergraduate student enrollment at these institutions more than tripling from 1990 to 2009 (Deming, Goldin, & Katz, 2012). Higher education researcher Kinser (2006) asserts that the rapid growth specifically in publicly traded corporate universities constitutes a new “Wall Street” era in for-profit education. Although a growing number of college students enroll in first-year writing courses at FPCUs, only two previous studies from the field of composition examine writing instruction within a for-profit model (Uluave, 2007; Hermansen, 2016). Existing news reports and research often present FPCUs as either institutions that prey upon low-income students (US Senate, Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, 2012; Field, 2011), or alternatively as potentially revolutionary reformations of non-profit institutions (Schilling, 2014; Gumpert, 2000). Research from the field of higher education and government organizations has often focused on student outcomes like graduation rates, alumni employment and salary (Deming, Goldin, & Katz, 2013; US Senate, Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, 2012) as well as for-profit marketing tactics (Iloh, 2014) and the political and economic circumstances that created space in higher education for FPCUs (McMillan Cottom, 2017).

In this dissertation study, I offer an alternative perspective of FPCUs centered on student learning about writing—after all FPCUs are still institutions of higher learning. I ask the question: what kind of literacy sponsorship do FPCUs provide student writers? I use literacy theorist Brandt’s definition of literacy sponsors as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy-and gain advantage by it in some way” (p. 166) to analyze large publicly traded for-profit colleges’ writing courses and students’ reports of their literacy practices in these courses. I combine students’ reports with recent news media descriptions of literacy at FPCUs to provide a

¹ Within this dissertation, I shift between calling these institutions for-profit colleges, and FPCUs.

fuller view of literacy sponsorship at these unique universities. This mixed methods study then incorporates 1) qualitative data from three sets of interviews conducted over a nine month time period with 14 currently enrolled adult female students at two of the largest publicly traded for-profit universities in the US recently enrolled in writing course as well as 2) corpus linguistic analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA) of a self-created corpus of 99 news articles about student writers and literacy at FPCUs published in the US between 1994 and 2016. At the same time, I maintain within the purview of this study the privatized context of FPCUs—as unique for-profit, corporate higher education institutions that must meet shareholder’s needs, but also open access institutions that have expanded the possibility of attending college to a more diverse student body.

I find that although news media reports describe students as ignorant, illiterate victims of aggressive corrupt recruiting tactics at FPCUs or even criminals complicit in federal financial aid fraud, my participants’ reports contradict these findings; by contrast, even before attending a for-profit college they had extensive experience with a variety of literacy practices, and many are enthusiastic about writing. Nevertheless, I also find that large publicly traded for-profit colleges provide a narrow model of literacy in writing courses focused on conventions and disciplining students’ grammatical or citation errors. Even further, writing is often an asocial activity for students at FPCUs, particularly within online writing courses, which means students do not gain a sense of writing as a rhetorical, social activity or understand audience awareness, and literacy activities are generally completed by students “on their own.” Perhaps most disturbingly, I conclude that this privatized literacy sponsorship model shifts both the risks of high college costs and the responsibility for benefiting from writing courses or literacy activities onto students themselves—resulting in a system where the few rare well-prepared, focused students flourish, but the majority flounder.

Chapter I: Students as Potential Learners in Writing Classrooms at For-Profit Colleges and Universities

This dissertation was inspired by a question that came to me long before I even entered graduate school. Before becoming a Ph.D. student, I worked for two years in administration and as an adjunct writing instructor for two-year Stanley College² in Philadelphia. Stanley College is not-for-profit, but at the time was beginning to adopt some of the practices of institutions known as for-profit colleges. I began to draw connections between my distress at what I was seeing happening in the classroom while I was teaching, complaints from my fellow colleagues about new college policies, students' expectations, and the management model of Stanley College. I found myself living somewhat of a “double life” at Stanley. I identified primarily as a teacher and educator—my sympathies usually lay with faculty when it came to policies and funding. However, as a Project Manager and Executive Assistant I was part of the dreaded “administration,” and I routinely sat in on budget cut meetings that threatened my own sense of what higher education was about (or at least what I as an idealistic young employee thought it was about—student learning!). I listened to full-time faculty stacked with teaching seven courses per semester complain with good reason about sacrificing teaching quality while the admissions and financial aid offices grew in full-time staff numbers. This experience led me to the question that has driven the following project: how does a for-profit college model impact the ways that students engage with and learn about writing in college? In short, what kind of sponsors of literacy are FPCUs?

The Rise of FPCUs

Within the past 20 years, a variety of changes have altered the traditional structure of the modern American institution of higher education as enrollment at for-profit colleges has exploded. Nonetheless, for-profit colleges are by no means new in the US; throughout the twentieth century small vocational and correspondence schools flourished, offering certificates

² Stanley College is a pseudonym used to protect anonymity.

or practical career-focused alternative degrees to the 4-year liberal arts degree (Kinser, 2006). Oftentimes, these institutions served diverse student populations who were not welcome at elite 4-year colleges.

But for-profit institutions like The University of Phoenix, DeVry University and Kaplan University are much larger than the smaller for-profit proprietary or trade schools that came before them. Unlike some high-profile for-profits like the now closed Trump University, the colleges above are also regionally accredited and offer formal degrees to their students. In 1996, the University of Phoenix was the first for-profit college to become publicly traded on the US stock market. By 2009 at least 76 percent of students attending for-profit colleges were enrolled in a college owned by either a company large enough to be traded on a major stock exchange or a college owned by a private equity firm (US Senate, Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, 2012).³ Furthermore, these institutions began enrolling a much larger overall share of first-time undergraduate students within the past several decades. The number of first-time student enrollees at FPCUs jumped from 2 percent of all undergraduate students in 1990 to 11.8 percent in 2009 (US Senate, Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, 2012). Kinser (2006) asserts that publicly traded corporate universities constitute a new “Wall Street” era in for-profit education. At the same time, FPCUs have also been hard at work defending their share of federal financial aid: FPCUs spent almost 40 million dollars on lobbying efforts between 2007 and 2012 to influence federal regulations; they often defend themselves as providing access to college for first-generation and low-income students (Kingkade, 2012). Thus, the emergence and rapid growth of huge, publicly-traded, university corporations as both educational and politicized institutions is a relatively new phenomenon in the United States.

More broadly, competition from for-profit institutions is changing the “name of the game” as Tierney and Hentschke (2007) have put it—the model of higher education itself is shifting. With growing public indignation over the rising costs of higher education in the US and deep cuts in federal funding to public universities, much of the discourse in the US media has circled around how to measure the value of colleges so that students, now also consumers, may make more informed, more economical choices. Former President Obama’s College Scorecard

³ For-profit colleges are distinct from public universities including 4-year public colleges and community colleges. They are also distinct from not-for-profit private universities such as Harvard and Yale which do not pay taxes. For-profit colleges have corporate tax status, and thus they do pay taxes and are structured like businesses. Publicly traded for-profit colleges have investor shareholders whose financial expectations in terms of profit-generation must be met. This study examines publicly traded for-profit colleges.

website allows prospective student-consumers to compare colleges based on employment outcomes, graduation rates, and financial aid (Zamani-Gallaher, 2015).

Not only are students now frequently identified as consumers of higher education, but the entire project of college has shifted. The commodification of all degrees of higher education in the United States has been examined extensively in higher education scholarship, including among many works Giroux's (2014) *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education*, Labaree's (2007) *Education, Markets and the Public Good: The Selected Works of David. F. Labaree* and Slaughter and Rhoades' (2009) *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy: Markets, State, and Higher Education*. Slaughter and Rhoades outline an ascendant academic capitalist system where even public universities like the University of Michigan and not-for-profit private universities like Harvard and Duke are increasingly intertwined with the private sector. Whereas FPCUs are corporate businesses themselves, not-for-profit universities, too, are acting more like businesses and forming extensive partnerships with corporations. Gumpert (2000) makes the crucial point that the way the American public even thinks about college in the US is transforming: "the dominant legitimating idea of public higher education has changed from higher education as a social institution to higher education as an industry" (p. 67). Consensus exists: the college degree has been commoditized in the US, for better or worse.

Large publicly traded for-profit universities—in their overt and distinct goal of generating profit for investors—may be radical examples of the privatization trends affecting all universities, both nationwide and globally. Writing studies researcher McRuer (2015) defines neoliberalism as "a system that positions the market as the answer to everything" (under par. 5) which shifts the location of previously social programs and not-for-profit public services from the public sector to the private sector. For-profit universities may be neoliberal in that they are touted for providing access to higher education to marginalized students, but they are also a market-based approach to serving these disadvantaged students as private corporations with hefty tuition bills. Considering carefully what this trend towards privatization means on a micro level in for-profit writing classrooms is my aim in this project.

This study examines how and what students learn at FPCUs specifically in the context of writing courses and literacy activities at FPCUs. As a writing teacher myself, this is always where my interests lie. The higher education policy research that does address for-profit universities with its focus on outcomes often implicitly reinforces the view of the degree as a

commodity or credential and the student as customer by suggesting FPCUs could be valuable—only insofar as they provide students with tangible career benefits. Ultimately, this research ignores the fact that FPCUs are—at the end of the day—still institutions of higher learning. This study seeks to answer a question that has been neglected thus far in research: how does this shift in the conception and focus of higher education influence students’ experiences in writing courses and students’ literacy practices. Does FPCUs clear prioritization of profit and focus on serving investor shareholders impact the ways that students engage with and learn about literacy at these institutions? What does being a literacy sponsor⁴ “for-profit” look like? I do not seek to diminish the 2012 US Senate report critiquing admissions practices at FPCUs as predatory and research that has raised serious questions about how FPCUs operate. Nevertheless, in this project I remain open to the possibility that perhaps students do learn and engage with literacy at FPCUs, that perhaps many students even come to FPCUs to learn. I consider what this large corporate for-profit institutional model might mean in terms of individual student writers’ literacy practices.

Writing courses are particularly important to examine because some form of composition or writing is often one of the few courses required by all students across a variety of different institutions of higher education. As scholars in the field of rhetoric and composition have pointed out, these composition courses often serve as “gatekeeper” courses that either keep students out or gain them access to higher education (Powell, 2013), making them a crucial moment to analyze within students’ college careers.

At the same time, the lack of knowledge about instruction and student learning at for-profit colleges has allowed news media to make sensational claims about literacy practices and student writers at FPCUs. In this study, I first interrogate the portrait of student writers and literacy practices at FPCUs painted via news media using corpus linguistics analysis as well as critical discourse analysis (CDA). In the second half of the study I employ qualitative, interview-based methods to balance the portrait of student writers at FPCUs in the media. In short, while news media often describe student writers at FPCUs without talking to them directly, in this project I both conduct an overview of news reporting to assess what has been said about students and literacy at FPCUs, while also nuancing these reports by talking to actual students themselves

⁴ In the following section I delve into what a literacy sponsor is, but for now FPCUs may be called sponsors of literacy because they offer courses in different types of literacy skills.

about their experiences with literacy at FPCUs. I also seek to shift away from the consumer-model like focus thus far in research on student outcomes, to consider what the in-depth processes of engaging with literacy and learning are like for students at FPCUs. My aim is to reconsider college value—within the hotly contested space of for-profit colleges—through careful attention to what students say about their experiences and literacy practices in writing classrooms.

FPCUs are remarkable in that they have undeniably enhanced access to higher education to large numbers of students who have been historically excluded and marginalized in higher education, but they have simultaneously been decried by the US government, research, and media reports for corrupt practices and providing little “value” to their students (now also consumers) (US Senate, Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, 2012). But the question remains, what kinds of educational and literacy learning experiences are students receiving at these universities? Ultimately, this dissertation tries to better understand writing courses and literacy experiences at these unique institutions that serve the most marginalized college students in the US. What kind of literacy sponsors are FPCUs, and what does this mean for students?

My Orientation as Researcher

I am committed in this project to a research methodology focused on building narratives that highlight students’ experiences as “subjugated knowledge” that has been ignored and condemned in the past (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In fact, the assumptions that for-profit universities provide little learning opportunities, or that students only enroll at FPCUs because of aggressive tactics imply that for-profit students are ignorant victims, or even worse, perhaps quasi-criminals committing financial aid fraud. Ultimately, this public discourse suggests that students at for-profit colleges are not really learning anything, maybe never really wanted to learn in the first place. This project questions these assumptions by deconstructing news media that engages in this type of labeling of student writers, and by also talking to students themselves about their learning experiences at FPCUs, and taking their reports of their learning experiences seriously.

More broadly, I seek to find out what engaging with literacy is like at large for-profit colleges, and how students’ experience it. The scope of this study is interdisciplinary, and this project builds from two fields. I both rely on insights on FPCUs revealed through 1) the field of

higher education policy, but maintain the pedagogical focus on writing courses and rhetorical lens of 2) the field of rhetoric and composition or writing studies. I build from Powell's (2013) *Retention & Resistance* which makes the case that researchers in writing studies should pay attention to the discourse around student retention in higher education policy work as we may have alternative types of analysis to offer: "At some point, we simply can't reduce student success and failure, the value of higher education, or the purpose of our courses, to a set of numbers" (p. 10); thus, rhetoric and composition studies offers unique modes for analyzing and understanding higher education outcomes and policies including the methods employed through this project: critical discourse analysis (CDA), corpus linguistics analysis, and coding-based interpretation of qualitative interview data.

Literature Review

As I have suggested above, previous research has largely examined FPCUs from economic, sociological and higher education policy perspectives, and often in quantitative terms. Questions researchers have asked include: how do student completion rates at FPCUs compare to rates at community colleges? Do for-profit alums earn as much as alums at community colleges or public universities? What kind of economic and political phenomenon in the US have influenced the growth of FPCUs? What is advertising like at FPCUs? What factors influence student consumers' decisions to enroll at FPCUs instead of other colleges? This research has produced important knowledge about student outcomes at FPCUs, but it also bypasses what students do in classes at FPCUs and how they engage and learn when it comes to literacy.

In fact, although for-profit colleges and universities or FPCUs have grown in enrollment and power within the broader higher education landscape, by contrast a relatively small body of research within higher education policy has revealed important information about them. In the literature review that follows, I describe what higher education policy research has found out when it comes to FPCUs and why our knowledge of FPCUs is so limited thus far. I describe student demographics at FPCUs, the unique situation of students at FPCUs, and the few studies that delve into teaching and learning at FPCUs. This includes the one existing dissertation that examines writing instruction at FPCUs from the perspective of writing instructors. As is made clear in what follows, research investigating FPCUs is glaringly absent from the field of rhetoric and composition, and thus writing studies research is noticeably missing from the literature I

outline below. However, in each findings chapter that follows, I draw extensively from research in writing studies to analyze the data I have collected about literacy at FPCUs.

Research from Higher Education Policy on Student Outcomes at FPCUs.

The lack of research conducted on FPCUs can, in part, be attributed to their unique financial structure. As I have described, for-profit universities—unlike other private universities (for example, Harvard and Yale in addition to many lesser known private colleges) do not operate as not-for-profit organizations with the same notion of serving the public good. Instead, as corporations, FPCUs view curriculum and instructional methods as patented trade secrets to be strictly guarded. Faculty at FPCUs are often required to sign nondisclosure and noncompetition agreements which do not allow them to participate in external research projects, or to share their institution’s information or curricular materials. This is an important and key difference in the roles of instructors at for-profit universities versus traditional institutions. For example, transparency and open access to curricular materials are at least purported values at most traditional institutions. Tierney and Hentschke’s (2007) landmark work on FPCUs *New Players: Different Game: Understanding the Rise of For-profit Colleges and Universities* highlights the differences between faculty roles at for-profits and traditional institutions. At least in name, traditional universities serve the public good and prioritize academic freedom and learning whereas publicly traded for-profit institutions must serve shareholders and make a profit. Tierney and Hentschke (2007) go on to point out that accrediting bodies may not understand FPCUs’ failure to incorporate faculty governance or shared governance which often plays a role in traditional institutions because “the idea of shared governance in business is a bizarre concept for those who work in companies whose purpose is to turn a profit . . . faculty fit in the governance structure at FPCUs—nowhere” (p. 101).

The corporate structure and commodification of curriculum at FPCUs, while it might prevent other FPCUs or even traditional institutions from copying curriculum or methods, also act as obstacles to conducting academic research at FPCUs. While some not-for-profit schools also copyright their curriculum, it is not a guaranteed aspect of their financial model in the same way as it is for FPCUs. As such, in this dissertation I refer to this copyright as the “black box” system which surrounds curriculum and instruction at FPCUs with mystery. I define a “black box” system as one that is not transparent about its processes and practices. This “black box” for-profit educational system to a certain degree sets apart curriculum and instruction at FPCUs when

compared with traditional institutions. The treatment of curriculum as a commodity and of profit-making as priority creates a unique environment at odds with traditional notions of academic freedom and institutional research and review. Kinser (2006) points out that thus far, little research has been conducted about how FPCUs organize their curriculum, design coursework, or launch or cut degree programs (p. 85). The small amount of existing research on FPCUs reflects the conflict between conducting serious institutional research and the treatment of curriculum and instruction as commodity.

As a result of the “black box” of FPCUs, the higher education policy research focused on FPCUs has used the data available: student outcomes and federal financial aid reporting. This data must be published by all higher education institutions who receive federal financial aid, and is thus accessible to researchers. Since faculty at FPCUs do not conduct research, faculty at FPCUs are not generating published studies about their own institutions or classes. Instead higher education researchers have focused on using accessible information, oftentimes to compare student outcomes at FPCUs with those at traditional institutions such as community colleges (Bailey, Badway, & Gumport, 2003). In part, this research seeks to understand FPCUs, and to fit for-profits into the broader landscape of institutions of higher education. This comparison has been justified as FPCUs and community colleges compete for and enroll students from similar backgrounds and both offer associate degree and certificate programs (Persell & Wenglinsky, 2004). Research suggests that FPCUs are more successful than community colleges when it comes to graduating students and providing high-quality student services, but perhaps inadequately prepare their students for work as for-profit alumni earn less and have less success on the job market than their community college counterparts (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2003; Deming et al., 2013). These contradictory student outcomes call into question what happens in classrooms in the for-profit sector: what I have called the black box of the for-profit classroom. In other words, what kinds of skills are students learning in writing courses that might assist them on the job market? Based on this research, the question arises: what are students’ learning experiences like at FPCUs in the context of writing courses?

FPCUs in the Context of Privatization.

While research comparing student outcomes at FPCUs and community colleges further perpetuates the black box of teaching and learning at FPCUs, likewise another body of research has focused on the political backdrop surrounding FPCUs. Oftentimes, this research highlights

the admissions and marketing practices of FPCUs, but again sidesteps for-profit curriculum and instruction. Again, this may in part be because it is easier for researchers to access advertisements created by FPCUs or online admissions materials than it is to access for-profit curriculum. It also perhaps seems intuitive that the corporate status of FPCUs would affect how these companies recruit students or “sell” college, rather than how they educate students necessarily. In fact, the aggressive admissions and marketing tactics of FPCUs are often seen as unique aspects of their operation in comparison with traditional institutions. The recent U.S. Senate Committee on Education (2012) report on FPCUs criticized the small budgets FPCUs allot to instructional practices as opposed to the larger budgets allotted to marketing. At the same time, it seems students choosing to attend FPCUs are frequently unaware of the financial status of their schools as research has shown that students who attend for-profit colleges often do not understand that they are any different from private or public colleges (Public Agenda, 2014).

Research has also analyzed the rhetorical and political contexts that have produced FPCUs in the United States. Higher education sociologist McMillan Cottom’s landmark book (2017) *Lower Ed: The Troubling Rise of For-Profit Colleges in the New Economy* argues that FPCUs be likened to the televangelists of higher education—using aggressive but often deceptive techniques to lure in students who believe college can change their lives. McMillan Cottom suggests that the push towards college for all as benefiting all students—or what she refers to as “the education gospel” (p. 11)—combined with rising socioeconomic inequality and disappearing social safety nets in the United States—have all contributed to the problematic rise of FPCUs as a growing part of the higher education system in the US. McMillan Cottom’s book is enlightening in addressing the social and economic structures that have led to recent rapid increases in enrollment at FPCUs, but does not delve into the actual academic content of coursework at FPCUs. In fact, instead McMillan Cottom also seems to reinforce the notion of FPCUs as simply offering “risky credentials” (p. 171) rather than existing as “real” institutions of higher learning. Writing studies scholar Hermansen’s dissertation entitled *Selling College: Student Recruitment and Education Reform Rhetoric in the Age of Privatization*, like McMillan Cottom’s work, is less concerned with the content of curriculum at FPCUs, and instead examines discourse on higher education purposes, including promotional materials for FPCUs, the documentary *Waiting for Superman*, the education reform report entitled *A Nation at Risk*, and qualitative interview-based data from students at FPCUs. Hermansen focuses on analyzing the

aggressive recruitment and advertising techniques of FPCUs and then asking participants who either once attended or are currently attending a for-profit college about their decision to enroll. While Hermansen is working within the field of rhetoric and composition, and she does highlight students' experiences at FPCUs, her work sidesteps the question of what and how students learn at FPCUs.

Research on Teaching and Learning at FPCUs.

An even smaller body of scholarship examines teaching and learning (rather than achievement outcomes such as graduation rates and employment rates, political and economic context, and recruitment practices) at FPCUs. Research in higher education only recently has begun to examine how instruction at for-profit institutions differs from instruction at more traditional institutions. More broadly, scholars have commented on the unique roles of for-profit faculty members, who frequently lack the academic freedom of traditional faculty as I have mentioned (Tierney & Hentschke, 2007; Tierney & Lechuga, 2010), and do not have any form of tenure or the power to build and change curriculum as course content is often highly standardized (Breneman, Pusser, & Turner, 2006; Iloh, 2016; Lechuga, 2008). Researchers have noted FPCUs championing of e-learning or shifting to online course offerings (Bell & Federman, 2013) and found for-profits to offer narrow career-focused curriculum in comparison with traditional institutions (Kinser, 2007). Researchers have also interestingly pointed out that the “customer service emphasis in the for-profit sector not only leads to a focus on particular student services, but also a learner-centered pedagogical approach” (Iloh, 2016, p. 431; Berg 2005). A recent ethnographic study examining one mid-sized suburban for-profit college found that many students perceived instruction to be high-quality, except for online courses (Iloh, 2016).

Likewise, the recently published study by Public Agenda (2014) uses focus group interviews and surveys to examine current students, alumni, and employers' views on FPCUs. This study also reveals insight into students' perspectives on their degree programs as many students and alumni reported satisfaction with key quality indicators at FPCUs like class sizes and caring instructors. At the same time, the study found that students and alumni worry about the high cost of their degrees. While this research suggests students are satisfied with their learning in classes at FPCUs, this raises the unique question: would students at FPCUs be entirely aware of, or upset by low-quality instruction or learning experiences? This question also points to possible problems resulting from the configuration of students as customers to be

satisfied. Simply because students perceive instruction at FPCUs to be high-quality, does that mean that it is in fact high-quality?

In fact, much of the critique of for-profits' curriculum and teaching practices does not appear in academic journals. Instead, op-ed pieces in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Field, 2011) and testimony from lawsuits led by disgruntled former instructors and students ("Fear and Frustration," 2011) have revealed information about FPCUs. As such, it must be taken into consideration that these articles and testimonies often very deliberately aim to debunk for-profits. In interviews with *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and in testimony provided as part of lawsuits more than a dozen faculty members from six of the seven largest for-profit university chains reported significant pressure from administrators to lower academic standards and to change failing grades (Field, 2011, p. A1). Another anonymously authored article similarly outlines an environment of distrust where faculty have been forced to lower academic standards to appease administrative enrollment managers ("Fear and Frustration," 2011). This information from news media perhaps contextualizes students' experiences with literacy at FPCUs, and reveals yet another shifting perspective about what literacy sponsorship is like at FPCUs.

Within the field of rhetoric and composition or writing studies itself, only one dissertation study has addressed FPCUs, and it produced mixed results. Uluave (2007) catalogues her own teacher narrative from working as a writing instructor at a for-profit as well as information from anonymous surveys completed by writing teachers at a variety of different FPCUs across the US. Her teacher narrative harshly critiques the standards for writing and the integrity of the single for-profit institution where she worked: "in the end no one with any power at the school valued writing instruction enough to require students to learn to write" (p. 64). However, Uluave's nation-wide survey of writing faculty across different for-profit institutions finds that for-profit writing faculty report that their composition classes at FPCUs are equally or more rigorous than classes they previously taught at traditional institutions.

Uluave's study also importantly considers the for-profit writing classroom as connected to political and economic contexts as she reconsiders her "democratic" role in this new context. Within her teacher narrative, Uluave reflects on her role at the for-profit college where she worked and often felt like a tutor working for a wealthy family. She asserts: "I found myself realizing that carefully distributing authority in a classroom, as I had done in past years, is only possible if one has authority to distribute; my notion of myself as a democratic teacher had to be

reconsidered” (p. 57). Uluave considers her conception of herself as a “democratic teacher” as needing radical adjustment—crucially supporting the conceptualization of writing courses at FPCUs as politicized and fraught with conflict. Uluave elaborates on how writing instructors at the for-profit college where she worked are only allowed to assign a minimal amount of homework and not allowed to “embarrass” students by waking them up if they fall asleep during class.

Most importantly, Uluave’s study suggests the need for further research on writing courses at FPCUs as a unique, under-studied, and complex politicized institutional context. The contrast between the portrait of the desperate writing instructor beholden to student customers’ whims and forced to reject a notion of herself as a “democratic teacher” that Uluave describes in her personal teacher narrative and the portrait painted by the survey she conducted of engaged and active writing instructors at FPCUs demonstrates the need for further research illuminating students’ perspectives on writing classrooms at FPCUs.

Uluave’s (2007) study touches briefly on—but is not focused upon—students’ experiences in the writing classroom. She directly describes students as customers at the anonymous for-profit institution where she worked. She notes many visible signs that students were customers in her classroom, including an institutional mandate for less homework, as well as a physical classroom space that students felt that they “owned” (p. 61). For Uluave, (2007) student “ownership” of the classroom is demonstrated through students eating full meals in class, arriving early and late, and alternately not coming or coming to class even when not officially enrolled to sit and listen to music and surf the web for personal purposes. Uluave (2007) then sees students as customers when they have radical amounts of autonomy—or control over their own behavior—as evidenced through their control over classroom space and activities, especially when students’ desires and interests have nothing to do with academics. However, she in some ways then seems to fall into the all too common trap of blaming students for the low-quality of education at FPCUs.

Research on Students at FPCUs.

As I have pointed out above, narratives describing for-profit college students in news media and research at times position students as clueless victims or as complicit in the corruption at FPCUs. These narratives are particularly problematic given that research has shown that for-profit students compared to community college students are disproportionately single parents, more

likely to have lower incomes, and almost twice as likely to have a GED instead of a high school diploma (Deming et al., 2012, p. 140). Another study revealed that from 2000 to 2008 the percentage of students between the ages of 18 and 26 living below the federal poverty line attending FPCUs increased from 13% to 19% whereas in public 4-year colleges over the same time the percentage of low-income students decreased from 20% to 15% (as cited in Iloh & Tierney, 2014, p. 2). Overall then, FPCUs educate a rapidly growing percentage of marginalized college students, proportionately more than public and private not-for-profit universities.

FPCUs also disproportionately serve students of color compared to traditional institutions. For example, from 2004 to 2010 Black enrollment in for-profit bachelor's programs grew by an enormous 264 percent, compared to only a 24 percent increase in Black enrollment in public institutions' 4-year programs (Wright, 2013). Higher education researcher Iloh (2014) points out that FPCUs maintain 40 percent enrollment of students of color. Iloh and Tierney (2014) go so far as to conclude that FPCUs are changing the choice patterns of selecting colleges for Black students through deliberately targeting marketing towards Black students. FPCUs then serve and disproportionately influence low-income students, first-generation students, and students of color.

The frequently quantitative higher education research drawing conclusions about student outcomes along with news media and research that often implicitly, if not deliberately, depict already marginalized for-profit students in a negative light without speaking to students directly demonstrates the need for this qualitative, interview-based research project.

By contrast, this study highlights students' narratives of their own experiences in the context of the writing classroom, while simultaneously contextualizing those learning experiences through analyzing news media representations of student writers and providing thorough descriptions of the institutional and politicized context of FPCUs. My study is unique in its specific focus on the model of literacy sponsorship at FPCUs which I investigate through students' reports in interviews about their engagement with writing and reading, course documents submitted to me by student participants from writing courses and samples of writing, and news media reports about student writers at FPCUs. Previous research then also opens space for my own study which provides a needed focus on students themselves rather than on writing faculty members' unique roles at for-profit institutions (Uluave, 2007). My study also attempts to break open the "black box" of writing classrooms at FPCUs I have described by shedding light on the understudied and legally restricted educational spaces of writing classrooms at FPCUs.

Theoretical Framework

Here, I elaborate on the ways I conceptualize this project, including the three foundational frameworks this study builds from: 1) my own concept of the “expansive” college writing classroom 2) the context of privatization in higher education and 3) literacy sponsorship. I view writing classes at FPCUs as not simply apolitically teaching students’ writing, but embedded within what I describe as the context of higher education privatization. I refer to this as an “expansive view” of writing classes. I hope to provide this “expansive view” of the writing classes across FPCUs within my study. This viewpoint does not begin and stop with the boundaries of the class and with students only as they exist inside the classroom. Instead, this framework suggests that such limited perspectives inaccurately portray students’ experiences in writing classes at FPCUs.

More specifically in this project, the economic trend that I am concerned with in analyzing writing courses is privatization in higher education. This trend in the US positions the private sector as the solution to social problems, and seeks to privatize previously public programs and institutions. Large publicly traded FPCUs are corporate, privatized institutions of higher education that at the same time open access to college to marginalized students.

In drawing this connection between perhaps seemingly distinct economic trends and for-profit writing classrooms, I refer to for-profit colleges using Brandt’s (1998) landmark concept of literacy sponsorship. Brandt defines literacy sponsors as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, *as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy*⁵ and gain advantage by it in some way” (p. 166), thus adding nuance to traditional notions of literacy as always improving people’s lives and occurring only within traditional classroom settings. Brandt used the term literacy sponsors in her book *Literacy in American Lives* to talk about how her interviews conducted with Americans from different generations about their literacy practices reflected the influence of larger shifting economic systems during the same time period and a variety of literacy sponsors—some labeled by individuals and some identified by Brandt herself. Brandt lends me a way to talk about the relationship between individuals’ literacy practices and broader economic trends.

⁵ Emphasis added.

The “Expansive” Writing Classroom.

This project is distinct in that I do not draw boundaries around student participants’ experiences with literacy in classrooms as the definitive parameters I seek to examine, or in fact around the site of the interview itself. I aim to analyze students’ reports in the context of corporate privatization at FPCUs. This project does not consider student learning as necessarily detached from, for example, for-profit tuition costs. Even further, this study begins by acknowledging that a disproportionate amount of first-generation college students in the US would not be attending FPCUs if not for the economic policies and practices that led to the rapid growth of FPCUs.

My unique view of writing classrooms as connected to larger economic and political trends builds more broadly from educational theorists Williams (1973), Bourdieu and Passeron (1970/1990), and Apple (2004) who have delineated the ways that education is imbricated in the reproduction of inequitable social structures. Bourdieu and Passeron (1970/1990) assert that “all pedagogic action (PA) is, objectively, symbolic violence insofar as it is the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power” (p. 5). While educational institutions are not often thought of as enacting symbolic violence, it is this violence that I am interested in revealing through my study. That is to say—educational systems are often masked as teaching and generally improving students’ lives—when in fact they also impose cultural systems of meaning upon students and maintain powerful systems of social stratification. Apple (2004) also theorizes that educational curriculum, rather than objective content knowledge, often has hidden political and economic repercussions. Apple asserts that a viewpoint that sees education as neutral ignores that “knowledge that now gets into schools is already a choice from a much larger universe of possible social knowledge and principles” (p. 7). Thus, any curriculum inevitably is the product of a series of institutional decisions reinforcing and electing certain values and ideologies and rejecting others. Already in the case of FPCUs, the 2012 US Senate Report has pointed out that the for-profit sector is unique from other sectors of higher education in that it spends more on marketing and recruitment overall than on curriculum and instruction: these curricular choices reflects FPCUs’ values in terms of serving shareholders and growing student enrollment quickly to generate profits. The broad conception of curricular content in both higher education and K-12 as neutral results from the reframing of curriculum development as a technical issue according to Apple: “Political and economic, and even educational, debate among real people in their day-to-day lives is replaced by considerations of efficiency, of technical skills” (Apple, 2004, p. 7). This

seems to describe the black box system I have outlined at FPCUs—where course content is privatized but simultaneously positioned as neutral.

Privatization in Higher Education.

For the purposes of my study, this expansive view of the writing classroom is important because it suggests that rather than neutral providers of learning, educational systems such as writing classrooms in FPCUs operate within complex and powerful political and economic contexts. This project is thus also indebted to writing studies researchers and educational theorists who have already begun to do the crucial work of examining the impact of the move towards privatization on educational structures more broadly, and on college classes in particular. Educational theorists have critiqued the narrowing of the goals of higher education within a neoliberal framework. According to Giroux (2008) “Higher education is increasingly abandoning its role as a democratic public sphere as it aligns itself with corporate power...instead of being a space of critical dialogue, analysis, and interpretation, it is increasingly defined as a space of consumption” (p. 45).

In terms of my thinking about this project, FPCUs’ corporate makeup suggests that they are a market-based solution to providing access to college. But even further, this framework of privatization in the context of FPCUs may subtly reconfigure relationships, values, and curriculum. Educational studies scholar Burch argues that the privatization that is occurring not only in higher education, but also within the K-12 system, requires two crucial areas of analysis: “(Re)definition of practices” as well as the “Recasting of roles, relationships, and interdependencies” (Burch, 2009, p. 121). For example, since FPCUs do not share public institutions’ purported mission of serving the public good, the knowledge which FPCUs pass onto their students may not reflect the goal of promoting democratic citizens. Instead, perhaps FPCUs focus on the narrower goal of providing concrete vocational skills. FPCUs might be concerned with providing students with concrete skills that might allow immediate entry into the workforce. Even further, FPCUs might not be as concerned with curriculum at all in terms of generating democratic citizens or even preparing alumni for jobs. Instead, if their largest priority is generating profit, FPCUs may be concerned with degrees and programs that will be the most appealing to market and sell to students, and the least expensive or most profitable to provide. In this way—FPCUs may provide a unique window into the role of the literacy sponsor whose top priority is financial profits. For example, many FPCUs provide degrees and programs in fields

like film-making, or TV broadcasting that may be sexy for prospective students, but very difficult fields to find jobs in upon graduation. In this way, shifts at FPCUs may be altering practices in higher education, as well as the relationship between the university and the student or the literacy sponsor and the literacy “initiate” or learner.

Within composition studies research more recently a small group of scholars have begun to examine the effects of privatization in higher education on postsecondary writing instruction specifically. Writing studies researcher Scott (2009) in *Dangerous Writing* includes “the university as a part of the fast-capitalist economy” (p. 18) and Welch (2008) describes “neoliberalism’s agenda” in the university setting which according to her involves “privatization, cost shifting, and austerity” (p. 1). Thus, there is acknowledgement among writing studies scholars that the economic shifts that privatize and sell off once public resources and turn to the free market as a catchall solution for social problems have begun to seriously affect not only the structures of our universities, but what happens in writing classrooms. Researchers have extensively critiqued the ways that this shift plays out in terms of the material conditions of teaching writing—writing program administrators train and oversee vast numbers of adjuncts, lecturers and graduate student instructors teaching writing who are often overworked, underpaid, and lack job security (Harris, 2004; Kahn, 2013; Lamos, 2013; Mountford, 2002). While I have pointed out that students at FPCUs are marginalized before attending college, writing instructors themselves in certain ways occupy a marginalized space in the university in terms of their work conditions and their precarious roles at FPCUs. Privatization then reconfigures the roles of writing instructors, and in the specific case of FPCUs as I have already mentioned this plays out in that most instructors at FPCUs are adjuncts, and adjuncts may play a role more like learning coaches or course deliverers who have very little power to change or control the curriculum.

This shift towards privatization at the university level not only repositions instructors, but also repositions students as customers or consumers: educational researchers have also considered what it means for students to be consumers as well as learners at college. For one, researchers have considered if there is a conflict between the role of consumer and student. Harrison and Risler (2015) suggest that a focus on student-customers might actually enhance learning: “in contrast to older faculty-centric models, colleges and universities must treat students seriously as stakeholders in systems where they have to compete for their business. If harnessed positively, this competition has the potential to improve student learning” through refocusing faculty on the teaching and

learning process rather than on research (p. 69). The shift to a student-consumer might provide a needed student-centered focus at universities that have recently suffered from mission drift. At the same time, another recent study found that college students who viewed themselves as consumers tended to receive poorer grades, as “higher consumer orientation was associated with lower academic performance” (Bunce, Baird, & Jones, 2016). Perhaps then, when students take on this view of education, their own roles are reconfigured and rather than seeing learning as a challenge or a source of personal enrichment that may be achieved through overcoming obstacles, student-consumers may struggle academically because they expect to be served, and to be satisfied by college. Composition studies researcher Fox (2014) describes using the student as consumer metaphor to open up discussion with her first-year writing students, and asking them to push the analogy so that they realize, “If in education, as in business, we get what we pay for, and the real currency with which students acquire knowledge and/or professional skill is their time and attention to the task of learning, not their money, then what students get from the class and from the instructor should match what they’ve paid for that educational experience.” But as she herself acknowledges “Unfortunately, some students just want a bargain; they spend a little to get a little.” The notion of the student as consumer and the degree as a product starts to break down when the, often intangible, benefits of the degree may come very late to the student: students may not recognize the value of their learning until long after the course or degree has ended, unlike most other consumer products.

Literacy Sponsorship.

Brandt’s concept of literacy sponsorship already points to the relationship between economic trends, literacy, and inequality. While Brandt has not examined literacy sponsorship in the specific context of higher education privatization, she addresses the ways that literacy sponsorship is intertwined with inequitable social structures. Arguing that social and economic forces may exploit or develop relevant literacy practices for gain, Brandt (2001) addresses the ways that “despite ostensible democracy in educational chances, stratification of opportunity continues to organize access and reward in literacy learning” (p. 24). Brandt then importantly points out the ways that stratification structures individual’s opportunities to engage in literacy practices. Rather than a democratic educational system, Brandt suggests that our current system both allows different groups of people to have access to literacy education in different ways, and rewards different groups for literacy learning in different ways. For Brandt, this ultimately means

that systems of literacy learning also have dire economic consequences for the individuals who navigate them, and these systems may reproduce wealth inequality.

The concept of literacy sponsorship also draws attention to the fact that writing courses have economic consequences both for FPCUs as well as for the students enrolled in writing courses at FPCUs. Sponsorship then suggests a dynamic, transformative and economic relationship between individuals engaged in literacy activities, and their sponsors. Brandt's focus on sponsorship is ideological, revealing the ways that individuals engaging in literacy are influenced by sponsors' goals for literacy or the "causes into which people's literacy usually gets recruited" (p. 167). Literacy and composition studies researcher Thomas (2011) makes the important point that "An examination of literacy sponsorship, then, is also an investigation into the power relations that exist between sponsors and literacy's initiates because sponsors determine the parameters by which opportunities for access and literacy achievement (and knowledge, and social power) are provided" (pp. 9-10). By extension then, FPCUs as sponsors have the power to name the tuition price and the type of literacy engagement that "initiates" partake in, and their reputations may positively or negatively impact the social or cultural power students gain from them: FPCUs influence the boundaries of the opportunities that arise for "initiates" as a result of their literacy learning.

Within the context of this study, students of higher education, including those in writing courses, are often, perhaps especially at FPCUs as I have already suggested, positioned as customers or consumers responsible for their choice of university. However, the concept of literacy sponsorship, while it does not remove customer responsibility from students, allows me to draw attention to the responsibilities of FPCUs to their students through writing courses, and to the dynamic and complex nature of the relationship between students enrolled in writing courses and their large, often online, universities. While it might seem like literacy sponsorship refers only to the relationship between students and their writing instructors, since the large publicly traded FPCUs I am investigating offer highly standardized curriculum (Lechuga, 2008) across writing courses, instructors may not play as important roles within this sponsorship model. Brandt's theory of sponsorship is also capacious as sponsors may be "any agents, local or distant" (p. 166), which could include a large post-secondary for-profit institutional brand with many different physical locations and standardized online courses. Through online writing courses and individualized

programs, FPCUs may offer a model of distant literacy sponsorship where students guide their own learning, reducing the importance of traditional writing instructors.

I acknowledge that different FPCUs may vary economically and qualitatively in the type of literacy sponsorship each provides—alternately empowering students and providing better economic value or perhaps providing little literacy skills for low-income students and by extension little economic value. I identify students’ experiences and views of their own writing courses while considering how the profit-generating goals of FPCUs affect students’ literacy practices. In the chapters that follow, I illuminate the ways in which the privatized economic model of FPCUs is reflected in the curricular content and theories of writing that I encounter in this study.

My use of the concept of literacy sponsors differs from Brandt’s theorization in important ways. First, Brandt has been critiqued for not adequately acknowledging the ways that stratification of opportunity in literacy learning often is organized not only along lines of socioeconomic status, but also along racial lines. Whereas Brandt describes literacy as “valuable – and volatile – property” (p. 2), Prendergast’s landmark work *Literacy and Racial Justice: The Politics of Learning after Brown v. Board of Education* acknowledges the ways literacy specifically has been conceived as “white property” historically and how race continues to affect literacy opportunities and resources. Here I both draw from Prendergast’s important recognition of the ways in which access to literacy is divided along racial lines, but seek to combine this with Brandt’s attention to economic forces.

Iloh (2014) uses critical race theory in her own work in analysis of online marketing materials that depict students of color and white administrators from FPCUs: “A critical race reading of these images might suggest a portrayal of people of color as the potential consumers of higher education and White individuals (i.e., administrators and staff) as the suppliers and facilitators of postsecondary education” (p. 100). Iloh’s critical race analysis of marketing materials highlights that students of color are depicted only as consumers or students in FPCUs where white administrators are depicted as the institutional authorities. I seek to consider the ways literacy sponsorship is tied up not only in socioeconomic inequality, but also in racial inequality.

Conclusion

This theoretical framework of literacy sponsorship and higher education privatization then allows me to avoid examining writing course content in decontextualized technical terms that might prioritize efficiency or apolitical educational “effectiveness” in teaching writing at

FPCUs, or even simply increasing access to higher education to a larger student body. By contrast, I acknowledge the often marginalized, vulnerable position of student writers' at FPCUs from the start of my project, and the corporate privatized framework that FPCUs operate within. I interrogate how well for-profit colleges serve the overwhelming number of first-generation college students, low-income college students and students of color who pass through their (often virtual) doors in the specific context of writing courses. While I am thoroughly invested in better understanding student learning about writing at FPCUs, I do this while keeping in consideration tuition costs and economic consequences of literacy sponsorship at FPCUs for students—as the concept of literacy sponsorship encourages. By remaining critically cognizant of privatization as a context, I can consider the effects of for-profit college shifts such as standardization of all courses and positioning students as consumers and avoid implicitly reinforcing the notion of the university degree—or the writing course itself—as a product to be bought and sold. Through examining FPCUs as literacy sponsors operating in the context of privatization in higher education, I consider how FPCUs' unique educational model may be trickling down and influencing writing curriculum and students' experiences with literacy.

Chapter II: Methodology

In the previous chapter, I introduced the phenomenon of large publicly traded FPCUs, and my project considering what kind of literacy sponsorship FPCUs provide to student writers. To put it simply, in the first chapter of this dissertation I answer the question: what is this study about? In this chapter, I answer the question: how did I do this study? Here, I describe the ways that I sought out and obtained perspectives about literacy sponsorship at FPCUs. I describe the methods I used to address the following research questions, which all fit underneath the overarching question this study seeks to answer: what is literacy sponsorship like at FPCUs?

- 1) *How do undergraduate students currently enrolled at FPCUs describe their perceptions of the model of literacy sponsorship provided based on a writing course taken as well as literacy activities completed in non-writing courses?*
- 2) *What are the theories⁶ of writing espoused through writing courses and literacy activities at FPCUs, and furthermore what do the theories of writing suggest about the model of literacy sponsorship provided by FPCUs?*

⁶ I make the case that every writing course at any postsecondary institutions reflects the “theories of writing” of the instructor and perhaps also of the department or the university. I thereby suggest that whether explicit or implicit, all teaching of writing is informed by theories about what writing is for and what writing is. Importantly, this is another way in which my study intervenes to view writing courses not as simply providing decontextualized skills, but also as also political and existing within a model of literacy sponsorship where literacy practices in writing courses have dire economic and personal consequences for students. Theories of writing influence the purpose, content, and delivery of writing courses. In making this assertion, I build quite directly from the National Council of Teachers of English’s (NCTE) position statement entitled “Principles for Teaching Postsecondary Writing” meant to serve as both a reflection of best practices and research and a guide for those running writing programs. NCTE is the largest professional organization in the field of rhetoric and composition, and the collective authors of the statement suggest: “Sound writing instruction extends from a knowledge of theories of writing (including, but not limited to, those theories developed in the field of composition and rhetoric),” thus highlighting the importance of understanding theories of writing for teaching writing. Importantly, the position statement is flexible in terms of prescribing a theory of writing for writing curriculum. Even further, the statement even goes so far as to suggest that instructors may use theories outside of the field of rhetoric and composition. Ultimately, this statement also supports the notion that each instructor may have a highly individualized approach to writing which may extend from a variety of theories. Central to NCTE’s assertion is the notion that instructors must be aware of and deliberate about the theories of writing they employ in their own teaching. Thus, NCTE also implicitly suggests that, whether deliberate or not, all writing courses espouse certain theories of writing in terms of the way the class is framed through the syllabus, the purpose and learning objectives of the class, and the underlying assumptions about writing that inform instruction and learning in the classroom.

- 3) *How is the model of literacy sponsorship provided by for-profits described in public discourse, and how does this compare with student writers' own experiences of literacy sponsorship at FPCUs?*
- a. *How are FPCUs described as sponsors of students' literacy practices in news media sources?*
 - b. *How do student writers perceive the similarities and differences between their own literacy sponsorship and experiences at FPCUs with those represented through public discourse?*

This chapter explains my methodology—or the concrete steps I completed in answering these research questions, including the design of my study, recruitment of participants, participants' bios, data collection and analysis as well as the evolution of the study and my reflection on my role as a researcher. This chapter also reflects on the ethical considerations involved in collecting and analyzing data for this project.

Overview of Study Design

This project is unique in its examination of literacy sponsorship at large publicly traded for-profit colleges and universities from overlapping but diverse angles. Brandt and Clinton (2002) make the crucial point that “Literacy in use more often than not serves multiple interests, incorporating individual agents and their locales into larger enterprises” (p. 338). I sought methodologically in this project to take account of both aspects of literacy 1) the “larger enterprise” of literacy sponsorship at FPCUs 2) as well as the individual student’s engagement with literacy at FPCUs. As a result, this project involved two interconnected parts:

- 1) creating a corpus of news articles about reading, writing, and literacy activities at FPCUs and conducting a corpus linguistic analysis and critical discourse analysis of these broader news media discussions about for-profit literacy
- 2) conducting a qualitative interview-based study with 14 adult women currently enrolled at two different large publicly traded for-profit colleges—Promise⁷ University and Turner⁸ University—and collecting artifacts about writing courses from these students.

⁷ Promise University is a pseudonym I use for one of the most common large publicly traded for-profit chain schools in the United States.

⁸ Turner University is a pseudonym I use for one of the most common large publicly traded for-profit chain schools in the United States.

Participants at the time we talked were taking a writing course at their respective university, or had taken a writing course in the last three years. This study began in May of 2016 with my use of the University of Michigan library online databases to encounter relevant news articles related to literacy or student writers at FPCUs and to build my corpus. I began analyzing the corpus of news articles that I created in the summer of 2016, and writing about this corpus in the fall of 2016. I received initial exempt status and IRB approval to engage in the qualitative interview-based portion of this study in June 2016. Immediately after, I began to attempt to recruit student participants, which, as I elaborate upon later, took time. My very first participant completed the initial online survey on July 28th, 2016. I engaged in continued recruitment from the end of July through the end of October 2016. I conducted three separate hour-long interviews apiece with participants from August 2016 through May 2017 using video-conferencing technology. I began coding and analysis of the data I had generated in October 2016. I used REV.com transcription services to transcribe interviews within a week of their completion. I also maintained a continual memo-ing and note-taking process throughout this time.

I collected and analyzed data from the following sources:

- 99 news articles discussing student writers and/or literacy at FPCUs generated from manually skimming 1,583 articles in ProQuest and Lexus Nexus
- 42 interviews (3 apiece) conducted with 14 adult women enrolled in college at Promise or Turner University (13 enrolled entirely online and 1 attending both online and face-to-face courses) totaling 47 hours and 48 minutes of interview data
- 112 artifacts collected from the above participants who completed the study including writing course syllabi, writing assignment prompts, written essays with and without instructor comments, university plagiarism and writing guidelines, course PowerPoint presentations, and screenshots of the online course site format and units
- 2 initial interviews (1 apiece) with 2 adult women enrolled online at Turner and Rogers University totaling 2 hours of interview data

Corpus Linguistic Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis

In the first section of this dissertation, I completed three tasks which included: 1) creating my own corpus of news media articles that discuss student writers at large publicly traded

FPCUs and their literacy practices 2) analyzing the corpus to identify some broad overarching trends in describing literacy sponsorship at large publicly traded FPCUs in news media 3) engaging in critical discourse analysis (CDA) of news excerpts from the corpus. To answer the question of what kind of literacy sponsorship model FPCUs provide for students according to news media and ad discourse, I used qualitative coding methods informed by Agenda Setting Theory (AST) from Communications studies to identify broader trends in public discourse on students as writers in FPCUs across a large sample of news articles. I also employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to engage in in-depth analysis of specific article texts. I elaborate further on these analytical frameworks in the following chapter. In my third and final qualitative interview with student participants, I showed students the overarching themes that emerged from coding the news articles and asked participants about their opinions of these depictions. I was able to compare then messages from news media with students' reports of their experiences with literacy at FPCUs, and to incorporate students' own comparisons into my findings.

I first created my own comprehensive corpus of news media articles that discussed student writers or literacy practices at large publicly traded FPCUs from 1994 through 2016. I analyzed the text content through qualitative coding methods to identify some broad trends in describing literacy sponsorship at large publicly traded FPCUs in news media. I chose the landmark year of 1994 to begin my search for news articles because that is the year that the University of Phoenix became the first publicly traded university on the stock market, which led to many other FPCUs also going public in the following years. My goal was to consider literacy sponsorship models at FPCUs as represented through news discourse.

In order to generate the corpus or the textual content for qualitative coding, I completed four searches total with two different current library news search engines—ProQuest and Lexis Nexus.⁹ As I was going through both the ProQuest database and the Lexis Nexus database,

⁹ Within ProQuest, my first search yielded 163 results (with the key words literacy as well as “For-profit universit*” OR “for-profit college*”); my second search (with key words reading OR writing as well as “For-profit universit*” OR “for-profit college*”) yielded 931 results. Then, I went through each of these articles in both searches skimming manually to check to ensure that the references to literacy were actually talking about students' experiences within the article. From those two searches I was able to find 109 articles that were actually discussing this theme. My search lasted from the beginning of 1994 until the present day, and the final day I searched through was September 9th, 2016. However, after finding these initial 109 articles in ProQuest articles, I went through the articles collected again to make sure I could find the full text to use. If I was unable to use the full text, then I deleted the news article from my final corpus. I ended up with only 80 articles. In LexisNexis, I used the same searches from 1994 through the present day for articles on for-profit college and university and “literacy” and got 69 results. Most of these had to with financial literacy, or I had already gotten them from ProQuest. I then searched also for “Reading” OR “Writing” as well as for-profit college Or For-profit University. Within this search, I ended up with 420 results. From these two searches, I completed the same process as I did in ProQuest and skimmed manually through each article to make sure the literacy practices were pertaining to the students described at for-profit college, as well as that full-text was available. Thus, in

there were some instances in which I included articles on topics that I had not anticipated including, such as ex-for-profit students engaging in letter-writing, testimony, or other activist literacy practices to organize in lawsuits against for-profit colleges that had overloaded them with debt and misled them about job prospects or accreditation.¹⁰

To create a series of summaries of news media statements to be able to use to show my students during my third interview, I skimmed through a total of 1,583 articles in ProQuest and Lexus Nexus to generate 99 relevant articles manually. I coded the 99 final articles according to the general overarching statements or themes they suggested about student writers and literacy sponsorship practices at FPCUs.¹¹ I did not start with any preconceived codes, but instead looked for themes as they emerged within the articles. Creating codes in this way is often referred to within qualitative research as building grounded theory, which is particularly appropriate for research like this that investigates understudied settings such as FPCUs. Charmaz (2004) notes that with grounded theory you “start with individual cases, incidents, or experiences and develop progressively more abstract conceptual categories to synthesize, to explain, and to understand your data” (p. 497). This has been my goal as I seek to examine the knowledge about literacy at

total, I skimmed manually through 1,583 articles within ProQuest and Lexus Nexus (although some were obviously duplicate articles within the two search engines) to narrow down to my corpus of 99 highly relevant articles. I saved the corpus articles originally using the Zotero software and reference manager.

¹⁰ For the purposes of this study, I am not concerned with financial literacy practices of students, although it is important to point out that many of the articles I skimmed through and excluded on literacy discussed the financial literacy practices of for-profit students. Indeed, it was often suggested that students should have financial literacy classes while in for-profit colleges to help them manage their student debt once they graduated, or that better financial literacy might have dissuaded them from enrolling in for-profit colleges in the first place. This was interesting in and of itself, although it is not in the purview of my study. This trend suggests that students at FPCUs are not depicted in the news media as engaging in academic work, and as literacy learners, but instead more often as victims of a financial scam. FPCUs are often also positioned as financial institutions rather than as colleges in the news.

¹¹ Within my ProQuest and Lexus Nexus searches, I chose to exclude historical newspapers, scholarly articles, and blogs, podcasts and websites. I wanted to know what official news media sources including magazines and newspapers said about for-profit literacy sponsorship, rather than scholarly pieces that might represent formal research and would not be as publicly accessible. On the other hand, I excluded blogs or podcasts because I thought their representations of literacy sponsorship might be more opinion-based or extremely informal sources of information, and they are also less commonly found in ProQuest and Lexus Nexus. I also excluded eBooks in my initial search, as I chose to focus on news media coverage. I eventually excluded wires, transcripts from congressional or corporate meetings or political speeches as I went through the articles manually because I found these to be very lengthy, and often to only mention for-profit colleges in passing among other topics. Congressional meetings and corporate meetings also do not have as widespread of a public audience, and the mention of for-profit colleges in these meetings is often only in passing with reference to stock market trends, but to use the entire news wire I would be forced to include large amounts of irrelevant text. In short, my search focuses on news articles since 1994 that discuss American for-profit colleges and universities as well as literacy, reading or writing practices of students. This left me with a wide range of dates, online and print newspaper and magazine sources, and diverse viewpoints. For example, some articles are more recent and are from nationally-focused news outlets like *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. Some news sources are more educationally focused such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education* or *University Wire*. However, using ProQuest and Lexus Nexus means that some smaller regional news sources are also included such as *The St. Paul Pioneer Press* as well as *The Arizona Republic*. It is important to note that restricting myself to articles with full-text often meant having to delete smaller regional news pieces as these tended to be less available through the search engines.

FPCUs propagated through news discourse. These themes or codes developed from raw data into themes and represent a wide diversity of views about literacy practices and student writers depicted in news media articles.

Narrative Research Methodology

While the CDA and corpus analysis of literacy sponsorship at FPCUs through the lens of news media provides important context and a global view of for-profit colleges, interviews with students provide personal narratives about what reading and writing activities feel and look like at FPCUs. Here I elaborate on my project's orientation to a qualitative, narrative-based research methodology to balance the view of literacy sponsorship that news media provides. Iloh and Tierney (2013) recommend qualitative, ethnographic, interview-based methods as particularly well-suited to study for-profit colleges and adult students. Iloh and Tierney (2013) assert:

Ethnographic research provides keen analytical tools to capture and understand the complex and vibrant realities adult students experience in education in such dynamic times... While adjusting to the challenges and rigors of college, many adult students are creating new identities in all areas of their lives. In fact, most adult college students are a portrait of life's transitions... The researcher can learn of some of these perspectives by hearing adult students express them in interviews (p. 29).

The qualitative, interview-based portion of this study then responds to this call for using ethnographic methods to better understand adult learners in the specific context of writing courses at FPCUs.

This study reflects a qualitative, narrative-based design in my desire to tell participants' stories, and to weave together stories about literacy sponsorship at FPCUs from a variety of sources. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) point out, "The main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world" (p. 2). Importantly, within this narrative qualitative framework, student writers at FPCUs can and do build knowledge themselves through the stories they tell about their literacy sponsorship experiences. I place students' stories about their experiences in writing courses at FPCUs into a narrative that also contextualizes the institutional setting of the FPCUs through the news media analysis and illustrates how students' see their experiences writing and engaging with literacy at for-profit institution as meaningful (or not).

In the following findings chapters, I have knitted together narratives of literacy sponsorship at FPCUs from the news media and from students' stories. Narrative qualitative research methods allowed for the particularly rich attention to context that I sought to provide. Students' stories about their own literacy experiences are contextualized through my use of corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis to provide media representations of student writers and literacy practices at FPCUs. However, it has been crucial to my narrative methodology that student writers have the final say on what literacy sponsorship is like at FPCUs. To enable this, as mentioned, I created a list of summary statements about literacy at FPCUs that emerged from my initial corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis. In the third and final interview I conducted with participants, I showed this summary to student participants, asking them to compare my findings about literacy sponsorship at FPCUs in news media with their own experiences.

To further avoid presenting a deterministic view of individual's literacy experiences, I combine my focus on FPCUs literacy sponsorship with this narrative approach that sees interviews as not only sites for students to report on literacy practices at FPCUs, but also themselves as sites of discovery and of opportunity for participants to teach me. Researchers have described the recent "narrative turn" in social science research (Goodson & Gill, 2011, p. 17). A narrative research approach is suitable for this qualitative project because it may lend itself to recovering subjugated knowledge, in particular when the participants' personal stories have been ignored or excluded (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 144), as is the case with student writers at FPCUs in both research and in the media. A narrative approach seeks to uncover the "subjugated" or systematically overlooked knowledge and experiences of these students through their own stories told by themselves. In this sense, narrative research is itself a political act.

My view of the interview as a pedagogical opportunity for the researcher to learn builds from recent research at the intersection of writing studies and narrative-based approaches to research. Writing studies and literacy researchers Halbritter and Lindquist's Literacy Corps Michigan (LCM) project also combines narrative methodology with research on literacy sponsorship. They suggest many creative methodological "foils for the predetermination of researchers' expert knowledge about literacy" (p. 189). I admire Halbritter and Lindquist's methodological goal as they assert: "we make a critical, ethical move that reestablishes the terms of collaboration [in research] and returns agency to the participants" (p. 191). Halbritter and

Lindquist interpret the interview as a scene of discovery of literacy sponsorship narratives enacted with participants. Through an entirely video-recorded process, they deliberately seek to undo hierarchy within the researcher/participant relationship by asking participants to bring in any artifact and describe it in the first interview, asking participants to choose the location of the second interview, and finally asking participants to video-edit their own stories of literacy sponsorship in final interviews. Similarly, Goodson and Gill's (2011) methodological inquiry, *Narrative Pedagogy*, describes the “narrative encounter”—a research method in which relationships between the researcher and participants are of the utmost importance, and a back and forth discussion or “dialogic environment” encourages interchange. Goodson and Gill claim that a useful and ethical methodology of narrative inquiry also functions like a pedagogy in its knowledge-producing operations, even going so far as to encourage educators to consider a narrative-based approach to their teaching methods. While time and interview site constraints prohibited me from closely following Halbritter and Lindquist’s methodological model or to exactly follow Goodson and Gill’s theory of narrative pedagogy, I conceptualize the interview as a site of collaboration between myself and my study participants and as a pedagogic encounter for both parties.

A narrative approach raises unique ethical considerations including maintaining the integrity of the voices of the students who participate in the research project while at the same time engaging in the re-storying process that is a natural part of narrative research. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) describe re-storying this way: “And in our story telling, the stories of our participants merged with our own to create new stories, ones that we have labelled collaborative stories” (p. 12). With this process comes the responsibility of staying true to the stories of students about their learning experiences in classes at for-profit colleges while still engaging in the re-storying process. As I have already mentioned, this is further complicated by already existing negative representations of for-profit news students in news and media. I sought to stay true to the data and unnecessarily avoid reinforcing the negative, often discriminatory narratives of literacy sponsorship told about FPCUs. I carefully structured interview conversations (and my final narrative) to allow students to be able to affirm or critique their writing classes and learning experiences or colleges (if they wanted to) while also considering the portrait of literacy at FPCUs in the media.

I believe the simple act of asking participants for their stories, remaining faithful to their stories in my own narrative and supporting participants' perspectives in my analysis can promote empowerment. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) point out "another way of understanding the process [of negotiating entry] as an ethical matter is to see it as a negotiation of a shared narrative unity" (p. 3). I sought to achieve that shared unity in my narrative between contextual information, my own role in the storying process, and my participants' stories.

While I listened to students' stories, I believe my study was empowering in providing basic information about FPCUs to participants that their own colleges had not tried to make known to them. For those participants who were unfamiliar with the term publicly traded for-profit college at the start of the study, I provided participants with a very straightforward definition of publicly traded FPCUs— "a college that is structured financially like a business, and has investors or shareholders but may be otherwise similar to other kinds of colleges." I also provided participants with the summaries of news stories about literacy at FPCUs that I created in the first part of my study (news summaries are attached as Appendix F). Again, this is information that I believe students have a right to know. In this way, students learned important information and narratives about their alma maters, while I learned important information from them about their alma maters.

Participant Recruitment

The 14 participants who completed all three rounds of interviews in this study were all students currently enrolled in two of the largest and most well-known publicly traded for-profit institutions. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) note that "the logic of qualitative research is concerned with in-depth understanding, usually working with small samples" (p. 45). This relatively small sample of students provides detailed descriptions of what students' experiences within these different for-profit universities' writing courses are like. Rather than focusing on a single writing classroom at one for-profit college or trying to generalize about all writing classrooms at all FPCUs, I sought to build rich, thick descriptions about different FPCUs to consider them as an understudied institutional context where literacy sponsorship occurs. As it turned out, although I initially sought to recruit participants from eight different for-profit publicly traded universities, all those participants who responded to my initial survey were enrolled at the same three colleges. Those participants who completed the entire study only attended two different institutions. While of course, student participants' experiences at these two institutions do not reflect other for-profit schools, there may also be some overlap.

I chose to limit my recruitment efforts to students from large publicly traded FPCUs as they represent the majority of FPCUs in the US. I also chose to limit my recruitment efforts to students who attended regionally accredited institutions because unless colleges have this type of accreditation, their credits are not transferable to other public and private institutions, and they cannot receive federal financial aid. To avoid talking to students who lived in one geographic area or who shared similar backgrounds, I conducted Skype or video interviews, and I deliberately recruited students from different geographic areas and backgrounds.

As a novice researcher beginning my study, I quickly learned that methods are a mix of a researcher's goals tempered by the limits of what is possible in the real world. In fact, my largest concern when I started this study was if I would be able to do it. As I have shown in the last chapter—the “black box” of curriculum and instruction at FPCUs has been somewhat successful in preventing scholars from conducting research on teaching and learning at FPCUs. To be able to conduct this study, I had to be creative in my approach to finding students to talk to. To avoid a biased sample of students already angry at for-profit colleges, I maintained neutral language about FPCUs in the recruitment language (See Appendix A). I simply state in the post for the survey: “Are you currently enrolled in a writing, communication or composition course at a for-profit college? Fill out this brief online survey to gain the opportunity to participate in a research study that pays \$50 to each participant.” Additionally, I initially planned to recruit students currently enrolled in writing courses, but as time passed, I adjusted my stipulations to include students who had taken a writing course in the past three years. I made sure to ask prospective students if they distinctly remembered their writing course, and if they answered yes, we moved forward. While this was not ideal, in retrospect this added a wider range of perspectives on literacy sponsorship to my study, including students currently enrolled in writing courses and students with a few years behind their course and time to reflect on what they learned.

The recruiting process was also complicated by the fact that, as I have already pointed out, most students enrolled at for-profit schools are not aware of the for-profit status of their institution (Public Agenda, 2014). To still be able to recruit students at FPCUs, I used the names in my recruitment post of specific large publicly traded for-profit schools to be able to recruit students unaware of the for-profit label of their institutions. For example, I stated in the online posting: “Are you currently enrolled in a writing course at Promise University, Turner University or Rogers University? If so, fill out this brief online survey to gain the opportunity to participate in a research

study that pays \$50.” I spent two full days driving around southeastern Michigan posting flyers with the same neutral language and information in public spaces near for-profit colleges, as well as in student lounges at the largest publicly traded FPCUs’ local campuses.

I amended my IRB application to include posting my study recruitment message on social media outlets and to increase compensation to \$75 for the full study and began to try to recruit students using the social media outlets Facebook, Reddit, and Instagram. I posted my recruitment message on the visitor or guest Facebook pages of most of the largest publicly for-profit colleges sites. Some colleges immediately deleted my post, and I was pleasantly surprised when others did not delete it. I sent out emails to my colleagues, and to the Writing Program Administrators (WPA) email list-serv, which is composed of US writing teachers, seeking student participants. I amended my IRB once again, this time to ask for permission to directly message students on Facebook enrolled at FPCUs. I was able to identify these for-profit students because they were also posting questions about selling textbooks and classes on the same guest pages of the same Facebook pages where I posted my recruitment blurb unsuccessfully. Finally, this more aggressive method worked. Students responded to these direct messages via Facebook about my study and began taking my online survey.

In the follow-up Facebook messages with participants, I answered prospective participants’ questions about the study and asked for students’ email contact to be able to send the study consent form via DocuSign (See Appendix B to view the consent form). If the participant failed to do this or to fill out the online survey, I followed up regularly to maintain contact, and reiterating to the potential student that participating is voluntary and confidential and that she would be awarded with a token of appreciation for follow-up participation.

Confidentiality was maximized by utilizing privacy settings that kept my social media profile from being displayed in any search engine, deleting the comments and postings once participants had been contacted, and preventing the study posting or comments from being present on a participant’s profile. I did not invite potential participants to join my Facebook “friend list,” since this connection would publicly reveal an association with my study. I deleted the chats within my own Facebook account after having scheduled interviews with the participant. These precautions guarded participant confidentiality by preventing the possibility that a participant inadvertently revealed her association with the study by either writing on or posting or adding a link to the study profile onto her own profile page or onto my page.

Data Collection

The initial online assessment via Survey Monkey generated basic contact and demographic information about prospective student participants. While 19 students filled out the initial survey, only 16 followed up for an initial interview, and 14 students completed the entire study. I interviewed all 14 participants for an initial hour apiece. Then I followed up for another hour-long second interview, and a final hour-long interview.¹² I structured the three interviews progressively in order to obtain a comprehensive portrait of literacy sponsorship at FPCUs, information that began with students' own educational backgrounds, beliefs and attitudes toward literacy and their universities, but that also thoroughly covered all aspects of their writing courses at FPCUs as well as writing for non-writing or English courses and for their past and future careers. As a result, the first interview was loosely focused on students' life stories and educational histories that led them to their college (See Appendix C). My aim in this initial interview was to build rapport with students and to learn about their overall experiences at college. I also asked participants in this first interview if they knew their college was for-profit, and what they believed that that meant. The goal of the second interview was to learn everything I possibly could about students' experiences in their introductory writing courses (See Appendix D). For most participants, this was the first and introductory writing course at the institution. During the final and third interview, my goal was to find out more about students' literacy experiences in non-writing courses as well as about students' experiences with literacy in relation to their past and future career plans (See Appendix E). My aim in the final interview was also to provide students with perspectives about literacy sponsorship in news media, while giving them the final say about what literacy sponsorship was like at their own institution. As a result, I also showed students' a list of summary statements in the final interview that I created representing perspectives on literacy sponsorship at FPCUs in news media and advertisements (See Appendix F), and asked participants if these perspectives were similar or different to their own experiences.

Throughout the interview process, I reminded students about the scheduled interviews both a week and a day in advance of the actual interview taking place via email and text message. As I mentioned, these interviews had to be conducted using video-conferencing technology to make this study feasible. Depending on what was most familiar or comfortable for participants, I used

¹² See Appendix C, D, and E respectively at the end of this document which contain these interview protocols.

Skype, UM's BlueJeans technology, and Facebook's video-calling messenger to complete the interviews. At times, the length of time of interviews extended as participants were very invested in their answers and had a great deal to say. I hoped to gain a more holistic perspective from participants, to build rapport, and to create a more long-term, and thus empowering relationship with my participants through the course of the interviews. Hogan (1988) writes that the researcher/participant relationship can be empowering for participants in narrative approaches if researchers take the time to build the relationship so that there exists "equality between participants, the caring situation, and the feelings of connectedness" (p. 12). While I cannot claim that using videoconferencing was deliberate on my part (it was a necessity), I believe that conducting videoconference interviews allowed for more equality in the dynamic between myself and participants. I also think that videoconferencing allowed for a greater connection than might have happened if we had met in a conference meeting room at my own university campus. For one, participants were able to talk to me from the comfort of their own home and space. The unique video-format also meant that I was able, at times, to briefly meet participants' children, partners or pets, and participants often met my cat and saw my own apartment as I conducted my interviews from home. Participants also felt more comfortable in that they could drink and eat while we talked if they liked. One participant Maisha—who was working two different jobs, enrolled as a full-time student at Promise University, and taking care of her elderly grandmother by herself—twice cooked dinner as we conducted our interviews. The Skype format then allowed her to multi-task and to fit my study into her busy life. This added to our personal connection, and I believe helped to lessen the inevitable intimidation involved in talking to a "researcher."

The Skype interview format allowed me to meet and converse with participants on their own terms. Stovall (2014) asserts that researchers working with participants who have historically experienced discrimination should avoid "'helicopter research' where university faculty 'drop down' on communities and leave once they have collected data" (p. 182). With several participants who were Moms, we were forced to stop our interview at times because of interruptions on the part of their young children. But Skype allowed for this flexibility, giving students more freedom to conduct interviews on their own terms. I also sought to avoid the "helicopter research" Stovall cautions against by engaging in three interviews over an extended period (anywhere from 2 months to 9 months) and working to build empowering relationships with participants. I did not require the set of three interviews to be spaced out at the same intervals. Instead, I scheduled interviews

to accommodate participants' schedules, semesters, and personal lives. In fact, one participant had to drop out after our first interview because of a family emergency, and then she rejoined the study many months later when things had calmed down. Another participant had to take a break because her cable company cut off her internet, but she was also able to return to finish the study later. Table one below demonstrates the dates when each interview was conducted with each participant:

Table 1. Interview Timing Schedule

Interview Timing Schedule for Each Participant				
Name	Survey Completed	1st Interview	2nd Interview	3rd Interview
Rhonda	10/19/2016	completed 1/16/2017	completed 2/20/2017	completed 2/27/2017
Jane	10/26/2016	completed 11/2/2016	completed 11/9/2016	completed 11/16/2016
Whitney	10/31/2016	completed 11/7/2016	completed 11/18/2016	completed 12/15/2017
Elizabeth	09/01/2016	completed 9/1/2016	completed 9/7/2016	completed 9/21/2016
Reagan	08/24/2016	completed 8/26/2016	completed 10/7/2016	completed 10/11/2016
Katherine	08/24/2016	completed 8/25/2016	completed 9/20/2016	completed 10/3/2016
Cassie	08/17/2016	completed 8/19/2016	completed 1/16/2016	completed 5/12/2017
Brenda	08/16/2016	completed 8/20/2016	completed 9/10/2016	completed 9/17/2016
Janice	08/13/2016	completed 8/13/2016	completed 9/10/2016	completed 10/20/2016
Rory	08/12/2016	completed 8/16/2016	completed 8/23/2016	completed 10/2/2016
Jeanie	08/12/2016	completed 8/17/2016	completed 9/7/2016	completed 9/21/2016
Amala	08/11/2016	completed 8/13/2016	completed 8/20/2016	completed 10/2/2016
Blanche	08/01/2016	completed 8/15/2016	completed 8/26/2016	completed 9/26/2016
Chandra	07/28/2016	completed 9/12/2016	completed 9/14/2016	completed 9/23/2016
Shawna	10/5/2016	completed 10/6/2016		
Rianna	08/15/2016	completed 8/16/2016		

While some might say this means my data is not standardized across participants, my goal was not to generate standardized or generalizable data in this study. This means that participants

were all at different stages in their college or writing classes and in their degree programs, and that diversity of experience and timing I believe adds to the nuance of my data.

Participant Bios

To obtain variety representing the diversity of students enrolled at FPCUs, I sought students from urban, suburban, and rural areas enrolled in both online and face to face writing courses as well as students from at least 5 different states that collectively represent the Midwestern, Western, Southern, and Northwestern and Northeastern US. Deming, Golding and Katz (2012) point out that students at FPCUs are disproportionately older (65% over 25), female (65%), African American (22%), from low-income backgrounds (53% receive Pell Grants), and single parents (29%). Once I collected demographic information in the initial online assessment survey, I hoped to be able to select participants who would reflect the overall demographics of students at FPCUs as a sector of higher education as well as the geographic diversity that I hoped to maintain. However, to be honest, because of the length of time I spent unsuccessfully recruiting students, I immediately accepted all participants who took the time to fill out the online survey and the consent form. That said, several participants did drop out for their own reasons.

19 students filled out the online survey, 16 students completed the first interview, and 14 students completed the entire set of three interviews or the study. Regarding the two students who dropped out after the first interview, one student dropped out because she dropped out of her university and writing course (Riana), and another student dropped out because her internet connection was cut off at home (Shawna). Of the 14 students who completed the study, all identified as women, and these women participants ranged in age from 19 to 55 years old. While I hoped that I might also be able to recruit participants who identified as men, since most students at FPCUs are women (65%), this outcome is perhaps unsurprising. Likewise, since the only successful recruitment method was direct Facebook messaging, this likely skewed my study towards women participants. Research has found that not only are more women on Facebook (76% of women who use internet vs. 66% of men who use internet) but also women are much more active, and have 55% more posts on their Facebook walls than men do (Vermeren, 2015). Three participants identified as African American or Black (21% of participants) and eleven identified as Caucasian or White. In fact, this closely matches the 22% of students overall at FPCUs who identify as African American. 12 out of 14 participants identified as first-generation

college students. Again, this follows the overall trend of enrollment at FPCUs where a disproportionate and increasing percentage of first-generation college students attend. 13 out of 14 participants worked outside the home or taking care of their children and/or grandchildren, in addition to being students. Several participants were working multiple jobs in addition to taking college coursework. I chose to count care for children or grandchildren as full-time employment simply because I believe that is an accurate description. Three out of 14 participants identify as having disabilities. Table two below compiles student demographics, including the two students who dropped out of the study after the first interview and highlighted at the end:

Table 2. Participant Demographics

Student Participant Demographics								
	Name	Age	Race	Student at	Resides in	Employed?	Kids?	First-Gen Student?
1	Rhonda	26	African American	Turner	NC	No	No	No
2	Jane	46	Caucasian	Promise	FL	Yes, full-time babysitting grandchildren	Yes	Yes
3	Whitney	39	White	Promise	PA	Yes, full-time as caregiver for individual with disability	Yes	Yes
4	Maisha	24	African-American/Non-Hispanic	Promise	PA	Yes, full-time in security plus a part-time job in security	No	Yes
5	Reagan	19	White	Turner	NE	Yes, full-time in retail at Wal-Mart	No	Yes

6	Katherine	38	White	Promise	FL	Yes, Mom of two	Yes	Yes
7	Cassie	32	Caucasian	Turner	NC	Yes, Mom of one	Yes	No
8	Brenda	48	White	Promise	CA	Yes, full-time for non-profit assisting people with disabilities in job search	Yes	Yes
9	Janice	33	White	Turner	MT	Yes, full-time as apartment lease agent	Yes	Yes
10	Rory	21	White	Turner	PA	Yes, Mom of one	Yes	Yes
11	Jeanie	45	White	Promise	MT	Yes, full-time business owner plus part-time CNA at night	Yes	Yes
12	Amala	27	Caucasian	Promise	AK	Yes, full-time debt collector plus seeking another job	Yes	Yes
13	Blanche	44	Caucasian? American	Promise	NM	Yes, Mom of three	Yes	No
14	Chandra	55	Black	Turner	DE	Yes, part-time at casino, and babysitting grandchildren	Yes	Yes
15	Shawna	41	White	Turner	NC	Yes, part-time in two different	Yes	Yes

						fast food restaurants		
16	Rianna	32	African American	Rogers	NJ	No	No	Yes

Participants hailed from all over the United States, including the South, Northeast, Midwest, West, Northwest and even Alaska. Five participants were enrolled in an Associate Degree program and nine were enrolled in a Bachelor’s Degree program. In total, nine out of 14 of study participants were either unaware or unclear about what a for-profit college was at the start of the study. Six out of the 14 participants completed a GED or alternative high school diploma. Six out of 14 participants were currently enrolled in their writing course at the time of the first interview, while eight participants had already finished but taken the writing course recently. While I hoped to generate a mix of students attending online and face-to-face courses, I ended up with 13 students out of 14 attending their entire degree program online. Only one student had attended a mix of courses, and completed her writing course in a face-to-face setting. Again, this follows the overall trend at FPCUs were 61.4% of all courses offered are online (US Dept. of Ed., 2014). Table three below compiles educational information about student participants, including those two students who dropped out after the first interview and are highlighted at the end:

Table 3. Participant Educational Info.

Student Participant Educational Information							
Name	University	Currently or Previously Enrolled in Writing Course	GED	Degree Pursuing	Familiar with "for- profit college"	Type of Enrollment	

1	Rhonda	Turner	Current	No	Associate's in Information Technology	A little bit	Fully Online
2	Jane	Promise	Previous (1 year ago)	No	Bachelor's in Psychology	Yes	Fully Online
3	Whitney	Promise	Previous (last month)	No	Bachelor's in Human Services	Yes, somewhat	Fully Online
4	Maisha	Promise	Previous (2 years ago)	No	Bachelor's in Criminal Justice	Yes	Fully Online
5	Reagan	Turner	Current	No	Bachelor's in Health Science	No	Fully Online
6	Katherine	Promise	Current	Yes	Bachelor's in English	No	Fully Online
7	Cassie	Turner	Current	No	Bachelor's in Psychology	No	Fully Online
8	Brenda	Promise	Previous (2 years ago)	Alternative cert.	Bachelor's in Business	Yes, very	Mix of Online and Face-to-Face
9	Janice	Turner	Current	Yes	Associate's in Information Technology	No, not when first enrolled, but now has some info	Fully Online
10	Rory	Turner	Previous, ended	No	Associate's in Early	No	Fully Online

			December 2015		Childhood Development		
11	Jeanie	Promise	Previous, 2 years ago	Yes	Bachelor's in Psychology	Unsure	Fully Online
12	Amala	Promise	Previous, recent, ended June 2016	Yes	Bachelor's in Business	Unsure	Fully Online
13	Blanche	Promise	Previous, 2 years ago	No	Associate's in Health Administration	Yes	Fully Online
14	Chandra	Turner	Current	Yes	Associate's in Human Services	Yes	Fully Online
15	Shawna	Turner	Current	Unknown	Unknown	No	Fully Online
16	Rianna	Rogers	Current	No	Bachelor's	No	Fully Online

Previous research on FPCUs suggests that this sector has a more vocational focus than traditional fields, and in some ways, that held true in my small sample of participants, with several business and technology majors, as well as fields like criminal justice and health administration. However, the most common major—Psychology—is a discipline and not a vocational field. One participant declared an English major at Turner University, but by the third time we spoke, she was questioning this choice and considering switching to something more “career-focused.” Table four below compiles the declared majors of participants:

Table 4. Declared Majors of Participants

Declared Majors of Student Participants	
Major	Number of Student Participants
Psychology	3
Technology	2
Business	2
Human Services	2
Criminal Justice	1
Health Science	1
English	1
Early Childhood Development	1
Health Administration	1

In what follows, I describe each participant’s individual bio in detail. I include a brief overview at the beginning of each bio describing the participants’ experiences with literacy sponsorship at her for-profit college:

Amala: White, 27-year-old female enrolled in a BA in Business at Promise who dislikes writing and reading and has had mixed experiences of literacy sponsorship.

Amala had a full-time job before she started at Promise working in debt collections, and she has been able to keep that job while she has been a student, and even hopes to start another job as a caregiver for people with special needs in the winter. She then will be working two jobs and almost 80 hours a week and enrolled full-time for her online Bachelor’s degree. She also started her degree several years back, dropped out once, and then came back. Amala has a boyfriend and a black lab who I both met briefly through the course of our Skype interviews. She is very passionate about business and very talkative and friendly. She even has plans to start her own clothing store with her boyfriend, and they have been working on a business plan on the side. Amala said herself, “I hate writing. I do. I don't like it. I don't like reading either, really.” In high school she was a C student, but at Promise University she is often an A student which she said helps to motivate her to keep going. Amala says that, “I got my GED when I was 16, and I started at a local community college when I was almost 17. I've been going to school off and on since then.” However, Amala feels like this time something has clicked, and she is getting more out of college; she is also very ambitious and career-focused, having the goal of working for a large corporation that helps or supports young people. Amala describes her goals: “I want to be a human resource manager and make at least \$100,000 a year.” Amala is not exactly a first-generation college student, but she was raised by a single Mom as her father passed away when

she was young. Her Mom went to college to receive her bachelor's degree when she was in high school. She remembers helping her Mom with her college coursework when she was in high school. Her father never attended college, and most of her other family members have not finished a degree. Amala is overall positive about Promise University, but says it is not "The God of all schools.... It's a good school, don't get me wrong, but it's not the best thing that I've ever experienced in my life. If it was the best thing I've ever experienced, I wouldn't have issues with it." Amala's issues with Promise University centered around not hearing back from her financial aid advisor for a long period of time about some financial issues, and being harassed by a debt collector when she defaulted on a tuition loan after dropping out for a short period.

Rory: White, 21-year old female living in rural Pennsylvania completing AAT in Early Childhood who does not like reading and writing and questioned having to take two writing courses at Turner University.

Rory is the full-time Mom of an energetic two-year-old who several times interrupted our interviews. Rory's son is very important to her, and played a huge role in her decision to attend Turner University online to complete her Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Development. Turner's online program enabled her to stay home with her son. Rory was shy at first during interviews, but had a lot to say about her experiences at Turner. She even mentioned that part of why she enjoyed online school was because she did not have to worry about the anxiety of speaking in front of her classmates or putting on presentations in a traditional classroom. She does not drive, and so that also played a large role in her decision to attend school online. Rory is a first-generation college student, mentioning that only her cousin had started to attend college in her family, and that neither of her parents attended. She describes "Well when I first graduated high school, it was 2013, and I was going to go back to college right after high school. I'd gotten pregnant so we waited." Rory is set to graduate in December. Although Rory doesn't enjoy writing, she made an A in her College Composition 1 course and a C in her College Composition II course and felt like she learned a lot. Rory mentioned: "I didn't like it [writing]. Even in high school, I put it off as much as possible. It was just something that I did not like to do. I try to avoid it even now as much as possible." While Rory seemed like mostly a satisfied customer with her writing courses, she did question whether taking two writing courses or any at all should have been necessary for her degree in early childhood development. She repeatedly questioned the relevance of writing instruction at Turner University for her career goals.

Katherine: White, disabled 38-year old female living in Florida enrolled in her BA in English at Promise University who loves writing, began our conversations excited about literacy sponsorship, and ended up disillusioned and disappointed.

Katherine has three kids, including two that are in elementary and middle school and still living with her who I met via Skype through the course of our interviews. She left high school after witnessing two homicides at her school in ninth grade, and then got married and had children before she went back to finish her GED much later. She mentioned that she has always loved writing. Katherine is attending Promise University online now and enrolled in her Bachelor's degree in English as she wants to be a writer. However, by the last interview Katherine was considering changing her major to technology or something more career-focused that would help her to find immediate work. Katherine chose online school because as she put it, "I have

disabilities which prevent me from going to a campus.” She mentioned having foot surgery, arthritis, back problems, OCD and anxiety throughout our three interviews. Katherine has written poetry and short stories, winning an award online for one of her poems. But, by the final interview she felt like majoring in English had taken the “fun” out of writing for her. She believes her disabilities will affect her future career pursuits as she said, “because of my disabilities I can't work at a regular job,” and initially she thought she might be able to work as a copy-writer or editor from home. Katherine also mentioned financial insecurity and housing insecurity throughout the course of our interviews as she and her boyfriend were struggling to make rent, and were looking for a new place to live and worried about being evicted. Katherine does not receive disability benefits from the government, although she is in the process of filing paperwork to receive them. Katherine also had begun the process of reporting her disability status to Promise University to receive accommodations by the final interview. However, she felt that the condensed 5-week course model at Promise University was so fast that by the time she received accommodations it would be too late to help with her current English course or even the next one. She received a very high grade, an A+, in English 147 called University Writing Essentials, and she felt like she learned a lot in the introductory writing course and that the instructor was excellent. Whereas in the beginning of our interviews Katherine loved Promise University, and had such rave reviews she was recommending it to family and friends, by the third interview over a month later she was considering transferring to a different university. Katherine ended up feeling disillusioned and frustrated with the 5-week course model and coursework that seemed overwhelming to her. She was upset that she was not able to choose the order of her courses, and she wanted to change her major but had received pushback about this from her advisor at Promise.

Reagan: 19-year old, white female living in rural Nebraska enrolled in a BA in Health Science at Turner who is interested in writing but had negative literacy sponsorship experiences in college.

Reagan just graduated from high school last year and lives in a tiny town of only 300 people in rural Nebraska. She says she “knows everyone” in her town, and part of the reason she did not want to leave home to go to the biggest university in Nebraska, the University of Nebraska Lincoln was because “going to a school that has like 12,000 people, just seems like it would be too much anxiety filled, too many people.” Instead, she is enrolled full-time in an online Bachelor’s degree in Health Sciences at Turner University, and she wants to go on to be an OBGYN doctor. Reagan is also taking courses through another online for-profit school called the Animal Behavior College to receive her vet tech certificate and on top of all that she works 40 hours a week at Wal-Mart with a two-hour commute to and from work. She hopes the vet tech certificate will help her get find a better job while she works on her degree so she can pay back her loans faster. Reagan chose Turner University because her Mom also went there for her nursing degree back when Turner was called Hamilton College. Reagan is a straight-A student at Turner, and works hard. She likes that she will be able to complete her bachelor’s degree in 2 years at Turner instead of 4, because she points out, “That way I don't have to be 39 and finally becoming a doctor, that way I can start younger.” Reagan is not a huge fan of writing as she says: “writing's not my greatest thing to do. I'm great with science” but she has written part of a fantasy romance novel that she wants to finish as a hobby. Reagan is nervous about the fact that her degree is not pre-med specifically, and she may graduate but still need more science

coursework from a different University to apply to medical school. She is also nervous about her credits at Turner transferring. However, after her writing class dwindled down from 20 to 7 students, she felt skeptical and her final comment on Turner was “I would just suggest researching more about the college before actually jumping into it. When you have a professor that goes from having 20 kids down to seven, obviously something is going on.”

Jeanie: 45-year old, white woman living in rural Montana enrolled in her BA in Psychology at Promise who both dislikes and does not see the purpose of writing and had a mixed experience with literacy sponsorship at college.

Jeanie received her GED in 2008, and now is enrolled in her Bachelor’s degree online in Psychology from Promise University, having recently switched her major from accounting. As she said, her kids had grown up and left, and going back to college for her: “Basically, it was just for me to push myself a little further and actually have a degree that I wanted ever since I was younger. It's not that I'm ever going to use a psychology degree. I probably never will.” Instead, she laughed and said that earning her Bachelor’s degree was a personal goal: “A \$50,000 goal.” Jeanie owns several businesses with her husband including a house remodeling and a tax business that keep them both very busy. She does think she might use her Bachelor’s in Psychology by going into work as a parole officer someday, but thinks she would keep her businesses running on the side. She also works both full-time, and a part-time job at a nursing home in the night as a CNA. Jeanie does not like writing or see its relevance for her in terms of her career, and even after the course feels: “I don't really have any use to write...I don't care anything about writing.... I want to be honest with you...I am glad it's the only writing class I had, because I don't want to write.” That said, Jeanie felt that she learned a great deal about writing from her class, and that it helped her to be able to write essays for her other classes. However, she wished that the writing course had more interaction with classmates, and group or team activities, and overall, she felt that writing was not a social activity in the course or in the college overall. Jeanie is mostly positive about her experience at Promise University, but also realistic about some of the drawbacks.

Maisha: A 24-year-old African American woman living in rural Pennsylvania enrolled in her BA in Criminal Justice who loves writing and had mostly positive experiences of literacy sponsorship at Promise College.

Maisha identified herself as practicing Islam during our interviews. She is married and her husband is currently incarcerated, and she also lives with her elderly grandmother who she cares for full-time. Maisha recently received her Associate’s Degree online from Promise University in Criminal Justice, and now is continuing onto her Bachelor’s in Criminal Justice and a minor in Human Services. Maisha works one full-time and one part-time job in addition to attending school full-time online, and both jobs are in the security industry. Maisha is overall very positive about her experience at Promise University and says that she chose to go there online because: “I was working a lot, and didn't have enough time or a vehicle to go to a traditional local college around where I am, so I sought out online school to be my best option... Online college offered me the convenience and more so the freedom to be able to do things on my own schedule. I also help take care of my grandma as well as being married myself, so I was just busy all the time.” She says that she hated anything related to school as a high school student, but enjoys her studies

at Promise University. Maisha also described her personal struggles to complete her degree in our conversation: “I also went through a lot of things during the course of my study. I was unemployed, I had surgery, I've had times where I've had to take care of my grandmother, so I ended up being automatically withdrawn from class due to lack of participation or not doing too well... I've had to write even more essays just to get my financial aid back. I went through a lot, so it definitely took me longer” to complete coursework. Because of this, her GPA is lower than she would like it to be, but she feels that Promise University’s student support services and dedicated advisors have helped her pull through those difficult times. Maisha said that she loved writing, and she often wrote in her spare time including poems to send to her husband in prison, short stories, and a blog. However, she viewed her writing course at Promise as very general and straightforward, and not quite as interesting because she didn’t get to write about topics she felt passionate about. Overall though, she is extremely positive about Promise University, and said she would recommend it to anyone.

Chandra: 55-year-old, Black woman living in rural Delaware enrolled in her AA in Human Services who is interested in writing but had negative experiences with literacy sponsorship at Turner University.

Chandra completed her GED over 30 years ago and served in the US Army Reserve for 8 years. She said that “after my children became adults I decided to return to school, to expand” her own career goals. Initially, she was majoring in business at a different for-profit school, but then she transferred to Turner to major in human services as she wants to work with the homeless. Chandra is a first-generation college student, although her daughter is also attending college now. She prefers Turner because it’s more hands-on than the previous for-profit university: there are weekly seminars, and there is also more feedback from the instructors than she received at the previous for-profit school. Chandra mentioned that part of the reason she chose Turner was the resources offered to help with writing and the emphasis placed on writing. Chandra definitely feels like a customer at Turner, and noted that “Well, really I'm what they call one of those, I think, a special customer because I'm a 55-year-old woman returning to the education, you know what I mean. Maybe they felt ... I know I feel I need a little bit of an extra helping hand and I felt like Turner has given me that extra helping hand.” Chandra notes that she is not very comfortable using computers, and her instructors as well as tech support have really worked with her on computer skills. However, Chandra is also frustrated because she feels that Turner “overcharges” for the degree, and she feels Turner is pushy to enroll and maintain student enrollment. By the end of the study Chandra had decided to leave Turner to transfer to a different university because of the negative reports she had read and the sense on her own part that Turner was much too expensive. She said she chose to leave Turner mostly because “I think it's overpriced. Highly overpriced” but additionally she had concerns about educational quality being sacrificed. She described: “Because they do focus on you trying to finish, but they want you to finish because they want that money.... You know what I mean, I can tell a little bit, they're a little lenient, as far as grade wise.” Additionally, Chandra voiced concerns about the education not being as high of quality because students must complete a large amount of the work on their own. Overall, she is obviously unsatisfied with her writing coursework and experience at Promise University.

Janice: 33-year old, white female living in rural Montana enrolled in her AA in Applied Science and Technology who dislikes writing, questioned the purpose of taking two writing courses, and had a mixed experience of literacy sponsorship at Turner University.

Janice is a single Mom, and she works full-time as a special education teacher for one child. She is also attending Turner online to earn her Associate's degree in applied science and technology. She mentioned that part of the reason that she chose to attend Turner online was because "the only thing that we have here is like a satellite of the big university. The only thing that they offer really is nursing school," so her college options were very limited. Janice dropped out of tenth grade, and earned her GED a year later. She also attended a community college for a little while, but her college closed because of Hurricane Katrina, so she couldn't finish. Janice is a returning student at Turner as she has had to drop out once for family reasons including her father falling off a roof and being severely injured and her grandmother having cancer. Janice is excited about working with technology, and would like to become a Special Education Teacher perhaps in the K-12 system using technology to work with disabled students, or to become an IT person for a school. Janice describes Turner as "a really great school" now and has positive things to say about her educational experiences attending there. She has had, however, a mixed educational history at Turner as she has attended off and on for about four years. Janice describes how the educational experience has changed in the past two years at Turner: "I think before that they were just getting people in there, and they were passing them and they would be like, 'Oh yeah you did good.' But you really didn't. They just wanted the money and the people there. But like I said, I think since they're being watched under a microscope constantly, they're actually starting to care and they're actually starting to put effort into the students and they're actually putting effort into the grades and the work." In other words, Janice suggests that the increased oversight at for-profits has put pressure on Turner to have higher academic standards and engage students academically. Janice also has very mixed feelings about her literacy experiences at Turner. She enjoyed College Composition 1, but said she did not feel like a satisfied customer with the more recent College Composition II course that I interviewed her about, largely because she didn't think the instructor explained material well and worked with the students. She also says in general at Turner the use of eBooks, podcasts, videos, and PowerPoints for literacy learning over traditional print books does not work for her: "I feel like if they're going to teach you something that they need to give you books for it. It's just, it's not something I like to do. I don't like the learning assignments they give us or the learning whatever they're called, you know, with the podcasts and the videos, and PowerPoint presentations and things like that. It's too much information all over the place, and it's just not something I like to do... I don't think it works effectively for anybody." Overall, Janice thinks the changes including stricter academic standards Turner are for the better, and she hopes as she finishes her degree that Turner continues to raise their academic standards and work more with students.

Blanche: 44-year-old, Caucasian female living in New Mexico enrolled in her AA in Healthcare Administration who enjoys writing and entered college as a confident writer and had outstanding literacy sponsorship experiences at Promise University.

Blanche home-schooled her three kids for six years, and she says that, "I've been a stay at home mom for 23 years (laughs). We've still got a 16-year-old...our youngest. And when we moved to California about a year and a half ago - well two years ago now - it was really expensive, I

needed a job to help support us, and I couldn't find anything.” She is enrolled full-time at Promise University online to earn her Associate’s Degree with a certification for healthcare and wellness administration. She has a very clear goal of using her degree to find a career as she says “I don't want to be working sales. I had no problem with that but I'm getting older, I can't stand on my feet those long hours and work at a check out, and I want to have a career that I can be proud of. I don't want to just punch a clock, I want to be proud of something.” She also says she feels most people at Promise University are just trying to make life better for their families, “I would say 99% of us have families and we're trying to better our home life that way.” Blanche has done very well as a student at Promise, and she told me she often makes 100% on writing assignments and her overall GPA is a 3.96 at Promise University. She loves writing and does quite a bit of it in her spare time including having a blog, and she enjoyed both of her required writing courses. She believes that she came in to Promise University with strong writing skills, but also feels that the courses provided her with important knowledge about plagiarism, APA formatting, and references that she never received in high school. Blanche seems overall extremely satisfied with her coursework at Promise, but she does note that the team assignments are frustrating to her because of the diversity of skill level and effort on the part of other students. Often during team assignments, she finds herself helping other students, and she even says she has gone so far as to totally rewrite what her teammates have given her when it was entirely plagiarized. She does not feel that instructors always hold students accountable for writing assignments. Overall though, Blanche has had an outstanding experience, is about to finish her degree, and says “this has really been one of the best experiences that I ever had educationally.”

Jane: 46-year old, white woman living in Florida enrolled in BA in Psychology who loves reading and writing and has had mixed experiences with literacy sponsorship at Promise University and eventually decided to transfer out.

Jane describes herself as “a 46-year-old grandmother;” she is divorced and lives with her daughter’s family and cares for her grandchildren about 60 to 80 hours per week. She was pursuing her Bachelor’s degree in Psychology at Promise University, but after some recent mishaps with financial aid, she decided to transfer to another online for-profit college. Jane wants to go on to earn her Master’s degree, and eventually her MD. Jane loves reading, and she is currently hooked on any books to do with fantasy. She also mentioned that she had started writing her own apocalyptic novel a while ago, but she has put it away. As a result of her love for reading, Jane said she looked forward to her required university writing course. She feels like the writing course at Promise gave her very valuable skills in learning how to “put a paper together properly,” and how to fix “grammar errors,” and to generate citations. Overall, she was mostly satisfied with her writing course and feels that it provided her with the building blocks to do well in other courses. Jane mentioned several times that in online courses students write essays frequently. However, she did emphasize repeatedly that the work at Promise University as a result of the online platform results in students working alone. She did not see writing as a social activity in her class. She also mentioned that the team activity in her writing class was very frustrating because other students did not do their part. Jane decided to transfer out of Promise University because her financial aid money was dispensed late repeatedly, and she even had to take a leave of absence and briefly drop out because her internet was cut off after her student loan check never arrived. Despite those administrative issues however, she seems partly satisfied

with academics at Promise, again with the caveat that “it's dependent on the student, and you get out of it what you put into it.”

Whitney: 39-year-old, white woman enrolled in BA in Human Services who loves reading and had a mostly positive experience with literacy sponsorship at Promise University.

Whitney describes herself as “a mother of 3” and she is divorced and now lives with her fiancé who is disabled. She has two children from her previous marriage and her fiancé has one child who she also cares for. She is currently enrolled in her online Bachelor’s degree in Human Services at Promise University, and she would like to go on to earn her Master’s degree to be a school counselor or Psychologist someday. Whitney mentioned that she wanted to attend college earlier, but her ex-husband did not support her goal so she never got around to it. She chose Promise University because of the flexibility it offered, since she also works as a caregiver and cares for the three kids at home. Whitney is friendly and was eager to provide me with as much information and detail as she could about Promise University. Overall, she reports that she has had an excellent experience as a student there. However, she has experienced two issues, one receiving her financial aid, and another issue with an instructor that was rude and not helpful; according to Whitney the instructor: “just seemed like she was there for the money.” Other than that though, she is very positive about her experience at Promise University. Whitney loves reading, describing herself as “an avid reader” and she did some writing for fun before she took her introductory writing course at Promise. She and her fiancé, who I also met on Skype, both enjoy reading fantasy series and described themselves as “Twilighters” as they are fans of the Twilight series. Whitney thoroughly enjoyed her introductory writing class, describing it as her favorite one so far in college. She saw the class as being focused on grammar, APA style, and putting together a paper properly, which to her was very useful in the writing she did in later courses. She also did feel that writing was social in the intro to writing class, and the discussion board was active, but said this was a stark contrast with most other courses at Promise where students do not use the discussion board to interact.

Brenda: 48-year-old, white disabled woman living in California enrolled in BA in Business who has extensive previous experience before college as a professional writer, loves writing, and had an outstanding literacy sponsorship experience at Promise College.

Brenda is the mother of six, and has seven grandchildren, and she is very close to her family. She worked in the past as the Director of Development and Marketing for a large non-profit organization focused on eliminating hunger in the United States for 9 years; she currently works full-time for an organization that assists people with disabilities in finding job placement in addition to studying as a full-time student. Thus, unlike other participants in this study, Brenda started her college with significant experience as a professional writer. Brenda also has Multiple Sclerosis, and had a stroke while she was completing her undergraduate degree, although it did not slow down her college completion process. Brenda grew up in foster care, and did not like high school, but says she loves college, where she is also a straight-A student. At the time of our interviews, Brenda was about to finish her Bachelors of Science in Business Administration at Promise University, and she talks about going for her MBA. Unlike all the other participants in this study, Brenda took classes both online and face-to-face. Brenda has had an outstanding educational experience at Promise University overall, stating that she had learned more there

than any other school or college she had ever taken courses at. However, her largest critique of Promise University is that team assignments, especially online, often mean that strong students like herself are forced to assist students who do not put forth the same effort or are not at the same skill level when it comes to writing. Brenda indeed said she often helped other students who did not have the same experience with writing as she did, even calling herself something of an unofficial “TA” in courses. Again, unlike other participants in this study, Brenda’s writing course entitled Communications 215 gave her a strong sense of rhetorical awareness focusing on ethos, pathos, and logos as well as Toulmin methods of argumentation. Brenda often described audience awareness and purpose as the most important concepts she took away from the course. Brenda loves Promise University, even going so far as to say she would be willing to be in an advertisement for the university if they asked her to be. She had graduated when we spoke.

Rhonda: 26-year-old, African American female living in North Carolina enrolled in AA in Information Technology who did not enjoy writing and had mostly positive, but mixed experiences with literacy sponsorship at Turner University.

Rhonda is married without children and is enrolled in her Associate’s Degree in Information Technology with a Minor in Software Development at Turner University. She describes herself as a “housewife, but other than I’m constantly moving around. I’m running errands, I’m doing everything else and it’s kind of hard to try to save that time to be in a school.” With this busy lifestyle, she says she likes Turner because of the flexibility that it offers, and she also has a scholarship that enables her to attend. She wants to work in IT for the government or an organization once she graduates. She graduated from high school in 2008, and she has been enrolled in three different colleges since then. She previously attended a community college but said that she did not like it because “a lot of times we were in class and a lot of my instructors were not keeping us in tune, so I would sleep a lot because it was just that boring. It was nothing to catch your eye, it was nothing that we were actually learning.” Rhonda said that she just felt like a “body” at community college, but at Turner she feels engaged in learning. Unlike many of the other participants in this study, Rhonda is not a first-generation college student, and she chose Turner in part because she has three different family members who have graduated from Turner. She had only completed one semester when we spoke. She is doing well at Turner and has a 3.7 GPA. She loves her technology classes, but said she had an issue with her introduction to composition course because the writing rubrics were unclear. She contacted an administrator at Turner to discuss the issue of the rubrics in her introduction to writing course. After that, the instructor changed the writing rubrics to her satisfaction. Overall, Rhonda is pleased with her experience at Turner.

Cassie: 33-year-old, Caucasian female living in North Carolina enrolled in a BA in Psychology who loves writing but had an incredibly negative experience with literacy sponsorship at Turner University.

Cassie is the single Mom of a rambunctious 3-year old toddler who once interrupted our online interview. When she graduates, she wants to work as a substance abuse counselor and to spread awareness of mental health issues. Cassie has a disability, as she said that she struggles with mental illness, and she receives disability benefits. Cassie had only just started her degree in our first interview, and she likes how Turner is adaptive and that the online format allows her to

study from home. Cassie is an outstanding student, and had a 4.00 GPA in all her courses the first semester. Cassie described herself as a “punctual writer in high school” where she wrote for the newspaper and won “all kinds of contests.” She also says, “writing is therapeutic for me because I suffer from mental illness” and she has a regular diary and writes poetry. Cassie increasingly over the course of our interviews felt that the work was too easy to be “college-level” as she put it at Turner, and expressed concern that she was not being challenged or encouraged to learn everything she possibly could about the subjects covered. She worries that her instructors are not critical enough, or that Turner does not hold students accountable. As she put it: “I would like to know that I’m getting what I paid for...I don’t know that I’m getting all the information that \$4200 is worth. That goes for more than just writing. That’s for the school in general.” Cassie feels rushed by the condensed course format at Turner and all the material that is squeezed into one week. She also said that unfortunately writing was not a social activity in the two introductory courses she was required to take. She says that writing is focused upon APA formatting and basic communication in Composition I. She really liked her Composition II instructor, but not the Composition I instructor. Overall, Tracy is frustrated with experiences writing and overall at Turner, although she has persevered through her courses.

Artifact Collection

After completing the first interview, I asked students to share with me: 1) the syllabus from their writing course, 2) a recent writing prompt and 3) their written response to that prompt via email if they had already completed the course and felt comfortable sharing these materials. I used the syllabi and writing prompt artifacts I collected such as writing assignments and/or syllabi for discovery or to talk to students about their interpretations of the documents during the second interview. These documents encouraged students’ detailed reflections on their experiences in writing classes, particularly for students who were not currently enrolled in their writing course. I also analyzed these artifacts to consider the model of literacy sponsorship most common at FPCUs. I asked participants if they could provide me with at least three documents. However, a few participants were less familiar with how to download and save artifacts from their course website, and could only provide me with their syllabus. Once participants emailed me these documents, I saved them on my password protected laptop using their pseudonym, and replaced any names within the documents themselves. As table five below demonstrates, six participants were very eager to share course documents with me, and provided more than three documents, with one participant even sending me 39 documents related to writing from her experience at Turner:

Table 5. Course Documents Collected

Course Documents Collected from Student Participants			
Name	University	# Docs Collected	Doc Contents
Rhonda	Turner	3	College Comp I Syllabus, one writing prompt, one essay
Jane	Promise	3	University Writing Essentials Syllabus, two sample essays with instructor comments
Whitney	Promise	1	University Writing Essentials Syllabus
Maisha	Promise	3	University Composition and Communication syllabus, two sample ethics essays
Reagan	Turner	3	College Comp I Syllabus, one writing prompt, one essay
Katherine	Promise	3	University Writing Essentials Syllabus, sample essay, essay template
Cassie	Turner	9	College Comp I Syllabus, one writing prompt, two sample essays, one sample outline, three discussion board samples, guide to evaluating sources,
Brenda	Promise	6	Effective Academic Writing Course Overview, Course Topics, two team writing essay samples from Ethics, individual paper sample,
Janice	Turner	11	College Comp II Syllabus, discussion board posts, discussion rubrics, college learning outcomes, writing assignments, worksheet example
Rory	Turner	39	College Comp 1 Syllabus, Units 1-9 Outlines, writing prompts, essay samples, learning activities sample, Turner Workshop PowerPoints, Turner Writing Guides, Turner Plagiarism Guide, Turner APA Guide
Jeanie	Promise	9	University Writing Essentials Syllabus, discussion sample, writing prompt, final essay, Grammarly report, personality test, weeks 1-4 overviews
Amala	Promise	18	Screenshots of Business Communication course syllabus, writing prompts, writing rubrics, course site, final grade, and elibrary handout
Blanche	Promise	3	Essentials of College Writing Syllabus, sample essay from health course, sample PowerPoint completed from health course
Chandra	Turner	1	College Comp 1 Syllabus

Data Analysis

I engaged in an iterative data collection and analysis process with the 14 participants, and thus I revised and revisited my interview protocol questions during the first, second and third round of interviews subtly. However, to ensure that I still covered similar ground in all the interviews, I added or slightly reworded questions rather than subtracting questions entirely from interview protocols. I conducted interviews and immediately afterwards or in the following few days after the interview while the conversation was still fresh in my memory, I wrote in-depth and robust reflective memos for an hour apiece. Already at the early memo-ing stage, I began to loosely identify recurring themes emerging in conversations.

My data analysis focused on interpreting the narratives I collected via student interviews, and via corpus linguistic and critical discourse analysis of media references to student writers at FPCUs in news media. I sought to answer the overarching research question of what kind of literacy sponsorship model or models are provided by this sample of FPCUs. As I mentioned, to maintain the confidentiality of my participants, all participants either chose or were assigned a pseudonym. I kept records of student names, email addresses, and contact phone numbers as they corresponded to assigned student participant pseudonyms only on my private personal laptop computer which is password protected. Within the interviews, all references to student names were replaced immediately during the transcription process with the appropriate pseudonym.

Again, as a novice researcher, I learned the hard way to start with my data first as a general rule when engaging in analysis. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) note that “A little bit of data collection and data analysis can reveal some important patterns” (p. 307). I started out by creating a detailed codebook without using my data directly but instead using my research questions, and then I ended up throwing out that codebook. Instead, I coded based on patterns I found emerging in reflective memos generated throughout the data collection process. I then looked back through these samples of coding from memos to generate more analytical themes or abstract codes. Once I had built themes from memos, I went back through the original interview data to code for these themes. At the same time, new codes also emerged in this process as I encountered topics students raised during our conversation (See Appendix G for my code book, which also includes the frequency of each code within all the interview data). Through this new coding process, I intended

to build grounded theory, which is particularly appropriate for research that investigates understudied contexts like FPCUs. Charmaz (2004) notes that grounded theory can be employed without more positivistic assumptions or from an “interpretative tradition [that] relies on knowledge from the ‘inside.’ That is, this tradition starts with and develops analyses from the point of view of the experiencing person...Such studies aim to capture the worlds of the people by describing their situations, thoughts, feelings, and actions and by relying on portraying the research participants’ lives and voices” (p. 499). I sought to take this interpretative approach. As my theoretical framework suggests, my analysis is framed through the critical lens of an “expansive view” of the college writing classrooms that connects students’ learning experiences in writing courses to the higher education privatization trends at FPCUs. After collecting my data, I coded descriptively, then analytically, then finally thematically searching for broader and more significant connections between pieces of data. This method also allowed me to put students’ stories at the forefront of my project, while still contextualizing them with crucial information about FPCUs and news media representations of students. Charmaz (2004) notes that as the researcher learns more, their questions change with grounded theory and become more “focused because the researcher engages in analysis while collecting data” (p. 506). Thus, I conducted both processes (data collection and analysis) at once.

Ethics of the Study

I sought to make my study empowering by giving student participants the space to build their own stories about their experiences at FPCUs. Rather than reinforcing the trend in news media of portraying for-profit students as simply illiterate victims of a scam without talking directly to them, I try to outline the literacy sponsorship model of various large public traded FPCUs from students themselves. Thus, I am operating from a qualitative paradigm that asserts “the importance of the subjective meanings individuals bring to the research process” where I view reality as socially constructed (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 56). Critical educational theorist Ladson-Billings (2000) has suggested that marginalized people have insight into the distortions of reality perpetuated through power inequities (p. 263). Importantly then, students’ stories at FPCUs reveal how dominant perspectives may distort reality in this unique context.

Evolution of Study

During the research process, my thinking has shifted about one important methodological question. This study began with my desire to speak with students at FPCUs about their learning

experiences in writing courses. Early on in designing this study, I pondered whether I should employ a comparative approach to compare students' experiences in writing courses at for-profit schools with students' experiences in writing courses at traditional universities or community colleges. I chose not to do this because an enormous amount of research—in fact an entire field has devoted itself to studying writing at public and private not-for-profit institutions—rhetoric and composition or writing studies. Likewise, entire journals and multiple yearly conferences exist about teaching English in the two-year college (community college) setting. To put it bluntly, there is no shortage of information about literacy sponsorship in these contexts. Of course, this has not been the case at FPCUs, where only one other dissertation thus far looks specifically at writing at FPCUs. While I remain open to the possibility that students' literacy experiences at FPCUs may not be drastically different from other students' literacy experiences at community colleges—this is not *the question* that I am interested in answering in this particular study. At the very least, the price tags of FPCUs and community colleges are drastically different—with the average yearly tuition of a for-profit college costing five times the average yearly tuition of a community college in 2013-14. And since I am interested in what literacy sponsorship is like at FPCUs, the economic consequences of literacy activities fall within the purview of my study. In fact, in the final round of interviews I asked students if their writing course was worth the money.

To me, focusing on the comparative question implies that the privatized versions of previously public institutions must be assumed to be equal or the same as those public institutions unless proven otherwise. Nevertheless, to keep this comparative view of FPCUs in the background of my study, I asked participants in our conversations if they had experienced literacy practices in a traditional or public college before and if they could compare the two contexts. As I mention earlier, research has found that 65% of students attending FPCUs are unfamiliar with the term for-profit college (Public Agenda, 2014). I asked participants if they were familiar with the term “for-profit college,” or aware of the for-profit status of their institution.¹³ If students were aware of their institutions' status, I went on to ask them how the for-profit institutional status affected their experiences more broadly, and specifically in writing classrooms. While this study is then not focused on explicitly comparing students' experiences

¹³ See Appendix C on pages 179-180 where my interview protocol addresses these questions about student awareness of their own institutions' financial model.

with literacy at FPCUs to students' experiences with literacy at community colleges or some other type of college, I did seek to contextualize students' experiences by drawing extensively in my analysis from the research in writing studies that has focused already on writing instruction at traditional institutions.

As I have engaged in data collection and analysis, I have encountered tension between my commitment to a narrative methodology that prioritizes students' voices and my sense as a writing instructor that at times participants remained unaware or unsure of what might be missing from their writing courses. During interview conversations with students about pedagogical practices that seemed either poor in quality or outright unethical, I pondered the consequences of remaining silent as a researcher. For example, many participants felt that writing a single two-page long essay over the entire course of their introductory writing course was very challenging, although my own experiences teaching community college writing courses involved assigning much larger quantities writing. At other moments, students did express discontent or dissatisfaction with literacy practices in our conversations, but I was unsure if or how I should respond. One participant who attended Turner in the final interview suggested, "I think that this school, particularly, it really didn't make a difference to them, because they didn't give me a pre-test...It didn't make a difference to them if we were prepared or unprepared" for writing at college. Again, this lack of care for student preparation concerned me, but I did not step in. This participant at the last time we spoke had chosen to transfer out of Turner University. In a more extreme example, a participant enrolled at Promise University who took face-to-face courses as well as online courses described:

So, I've seen students come into the university who were military. They would sign in on the roster...they would sign in and leave. Even if they've already missed a day, if they sign in, they're considered there, but they wouldn't stay in class. And what that enabled them to do was collect their military pay while they're in college, but they never stayed in class. When I addressed that, they said that was the standard that was set in the contract with the military. As long as they sign in, they can't make them stay there, which I thought was unethical. They're holding us, who are not military, to a higher standard than those who were. And it affected grades, because if you're in a team and they're not there

to hear what's going on, they're a less effective team member for the team grade. So then, the other team members have to pick up their slack.

This participant did not withdraw from Promise University, but did choose to address this issue with her instructor and even an administrator, where she received a somewhat unsatisfactory response. I chose not to step in during these instances to provide my personal or ethical opinion on these matters to participants, and I struggled with this decision. At the same time, through sharing of summaries of news media stories about literacy at FPCUs, as I have mentioned, I believe I was able to provide a diversity of information about FPCUs to students, while still prioritizing their own experiences.

Secondly, I also encountered this tension between my role as a researcher and a writing teacher while writing up findings from the dissertation and attempting to stay true to students' stories. I sought to frankly address the limitations of literacy at FPCUs that student themselves reported and sometimes—but did not always—identify as limitations. To analyze students' stories about literacy while also contextualizing their experiences, in both chapter three and four I compare students' reports of writing courses at FPCUs to the National Council of English Teachers' (NCTE) *Principles for the Teaching of Postsecondary Writing* which is meant to provide standards across institutional contexts. I also used the artifacts participants submitted to me for analysis—syllabi, course descriptions, writing prompts and documents generated by the university; these provided a somewhat different perspective on literacy sponsorship from what students' themselves told me about their experiences. Nevertheless, I chose to not extensively incorporate student writing samples into my analysis and findings, although I did collect an extensive number of writing samples in artifacts. When I tried to analyze student writing, critiquing student writing samples felt and looked like critiquing students' identities, or falling into the trap so common in news media of blaming or disparaging students for attending a for-profit college in the first place. As a result, I made the decision to place student writing samples off the table as data.

Validity

Since a narrative approach emphasizes the lived experiences of participants, I aimed to achieve validity through generating “thick descriptions” which get at the question “how do the people under study interpret phenomena?” (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 326). More specifically, I

created thick descriptions about how students interpret their writing courses at FPCUs. A narrative approach methodologically considers reality to be socially constructed and thus this perspective informs my analysis and validity. I focused on communicative validity (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 49) by building a narrative that was trustworthy to participants who are key knowledge builders. This is also defined by researchers as transactional validity (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 321).

Member Checking

I gained transactional validity through completing an extensive member checking process with participants. Cho and Trent (2006) assert that in qualitative research member checking “occurs throughout the inquiry, and is a process in which collected data is ‘played back’ to the informant to check for perceived accuracy and reactions” (p. 322). This involved a continual process of repeating back details or stories briefly to make sure I correctly perceived participant’s stories during interviews. Additionally, in my final interview, I provided my participants with the summary of key findings about literacy sponsorship at FPCUs from news media and ads and asked participants if those findings fit or departed from their experiences and stories. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) describe this type of validity as “a dialogue among those considered legitimate knowers, who may often make competing claims to knowledge-building” (p. 49). Thus, I dialogued with my participants, and checked in to make sure that the knowledge-building happening corroborated with their stories. I also wrote participant profiles after the three interviews were complete and sent each participant her profile via email to make sure she felt that it fit. I adjusted participant profiles according to the feedback I received from them. I also emailed brief summaries of the two major findings from the two findings chapters that focus on students’ experiences to the study members to make sure that they agreed with those findings. About half of my participants responded to this request, and all of those who responded felt that the findings fit with their experiences and reports. Additionally, once the research was written up, I hoped to achieve craftsmanship validity which Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) define this way: “Is the researcher able to tell a convincing story?” (p. 49). With narrative approaches this type of validity was crucial, as I was completing the re-storying process and building a new narrative.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I hoped to build what Cho and Trent (2006) call transformational validity—or “a progressive, emancipatory process leading toward social change that is to be achieved by the research endeavor itself” (pp. 321-322). They elaborate that transformational validity suggests that “validity is determined by the resultant actions prompted

by the research endeavor” (p. 324), and thus it is action-oriented. This type of validity would mean that my research might be useful to other researchers or policymakers, perhaps challenging hegemonic narratives about FPCUs. My research offers a narrative about student writers’ view of the model of literacy sponsorship at FPCUs, and furthermore how they negotiate and imagine that sponsorship model. My research provides narratives that might inform public policy that eventually leads to certain types of regulations or better public information on FPCUs—breaking open the black box surrounding classrooms I describe. I build theory that might inform other researchers’ frameworks and questions when studying FPCUs. This theory has analytic generalizability (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011, p. 53) through its usefulness as a framework or set of new questions to increase our limited understanding of students’ experiences in their writing courses at FPCUs.

Reflexivity

Throughout this entire project, I have been engaging in reflexivity or thinking about my role as a reader of the news media I analyze, an interviewer of participants, an analyzer of data and finally more recently as a writer. Within the “re-storying” process, reflexivity refers to “questioning of one’s place and power relations within the research process” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 13). As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note when doing analysis in their narrative study, “We learned that we, too, needed to tell our stories. Scribes we were not; story tellers and story lives we were” (p. 12). Thus, with a narrative approach reflexivity means the constant balancing of participants’ narratives with my own reiterative examination of my positionality and “storied” role in the research process.

Indeed, I must acknowledge in my narrative that the American system of higher education, as many researchers have pointed out (Haveman and Smeeding, 2006) functions quite obviously to separate young people and adults based on socioeconomic status, race, and even geography. On the other hand, from my own positionality as a middle class, white female who attended a high-performing high school in the US and then elite institutions of higher education with little conflict, this system worked nicely to my advantage. On the contrary, for many of the participants I interviewed this system of K-12 and then higher education has been at best perhaps neutral and at worst worked explicitly to their disadvantage. That is to say—FPCUs as mainly open access institutions, possess less cultural capital, precisely because of the elitist and hierarchical system of higher education. To offset power imbalance between students and myself, I have listened

carefully to them while conscientiously avoiding making assumptions about their experiences. I have engaged in open-ended questioning to ensure that my participants were telling their stories as they wanted to and comfortably (without my prodding or controlling). At the same time, I conducted my research project knowing that students' may hold negative views of me because of my positionality and subjectivity. As an administrator and writing teacher who worked for a 2-year institution in Chicago that was not-for-profit, but starting to adopt some of the practices typical of FPCUs, I have also reflected on my prior experience with FPCUs. From this initial experience, I both became aware of FPCUs, and developed mixed feelings about how much value the college I worked at provided for students.

Conclusion

In this study, I have sought to find, analyze and weave together sometimes conflicting narratives about literacy sponsorship at FPCUs through two different but connected views: 1) what news media in the past 20 years has had to say about literacy at for-profit colleges 2) what students themselves and their writing assignments say about literacy at for-profit colleges. Methodologically then, this project is unique in my decision to bring together this more global, birds-eye view of stories about literacy and FPCUs from media and to marry it with highly individualized, personal stories of experiences with reading and writing from currently enrolled students at FPCUs. I believe this methodology is important in providing a more balanced and comprehensive portrait of literacy sponsorship than either news media or students' reports might provide alone. This project represents a departure from previous research in considering the specific literacy practices and writing courses students engage in, and their own reports of their learning experiences. Throughout this project, I have sought to maintain a narrative methodology that privileges students' voices *over* other narratives about literacy at FPCUs. I even went so far as to summarize news media narratives and to show them to my participants in the final interview to ask if news stories aligned with students' own stories about reading and writing. I believe this orientation of my study is crucial considering that for-profit students have been portrayed as helpless, illiterate victims in news media or condescended to and judged as ignorant or lazy consumers for their choice of college. At the same time, I have balanced students' reports of their experiences with research on best practices in college writing that I hope contextualizes students' reports in interviews. In the next findings chapter, I first identify a narrative in news media that has generalized in suggesting that FPCUs offer low-quality literacy sponsorship and

cheat ignorant students, and furthermore that this scenario is students' fault as consumers choosing a college in the first place. In the subsequent two findings chapters, I consider students' reports and course documents more closely in comparison to standards developed for college writing in the field of rhetoric and composition. Using these data sources, I argue that the specific focus of literacy sponsorship at FPCUs is on conventions or standardized citations and grammar, and furthermore I argue that there is a lack of a social model for writing at FPCUs. I explore how these themes play out from a variety of students' perspectives.

Chapter III: News Discourse on Literacy Sponsorship at FPCUs

My commitment to attending to economic trends and generating contextual information in my study of writing courses at FPCUs means considering not only how students view their literacy sponsorship, but also considering how students are represented with regard to literacy and writing in discussions about for-profit colleges in news media outlets. Since I conceptualize the classroom as a political space, in addition to an educational space, then FPCUs are not simply providing skills for their students. They are also providing a model of literacy sponsorship that positions students in various ways, and has consequences for students' futures. As research on FPCUs is scarce, news articles have seemingly become more important as singular sources of information about FPCUs for researchers, the public, and even some prospective students. Indeed, higher education researcher Iloh (2013) has pointed out: "Of note is the overall scarcity of literature on FPCUs. The influence and ethics of for-profit colleges have been debated in newspaper articles" but at the same time "empirical research of the sector is scarce." Thus, news sources represent unique sources of information on FPCUs.

As I have already pointed out, research has shown that students who attend for-profit colleges may be unfamiliar with this news discourse on FPCUs (Public Agenda, 2014). For example, a recent study found that 65% of students enrolled at for-profit colleges are unfamiliar with the term for-profit college (Public Agenda, 2014). The recently published study by Public Agenda (2014) surveyed 197 current undergraduate students at FPCUs, 249 alumni of FPCUs and 803 prospective students. The researchers find that for-profit students seem unaware of news coverage of their schools: "Generally, students – prospective, current and graduates...seem quite distanced from the enthusiastic policy conversation about for-profit colleges" as students are often unaware of the for-profit status of their schools (Public Agenda, 2014). Problematically then, this news discourse describing and sometimes making judgements about the value of students' literacy practices at for-profit college is often entirely unfamiliar to students at FPCUs themselves. This is important because students and their literacy practices may be unfavorably

represented without their permission or even awareness, and with their own voices and opinions on FPCUs noticeably absent from public discourse.

Previous Scholarship Analyzing For-Profit Ads and Media

Previous scholarship has begun to analyze media coverage and advertising at for-profit colleges (Hermansen, 2016; Iloh & Tierney, 2014). By and large, this scholarship has focused on advertising on the part of large publicly traded for-profit colleges, rather than news coverage of for-profits. Perhaps, in part this focus in research on FPCUs on advertising is because FPCUs are seen as unique in their aggressive advertising strategies. The 2012 U.S. Senate report on FPCUs found that during only the fiscal year 2009 for-profit education companies reviewed by the Senate Committee spent overall \$4.2 billion or 22.7% of total revenue on marketing, advertising, recruitment, and admissions staffing, whereas only \$3.2 billion or 17.2% of revenue was spent on instruction. Writing studies researcher Hermansen (2016) has pointed out that “in 2012 the University of Phoenix paid more for advertisements on Google than any other client, spending an average of \$200,000 per day for their advertisements to appear on the search engine” (p. 88). Thus, an overt focus on advertising has been identified as a key, and perhaps defining characteristic of for-profit institutions. I seek to fill the gap in research on FPCUs then by analyzing news coverage of literacy sponsorship of FPCUs from 1994 to 2016 within the following chapter.

Research has not only demonstrated that FPCUs advertise heavily in comparison to traditional colleges, but also confirmed to some extent that this aggressive advertising is successful in recruiting students. Public Agenda (2014) found that 64 percent of prospective students had learned about the for-profit college they planned to attend through television commercials, billboards, or online advertisements (p. 11). One dissertation from the field of composition studies also addresses advertising at FPCUs and touches upon the idea of FPCUs as literacy sponsors. Hermansen’s (2016) dissertation *Selling College: Student Recruitment and Education Reform Rhetoric in the Age of Privatization* focuses on what she identifies as “pro-privatization reform discourse” which includes 1) ads intended to promote FPCUs 2) documentary films like *Waiting for Superman* that analyze the role of education in American society and finally 3) interviews and testimonials from students attending FPCUs. In this chapter, I then build from Hermansen’s work on FPCUs, but rather than focusing on broadly analyzing privatization rhetoric, my aim is to outline the literacy sponsorship model of FPCUs depicted

through news media. While Hermansen briefly references Brandt's theory of literacy sponsorship in her introduction, throughout her study the term literacy seems conflated and often replaced with education more broadly conceived or general college attendance. I seek to avoid this conflation of literacy with a college degree in my analysis of news articles by focusing on very specific literacy practices.

Analytical Framework

Each section in my project—the analysis of news media depictions of student writers at FPCUs, and the qualitative interviews about students' experiences in writing courses at for-profits—affords me a different view of what I refer to as the literacy sponsorship model enacted at FPCUs. My framework for crafting each part of the dissertation project uses Brandt's concept of literacy sponsorship that I have already elaborated upon in my introduction and theoretical framework. I use the concept of literacy sponsorship in this chapter to think about the shifting relationship between students at FPCUs as readers, writers, and literacy learners and FPCUs institutions as literacy sponsors.

Agenda Setting Theory

Agenda setting theory informs my consideration of the mass media within this chapter. Agenda setting theory highlights that the press “may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think *about*” (Cohen, 1963, p. 13). In short, some topics are perceived as highly relevant to media consumers because news media highlights those topics by covering them more frequently and comprehensively. Agenda setting theory was formally explored in 1973 by Communications theorists McCombs and Weaver who described the ability of mass media coverage of the U.S. Presidential election to determine what the public saw as the most important presidential election issue. Since its initial emergence, agenda setting theory has become a fruitful line of research exploration in Communications, Sociology, and Psychology (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2014). In what follows, I use concepts from Agenda Setting Theory (AST) to complete my first broad analysis of the 99-article corpus I created.

The combining of agenda setting theory with framing theory is important for my own analysis of the news articles discussing literacy sponsorship at FPCUs; this combination is often referred to as second-level agenda setting or attribute agenda setting. Other communications theorists introduced framing to AST (Gamson, 1989; Gitlin, 1980), pointing out that not only did

news media influence how the 1960s student movement was viewed, but that it also had measurable behavioral consequences on the direction of public opinion on this issue, and whether the public might be willing to vote or act on the issue. Since then, McCombs (2005) has argued that agenda setting theory encompasses both mass media's ability to influence the salience of various topics, as well as how people view the attributes of those topics: "The media not only can be successful in telling us what to think about, they also can be successful in telling us how to think about it" (p. 546). AST assists in identifying the relevant topics when it comes to news coverage of FPCUs, as well as how those topics are presented.¹⁴ Within the 99 articles that discuss literacy practices that students at FPCUs engage in, second-level agenda setting or framing assists in explaining the often highly inflammatory frame through which literacy sponsorship models of students are discussed. The language I borrow from McCombs (2005) to analyze "how" these news media frames encourage their audience to think about for-profit literacy sponsorship includes: 1) the notion of the **object**—or for-profit college literacy practices and sponsorship and everything involved along with them as an object of news media coverage, 2) **attributes of the object**—or qualities of for-profit literacy sponsorship most frequently depicted, often as simple as low-quality or high-quality literacy sponsorship, and 3) **framing of the object** or contextual maps or pictures onto which the viewing audience might place for-profit literacy sponsorship practices—in the following analysis I discuss how students at FPCUs are often framed as consumers, and higher education in general is framed as a marketplace for media audiences. These terms and the framework of AST inform my following analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis

AST is highly useful in my examination of the most pervasive frames and attributes of literacy sponsorship highlighted through FPCUs, but I also rely on critical discourse analysis (CDA) to focus on how societal power relations are established and maintained through the language used within the news articles about literacy sponsorship at FPCUs. Foundational CDA

¹⁴ As I have already suggested, reading and writing or literacy practices were not actually highly relevant in news coverage of FPCUs overall. In fact, only 99 out of 1,586 news articles that I skimmed or about 6.2% of media pieces discussing FPCUs discussed literacy practices on the part of for-profit college students such as reading and writing, and this 6.2% even allowed for articles that discussed students using literacy to participate in legal or political action against FPCUs and at times articles that brought up for-profit students using literacy in the college selection process. This trend interestingly suggests that specific academic or literacy practices are not often part of the major agenda setting or the salient objects of news coverage when it comes to FPCUs. Instead, most articles focused on other topics related to FPCUs such as student debt, defaulting on loans, student recruitment, for-profit college marketing and recruiting, for-profit college job placement after college, and alumni earnings. Importantly then, when it comes to coverage of FPCUs, news media seems to reinforce a consumer model of education that focuses on the college selection process, financial literacy, college costs, and financial benefits of college on the part of students, also seen as consumers. The objects that are highlighted through this agenda-setting exclude the academic content of courses or degrees at FPCUs, thereby both implicitly suggesting the emptiness of for-profit degree programs and at the same time reinforcing an overall view of higher education as simply a credential for a student-consumer to be trained for a lucrative career.

theorists Wodak and Meyer (2001) describe CDA in this way: “CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, signaled, constituted, legitimized and so on by language use (or in discourse)” (p. 2). For example, I ask in the analysis that follows: how do representations of literacy sponsorship at FPCUs on the part of news media express, constitute or legitimize social inequality with regard to the student writers described? I employ discourse theorist Gee’s (2014) methodological questions for applying CDA in my analysis of news discourse including:

How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?...What practice (activity) or practices (activities) is this piece of language being used to enact?...What identity or identities is this piece of language being used to enact (i.e. get others to recognize as operative)? What identity or identities is this piece of language attributing to others and how does this help the speaker or writer enact his or her own identity? (p. 32-34)

These useful methodological questions highlight the ways in which the news articles in question work to distribute power, and constitute or express social inequalities.

Broad Content Analysis of News Articles

In the next section I present the textual content analysis of the corpus I created and coded. I start with charts depicting the prominence of themes I uncovered within the articles. Then, I go into the most prominent or frequent six themes and provide some examples and analysis of when and how I saw those specific themes emerge within the data I collected. My analysis of specific examples from the articles is informed by both Agenda Setting Theory or AST and CDA.¹⁵ The bar graph below presents an overview of the coding themes that were most frequent in my coding analysis:

¹⁵ See appendix F to examine the exact summary statements that I created from this round of coding, in the exact order that I presented them to participants.

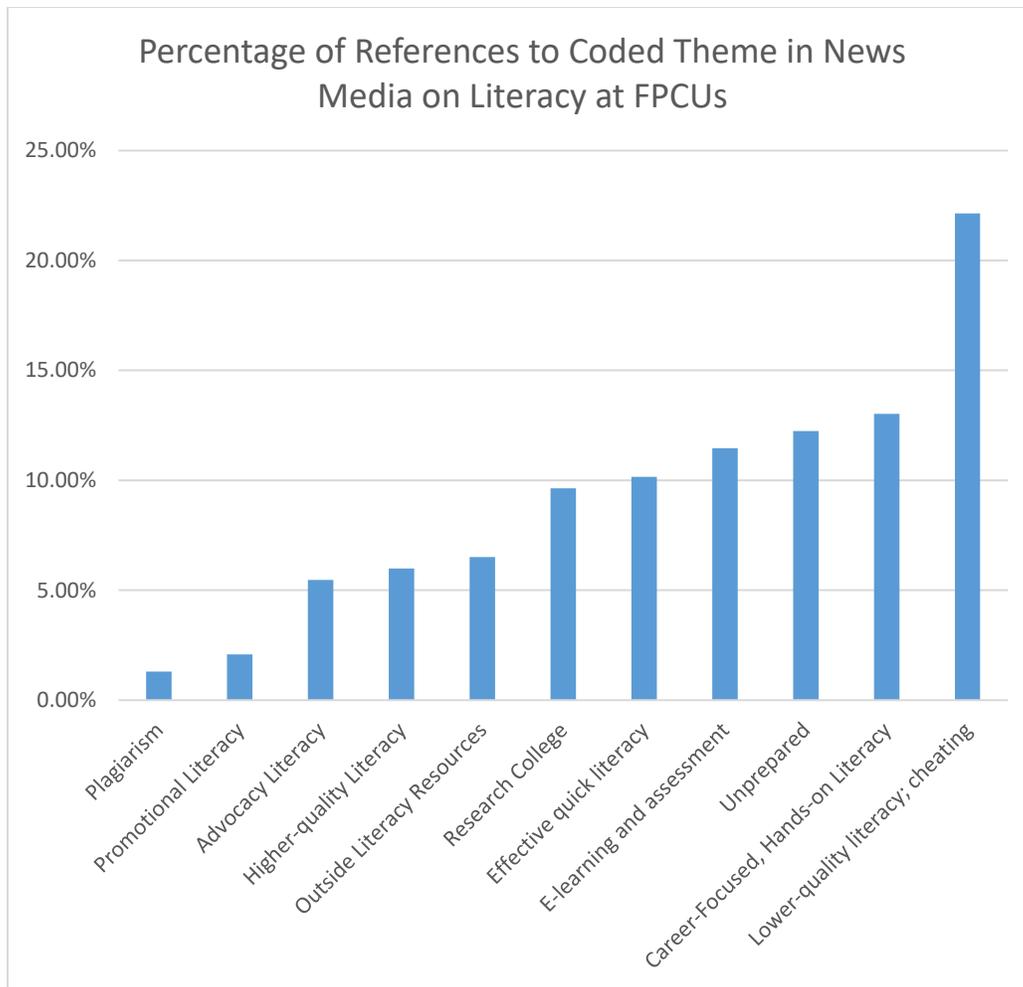


Figure 1. Percentage of References to Coded Theme in News Media on Literacy at FPCUs.

As figure one demonstrates, the theme of low-quality literacy sponsorship or FPCUs cheating students in one way or another out of valuable literacy experiences was the most prominent or frequently recurring theme within the 99 articles. Lower-quality literacy sponsorship at FPCUs garnered 22.14% or almost twice the percentage of references in comparison with the next most frequent theme of career-focused, hands-on literacy at 13.02%.

The above figure is focused upon the overall number of references in all the articles as I went through and qualitatively coded each article line by line. However, I also examined how many articles contained any reference to each code. Below are the total number of articles that contain any reference to each code:

Table 6. Focus of News Articles 1

Overall Focus of News Articles	
Code	# of Sources
Plagiarism	5
Promotional literacy	7
Advocacy literacy	17
Higher-quality literacy	20
Outside literacy resources	18
Research college	22
Effective quick literacy	32
E-learning and assessment	30
Unprepared	37
Career-focused, hands-on Literacy	37
Lower-quality literacy; cheating	58

Again, low-quality literacy is the most prominent theme overall, with 58 out of 99 articles containing this theme. So also, the order of the next themes in terms of prominence is the same.

Theme #1: Writing and reading activities at for-profit colleges are of lower quality than other writing classes at traditional schools, and thus students at for-profit colleges may be cheated out of a quality education, and unable to find better jobs afterwards.

This is perhaps not surprisingly the most prominent theme I encountered overall within the 99 articles. One anonymously authored article from a former instructor at *The Chronicle of Higher Education* bluntly asserts:

Some of these students will never finish their degrees, whether because they are functionally illiterate, or have failed their courses throughout high school because of learning difficulties, or have generally low levels of intelligence and ability, or, perhaps, exhibit signs of untreated psychological problems...Such students are always accepted at

for-profit colleges, where they fail semester after semester, continually encouraged to re-enroll by the admissions and advising offices that urge them to take out more student loans, thereby lining the pockets of investors. As a result, some faculty have little knowledge of what actually constitutes college-level work...Countless examples from my years at a for-profit college show that these colleges exploit students...Faculty then routinely rate as “passing” or even “excellent” work that would not have passed muster when I taught high school. Yet while assigning passing grades to students who do not master the material may seem altruistic and supportive, it is an extreme disservice to those students. They will have earned a degree, but that degree will not represent actual learned skills. Those students will not be able to make it through a job interview or fill out job applications. (“The Fear and Frustration,” 2011)

Low-quality literacy sponsorship means not only that students enrolled in coursework at FPCUs might be “functionally illiterate” (“The Fear and Frustration,” 2011) in the first place, but also that faculty may be unaware of what constitutes college-level literacy practices and thus pass students even though their writing is not at “college-level.” In this article authored by an anonymous ex-faculty member, students are then depicted as victims while faculty are complicit in an institutional model that prioritizes profit at the expense of students’ literacy learning.

In many examples like the statement above, news articles referencing this theme made overarching statements about the lack of academic value, rigor, or standards at for-profit schools that ended up cheating students out of literacy skills that might enable them to improve their employment prospects. Some of the news headlines in the corpus reveal the prominence of this theme of exploitation: “For-Profit College Enrolls, ‘Exploits’ Student Who Reads at Third-grade Level;” “For-Profit Colleges Need More Consumer Oversight;” and “For-Profit Colleges Need Close Scrutiny from Congress.” These articles suggest that the literacy sponsorship model at FPCUs is predatory, that literacy is indeed a valuable commodity as Brandt’s notion of literacy sponsorship highlights, and FPCUs exploit and cheat students out of this commodity while charging exorbitant prices for tuition; further FPCUs then provide empty literacy experiences that will not help students to find better employment upon graduation. Some articles reference the dearth of library facilities at for-profit schools as cheating students, the low quality of literacy instruction, or the prevalence of plagiarism as evidence of this low-quality literacy sponsorship.

While the literacy sponsorship model is characterized as exploitative in news media, using CDA to examine these references suggests that students are simultaneously assigned identities as victims, perhaps “functionally illiterate” or lacking in intelligence or the capacity to protect themselves from this predatory literacy sponsorship model. Student identities are also raced, classed and disabled in problematic ways. One article from Salon.com is entitled “Young, Black and Buried in Debt: How For-Profit Colleges Prey on African American Ambition” (Wright, 2013). Although these articles often have the goal of exposing the predatory behavior of colleges on vulnerable students, they also seem to generate stereotypes about for-profit students. Several articles suggest that student writers at FPCUs may have problems with literacy because of “untreated psychological problems,” learning disabilities, or precarious economic situations. While research has demonstrated that students at FPCUs are much more likely to be low-income or of a minority background, these news articles may also be seen as reinforcing racist or classist views of the inferiority of literacy skills of students of color or working-class students. For news audiences skimming audiences may assume—and journalists may imply—that it is students’ own faults they are not gaining valuable literacy skills, rather than for-profits’ fault for not teaching literacy skills.

Students also seem to be portrayed as trapped within this literacy sponsorship model—overloaded with unsustainable debt but stuck in low-paying jobs and at predatory colleges. Student identities are then somewhat static within this vicious cycle, whereas the authors of the articles—whether journalists, or anonymous ex-faculty—enact identities as powerful whistleblowers by exposing these scandalous stories about for-profit higher education. Although ex-faculty might obviously be wary of associating themselves in print with these scandalous stories about for-profit colleges, they may publish anonymously and have had the power obviously to switch jobs to leave FPCUs behind. It seems assumed that students trapped in this for-profit education cycle are not the intended audiences of these articles as students are referenced within the articles as “They” and “Those students” (“The Fear and Frustration,” 2011). Perhaps the authors assume that reading news articles is not the type of literacy activity that “those students” might engage in. It seems unclear then what the goal of whistleblowing is, except possibly to inform Congress members or accrediting agencies who might have the power to regulate literacy activities at FPCUs.

At times within references for this theme of literacy exploitation, journalists suggest US

Congress or government should step in to protect student consumers from this fraudulent literacy sponsorship model. In this news discourse, literacy sponsorship at FPCUs is framed within a highly politicized, legal framework. Within this contextual map, academic abuses in terms of literacy learning are righted through regulations or lawsuits rather than through institutional reform or faculty changing curriculum. This model of literacy sponsorship very explicitly positions literacy as a commodity to be traded for employment, but this positioning means that the only way institutions may measure success in literacy sponsorship is through students' future employment endeavors.

A CDA lens might point out that the use of literacy for other purposes such as civic, artistic or entertainment aims does not even register within this for-profit model of literacy sponsorship depicted by news discourse. Literacy scholar Scribner (1984) uses three metaphors to describe literacy as: 1) adaptive or functional skill to navigate daily life, 2) as power or as a tool for maintaining hegemony for powerful groups, and finally 3) as state of grace or salvation practice. However, within this sample of news discourse spanning over 20 years, literacy for student writers at FPCUs is only described as a functional skill to exchange for employment. Student writers at FPCUs are never described engaging in literacy as an artistic activity or in terms of religious practices as a salvation practice. The underlying assumption seems to be that considering the types of racist, ableist, classist identities the articles assign to students—as low-income students or disabled students or students of color, these articles offensively imply students might only be able to engage in the most minimal, functional type of literacy activity. On the other hand, from a CDA perspective, literacy becomes powerful in these news representations insofar as it is withheld from students by FPCUs, thereby halting their future career mobility.

While FPCUs' literacy sponsorship model—according to news discourse—ironically capitalizes on vulnerable students' desperate need for literacy skills to secure better future employment, FPCUs are depicted as lacking in literacy instruction that might be of real value for students. For example, in an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, a ghostwriter describes illegally writing and selling papers and assignments for college students. The ghostwriter comments on the assignments he completed for for-profit university students:

As he wrote papers for students across a range of institutions, Mr. Tomar said in the interview, he saw vastly different levels of expectations. The lowest, he said, was at for-

profit colleges, where he often saw the same assignment recycled. Sometimes he was hired to complete writing assignments for online discussions at for-profits, where the grades are based on whether the work is completed, not on its quality. Such work received little of his attention, he said, “because it was clear to me that nobody, nobody, nobody cares.” (Berrett, 2012)

The author suggests that FPCUs do not care enough about literacy to instruct students and hold them accountable for their own writing products, or to judge the writing based on “quality” rather than mere “quantity.” CDA exposes how significance is enacted through this example. Ghostwriter Mr. Tomar with the passing phrase “nobody cares” and a single example disregards the significance of ANY of the literacy activities that occur at FPCUs—to him the ghostwriting work he completed for students at for-profits was unimportant because those institutions, including the students who attend them, are themselves an unimportant joke. Tomar suggests that all FPCUs engage in this ridiculous bankrupt model of literacy sponsorship.

News discourse suggests that the literacy sponsorship model at FPCUs is also overly focused on grammar instead of on more important writing concerns like plagiarism and actual writing content. Another article by a professional dissertation editor revealed her frustration at working with for-profit doctoral students because of the for-profits’ focus on surface-level features of writing rather than real research and academic content:

Most academic institutions set rules to ensure quality of research or academic ethics. For-profit programs are greatly preoccupied with rules, too, but not the kind that guide students about things like research content or plagiarism. I would fruitlessly expound to my clients about the need for additional research or greater attention to academic honesty in their work...when students forwarded to me the responses they'd received from their committee chairs, the only rules that seemed to preoccupy them were grammatical ones...The committee chairs demonstrated no concern for holes in a student's research content or for evidence of plagiarism. I was flabbergasted. (Canchola, 2011)

Canchola also describes receiving illegible dissertation drafts, making her question why the student had been accepted into a doctoral program in the first place. For-profit models of literacy sponsorship depicted in news discourse are marked by a lack of rigorous engagement with student research and writing, where instead grammatical rules become the focus of literacy. From a CDA perspective, for dissertation editor Canchola, the writing instructors and

dissertation committee members at FPCUs are portrayed as also to a certain extent as insignificant joke in that they are overly concerned with small grammatical rules, but ignore much larger problems with student writing like plagiarism and the need for real research. At the same time, Canchola through this characterization enacts for herself the identity of a serious and significant editor, pushing her for-profit clients to improve their dissertations in truly substantial ways, while also distancing herself from what happens in terms of literacy at FPCUs.

On a final note, agenda setting theory would suggest that the pervasiveness of this coded theme throughout the articles means that by and large the picture that the press is painting in the minds of the audience is one of for-profits as vicious profit-hungry predators that recruit practically illiterate students and victimize them, fraudulently taking their federal financial aid money and loans and offering them no valuable literacy skills in return—of FPCUs as places where “nobody cares” about literacy, not administrators, not instructors and not even at times students who may also be plagiarizing and cheating their way through writing assignments. Rather than identifying single for-profit college chains as at fault, most of these articles suggest that in general most FPCUs engage in this type of predatory behavior. One article describes for-profit colleges across the board as having “uneven, if not lower or nonexistent academic standards” (Weathersbee, 2006, p. B7). In this way news discourse not only implies that meaningful literacy instruction is not an attribute of FPCUs, but also even more importantly news discourse is shaping how media consumers consider literacy sponsorship at FPCUs—as generally low-quality and cheating students. Furthermore, since these discussions of low-quality literacy sponsorship are often framed through discussions of federal financial aid, legal actions and employment regulations, news discourse in some ways places FPCUs onto the mental map of media audiences as corrupt corporations perhaps like the next Enron taking advantage of vulnerable people for profit that ultimately have little do with “real” or traditional education or literacy learning.

Theme #2: Student’s reading and writing practices at for-profit colleges are hands-on, geared towards their career goals, and involve smaller classes, reflecting the goals and needs of non-traditional or adult college students.

This is the second most prominent theme in terms of the number of references overall. However, it ties with the theme of unprepared students for the number of overall articles that demonstrate the theme, as each could be found in 37 out of 99 articles. Articles containing this

theme reference the career-focused literacy curriculum that is common at FPCUs, the focus on writing at FPCUs with a goal of going into professional fields, the acceptance of work experience or competency-based credits that use assessments to give students credits for knowledge learned outside the university, the non-traditional older students who are already employed and want to learn literacy skills that can be applied right away in their workplaces, and the convenience of online literacy coursework for FPCUs for those students already working. Quite clearly, this theme contrasts with the previous theme in that by and large it seems like it suggests a more positive portrait of literacy sponsorship at FPCUs. However, the references to a career-focused, hands-on for-profit literacy sponsorship model seem to operate along a continuum: from a few intensely positive assertions that a career-focused for-profit approach to literacy is the future of higher education to more neutral discussions of the practical need for career training for working adults that attend certain FPCUs like DeVry for example, to more negative descriptions that suggest that FPCUs have stripped literacy down to its most minimal form. Even further, some of the most berating and negative of references argue that FPCUs' career training model does not work, as the job market shifts too rapidly, and students end up even ill-prepared for the supposedly practical careers they thought they would be able to obtain jobs in.

On the extremely positive end of the continuum FPCUs supposedly represent the future of higher education in the US and abroad, where traditional universities' liberal arts campus-based learning model is cast away as part of the past. For example, one op-ed article entitled "We Should Not Fear an Online Future that Can Provide Quality Distance Learning for Millions" points to the University of Phoenix as an outstanding model:

The online, for-profit University of Phoenix employs an Adult Learning Outcomes Assessment system that embraces pre- and post- entry cognitive assessment, critical thinking, a communication skills inventory, portfolio assessment of prior academic and experiential learning and "professional values"... There will always be a place for Oxbridge and the Ivy League. But they do not represent the future shape of global higher education (Alderman, 2001, p. 14).

These references within articles tend to discuss the divide between the liberal arts and broader missions of traditional universities and the vocationalism of FPCUs, sometimes suggesting that the bare bones practical approach of FPCUs is just what working adults need, and most students

will need in the future. These news articles then seem to align with Composition studies researcher Hermansen's classification of two types of advertisements for FPCUs, one which critiques traditional higher education as the "status quo" or even the past and represents FPCUs as the future of higher education. These types of references often critique the status quo of higher education. Operating from a CDA lens, this reference places significance on the use of technology to complete individualized literacy assessment by FPCUs and to allot academic credit for previous work experience, suggesting these types of literacy activities are more significant or effective in terms of the future of higher education than perhaps more traditional or liberal-arts based literacy activities employed by ivy league universities. The underlying assumption is that liberal arts literacies do not adequately prepare students for success in the modern workplace. These types of statements also set up false binaries that suggest FPCUs and the Ivy League Colleges have nothing in common when it comes to literacy practices. This reference makes the implicit assumption that at some point in the future most universities may be for-profit, online, and all students may engage in series of online assessments to receive academic credit for work experience, and to assess the knowledge they gain through each academic.

Perhaps less extreme, many the references in this theme simply discuss the career-oriented focus of literacy at FPCUs as filling a need in higher education for some non-traditional students. In the example below the author stresses the practical literacies acquired at the University of Phoenix for the workplace:

The courses stress practicality. "Adults learn best when they learn information they can use," says Joleen Clark, a former airline executive and a Phoenix teacher for 12 years. "Your students aren't 22 years old who are thinking, 'Oh, we can change the world.' They're 35-year-olds or 40-year-olds who are thinking, 'How am I going to make an impact on my organization?'" (Stecklow, 1994, pg. 1).

The University of Phoenix then is described as a practical college option, teaching career-focused literacy skills for older non-traditional students who do not want to earn useless degrees or have lofty educational goals; even further, these working adults are described as wanting to engage in literacy activities that will impact their jobs and salaries right away as they are already working full-time perhaps in an organization in the field they are completing coursework in. In another similar article the former President of DeVry Inc. is quoted: "'We're not trying to produce Harvard graduates...Our students are interested in a career and want the skills --

technical and nontechnical -- to do the job” (qtd. in Arenson, 2000, pg. B12). Thus, these articles do not necessarily point to FPCUs as the future of higher education, but instead as a decent option for older career-focused adult students going back to college. Another article states:

[Phoenix] aims to meet underserved demand for post-secondary education...Phoenix offers the educational equivalent of a subprime mortgage: not the best product the industry has to offer, but a potentially valuable option for people who might not otherwise get into a desired market (Mangu-Ward, 2008, p. 39).

This somewhat cynical comparison suggests that FPCUs’ practical career-focused model of literacy education offers a subpar option to working students who might not otherwise be able to attend college at all. From a CDA lens, combined with some of the assumptions made about students’ identities, this focus on career literacies implies once again that artistic, spiritual or other types of literacy goals are beyond what low-level for-profit students “should” need or expect considering their identities and abilities and the institutions where they are able to attend college. A CDA lens illuminates that these references blatantly place literacy learning in a consumer model as a commodity or “product” in comparing it to a subprime mortgage and called higher education a “market.”

On the other hand, within this theme critics of a career-focused approach to literacy lament the narrowing of educational goals at FPCUs. Some even go so far as to suggest that the danger of this bare bones approach to literacy learning is that it will begin to permeate not only FPCUs, but private and not-for-profit institutions may begin to model themselves after FPCUs as well:

One reason traditional universities want to emulate for-profits is simply because the latter have cast aside some of the most central and ticklish functions of higher education: their purpose is not to promote innovative scholarship, academic freedom, individual reflection or any number of other noble pursuits. It is simply to turn a profit by training students and awarding them with a credential...Do we care anymore whether colleges and universities are custodians of collective, diverse cultures...whether they record, teach and transmit traditions, and give us the linguistic and symbolic tools to express our veneration, criticism and contribution to our culture, to make connections with its variety, to examine its chequered past and to imagine its possible future? (Palattella, 2001, p. 34)

Vocationalism is then defined as the narrowing of the goals of literacy, and closely associated with the literacy sponsorship model at FPCUs. From a CDA lens, here inherent significance or importance is ascribed implicitly to liberal arts literacy practices such as cultural criticism or the use of literacy to investigate historical or cultural patterns, and by extension literacy activities that are limited to training for concrete career goals are devalued.

This suggestion that cultural criticism is a valuable yet elite literacy activity corroborates with literacy scholarship. For example, reading theorist Warner (2004) suggests that the ability to analyze or critique is a privilege and points to the historical roots of the notion of critic, “Aristotle methodically distinguishes his critical judgment from the taste judgments of the audiences or the publics of popular contests...Criticism is the practice of the few, not the many...Like Aristotle’s, [the modern ideal of critical reading] entails—more explicitly in some cases than in others—an ethical personality and a model of citizenship” (p. 25-26). Thus, as has been the case historically, the critical thinker occupies a place of privilege. Reading theorization scholar Hutton asserts that within a model of critical reading, “The reader can then use the text not only for a specific knowledge-based goal, but also to lay claim to her own larger independence of thought,” or what Warner refers to as “the reader’s freedom and agency” (p. 20). Implicitly then, news articles referencing the superiority of literacy practices like cultural criticism suggest that students at FPCUs are not able to engage in these elite literacy practices or to take on the cultural role of the critic. Even further, in this reference the author suggests that vocational literacy activities are not only unimportant but exist in higher education “simply to turn a profit” for the institutions that provide them. The author then suggests that literacy focused on career training cheats students through making profit.

In terms of its direct effect on literacy practices, this vocational focus of FPCUs was sometimes described as a literacy sponsorship model that eschewed traditional literacies such as reading from books for more practical, “hands-on” experiences. One article describes the practical curriculum of the film school at for-profit Full Sail University. A film student is quoted as stating: “I didn’t want to get in a class and just read books,” Mr. Carmona Astor said. “I wanted to go somewhere where you could immediately get your hands busy” (Barnes, 2015, p. 10). Again, from a CDA perspective this language implicitly suggests that hands-on learning is more significant or valuable than reading books or traditional literacies. So also, this career goal means that course design at FPCUs is often separate from instruction, and instructors’ roles are

also narrowed to be more like coaches encouraging individual literacy sponsorship rather than instructors. One author stressed that the new for-profit segment of NYU had modeled its new course design after Phoenix “As at Phoenix, course design and instruction are done in a piecemeal fashion. An NYU professor creates the syllabus and chooses the readings, a technician puts the material online and a part-time instructor interacts with students in online chat sessions” (Palattella, 2001, p. 34). In short then, whereas there is wide variation as to whether news discourse portray the career-focused literacy sponsorship of FPCUs in a positive or negative light, the articles suggest that vocationalism is one shared attribute of FPCUs. This career-focused mission of FPCUs often involves unique ways of putting together literacy materials for courses and of engaging students with literacy materials.

Ultimately, agenda setting theory would suggest that as the second most frequent theme, a career-focused, hands-on literacy model is one of the most pervasive attributes assigned to the for-profit literacy sponsorship model. The picture of FPCUs that media audiences are given of literacy at for-profit colleges, while more diverse in terms of its praise and criticism of FPCUs, also limits the kinds of literacy activities that for-profit students are, or it is sometimes implied, should be engaging in as merely functional, hands-on literacy activities that directly prepare students for clear employment goals. The underlying assumption is that the types of students who attend FPCUs may only need, want or be able to engage in minimal, career-focused literacies. On the other hand, liberal-arts, “reading books,” cultural criticism, and literacy with more lofty goals or other types of more humanistic, artistic or traditional literacy activities are separately ascribed as attributes of literacy at traditional elite private or non-profit colleges. This binary also suggests that the types of hands-on vocational literacy activities at for-profit colleges are entirely separate and unrelated to literacy practices at traditional higher education institutions, and that traditional liberal-arts focused literacy practices may be impractical in that they do not prepare students for the workforce.

Theme #3 Students who are accepted to for-profit colleges are severely unprepared for reading and writing on a college level.

This theme tied with the theme of career-focused, hands-on literacy learning in terms of the numbers of article that mentioned it at all—38 out of 99 articles referred to severely unprepared students. Within these references are often emotional descriptions of students who can barely sound out letters or sign their names or who have cognitive disabilities and are

coerced to enroll at FPCUs solely so that for-profits can take their federal financial aid or loan money. Nevertheless, one article does suggest that although the University of Phoenix accepts students with lower level reading and writing skills than other colleges, Phoenix students improve more quickly in those skills than do students at traditional institutions; however, most articles suggest that FPCUs recruit incapable students for the tuition dollars. A few of these articles are authored by ex-instructors from FPCUs, and one describes a former librarian at a for-profit college all lamenting their institutions' acceptance of unprepared students. The former librarian describes in detail how one student was recruited but not offered proper literacy services or coursework to assist his need in basic reading and writing skills. The following is an example of the highly emotional descriptions found in many of these articles:

A librarian at a southern California campus of Everest College abruptly resigned last week, deeply upset that the for-profit school had admitted into its criminal justice program a 37-year-old man who appears to read at a third-grade level. The man, who shakes, speaks haltingly, and may suffer from a developmental disability, told the librarian he expected to be a police officer after completing the program. But the librarian, Laurie McConnell, is certain he can never obtain such a job. (Halperin, 2014)

From a CDA perspective, this article offensively suggests that this for-profit student may be developmentally disabled without any confirmation of disability status from him. In fact, the perspective and opinions of the librarian seem to be central throughout the article, while the student has not been interviewed so he can speak for himself on the matter. Additionally, the journalist seems to have assigned the librarian the identity of moral savior in this narrative as she is “deeply upset” and in another section, describes how she worked extensively one-on-one with the student, and wrote to the President of Everest College to tell him she felt the student had been enrolled without understanding the “ramifications” of enrolling; the librarian received no response from the President and thus decided to resign. These types of references again seem to have the intent of whistleblowing or exposing the corruption in terms of literacy instruction at FPCUs, but at the same time make problematic statements about students' identities. So also, from a CDA perspective, such references implicitly suggest that certain types of students—non-disabled, privileged, with certain literacy skills—high-level skills, belong in college and others who do not meet these criteria do not belong in college. Even further, the patronizing tone of the article suggests that the librarian knows what is best for this adult man. This theme of the

unprepared student often overlapped with the most prominent theme of cheating, as FPCUs are described exploiting these students frequently labeled as “functionally illiterate” (“The Fear and Frustration,” 2011).

FPCUs are generally open access institutions, which means that they accept all students who have a high school diploma or GED, as do community colleges. Nevertheless, some articles suggest that FPCUs fail to provide adequate literacy support services or placement testing that community colleges provide to unprepared students. One article suggests that one key difference between community colleges and FPCUs policies on unprepared students is that community colleges use placement tests and offer remedial coursework in basic skills, whereas for-profit institutions may accept students without placement testing or remedial coursework: “In that case, then the school has only helped its pocketbook and not the student” (Weathersbee, 2006, p. B7). In the same article a student is described as having graduated from a for-profit college with a bachelor’s degree while reading at a sixth-grade level. Students are tragically described as not able to understand that they have been victimized, or even as graduating with a certificate or degree, and then not being able to transfer to another school or get a job because of a lack of actual literacy skills. These types of news references suggest that FPCUs although they do perhaps provide college access to students who might not otherwise have the opportunity to attend college, end up doing those students a disservice through accepting them but not supporting their literacy skill development.

At best, students at FPCUs are described as practically illiterate and unprepared for college, and at worst as not only ignorant but perhaps also taking advantage of the for-profit system. For example, in one article a former student at Everest College is quoted who heard his for-profit instructor tell other students they would get A’s in the course no matter what: ““Are you kidding me?” he sighs, recollecting the incident. “I’ve worked my butt off to get my 3.9 GPA, but then you’re telling me there’s other people with a 3.5 or a 3.0 and I know for a fact that they did not do anything?” (Jaffe, 2015). Thus, this student asserts that the low literacy standards for incoming students, and for coursework, mean that his own hard work is devalued. This same student went on to describe being laughed at for his degree, and entirely unprepared for the jobs he applies for, which his university assured him he was prepared for.

Using agenda setting theory to consider this trend of describing for-profit students as unprepared for college-level literacy activities, news discourse suggests most students fit into the

category of unprepared for college literacy activities. In fact, whether or not this is the case for singular students attending FPCUs or the majority of students remains unclear in many of the articles. Sometimes journalists describe individual cases of unprepared students as if these students are examples of broader trends and other times journalists broadly disregard most or all for-profit students as unprepared for the academic work of college. These inflammatory portraits painted by the press suggest that all students at FPCUs are ignorant victims who should not be in college at all engaging in any literacy activities because their abilities are too low for them to benefit from literacy instruction, further stigmatizing a student population that is already vulnerable and stigmatized. This portrait is even further complicated by the fact that many students may be entirely unaware of these discussions, as I mention at the start of this chapter. Furthermore, this trend continues the theme of exploitation, suggesting that the literacy sponsorship model at FPCUs involves the institutions deliberately recruiting students unprepared for reading and writing on a college level, not offering adequate literacy support services to assist students, pushing students through to graduate by giving them high grades even if the students' work is not worthy of it, and not providing any real literacy skills to them.

Theme #4: Students have frequent opportunities to work with technology, eBooks, and e-learning at for-profit colleges and are often assessed.

This was the fourth most frequent theme mentioned overall. As most FPCUs offer some type of online degree program and some for-profit colleges only offer online coursework, it is not surprising that e-learning, e-books and working more with technology is such a prominent theme in the news discourse. In terms of a literacy sponsorship model, these articles suggest that FPCUs are pioneers introducing new technology into higher education literacy activities; they describe how FPCUs have largely foregone traditional print books or written assignments for eBooks and online assignments:

Bulging backpacks no longer clutter Darris Howe's organizational behavior class where the majority of students have chosen "e- textbooks" over the traditional, heftier and more expensive bound volumes. Gone, too, are highlighter pens and the rustle of pages.

Instead, students, hunched over laptops and hand-held computers, click and tap their way through chapters. Howe teaches one of 50 classes at the University of Phoenix in Utah that are participating in the school's national "go bookless" program. (Stewart, 2012, p. 2002)

Thus, Phoenix and other FPCUs are depicted as ushering in these new literacy practices in college classrooms, now entirely virtual. From a CDA perspective, these references seem to assign inherent significance to literacy activities conducted through new technologies, suggesting these are new and better ways of engaging students with literacy than traditional book or print-based methods of literacy.

At times, like the references to the career-focused model of FPCUs, this reference to online literacy coursework does seem to have an air of inevitability about it, implying that this new technology will transform the future of higher education. For example, one article suggests that enrollment in online coursework will only keep increasing: “‘We don't see [online enrollment] plateauing any time soon,’ said Elaine Allen, a statistics professor and researcher at the Consortium. ‘All we see is the trajectory going up in double digits.’...Internet classes have helped the University of Phoenix become the largest institution of higher learning in the country with campuses far from its namesake” (Scott, 2007, p. B1). Interestingly, again these types of references reinforce a framing of FPCUs within an intense consumer model of literacy sponsorship by suggesting that the demand for online literacy or coursework on the part of enrolling students may mean that one day in the future college campuses will cease to exist. Journalists point out that with the rise of the online classroom, fundamental changes often occur in the ways courses are created and delivered: “‘The learning experience used to be totally faculty controlled — at least that’s our nostalgic view of the past,’ says Elliot King, a professor of communications” (Blumenstyk, 2016). Again, this seems to align with Hermansen’s identification of two types of advertisements for FPCUs, one which critiques traditional higher education as the “status quo” or even the past and represents FPCUs as the future in their use of technology and unique model where of higher education. From a CDA perspective again, these references assign inherent significance to literacy activities conducted online or e-learning and implicitly relegate traditional literacies and models of courses where faculty oversee the learning experience as outdated and “nostalgic” or naïve models of literacy learning.

Nevertheless, other journalists question the efficacy of literacy learning online and raise the issue of cheating or plagiarism in writing for online courses (“Brandstad’s actions,” 2013). Some suggest that although there are benefits of online learning, overall it still falls short of the deep kinds of literacy learning that happens in a physical classroom. One journalist laments the loss of connection involved in e-learning:

For reading, writing, communicating and many kinds of research, the Internet has erased distance and put a world of knowledge at our fingertips. But the best Internet connection in the world can't take the place of hands-on learning, of toiling in a laboratory, of that face-to-face connection among scholars where the dual miracles of insight and creativity so often find their spark. (“Brandstad’s actions,” 2013).

These types of statements echo lamentations about the narrowing of goals of higher education towards the vocationalism of FPCUs wherein a liberal-arts focused literacy model is in some ways idealized. While some articles I discuss earlier imply that literacy activities at FPCUs are more “hands-on” than traditional colleges because they are career-focused, here the author makes the point that the for-profit online model of literacy may be in some ways less “hands-on” than a physical classroom or laboratory might be. From a CDA perspective, this type of reference again assigns inherent significance to traditional classroom-based literacies, while implying that something is lost when literacy activities are completed online only. Interestingly, this piece also seems to assign the identity of scholars to those who engage in face-to-face literacy activities such as debating and speaking, implying that students reading and writing online may not be scholars. This reference then echoes previous news articles I have already described that suggested the limitations of goals for literacy activities for students at FPCUs— for-profit students may only engage in literacy activities for vocational purposes.

Ultimately, agenda setting theory suggests that news discourses identify online literacy activities and e-learning as key attributes of the literacy sponsorship model of FPCUs. Often, news discourse seems to present this trend in literacy sponsorship in a positive fashion, or even a binary that describes these new technology-based literacy activities inevitably replacing older types of print-based literacies throughout higher education, and by extension of FPCUs as at the cutting edge of education. Within these representations are suggestions that faculty are no longer as important to these new literacy activities that students may guide themselves through individually online. Nonetheless, taken together with the most prevalent trend of exploitation as the literacy sponsorship model at FPCUs, this theme highlighting the prevalence of online or e-learning literacies perhaps implies FPCUs use online technologies for literacy activities that replace faculty labor to garner greater profits and to slim down instructional costs.

Theme #5: For-profit colleges are able to teach writing and reading more quickly to students than traditional schools and effectively.

This theme was the fifth most prominent, showing up in 32 out of 99 articles. References to this theme described the shortened length of college writing courses at FPCUs. For example, the University of Phoenix's bachelor program consists of 5-week long courses that most students take one after another consecutively, while Kaplan University offers a 10-week semester. Not only are courses condensed at FPCUs, but in general degree programs are designed as accelerated in comparison with degree programs at traditional institutions, with some offering 16-week associate degrees, short 6 or 9-month certificates, and a few FPCUs offering a two or three-year bachelor's degree. Courses at FPCUs are sometimes described as more rapid and effective than those at traditional schools, or simply as effective enough, as with the analogy I referenced earlier to the for-profit degree as similar to the subprime mortgage. One article from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* references the President of the Apollo Group which owns Phoenix: "Freshmen at the University of Phoenix enter with reading, writing, and mathematical skills that are, on average, below those of other college students, but according to data from standardized tests, Phoenix students appear to improve in those skills at a greater rate than do students at other colleges" (Blumenstyk, 2008). However, the article treads carefully in presenting this statement as Phoenix's own conclusion about themselves as the headline reads "University of Phoenix Says Test Scores Vindicate Its Academic Model." Interestingly, this article also suggests that the University of Phoenix represents a unique academic model.

"Good Enough" Literacy

Some articles referencing this theme combine the notion of a faster literacy sponsorship model with the bare-bones vocational goal of literacy practices at for-profits. In one article an English and Law Professor at NYU enrolled in an online creative writing course at the University of Phoenix writes about the experience in an op-ed for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*; she came away from the course very critically with the sense that Phoenix provided her classmates with a writing instruction experience that was "at least 'good enough,' to use that phrase applied approvingly so often now to the quality of the products of 'disruptive technologies' or 'disruptive innovations.' For my classmates and their peers everywhere, surely good enough can never be good enough. We are talking about education, not a remote-controlled toy" (Stimpson, 2012). Here an efficient literacy sponsorship model is critiqued: underserving

college students pay exorbitant tuition and perhaps receiving inadequate literacy services in exchange or “good enough” literacy. Again, CDA might raise the question of good enough for who? Certainly, parents and students at elite colleges would be outraged at the suggestion that their first-year writing courses or overall literacy experiences in college might be only “good enough--” and online writing courses have been pioneered at less elite institutions like FPCUs, community colleges, or large public regional universities. This reference also seems to overlap with previous comments in articles critiquing the vocational literacy focus on FPCUs as too narrow, eliminating more lofty goals for literacy practices such as cultural criticism or artistic aims. I would reference reading theorist Warner’s notion that a model of critical reading and writing allows for “the reader’s freedom and agency” (p. 20). By contrast, this notion of “good enough” literacy which Stimpson highlights in her piece seems to limit the types of literacy practices and purposes for writing that students at for-profit colleges can engage in. In this sense, the notion of “good enough literacy” seems to, as Stimpson suggests, and like many of the other descriptions of literacy at for-profit colleges, trap for-profit students into a vicious cycle of mediocrity or perhaps worse exploitation when it comes to literacy.

Theme #6: Students who choose to attend for-profit colleges should be using reading and writing skills to research and find a high-quality university before attending.

These references within articles strongly invoke a consumer model of higher education through discussions of students shopping around for universities to gather important consumer information. However, I should clarify that this theme does not include references to financial literacy, as these formed another huge bulk of articles. Instead, these articles talked specifically about students’ reading and writing practices when it came to selecting a for-profit college. These articles often suggested that college students should use literacy to engage in research about prospective colleges and that students themselves are responsible for the college that they choose to attend as consumers or customers, even if the college is corrupt or predatory. One article goes so far as to explicitly compare paying college tuition to buying a television:

Students should always carefully research a school -- whether for-profit or non-profit -- before enrolling, but that is especially true now, advised an industry group. "This is a major investment, just like buying a house or buying a car or a high-end television," said Harris Miller, president and CEO of the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities. “Get an independent, third-party source (of information), because you are

talking about a lot of time out of your life and, potentially, a lot of money.” (Berry, 2011, p. D1)

The language in these references often proclaims that students must be careful and accountable or condescendingly tells students what to do; for example, one article entitled “Do Your Homework on Career Schools” asserts that: “Students have to do their own investigations of the quality of proliferating for-profit colleges” (Trainor, 2009, p. B01). In some cases, it seems like these articles are shifting blame for for-profit corruption away from the colleges or from government regulation to suggest that it is the consumers or students’ fault if they make poor decisions about which college to attend. One article quotes a consumer advocate who states: “‘Students need to step up, be responsible and make sure they take a hard look at what they’re getting themselves into,’ said Joanne Wenzel of the state’s Department of Consumer Affairs. ‘They need to make thoughtful decisions’” (Fisher, 2008, p. B). This trend to some extent then seems to blame students for selecting a low-quality or corrupt for-profit college, and to imply that students who attend for-profit colleges are not making sound decisions or using literacy to engage in any type of research on their college. From a CDA perspective, the identities enacted through these texts seem to be that of journalists alongside higher education experts or consumer advocacy groups reinforcing their own roles as wise watchdogs, simply trying to caution students for their own good. On the other hand, these references infantilize prospective for-profit college students as it is implied that for-profit students are irresponsible, fail to investigate FPCUs or “do their homework,” and fail to consider how big of an investment college is financially. Interestingly, these references seem to be some of the only articles within the sample corpus I created that assume that for-profit students might be the audiences reading the news articles themselves, as these articles refer to students directly, often commanding students about how to go about selecting a college.

While conducting research is of course excellent advice for all prospective college students, other references within the articles to the college selection process discuss new Department of Education regulations about disclosure of important information to prospective students on college websites. Some articles describe students receiving inaccurate or misleading information from admissions representatives at FPCUs. Meanwhile, another article entitled “Colleges’ Disclosures on Cost, Jobs Falling Short” points out that simply encouraging students to do more research may not always be effective as college websites may not contain easily

accessible important information: “Advocacy groups say loopholes in the regulation and lax oversight have allowed schools to make crucial consumer information nearly impossible to find or, in other cases, almost useless” (Berry, 2011, A1). The article goes on to describe how some FPCUs have been accused of counting alumni as working in jobs in their career field if they major in computer science and then work at Best Buy, and some FPCUs count students or alumni as employed even if their job was obtained before the student enrolled at the college. Even further, references within this section also cite the aggressive and sometimes misleading and even fraudulent recruitment tactics of FPCUs. One article describes the Senate report’s undercover reporters receiving encouragement to falsify financial aid information to qualify for more aid: “Undercover investigators posing as prospective students found that at four of 15 for-profit colleges, they “were encouraged by college personnel to falsify their financial aid forms to qualify for federal aid” (Wang, 2010). Even further, all of the 15 colleges according to the article and the Senate report made “deceptive or questionable statements” (Wang, 2010) to the undercover applicants. Several articles describe the boiler room atmospheres of admissions offices at FPCUs.

The “Literacy Catch 22”

Finally, in terms of agenda setting theory, this theme suggests that students at FPCUs are without a doubt framed for the media audience as consumers. Ironically, this theme also highlights the fact that “shopping” for college itself involves engaging in literacy activities such as online research and information-gathering. Nevertheless, these article references suggest that students who fail to research colleges are held responsible for their own lack of information as consumers. But, how can student consumers always be expected to engage in this research process when they may be enrolling in college to gain those information-gathering literacy skills in the first place? I refer to as the “literacy catch 22.” When the frame through which the news media presents college including FPCUs is essentially a marketplace of higher education and it is assumed students are consumers, they are then held responsible for their negative experiences at FPCUs even though those same students may have sought to enroll in college to acquire the literacy skills needed to thoroughly research college options. Furthermore, these articles also suggest that important consumer information about FPCUs revealed through websites or in person may be misleading or even inaccurate, making the process of selecting a good college even more complicated. This theme of FPCUs misleading students either on their websites or in-

person about important consumer information also continues the primary theme of cheating or exploiting students as the primary literacy sponsorship model at FPCUs, while also further reinforcing the notion of FPCUs as financial institutions that must be considered within a legal framework rather than institutions primarily dedicated to higher learning.

Conclusion

Overwhelmingly, when literacy sponsorship at FPCUs is considered as an object of media news coverage, the attributes which define literacy sponsorship according to news coverage include low-quality literacy instruction and cheating students out of valuable literacy skills while charging exorbitant tuition; news discourse suggests FPCUs pass students through writing and other courses while leaving them unprepared for better employment upon graduation. This theme of exploitation is somewhat echoed in the small amount existing higher education policy research on FPCUs: in one study Harvard economists found that students at for-profits are more likely to complete their degrees than community college students, but then fare worse than their community college counterparts on the job market and in terms of earnings after the degree (Deming, Goldin & Katz, 2013).

But, when I asked my research participants if they agreed or disagreed with this theme from news media, the majority or 9 out of 14 of my participants or 64% of the students I spoke with disagreed that exploitation was the primary literacy sponsorship model at FPCUs. One student Maisha enrolled in a Bachelor's in Criminal Justice at Promise University put it this way, "Just from my own writing and my own caliber of writing skills, I've never really had any kind of grade that was subpar. I feel like if I didn't do a good job, I didn't do a good grade. There's been times where I didn't do as well as I thought I could and he [the writing instructor] let me know why. They don't just pass you because you're paying a crap load of money to go to this school." Other students pointed out that they didn't think literacy instruction at for-profit colleges would be that drastically different from non-profit colleges. Two students suggested that the literacy sponsorship model is dependent on the instructors—where some instructors work hard and hold students accountable for their writing and others do not. Thus, instructors may be the primary sponsors of literacy at for-profits and there may be as much variation among instructors at FPCUs as there is at traditional colleges. Several students mentioned that the literacy skills really depend upon the work the student is willing to put in—thus, students may be self-sponsoring literacy instruction. Nevertheless, five participants I interviewed did agree that

FPCUs exploit students; one student said she worked hard, but was shocked to see other students slide by in her writing course at Turner University: “There are some things that ... If a sixth grader even turned it in, it wouldn't qualify for even a C...People are forgetting capitalization, periods, commas, how to spell words that are easy.” Interestingly then, when students are also customers, then the goal of literacy instruction may simply be to keep students satisfied or happy in their classes to maintain enrollment—but that goal may conflict with challenging students to learn. Students may then again not feel like they are being cheated until after they have graduated when they cannot find better employment with their degree.

Literacy exploitation on the part of FPCUs might also mean not providing support to struggling students who need help and support within writing courses. Another student said she thought Turner University offered her strong support initially in the writing course but not later: “in the beginning they tried to...They send you emails, they give you calls and try to make you feel important, and then after a couple courses, it kind of dwindles and you're like, what happened? You know, where's the support here?” Ultimately, my participants’ reflections demonstrate that while exploitation may describe the literacy sponsorship model for some students, that exploitation may look different for different students; it is inaccurate and misleading for news media outlets to categorize FPCUs as singularly cheating students out of literacy skills. Furthermore, this negative characterization on the part of news media means that those students who gain valuable literacy skills attending FPCUs may still have difficulty on the job market if employers have read these stories about lack of literacy learning and exploitation at FPCUs.

Since literacy learning and college attendance are also overwhelmingly framed by news media as commodities in a marketplace, in what I call the “Literacy Catch 22” students are also frequently held responsible or even reprimanded in news discourse as consumers for their poor choice of college in the first place; however, ironically it is clear that advanced research and literacy skills may be required in the first place to investigate important admission information especially when it comes to for-profit colleges. When I asked student participants if they agreed that students should be using literacy skills to research colleges, particularly for-profit colleges, most or 10 out of 14 agreed. Many said that they should have done more research, several noting that they were unaware that their colleges were for-profit before enrolling. However, one student participant, Maisha, did take issue with the idea for-profit students “should” be using literacy

skills to find a high-quality college in the first place: “I feel more like it's kind of like an insult. It's like, ‘Oh you guys are unprepared. The little bit of skills you guys use, you need to be finding better colleges instead of trying to find this quality education from a for-profit.’” Maisha calls attention to the patronizing and infantilizing of for-profit students that occurs within this message from news media. Ultimately, students at FPCUs do seem caught in a “literacy catch 22” where they enroll at FPCUs to gain literacy skills, but are then held accountable as student consumers for not using literacy skills to sift through information to select a good college.

As I suggest in my analysis, news articles frequently and problematically depict students as severely unprepared for college-level literacy practices. However, most of my study participants, or 9 out of 14 did agree with this statement. Some said they themselves were not unprepared, but they often saw that their peers were unprepared for writing activities in courses. Blanche who is earning her BA in Health Administration from Promise University and has a 4.00 GPA states, “I would have to say the majority of written samples that I've seen, they were unprepared.” Two other students suggested perhaps half of the students in each course or 50% were unprepared for college literacy activities. When I asked students how they could tell this, one stated, “I see a lot of the adults asking just basic questions on, where this is, how I do that?” One student made the important point that since Turner University did not conduct any placement testing for writing courses, how would they even know if she was prepared in the first place? Thus, students may indeed be unprepared for college-level literacy at FPCUs as my participants suggest, but inflammatory news reports reiterating this point also serve to stigmatize already vulnerable student populations through labels like “functionally illiterate” and “disabled” when students have not been interviewed or reported their disability status. It’s important to note that many of my participants, while they agreed that some students were unprepared at their college for reading and writing, asserted that some students are prepared for college-level literacy activities. Again, the lack of nuance in news media descriptions unfairly stereotypes for-profit students, and may lead to potential employers eliminating for-profit college alumni before even giving them a chance.

My analysis of news discourse also pushes upon and adds nuance to Brandt’s definition of literacy sponsors as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy-and gain advantage by it in some way” by pointing out the ways that specific types of literacy practices may marginalize

for-profit students. That is to say—Brandt does not distinguish explicitly between the kinds of literacy activities that students are engaging with, the different purposes for literacy, or the variety of experiences individuals may have when it comes to literacy. As I point out in my analysis, the narrowing of literacy goals or aims to purely functional, vocational terms within news discourse unfairly limits the scope of literacy activities for for-profit students. The focus on surface-level features of student writing such as grammar that news articles suggest on the part of FPCUs, as well as the focus on quantity over quality all seem exploitative of students, but do not necessarily mean simply withholding or suppressing literacy. In short, my analysis suggests that actual writing courses and literacy instruction at for-profit colleges can still be exploitative of students—even though they may not necessarily suppress literacy.

Finally, literacy sponsorship at FPCUs is framed through news coverage in legalistic terms that position for-profits as financial institutions or corporations to be regulated through lawsuits and the government, with the assumption that if institutions are not themselves maintaining college-level literacy standards or even disclosing accurate information to prospective students, outside regulators must step in to redirect their actions. This also interestingly means that students are described very rarely, but with perhaps the most agency in news articles when using literacy practices to advocate for their own interests against predatory colleges whether through participating in lawsuits, activist organizations for student consumers, or writing letters to the Department of Education or to Congress. This theme of students using literacy to advocate for themselves was only present in 17 out of 99 articles, but this seems to suggest that students as consumers must engage in unique self-sponsorship when it comes to literacy, because FPCUs may not always make student learning their primary goal.

Chapter IV: FYW at For-Profit Colleges: Narrowing and Disciplining Student Writing

“Whenever information does not come out of your own head, you must cite it” ~Student Handbook on Citations at Turner University

Ironically, as I demonstrated in the last chapter, some news media and FPCUs themselves suggest that for-profit colleges provide a literacy sponsorship model that is on the “cutting edge” or represents the future of higher education when it comes to literacy learning through their vocational goals and use of e-learning and eBooks. I have highlighted how this rhetoric aligns with a trend toward privatization in higher education that suggest the inevitability of the need to “reform” education often via new technologies and for-profit business models. By contrast, within this chapter I make the argument that the literacy sponsorship model at the two large publicly traded FPCUs where my participants attend reflects an outdated, narrow model of writing instruction. In the previous chapter, I sought to provide a window into literacy sponsorship at FPCUs via analysis of news media about literacy at FPCUs balanced by participants’ own assertions, but in this chapter, I seek to break open the “black box” of writing curriculum at FPCUs, and answer the following two research questions:

1. *How do undergraduate students currently enrolled at FPCUs describe their perceptions of the model of literacy sponsorship provided based on a writing course taken as well as literacy activities completed in non-writing courses?*
2. *What are the theories¹⁶ of writing espoused through writing courses and literacy activities at FPCUs, and furthermore what do the theories of writing suggest about the model of literacy sponsorship provided by FPCUs?*

¹⁶ I make the case that every writing course at any postsecondary institutions reflects the “theories of writing” of the instructor and perhaps also of the department or the university. I thereby suggest that whether explicit or implicit, all teaching of writing is informed by theories about what writing is for and what writing is. Importantly, this is another way in which my study intervenes to view writing courses not as simply providing decontextualized skills, but also as also political and existing within a model of literacy sponsorship where literacy practices in writing courses have dire economic and personal consequences for students. Theories of writing influence the purpose, content, and delivery of writing courses. In making this assertion, I build quite directly from the National Council of Teachers of English’s (NCTE) position statement entitled “Principles for Teaching Postsecondary Writing” meant to serve as both a reflection of best practices and research and a guide for those running writing programs. NCTE is the largest professional organization in the field of rhetoric and composition, and the collective authors of the statement suggest: “Sound writing instruction extends from a knowledge of theories of writing (including, but not limited to, those theories developed in the field of composition and rhetoric),” thus highlighting the importance of understanding theories of

My examination of literacy sponsorship at FPCUs reveals its broad focus upon what I will refer to in this chapter as conventions—Standard Edited American English grammar and APA citations. In fact, following conventions are often the major takeaways of writing courses at these two FPCUs according to study participants. In what follows, I first describe a brief history of the role of grammar instruction to provide context within which to situate the recent focus on conventions at FPCUs. Then, I outline writing standards developed within the field of writing studies that I use throughout this chapter to analyze participants’ syllabi, assignments, and reports of their experiences engaging in literacy practices at FPCUs. I argue that this overarching focus on conventions in writing courses at the two large FPCUs my participants attend functions in two overlapping ways: 1) **narrowing** what writing means for students at FPCUs to simply standard conventions 2) and **disciplining** students’ language practices as right or wrong.

Within the field of composition studies, definitions of “best practices” in college writing instruction have evolved dramatically over the past 70 years. Grammar instruction held a central role in the teaching of college writing historically in the United States—as Harvard’s 1874 entrance exam demonstrates in directing: “Each candidate will be required to write a short English composition, correct in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and expression.” Indeed, rigid attention to standard American English grammatical rules dominated college writing instruction through the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century in the United States. However, in 1963 writing researchers published a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) report entitled *Research in Written Composition*, in which they famously asserted:

In view of the widespread agreement of research studies based upon many types of students and teachers, the conclusion can be stated in strong and unqualified terms: the teaching of formal grammar has a negligible or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in actual composition, even a harmful effect on the improvement of writing. (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, & Schoer, pp. 37-38)

writing for teaching writing. Importantly, the position statement is flexible in terms of prescribing a particular theory of writing for writing curriculum. Even further, the statement even goes so far as to suggest that instructors may use theories outside of the field of rhetoric and composition. Ultimately, this statement also supports the notion that each instructor may have a highly individualized approach to writing which may extend from a variety of theories. Central to NCTE’s assertion is the notion that instructors must be aware of and deliberate about the theories of writing they employ in their own teaching. Thus, NCTE also implicitly suggests that, whether deliberate or not, all writing courses espouse certain theories of writing in terms of the way the class is framed through the syllabus, the purpose and learning objectives of the class, and the underlying assumptions about writing that inform instruction and learning in the classroom.

The report had ripple effects on the teaching of college writing. Writing studies researcher Brown in 2009 reports on the continued influence of that 1963 NCTE report and the still pervasive “belief in the English education community that grammar does not need to be, perhaps should not be, taught in any systematic way” (216). Of course, grammar instruction has never disappeared from college classrooms, and recent researchers have demonstrated that incorporating lessons on grammar in context in college writing courses improves student writing (Myhill et al., 2012; Wolfe et al., 2012; Lancaster & Olinger, 2014).

In fact, the educational movement against teaching grammar has been complicated by growing awareness over the past 50 years that prescriptive grammar instruction in Standard American English reflects discrimination against marginalized students. NCTE published first in 1974 the *Students’ Right to Their Own Language* position statement professing that “Many of us have taught as though there existed somewhere a single American ‘standard English’ which could be isolated, identified, and accurately defined” but the existence of a Standard English is in some sense a myth (p. 3). This awareness reflects research on the part of sociolinguists who have demonstrated the ways that language use and beliefs are imbricated in power structures. Heath draws attention to the role that language ideologies may play in individual identity or group identity as she defines language ideologies as “self-evident ideas and objectives a group holds concerning roles of language in the social experiences of members as they contribute to the expression of the group” (p. 53). By extension, Lippi Green defines standard language ideology as “a bias toward an abstract, idealized homogeneous language, which is imposed and maintained by dominant institutions”; standard language ideology then becomes an institutionalized means of discrimination against marginalized groups of people within a society (p. 67). Conventions then—although presented as neutral on the part of the for-profit institutions participants attend—reflect standard language ideologies, subtly enacting discrimination against language use by marginalized students. In fact, I provided the brief overview above of the role of grammar instruction in college writing in the US in the past to suggest that rather than neutral or objective, writing pedagogy focused upon conventions has a history and an underlying ideology.

Especially recently, researchers and educators have published frameworks and guidelines for college writing instruction based upon best practices that suggest conventions play a negligible or small role in the content of college writing coursework. Within the chapter that follows, I draw from three different sets of standards to compare best practices from writing

studies with students' reports of writing and FYW syllabi and documents from for-profit colleges. First, I use the *Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing*¹⁷ (2015) developed by the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC)—the largest conference in the United States on college writing instruction. I also draw from the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*¹⁸ developed by the Writing Program Administrators organization (WPA) along with National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). Finally, I also incorporate Common Core Standards' objectives for 12th grade high school students attending United States public schools in order to illustrate that in fact standards set for students in first-year writing college courses at FPCUs seem less challenging and specific than the 12th grade Common Core Standards.¹⁹ Although the development of the Common Core Standards was controversial, the Common Core purports to represent “best state standards already in existence;”

¹⁷ Here I include the full contents of the *Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing*, which from here on within this dissertation I will refer to as simply *Principles*:

Guiding Principles

1. emphasizes the rhetorical nature of writing
2. considers the needs of real audiences
3. recognizes writing as a social act
4. enables students to analyze and practice with a variety of genres;
5. recognizes writing processes as iterative and complex;
6. depends upon frequent, timely, and context-specific feedback from an experienced postsecondary instructor;
7. emphasizes relationships between writing and technologies
8. supports learning, engagement, and critical thinking in courses across the curriculum.

Enabling Conditions. Sound writing instruction:

9. provides students with the support necessary to achieve their goals;
10. extends from a knowledge of theories of writing (including, but not limited to, those theories developed in the field of composition and rhetoric);
11. is provided by instructors with reasonable and equitable working conditions; and
12. is assessed through a collaborative effort that focuses on student learning within and beyond writing courses.

¹⁸From here on I will refer to this in the dissertation simply as *Frameworks*.

¹⁹ FPCUs are not even as challenging as The Common Core Standards include the following two objectives for 12th grade writers:

- 1) Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence
- 2) Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content

These are complex goals, and even suggest that high school seniors in the United States should within their writing “convey complex ideas” and write arguments that support nuanced claims with a variety of evidence and analysis. Even further, the Common Core Standards describe rigorous and robust research objectives for high school student writers:

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation

Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

Here, while the objectives incorporate citations, the overall goal of citations is to serve students' research purposes; furthermore, students must evaluate sources to find those that are most “authoritative.” Students are also encouraged to ask their own original research questions, and to develop answers based upon careful evaluation of sources and gathering of information.

English content experts, states, and leading education thinkers all provided input in developing the Common Core. Noticeably absent from CCCC's *Principles* is any mention of conventions such as Standard American English grammar, MLA or APA citations, or mechanics and formatting. Instead, the *Principles* focuses upon rhetorical awareness through concepts like audience, genre, writing as a social act, and context. Unlike the *Principles*, the WPA's *Frameworks* does include "Knowledge of conventions – the formal and informal guidelines that define what is considered to be correct and appropriate, or incorrect and inappropriate, in a piece of writing." Although grammar and APA or MLA citations are not specifically referenced by the *Frameworks*, these are obviously different kinds of conventions. However, even the use of the term "conventions" also implies the teaching of grammar or citation methods alongside the understanding that grammar instruction and citations are not objective or neutral, but instead dependent on the traditions of different contexts and cultures—whether that be academic writing or perhaps even more specifically writing in the humanities or writing within the sciences.

Unfortunately, in the analysis that follows, the understanding of conventions as dependent on context is entirely missing from participants' reports of writing at FPCUs. It is important to distinguish between different types of conventions—grammar instruction is, of course, not the same as citation instruction. While Standard American English grammar instruction reflects standard language ideology and enacts discrimination against marginalized groups if taught as neutral and objective, accurate citation formatting is often viewed as a crucial aspect of avoiding academic plagiarism in college writing courses, and college writing more generally. Nevertheless, both grammatical rules and citation formats change over time and are dependent on cultural and professional contexts—consider the differences between using APA version 7 versus version 6, or MLA or American or British spellings. Likewise, grammatical rules, mechanics, and citations share in common the notion that they may be "correct and appropriate, or incorrect and inappropriate." More than any other feature of writing identified by the *Frameworks* and *Principles*, conventions may be presented as easily evaluated as correct or incorrect. It is this illusory sense of right and wrong when it comes to language conventions that I highlight throughout the following chapter as disciplining students' language use.

I argue in this chapter that the overwhelming focus on conventions in writing courses at the two for-profit colleges participants attend replaces attention to more complex writing concerns like rhetorical awareness, audience awareness, or content within the writing curriculum.

Thus, based on my participants' reports from two large for-profit college chains, writing courses do not align with "best practices" in writing instruction as outlined in the *Principles and Frameworks*. Further, my participants' narratives suggest that standards for college writing are set low for students at FPCUs. However, I am cautious in the following analysis to distinguish between participants' reports of the content of writing courses, and my own evaluations of that content based on best practices and standards developed in my field. In fact, I must acknowledge that while some participants identified standards for writing as low at their institutions, others did not express this concern. Most participants did not express frustration or dissatisfaction with the focus upon conventions in writing courses. As my overview of research on FPCUs in the first chapter points out, several previous studies have found that students perceive instruction at FPCUs to be of high quality and that the customer service emphasis of FPCUs may even promote a "learner-centered pedagogical approach" (Iloh, 2016, p. 431).²⁰ I believe these studies suggest the need to bring in outside standards as necessary models for writing course content comparison. To be blunt, students at FPCUs may be unaware of what is missing from their writing courses.

Of course, one might ask what it means to set standards low, or to set standards at all for college writing? In Elbow's (2011) review of the NCTE volumes entitled "What is College Writing?" he suggests the authors' goal in these volumes is "to figure out levels or standards. In other words, the impulse...is mostly normative. They investigate not so much what college writing is, but what it should be" (p. 154). Setting standards is then a normative enterprise involving human judgement about what is best and worst when it comes to college writing. Elbow himself makes a case against setting standards for college writing. Elbow points out that setting college writing standards might reinforce an education reform agenda that originated even before No Child Left Behind, creating "bulldozer pressure for testing." Ultimately, college writing standards might narrow conceptions of college writing. Elbow asserts that his stance against writing standards reflects his faith in the messiness of the US higher education system: "What I love about higher education here is that almost anyone can go to college somewhere—

²⁰ Researchers suggest that "customer service emphasis in the for-profit sector not only leads to a focus on particular student services, but also a learner-centered pedagogical approach" (Iloh, 2016, p. 431; Berg 2005). An ethnographic study examining one mid-sized for-profit college found that many students perceived instruction to be high-quality, with the exception of online courses (Iloh, 2016). Likewise, the recently published study by Public Agenda (2014) reveals many students and alumni reported satisfaction with key quality indicators at FPCUs like class sizes and caring instructors. While this research suggests students are satisfied with their learning experiences in classes at FPCUs, this raises the question: would students at FPCUs be aware, or even upset by low-quality instruction or learning experiences?

all because we lack unified agreed-upon standards. What is “basic writing” at one place is good writing somewhere else” (p. 158). FPCUs—as open access institutions accepting all students who defend themselves as serving a diverse, non-traditional student body are the quintessential examples of how “almost anyone can go to college somewhere.” But I suggest that Elbow romanticizes inequities in the US higher education system by implicitly suggesting that all college writing is socially situated and that one context of college writing cannot compare with another. In fact, alumni from FPCUs will compete alongside graduates from all different kinds of colleges when it comes to using literacy skills to land a job. Literacy activities are never purely socially situated. As I point out in the first chapter, Brandt’s theorization of literacy sponsorship acknowledges that “Literacy in use more often than not serves multiple interests, incorporating individual agents and their locales into larger enterprises that play out away from the immediate scene” (Brandt & Clinton, 2002, p. 1). Like Elbow, I remain wary of decontextualized standard setting, but I believe that to interrogate literacy sponsorship at FPCUs, it is necessary to use standards developed within writing studies.

The Background: Narrow Writing in For-Profit Writing Course Syllabi

Every participant in this study submitted at least one document to me from either their first-year writing courses, or writing in other courses, oftentimes including a syllabus and a writing sample. Below are the “competencies” or course goals from Turner University’s first-year writing syllabi. Since Turner used standardized syllabi, these were the same competencies I received from several other student participants enrolled at Turner who had taken the same course. Turner’s use of the phrase “competencies” instead of course goals or objectives implies more basic skills:

Apply reading skills to determine the elements of effective writing.

Use language appropriate to audience and situation in a personal document.

Apply strategies to write effective academic documents.

Demonstrate when, how, and why to support your writing with appropriate research.

Apply strategies to write effective professional documents.

Demonstrate college-level communication through the composition of original materials in Standard American English.

Engage in a team setting with professional integrity and respect.

There is at least some mention of supporting writing with “appropriate research” in this list and considering “audience and situation” in a personal document does seem to be a version of rhetorical awareness of audience. Nevertheless, out of the list of six competencies at Turner, one directly references Standard American English instead of the more nuanced notion of grammatical or stylistic “conventions” that change according to context that is used by the WPA’s *Frameworks*. The reference to “original materials” also implies that college-level writing is simply writing that is not plagiarized. The word “effective” appears four times in the course description and list of competencies, suggesting a resort to “good enough writing” or a focus on what is minimally needed or functional.

Consider these competencies for Turner’s first-year writing course in comparison with CCCC’s *Principles* or the WPA’s *Framework* which I began this chapter by outlining. Those objectives stressed audience awareness, writing as a social act, rhetorical purpose, and critical thinking. Furthermore, even the Common Core Standards seem to have more challenging goals for 12th grade student writers than these for-profit writing course competencies as they describe:

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Consider the difference between asking student writers to work on sustained research projects or to generate questions and evaluate complex textual sources to arrive at answers versus asking students to “communicate ideas effectively in personal, academic, and professional situations” as Turner University does in its course description. The Common Core Standards seem more specific and more challenging than the stated goals of for-profit writing courses that participants attended. At least officially in syllabi, the standard seems set low for students’ writing practices at Turner, especially when considering that these Common Core Standards are meant to guide literacy aims for 12th grade writers, not college writers.

Participants suggested they took course documents such as syllabi somewhat seriously, or saw them as a sort of promise of what the course might cover that went either fulfilled or unfulfilled. For example, I reviewed Turner’s first-year writing class course description: “Building on your existing writing strengths will help develop a foundation for a successful education and career. You will learn strategies to express yourself with confidence and

communicate your ideas effectively in personal, academic, and professional situations” with Turner student and participant Reagan. Reagan is 19 years old and enrolled online in a Bachelor’s degree in Health Sciences. When I then asked how she interpreted that description, she responded:

Well, I thought we would do a little more than ..[pause].. because we never really did anything on the personal situation stuff, it was more just academic and professional. I thought there was going to be more of the personal stuff. And, we really didn't do much on writing strengths, because none of us that were in this class knew that the mandatory format was APA, because we've all known MLA, but Turner's mandatory is APA, so that was completely different for us.

I dreaded this class. Like after we got more into it I dreaded it, until the last two weeks, and then stuff finally started to make sense, like the in-text citations. My biggest fault was not alphabetizing my citations on my resource page, so I finally got that figured out.

Reagan suggests that APA citations take an oversized role within her writing class, and even goes so far as to describe APA as “Turner’s mandatory” writing requirement, aligning it with the institution overall. Reagan implies that this standardized literacy sponsorship model is “Turner’s mandatory” writing model rather than the arbitrary focus of her instructor. Furthermore, Reagan’s reflections on her own improvement are likewise narrowed to surface-level conventions like alphabetizing citations. This suggests that she exits this course with the view that developing as a college writer means learning how to put citations in order. Ultimately, when students are deprived of a more capacious, rhetorical sense of what writing is, then writing courses are not as engaging, as Reagan also “dreaded” this course.

While Reagan implies that conventions took on an oversized role in her class, this emphasis on citations and grammar was also visible in syllabi from Promise College—the other large publicly traded for-profit my participants attended. The course description for a class called University Writing 101 at Promise University states:

This is a course in developing foundational skills necessary for effective and appropriate academic writing. This course reviews the fundamentals of grammar, writing mechanics, style, and proper documentation of sources

Like Turner’s list of course competencies, Promise seems to again invoke this notion of “good enough literacy” as they suggest skills must be “effective.” By contrast, WPA’s *Framework for*

Success asserts a more complex understanding of what good writing is: “Rhetorical knowledge – the ability to analyze and act on understandings of audiences, purposes, and contexts in creating and comprehending text.” While Promise’s first-year writing syllabus focuses on source documentation, the Common Core standards for 12th grade writers brings up citations in the context of students’ creation of original researched arguments driven by their own questions, where learning how to cite information is part of taking ownership for one’s original ideas, and evaluating the ideas of others found within outside sources.

In fact, the Common Core Standards for 12th grade writers move beyond vague language about effective communication to describe a complex argument more explicitly. The Common Core Standards suggest that students:

Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that logically sequences claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

Again, this sort of evaluating of the significance of and evidence from various texts, and making interesting and “precise, knowledgeable” arguments is absent from Turner’s syllabus goals for student writers in an introductory writing course as well as from Promise University’s course descriptions. The Common Core Standards describe goals for 12th grade writers, but seem to set more specific and challenging writing objectives than standardized syllabi at these two large for-profit institutions. Ultimately then, the syllabi and course descriptions at both Turner and Promise University reflect narrowing of writing to mean conventions, a focus on “good enough” literacy and low standards for writing in comparison with best practices.

While I use the word “narrowing” metaphorically to describe the focus on conventions at FPCUs, narrowing is also visible literally through the quantity of writing required by students in writing courses at FPCUs. At both Turner and Promise University, syllabi describe how students in the introductory writing course—sometimes called College Composition 1 or University Academic Writing were asked to piece carefully together a single polished two-page essay across the entire class (lasting 5, 8 or 10 weeks depending on the institution) in addition to varied requirements for less formal online discussion posts. The minimal amount of polished or revised writing completed raises questions in comparison with research in writing studies on student engagement and writing quantity. Writing studies and education researcher Light (2001) found “The relationship between the amount of writing for a course and students’ level of engagement

— whether engagement is measured by time spent on the course, or the intellectual challenge it presents, or students’ level of interest in it — is stronger than the relationship between students’ engagement and any other course characteristic” (p. 55). Light’s study suggests that by asking students to write less, college instructors engage students less. By extension, this minimal amount of required writing in introductory courses at both Turner and Promise—two pages in one semester—suggests minimal student engagement.

Narrowing and Disciplining Writing: Students’ Reports

Student participants often identified attention to conventions as not only what their instructor sought to pass onto them, but also what they took away from their writing class overall, or what had the most impact on their writing habits. By extension, this narrow view of writing also disciplines students’ language use subtly, as it simultaneously suggests that developing as a writer means adhering to grammatical correctness and a mandated citation style.

While most participants in this study were non-traditional students, Reagan was unique among participants in this study in that she had recently graduated from high school and right away enrolled in an online Bachelor’s Degree at Turner University. Reagan is from a tiny town in the Midwest. I asked her in our second interview about her first composition course: “Now that you’re in the writing course and it’s fresh in your memory, what are some differences from writing you did in high school to the writing you’re doing now?” She responded: “Well, they like to use APA format, I’ve learned that. I’ve been used to using the MLA, because that’s what my high school teacher liked, he did not like the APA format. Going from MLA to APA, and it being mandatory having to use APA, that’s just completely different.” Reagan views the use of APA as a large change or “completely different” from her high school writing requiring MLA, suggesting that citations are an important part of her course overall. Reagan brought this theme of focusing on citations up repeatedly throughout our second interview. Reagan’s use of the term “they” is interesting, as she seems to be referencing perhaps multiple instructors as focusing on citations, but also her for-profit college in general focusing on this. I also asked Reagan if and how her goals were fulfilled for her College Composition 1 course and she responded, “I learned how to write a paper in the Turner format.” While I was originally asking Reagan about her own goals, she responded with the “Turner format.” When I followed up and asked what she meant, she clarified that the Turner format focused on APA citations. Thus, Reagan identifies Turner’s literacy sponsorship here as focused upon APA citations. Reagan suggests that Turner’s

institutionalized literacy sponsorship model is this focus upon conventions. Again, considering CCCC's *Principles* for teaching college writing that emphasize writing as a social act, and asking students to engage in audience awareness, this narrow view of writing only seems to suggest that Reagan obey the APA rules that "they" mandate at Turner. But at the same time, while the definition of good writing narrows, Reagan is also subtly disciplined as a student by a model of writing that involves "it being mandatory having to use APA."

Blanche, who was enrolled in her Associate's Degree in Health Administration online at Promise University echoed this reference to a university-wide focus on conventions or citations. Blanche's response to the question: "what does your university emphasize about writing?" was "I think I said before, they're very big into the grammar, punctuation, the formats. A lot of them are APA format. They're sticklers for that. They want to make sure you're doing it accurately." Blanche also echoes Reagan with this sense of subtly disciplining, in noting that Promise are "sticklers" about conventions and very focused on accuracy. This focus upon accuracy seems an important part of disciplining, where allowance for subjectivity or more open-ended goals are absent. Blanche also echoed Reagan in her use of the institutional "they" in speaking. In part, this notion of an institution-wide policy or institutionalized writing model is then reinforced by standardized syllabi, and online coursework in which students never get to know instructors quite as well as they might in brick and mortar classrooms. Certainly, the consensus of Blanche and Reagan seems like it might contrast with a small liberal arts college where students might complain that different instructors have very diverse expectations or models for writing.

While another possible interpretation is that conventions are the simplest or most straightforward objectives for students to latch onto and discuss, I heard this from participants across the board, who came from very different backgrounds and even attended different institutions. Unlike Reagan who is an 18-year old enrolled at Turner living in a tiny rural town in the Midwest, Blanche is a non-traditional 44-year old stay-at-home mother attending Promise University and living in the southwest. While Reagan had just begun, Blanche was about to finish her online degree, and she is enrolled in an entirely different large publicly traded for-profit chain university. In fact, Blanche was in some sense an outlier compared to other participants because she reported a significant amount of confidence and previous knowledge about writing when she started at Promise. But Blanche made the same comments about the institutional focus upon conventions as other less experienced students. Despite attending

different for-profit colleges, and having such different life experiences, both Blanche and Reagan still identified this common theme.

Reagan's and Blanche's conclusions about writing at their institutions were again echoed by Katherine, a participant who recently started her Bachelor's Degree in English online at Promise University. Katherine lives in Florida, has three children, and is disabled. At the time of our second interview, Katherine was currently enrolled in College Composition 1, and she similarly felt that surface-level concerns dominated her writing course. Katherine's response to the question: "What would you say, what did your teacher emphasize about writing in the class? What do you think you'll take away in terms of what's most important?" was "Writing in a correct form using the correct mechanics, proper grammar, and the proper way to do citations and references." The focus on the correctness and properness within Katherine's answer again suggests the way that the narrow focus on conventions also disciplines students' language—the focus narrows oppressively to correct vs. incorrect writing. Again, the similarity in response across participants with very different life experiences, majors, and attending two different for-profit institutions is remarkable. Of course, grammar may also be what students remember most easily or is easiest for them to pinpoint from a writing course. Nevertheless, the competencies and objectives from the standardized syllabi as well as course documents describing plagiarism that precede students' comments suggest that conventions were, in fact, what participants' writing courses emphasized. I would argue that this suggests that this is a pervasive model of literacy sponsorship at these two FPCUs, rather than the idiosyncratic focus of one instructor. Ultimately, this meant that the courses set minimal standards for student writing, and fail to give students a rich sense of rhetorical awareness that considers writing as complex, social act.

Disciplining through conventions seems to describe not only the relationship or dynamic between these two for-profit universities and their students, but also between classmates interacting in a single course with one another. Katherine responded to the question "Can you describe your classmates for me?" by immediately shifting to talk about her classmates' grammar use: "I noticed some of them didn't use as much proper writing as they should have." To better understand what she meant, I probed, "When you say proper writing, what do you mean exactly?" Again, Katherine's takeaway was grammar and mechanics as she responded: "Like the writing mechanics and the grammar, some of them like "I is doing," stuff like that. That's improper, you know?" Nevertheless, Katherine's College Composition 1 course seems

misaligned with the best practices in writing instruction I outline at the start of this chapter. Katherine also suggests that she herself, and perhaps other students as well, discipline grammar or make judgments and form opinions about their classmates based on their grammar usage. I started out this chapter by describing Standard Language Ideology, and Katherine suggests that students are encouraged to impose this on one another rather than taking away an understanding of how grammar changes in different contexts and within different dialects of English such as African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Students then take in this narrow view of what writing is and impose it on one another through the writing course—disciplining one another through their interactions. Again, the space for subjectivity or for feedback on writing beyond what is inaccurate or accurate in terms of standard conventions is missing in what Katherine describes.

In an online writing course where students cannot see or hear one another, perhaps judgments based upon conventions become common as the only way students really get to know one another. This may be especially true if students are asked to give one another explicit feedback on grammar and citations by their writing instructor. To return to the rhetorical knowledge upheld by the *Principles* and the *Frameworks* I began this chapter with, this means students are not considering one another as authentic audiences for analyzing and sharing their writing. Instead, students become targets of language discipline by one another. Another participant Cassie described a classmate she met, who she would email back and forth with in this way: “She would send me her stuff, I would send her my stuff. I actually have something of hers that she wrote in my stuff saved, where we would just spellcheck each other’s stuff. We would say, ‘Yes, you cited that correctly,’ or, ‘No, you didn’t.’” This means that rather than engaging in debates around the content of writing including ideas, texts, or research, students engage with another by simply disciplining citations and grammar—adopting and absorbing this narrow model of writing and imposing it upon each other.

Online discussion boards play a central part of participants’ descriptions of their writing courses, and often their descriptions of discussion boards overlap with this disciplining of conventions. Reagan’s first mention of discussion boards was: “We have discussion boards that we have to post in, and they have to be grammatically and punctually correct.” Reagan’s focus on mandatory rules and correctness denotes the type of disciplining that I argue coincides with

narrowing. Reagan also suggested that discussion boards were ground zero for students' disciplining of one another's grammar:

You're supposed to criticize and opionate all these things for a discussion board, whatever the topic is and if it's supposed to be good writing, like not good, but professional writing, you're supposed to have capitalization, you know, everything that grammar rules has that you have to do, but there are people who don't do that and the ones that are going to sit there and say, "Okay, you forgot this, this, this, and this," but their thing is just as bad or if not worse than what you've already wrote.

Reagan's description of her dissatisfaction with discussion boards suggests that she sees "good" or "professional" writing as any writing that follows grammar rules. At first glance, it appears that Reagan feels resentful of other students' corrections of her grammar on discussion boards when their own writing in terms of grammar is "just as bad" as her own. The phrase "bad" like Katherine's earlier reference to "proper" suggests that grammar becomes a source of judgment and disciplining between students. Within this comment Reagan also points interestingly to the possible subjectivity of more complex writing concerns—she refers to those comments on the discussion board when "You're supposed to criticize and 'opionate'" as perhaps much murkier or complex. By contrast, if students stay focused in their feedback on following "grammar rules" they will be able to definitively assert: "Ok, you forgot this, this, and this." In some sense, Reagan then points to what I would call the oddly enticing appeal of disciplining conventions for writing students who are also customers at FPCUs: there is a certain satisfaction for students in being able to definitively point to what they know about grammar or citations or what is right and wrong. It perhaps seems safe to learn a rule and how to do something correctly or incorrectly, instead of jumping off into the unknown where one might "criticize and opionate" about writing. In this way, when FPCUs discipline conventions, they both offer a more concrete and simplified model of what "writing" is, and perhaps satisfy student customers' desires to gain definitive knowledge about writing quickly.

Other participants' reports reaffirm this sense of satisfaction from definitively knowing the conventions. When asked what she thought an expert writer should be able to do, my participant Janice first answered, "They would use proper grammar." When I asked Janice if her writing course at Turner University changed the way she wrote, she said "No" but instead:

I think it's making me more aware of my, I think grammar, and things like that. I was on Facebook the other day after I got done with...one of my papers and one of my friends said something and he just completely messed it all up and I corrected him. I said, "I'm taking a composition class so I know these things now."

Again, Janice was not unique among my participants in mentioning this focus on conventions as having changed her writing, as other student participants also talked about becoming more aware of grammar use on social media or through text messaging. In fact, Janice identifies this knowledge as the most valuable and concrete expertise she can assert that she has taken away from her class. Janice uses this knowledge of what is "correct" grammar that she has absorbed from her for-profit writing course to discipline her friend's Facebook post.

Statements from other participants confirm that conventions are *the* major takeaways from the writing courses at their for-profit colleges—disciplining is then particularly effective in driving home these aspects of writing at Promise and Turner University. For example, Rory was required to take two writing courses: College Composition I and College Composition II. When I asked the broad question in our second interview together, "What do you feel like you learned?" in your two writing courses, her first response was "Definitely why it's important to use proper APA formatting and citing when writing something." Again, while one might argue that these are easy things for students to pinpoint, I was asking students repeated questions about the goals, purpose, and outcomes of their writing courses, and all the answers pointed to a focus on conventions.

While my participants were not in the exact same writing course, this theme of focusing upon conventions was pervasive among different types of writing courses and contexts at the two FPCUs—Turner and Promise. I thus argue that the notion of objective conventions that participants seem to take away is decontextualized. Amala lives in Alaska, and is a student in the online Bachelor's in Business Administration at Promise University who recently completed a Business Communications course. When I asked Amala if this course had changed her writing process at all she responded:

Not really what I'm writing, but the format that I'm writing it in. That's what it's changed the most, I think. Especially with the thing like at the end, it's almost a footer? That little signature at the bottom that says this is all my contact information.

Amala identified the largest change in her own writing as a result of this online writing course to be her awareness of the business convention of using a signature with her contact info at the end of her professional emails. The narrowness of curriculum is then visible not only in College Composition or introductory writing courses, but also in what it might seem like would be more advanced Business Communications courses. Amala also expressed that she felt very pleased with this change in her writing format, as she felt that the email signature was very important. Again, the focus on conventions in some ways provides students with tangible, simple takeaways from writing courses that may be satisfying for student customers.

One might argue that student participants focused on conventions in their discussions with me, even though instructors may have sought to teach different skills. Nevertheless, the evidence from syllabi and course documents that I presented at the start of this chapter, as well as students' comments suggests that these items were the focus of writing classes. Student participants also suggested to me that not only were citations part of the instructional focus, but that they also formed a large part of what instructors based grades upon. Rory described how citations formed the bulk, or at least half what she was graded on at Turner University in her writing courses:

For the most part, it was, the grading was “Did we use proper punctuation? Did we cite properly? Was there plagiarism? Did we stay on topic?” For the most part, in the second [writing] class, from what I can remember, we’re given one or two things to choose from, and then we choose which one we wanted to write about...Like I said, they basically just made sure we did what we’ve learned from the first class, with the proper spelling, especially this APA formatting...APA formatting was worth 50 points out of the writing assignment. If not, more. They were very strict on making sure everything was APA-formatted... Normally, the[re] were between 100 and 150 points. So sometimes, the formatting would be more than at least half of the assignment.

Once again, the use of the notion of an institutional “they” who authoritatively disciplines students' language appears when Rory describes her writing instructor from the second college composition course. Rory's comment suggests the disciplining of students' language, rather than gaining a more expansive perspective of writing or audience or rhetorical awareness as she reiterates that Turner “made sure we did” what was properly formatted. Rory also suggests that it is not the case that students fixate on conventions although instructors try to teach other topics,

but instead the instructor's emphasis and grading are focused on conventions. Another participant enrolled at Turner echoed this sense that about half of the assignment was weighted on APA citations: "In college comp I missed half my points for it [citations] because she says that I wasn't ... my in-text reference page citations didn't really follow the APA 6th edition guidelines. I lost a lot of points for that." That APA might account for over half of the grade of a single writing assignment given that the *Principles* published by CCCCs fails to mention conventions at all suggests that students are not gaining an understanding of writing aligned with best practices. This narrow view of writing as nothing more than conventions is repeatedly reinforced then through both the syllabi from Turner and Promise University, the online discussion board, the instructor, and finally the rubrics with which student writing is graded.

Not only do conventions dominate writing classes at the two FPCUs participants attend, but as I have argued, conventions seem to replace other content such as rhetorical awareness or audience awareness. By singularly highlighting conventions Turner and Promise Universities then cut out attention in the writing curriculum to critical thinking, research, or rhetorical awareness. Maisha who had already received her Associate's Degree from Promise University in Criminal Justice, and now was progressing towards her Bachelor's Degree, was unsure about the mention of "rhetorical modes" in her course description for composition. When I specifically followed up and asked Maisha what she had learned about rhetorical modes, her response was "I'm not even going to lie, honestly I don't even remember. It was one of those other parts of writing that I probably wouldn't use often." On the other hand, Maisha described the major takeaway from her composition course as:

I would just say learning about APA format and just the resources in the library that we have and how beneficial they really are. I would say would be ... Yeah, I would say.

Because without that course I really wouldn't know anything about APA formatting at all.

Not only do conventions dominate then and discipline students' grammar and citation usage, but even when rhetorical awareness or "modes" are part of the course objectives, they do not seem to form the bulk of the class, or what instructors emphasize to students, and by extension what students end up viewing as the major takeaway or final goal of the course.

Disciplining through Fear of Plagiarism

Disciplining students' language was also visible through institutional fear mongering about plagiarism. Course documents provided by students reaffirm this focus on plagiarism. I collected many artifacts from Rory that were used in her writing course at Turner University. While some of the other topics of these documents included "Editing and Revising" and "Pre-writing" and "Analytical Reading," there were also four entire separate large documents dedicated to APA citations and plagiarism totaling 61 pages. The four documents all address the same topic, while one is a PowerPoint saved from an online workshop on the topic. The PowerPoint is from a workshop on plagiarism at the writing center, and one of the slides describes three other dates in a single week span of plagiarism workshops, declaring that "May's theme for the Writing Center Workshops is Plagiarism." One of the documents begins with following dramatic description:

In fact, there have been several highly publicized instances where people have suffered severe consequences for using others' ideas or words without permission. They have lost millions of dollars, and they also have been publicly humiliated by being called out on national television, in addition to facing the prospect of no one ever publishing their work again. People lose jobs and ruin careers when they do not provide proper credit for work they borrow from someone else. This handout is designed to help you avoid such problems...

While I do not aim to minimize the importance of students' learning about plagiarism, this description seems intended to invoke fear in a student who may be unfamiliar with citation guidelines. The same document commands students: "A simple rule to follow is: Whenever information does not come out of your own head, you must cite it." This picture of writing "out of your head" without an audience fails to mention how citations serve ethical research purposes or how using citations enables student writers to engage in intellectual conversations and exciting debates with other professionally published thinkers and writers. Instead, as the quote suggests, an isolated, narrow view of writing is offered as whatever "comes out" of a student's head.

My participants consistently brought up plagiarism as an important class theme, echoing the sense of fear about plagiarism within the institutional documents. I asked Rory what her writing instructors at Turner emphasized the most about writing, and she responded:

I think they mainly emphasize not plagiarizing. The second teacher that I had, he was very strict with any kind of plagiarism. I know a lot of the time my professor was making sure that we stayed with APA formatting. I don't know what they're called. In-text citations.

Rory suggests that this theme of plagiarism and citations takes up a significant portion of the course or “a lot of the time.” At another point in our interview she repeated this to me: “You can get in a lot of trouble for plagiarism... I guess I never realized how important that was until taking the [writing] courses.” While, of course providing instruction in citations may be necessary in college writing, that this was the major takeaway she identified as singularly “important” suggesting that this focus on avoiding plagiarism has been equated, at least in Rory’s writing course, with good writing. The fear Rory expresses about plagiarism was echoed across participants when it came to citation discussions. Disciplining then also problematically sets literacy standards incredibly low for vulnerable students at for-profit colleges—students finish courses considering that college writing means avoiding plagiarizing.

Writing Without a Purpose: Generic Essays

Within this section, I suggest that one of the consequences of disciplining and narrowing as a unique literacy sponsorship model was the decontextualized view of writing I witnessed on the part of several participants. As CCCC’s *Principles* suggest, behind every pedagogical method for teaching writing is a theory of what writing is, and I argue that disciplining narrow conventions reinforces a decontextualized view of writing for students. I saw evidence of this in my interviews when students expressed confusion about the kinds of genres that they write in, who the audiences were that they were writing for, or even what particular context they were supposed to be writing for in the composition class—whether academic, professional, or personal. I suggest that the narrowing of writing to conventions or minimal surface-level features of writing that may be graded as accurate or inaccurate means that students fail to gain a macro or broader picture of a rhetorical situation in which a writer is responding to a specific context or exigence, addressing a specific audience, and taking up or modifying an existing genre. Narrowing as a literacy sponsorship model means that conventions or APA citations and correct grammar fail to connect back to writing larger essays in various genres and an understanding of rhetorical theory. Overall, across the three interviews, nine out of fourteen of participants reported some uncertainty when it came to the genres and contexts that they were writing. While

this theme was not as prevalent as the focus upon narrow conventions was, it was visible broadly across narratives from the majority of participants.

In designing interview questions, my goal was to get a sense from students about what the genres and contexts of the writing assignments were at FPCUs. I was eager to find out how participants interpreted those genres. I asked participants specifically with regard to their writing courses: “What kind of writing do you do in your class” and “Describe a typical homework assignment in your class.” Depending on how they answered, I sometimes also followed up to ask, “What kinds of genres would the essays be?” I asked them to describe these writing assignments to get a sense of how they themselves defined these genres.

My participants all agreed courses were faster-paced than at “traditional” or non-profit colleges, and that writing assignments were completed in a step-by-step manner. While many students appreciated this scaffolding in easing them into writing—what for them was a larger essay—this step by step process did not seem to translate to clarity in terms of genre and rhetorical situation. Perhaps then the broken down or step-by-step process of condensed online introductory writing courses did not translate to a more holistic view understanding of writing. Katherine, an English major at Promise University, expressed her frustration when this step-by-step model in her introductory course outlined one model for college writing, and then she entered an upper-level literature course and found out that the type of “essay” she learned did not apply at all:

My last course—It was a little difficult, but it was a course that helped you week-by-week, step-by-step on how to write an academic essay that would be good for school. It was wonderful. But it doesn’t prepare you for what another course syllabus is going to be. Like this one, when I think of writing a thesis statement, I’m thinking of writing the 3-part thesis like I learned in the last course and writing my opinion and then writing three supportive facts about it. This is something totally different. You have to read a piece of work and understand the theme of the work to be able to create a thesis...I feel like I'm being bounced around.

In fact, Katherine’s critique that the introductory writing courses teach students that academic writing is a single monolithic thing when in fact academic writing varies substantially from one academic discipline to another has been launched recently (Wardle, 2009) at many first-year writing courses at not-for-profit and public institutions. Wardle describes the lack of purpose in

these types of writing assignments: “students are told to write an argument in order to write an argument or ‘describe the atmosphere of a football game’ simply for the sake of doing so (i.e. for “practice”)” (p. 777). This seems similar to what Katherine means when she generally outlines the very broad conception of “an academic essay that would be good for school.” Of course, Wardle highlights that students may learn how to write a certain type of generic academic essay for their first-year writing course, and then feel confused when they choose a major and discover that different academic disciplines have different writing conventions and use different genres. Wardle (2009) makes the case that:

If students are taught decontextualized “skills” or rigid formulas rather than general and flexible principles about writing, and if instructors in all classes do not explicitly discuss similarities between new and previous writing assignments, it stands to reason students will not see similarities between disparate writing situations or will apply rigid rules inappropriately (p. 770).

Certainly, this seems to be the case for Katherine when she moves to a literature course and must shift to write a different type of college essay. Katherine reports feeling “bounced around” likely because she felt that the first “academic essay” she learned how to write in the introductory class was meant to be a formula for writing later other courses, and then she realizes this is not the case. In short, the narrowing of writing at Promise University to conventions means that Katherine gains a simplistic view of genre as a formula for writing a generic essay that she should be able to use in subsequent college courses, and she feels cheated when this is not the case. Katherine’s experience suggests that literacy sponsorship may offer students narrow and misguided expectations for writing in other courses or in the world.

One might again argue that these concerns are not distinct from those of many students in first-year writing at any higher education institution, who experience a shock when writing conventions or models change within their major or discipline. Nevertheless, Katherine identifies “an academic essay” based on her first writing course at Promise as one where you have a “3-part thesis” and you are stating your “opinion” with straightforward supporting facts. This “opinion” based essay that totals two pages for most participants or 700 to 1,000 words seems in fact much simpler and less complex than the Common Core Standards for 12th grade. The standards describe how students: “Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.” Thus, not

only is Katherine learning a formulaic genre, but the genre itself seems simplified compared to 12th grade writing standards set by the Common Core. Katherine seems to describe the traditional 5-paragraph essay that college writing instructors often complain students have learned to write in high school, perhaps for the SAT or some other form of standardized testing, and which must be unlearned in college. But for Katherine, this was the genre of writing modeled in her first-year writing course at Promise University.

Ultimately, this simplified notion of genre fails to help students gain a sense of how to respond to a complex rhetorical situation in their writing. Reagan expressed her frustration with the writing prompt that she also submitted to me (See Appendix H for this sample assignment). The title of the assignment is “Expressing Your Ideas for an Academic Audience and Plan for Additional Research.” Reagan felt confused as the assignment obviously states in the title that it is for an academic audience, but then within the assignment suggests:

Apply what you have learned about formal language and academic writing to write your own 2 page article that could potentially be published at the reputable Internet website you used to locate the articles you used for the Assignments you wrote for Unit 4

This essay prompts refers to career-focused websites with audiences of professionals rather than academics. Reagan responded to my question about the type of essay this was by describing several perhaps overlapping genres:

It was supposed to be like a, I think it was a, professional, academic, research paper, type of thing. It had to be in professional words, but educational, and in-text citations had to be in there. She didn't want direct quotes...Once you asked her a hundred different questions about it, you finally started to understand...I mean, obviously there's instructions there, and some people need the giant paragraph of explanation, but like I didn't find half the answers to my questions, and she was like, “Use the writing center.”

Reagan sees this essay as trying to do many things—to be both “professional” yet also “educational” and “academic” at the same time while also using “research.” Reagan does not seem to have a clear sense—even with the prompt in front of her as we spoke—of why she wrote this, or what the goals of the assignment were. Even after following up several times with her writing instructor, Reagan cannot tell me what the purpose of this essay is supposed to be.

I argue that Promise and Turner University writing courses provide formulaic writing genres that fail to offer students more complex or flexible ways of considering genre and

rhetorical situation. Participants' experiences with genre then seem to align with what Wardle (2009) identifies as "mutt genres" where students are asked to write something simply for the sake of writing it rather than investigating the rhetorical situation of purpose, audience, and complex genre involved in an assignment. Rory described her writing assignments this way when I asked, "What are your writing assignments like?":

A lot of them were, like I said, just ... I would say a lot of them were like compare and contrast things. I know a couple of them were like, "Can you explain what proper grammar is?" They would just give us writing prompts. One of them was we had to choose from a list of 50 different things and just explain what it meant to us.... We've had the discussion board, which is where the ... I don't know if it's the teacher who makes up the questions or the school that makes up the discussion board questions, but they'll ask a question. One of the things, like, "Can you give 3 points on proper citing?" I had to go through and look what 3 main points of citing would be and explain what they were.

Rory is unsure about the types of genres that she is asked to write in for College Composition 1. Rory's assertion that "They would just give us writing prompts" certainly seems to suggest a more static, fixed sort of genre or assignment. A compare and contrast essay might describe assignments students complete earlier in the K-12 education, but seems to set a low standard for an assignment for a college-level writing assignment again in comparison with best practices in the field of writing studies. This notion of compare and contrast seems to be more similar to the following Common Core Standard for 8th grade writers: "Introduce claim(s), acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically" or to compare and contrast ideas. The Common Core Standards does not describe compare and contrast assignments within their objectives for 12th grade writers, but instead describes a primary focus in genre on research and evidence-based arguments or: "Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence." Again then, in terms of genre the standards seem set low for students in Rory's course.

While Rory expresses confusion perhaps in remembering the writing assignment: "I think one of them was about teen pregnancy or something," there also seems to be a lack of clarity in the class overall about genre. One assignment asked students to pick something from a large list and to explain what the item meant to them. She also describes two writing prompts for the

online discussion board as focused upon grammar and citations as subjects—one in which she had to explain “what proper grammar was?” and another discussion board in which she had to write about three main points of citations. Rory is unsure about whether the teacher or the “school” make up the assignment prompts for the discussion board, hinting at an institutionalized or standardized writing model. She does not ask if “the school” or “they” create the prompts what that might mean for students—but again this seems to suggest a more static or formulaic notion of genre, where students see assignments static and standardized across the institution. Indeed, higher education researcher Lechuga (2008) has pointed out that FPCUs offer highly standardized curriculum. This lack of a complex understanding of genre or rhetorical situation may be a consequence of narrowing writing—as Rory suggests grammar and citations play oversized roles in her writing courses—a byproduct of narrow writing may be ignoring more comprehensive or complex writing concerns in the online writing classroom.

While Rory was attending Turner University, students at Promise University repeated this more formulaic view of genre, and not only for assignments in writing courses, but across the curriculum. Jane is enrolled in an online Bachelor’s degree in Psychology at Promise. When I asked Jane to answer the question, “What kinds of genres would they [the essays] be like?” throughout her classes she responded “Some of them were compare and contrast and others were ...[pause]. I don't know that I would...[pause].. I guess they would be argumentative.” When I followed up and asked, “You said maybe argumentative?” to clarify she stated, “Not really. I'm not really sure how I would classify them. It was more of informative essays.” While Jane is again unsure of how to classify most types of writing she completes at Promise University, she finally decides most of the essays are informative or relaying information. This seems like another instance of sponsoring “good enough writing,” as informative may mean essays that are summarizing information rather than making arguments. However, Jane’s uncertainty leaves this open-ended: perhaps the essays assigned in most classes are simply informative or more like summaries. Perhaps the prompts, genres, and rhetorical situations of the writing assignments across the curriculum are not very clear to students, and thus Jane perceives the essays as informative while the instructors may have other goals that have been lost in communication. Then again, since Jane feels her writing class and university is mainly focused on conventions like grammar and citations, she may not see the genre or prompt as important enough to take notice.

Ultimately, when students remain focused on decontextualized surface-level writing concerns, Promise and Turner through writing courses fail to communicate to students a more holistic view of writing that might consider complex notions of genre as responding to a rhetorical situation with a specific purpose. Students are left viewing good writing as following conventions instead.

Writing Without a Purpose: The Devaluation of Writing and Literacy

While students then seem to be practicing formulaic genres that leave them without a strong sense of what the purpose of these essays is, another consequence of disciplining and narrowing writing is that student participants sometimes also question the importance of writing or literacy skills for their future careers. Again, when writing is decontextualized and becomes equated with conventions like understanding APA citations, students fail to connect to writing a valuable activity for their own career goals. Participants had a variety of career goals including becoming a teacher, a gynecologist, or technology specialist at a school among other careers. Overall, students feel their degrees are “career-focused” in general. In fact, overwhelmingly students agreed with the following summary statement from news media in the final interview “Student’s reading and writing practices at for-profit colleges are hands-on and geared towards their career goals.” However, interestingly some participants question the importance of both writing assignments and courses for their individual careers. Thus, while participants seem to see FPCUs’ literacy sponsorship as broadly vocational in terms of focus, they do not always connect writing courses and assignments explicitly as having value for their future careers.

My participant Rory questioned the need for her to take writing courses, even though she plans to go into the field of education. Rory is pursuing her Associate’s Degree in early childhood education at Turner University, which means she might in the future be teaching Kindergarten students literacy skills, or even students as old as eight years old in a K-12 classroom. Her view on the two writing courses that she was required to take was this:

I think the writing compositions themselves. Most of them [the writing assignments] weren't very useful at all for what I was going to get my degree for. I mean I guess in a way they would've had to have been or they wouldn't have been included in the curriculum. For me personally, I don't think that they were very helpful as far as me getting my degree in it.

However, as I have suggested, since she feels her course focused on conventions such as APA citations, of course APA citations are unimportant for an early childhood education major. To be clear I am not suggesting that the university should not ask students to learn how to cite information according to APA or MLA styles, instead I argue that only focusing upon citations leaves students unable to see the value of writing beyond submitting an essay to see what is correct or incorrect in terms of conventions. If the model of writing students experience fails to focus on the shifting rhetorical purposes and audiences for writing, then of course Rory remains uncertain even at the end of her writing course why it might be important for her to develop writing skills while obtaining her associate's degree.

While one might argue that many college students remain unclear of what the purpose of general education requirements such as first-year writing are for their future career goals throughout college, I suggest that the narrow view of writing students receive at FPCUs at the very least exacerbates students' sense of lack of purpose for writing. I asked Rory about the various audiences that she wrote for, which she seemed uncertain of, and she responded:

Yeah. I don't think the writing assignments were towards the correct audience. A lot of the times the audience would be someone other than who ... Like I said, the early childhood development degree is for working with newborns through 8 years old, so for the audience to be anything higher than 8 years old, I just felt like it wasn't helping me at all to go on to work after I graduate.²¹

The vocational mission and ethos of FPCUs may be confusing for students if they then take writing courses that do not seem directly connected to teaching them what they want to do in their future career goals. Rory believes that writing assignments for students like her studying Early Childhood Education should be written for audiences of young children. But again, this also demonstrates Rory's narrow view of what it means to teach pre-school-through 8-year old students as she would also likely in her career be interacting with parents, other teachers and colleagues, and administrators through writing. However, again, it is unsurprising that Rory fails to see value in these writing classes if the only information she takes away from the writing courses is correct grammar and citation styles.

²¹ Earlier I discuss Rory's sense that her class is dominated by a focus on citations, even in the grading as APA citations according to her account for "more than at least half" of the grading points on an assignment. I also outline previously the ways in which Rory describes uncertainty about genres in her writing course. Rory expresses a lack of clarity about genre.

Not limited to Rory, this theme of questioning the value of literacy activities arose with several other participants as well. Reagan has the goal of going into the health sciences as she is enrolled in an online Bachelor's degree in Health Science at Turner; she wants to be an OBGYN. When asked if she felt that Turner University's literacy practices were geared towards career goals Reagan stated:

I don't necessarily think it's [Turner's writing class is] really geared towards our career goals, unless we're going into something that has to deal with a lot of writing, because like if you're in the health sciences or any kind of science class, you're not really going to be writing a bunch of writing things. You're just going to do short, simple, to the point kinds of answers or notes.

Reagan then questions the value of literacy activities or “writing” for those going into health science fields. She feels that for the line of work she wants to go into as an OBGYN, writing will not be as important of a skill for her to develop. Reagan's view of the skill set required to become a doctor is somewhat narrow. Reagan did express her concern that since she was enrolled in Turner University online, she would not be able to complete lab science courses, and might have difficulty completing the requirements to be able to apply to medical school. Again, vocational goals of FPCUs like Turner may be misleading for students, as they may expect all their coursework to provide direct or explicit instruction in what they want to do in their future careers. In fact, most careers will likely require some professional writing skills and particularly in the field of medicine, mastering a significant amount of academic work is required before learning any applied knowledge.

Ultimately, again I argue that both Rory and Reagan's view of writing as unimportant stems from learning that good writing means following conventions—APA citation standards and avoiding plagiarism—lessons that they could also learn from simply looking at citation websites. By contrast, the WPA *Frameworks* suggests that good writing is: “Rhetorical knowledge – the ability to analyze and act on understandings of audiences, purposes, and contexts in creating and comprehending text.” Thus, the WPA suggests that understanding the purpose for writing in a genre or unique context is one of key aspect of rhetorical knowledge. By extension, the lack of rhetorical awareness inherent in the literacy sponsorship at Promise and Turner means that a more capacious sense of the varied rhetorical purposes of writing both on the assignment-level, and overall in writing courses is not immediately apparent for these

students. But, this means that Turner University has also failed to give Reagan a sense of what might be required of her once she completes her Bachelor's and must take the MCATs—and the role that reading especially, but also writing will play in her success in becoming a doctor.

Janice also suggested writing was not important for her career goals overall. She wanted to work as a technology specialist at a school, or to teach classes on technology. Janice put it this way:

But, you know, I'm in technology and I feel like taking a second writing class is not something I wanted to do and it's just [pause] I don't think it should have been in there twice. I think the first one was completely fine and it really showed us how to do everything and I don't feel like that the second one was even worth it.

For Janice then, the second writing class did not seem relevant for her career interest in technology. Again though, since she learned a model of writing characterized by hyper-attention to conventions, it is unlikely that she would see the relevance of writing for any career. She also suggests that she was learning decontextualized or static skills here or “how to do everything” rather than gaining more flexible or capacious understanding of rhetorical situation, audience and purpose. A sense of rhetorical purpose in her second writing course just might have convinced her of the greater value of the class for her career. In fact, many free citation websites assist writers online, and this narrow model of literacy renders writing irrelevant for students.

Ultimately then, when the literacy sponsorship model of an institution is narrowing writing to mean disciplining APA citations, grammar, and mechanics, the result is that students leave writing courses with the similarly narrow sense that literacy skills are unnecessary in future careers in education, medicine and technology. However, students who perhaps may also be considered customers—at least in the eyes of the FPCUs—remain in an even more vulnerable position in that they are unaware of the rhetorical principles and awareness that might be missing from their writing classes, and unaware of what they are learning about writing that might be crucial for their future careers.

For-profit Literacy Sponsorship Outliers

In contrast to the stories of literacy sponsorship I have painted above, three students out of the fourteen who completed my study reported a strong sense of rhetorical awareness when it came to audience, context, and genre from their experiences at Promise University specifically. But those three students entered college with significant experience writing, including two

students who worked in full-time positions requiring extensive professional writing. These three participants identified themselves as expert writers at the end of the study, but also expressed a significant amount of confidence with writing before starting college. Perhaps the low literacy standards and the narrowing I describe did not matter for these students because they set high standards for themselves, and they entered their colleges with clear career purposes that shaped their writing experiences. If literacy sponsorship suggests a dynamic or relationship between sponsors, and literacy learners, then perhaps these students were able to engage in self-sponsorship given their prior experience with writing in the workplace.

In the interest of providing this alternate perspective, I introduce Brenda's story here as an outlier. Brenda is a 48-year old woman who identified herself as "White" from California and is the mother of six, and has seven grandchildren. She worked previously as the Director of Development and Marketing for seven years for a large non-profit organization before enrolling in her Bachelors of Science in Business Administration at Promise College. Brenda is an extreme outlier in that she already obtained a certificate in grant writing before starting her Bachelor's degree and described herself as coming into college: "as a paid person who writes I'm already an expert." Brenda also identified her writing course and literacy experiences at Promise as highly valuable: "I'm a better professional writer today, than I was before I started this school." Brenda is the only one of my participants who did not attend her writing course online.

Brenda's first-year writing course description from Promise University seemed both more specific and focused than the course descriptions of most participants. Although I assumed this was because she placed into a higher course level, she also reported that she never took a placement test for writing. It remains unclear then why her syllabus was so different. Brenda was, as I have mentioned the only one of my participants who attended both online and face-to-face courses, and it had been several years since she took her first-year writing course when we completed the interviews. Unlike most participants who were just beginning their degrees, Brenda was about to finish her degree. Perhaps the difference between other participants' experiences and Brenda's lies in the fact that Brenda took her writing course face-to-face class; additionally, Brenda took her course three years ago, and its possible Promise University has since changed their writing curriculum in the last several years. Her introductory writing course description seems to set a higher standard for incoming student writers:

This course develops the skills used in writing applied research papers for a university-level audience. Students will write position papers, persuasive essays, and case study analyses. Students will study classical rhetorical concepts of authority and the Toulmin method of argument analysis, and will evaluate outside sources for objectivity and utility in constructing persuasive arguments. Students practice giving peer feedback, revising essays in response to feedback, and writing collaboratively as Learning Teams. The course reviews the elements of grammar, mechanics, style, and proper documentation of sources.

Although grammar, mechanics, and documentation are still included in the course description, since the research aims for Brenda's course seem both more specific and more challenging, it seems like the conventions would serve those more complex purposes.

In contrast to the sort of disciplining and narrowing I describe earlier, Brenda also suggested that the course description and the sort of tone of the class set by the instructor encouraged students to speak back or to question academic writing:

It just started you know, he [the instructor] started with engaging and questioning writing. It always continued in that, questioning the writing. That was the one thing I really knew right off the bat after the first class and after reading the course description was, we're going to question everything. I'm going to question everything.

This class atmosphere seems much more aligned with the *Principles*, as students engage in back and forth dialogue that for Brenda at least, was positive and exciting. Consider for example, Reagan's comment that her course at Turner did not focus on students "writing strengths" because all of the students had used MLA citations before, and the course was focused on "Turners' mandated APA." Even the idea of a "mandate" seems like it would not fit in with the sort of writing class environment that Brenda describes. As I have suggested, at its extreme disciplining students seems to invoke fear-mongering about plagiarism, but Brenda's class seems focused upon inquiry rather than plagiarism.

Brenda's story again did not coincide with many of the participants in terms of her understanding of genre and rhetorical situation. Brenda gained a sense of rhetorical situation that enabled her to analyze future writing assignments and to think about rhetorical purpose: "that first class, transitioned me to do the upper level writing classes that were very strategic in writing ability. We had to really understand how others perceived what we're saying in our work and

what the purpose of the work is?” For Brenda then, the genres she practiced in the introductory writing course were not so formulaic that she was unsure of any purpose at all for the assignments as was the case earlier with Rory and Jane, but instead flexible and grounded enough to give her a sense of how to adapt her knowledge about writing within new contexts. Brenda also saw writing as closely connected to her career, and while this in part stemmed from her extensive experience as a professional writer, she also suggested it was a unique aspect of Promise University that coursework was relevant to the workplace.

Nevertheless, Brenda also suggested that quite frequently her classmates did not take away the same complex knowledge about tackling a writing assignment that she herself did. In fact, throughout my talks with Brenda, she frequently mentioned her frustration with other classmates’ writing skills and work ethic when it came to writing. She also described assisting her classmates so frequently that:

I would consider myself as almost like a TA because I've always been the team leader, always. I would always be the mother hen to the other students because they didn't know how to structure an essay, in regards to answering to a prompt. So, I had to teach them how to take a prompt and use the prompt as a tether to outline...and structure their paper to answer the prompt. Those are things that I did at my house with students around the table and some coronas and some pizza. We sat around and taught these children or young adults how to write a paper.

Thus, Brenda suggests that other students are not gaining the same confidence in tackling new writing situations from their writing courses at FPCUs as she herself did, and she is going out of her way to assist her fellow classmates. Brenda seems to understand essay prompts as rhetorical situations in and of themselves as she describes “how to take a prompt and use the prompt as a tether.” While the reports I describe earlier suggest that students gain a very narrow isolating view of writing as simply adhering to mandated conventions, Brenda, by contrast, has sought to build a writing community by inviting her classmates into her home to practice and work together. She identified this more capacious sense of writing with a real audience as a need that was not being met by Promise University for her peers; as a sort of “mother hen,” she sought to fill this need herself.

Conclusion: Variation Across Literacy Sponsorship at FPCUs

I describe these outliers to do justice to the diversity of conversations I had with participants, and to add complexity to the portrait of literacy sponsorship at FPCUs. Perhaps for the right student—for Brenda who had worked for nine years as a professional writer but who was also a first-generation college student—Promise College is in fact an outstanding literacy sponsor in providing the flexibility of a degree that allowed her to maintain full-time employment as a student. But Brenda seemed confident enough as a writer to sponsor her own literacy activities as well as those of her peers. When the literacy sponsorship of Promise University fails inexperienced student writers who are struggling, perhaps advanced student writers like Brenda sometimes step up to sponsor their classmates' more complex understanding of writing. Indeed, Blanche—who I have described earlier in this chapter—and who also was an outlier in terms of her extensive previous experience writing, also suggested that she spent an extensive amount of time helping other students in classes who struggled with writing.

Yet most participants—all of whom never got extra help from Brenda or anyone like her—reiterated the institutional emphasis on conventions as what they were taught in their writing classes, as what instructors emphasized, and as what grading was based upon. These students left their writing courses *without* learning about rhetorical awareness, genre, context, critical thinking or other themes or ideas about writing that they took away. This means that for these—the majority of students I got to know and spoke with—attention to conventions *replaced* more challenging aspects of writing such as research, rhetorical awareness, genre, and context. Throughout this chapter, I have described the ways in which what I call disciplining and narrowing as a literacy sponsorship model works at Turner and Promise—it is an institutionalized model of writing that is hyper-aware of standard conventions and places a premium on correctness or incorrectness, thus removing more subjective and more complex concerns from the college writing curriculum. Even further, this disciplining fails to encourage students to see conventions themselves as changing and contextual. Students absorb this narrow model and in turn begin to discipline one another's language. Disciplining students' language use by extension also means fear-mongering about plagiarism on the part of Turner and Promise.

As I point out in my literature review and the previous chapter analyzing news media, disciplining students is problematic given that the student population attending FPCUs is particularly vulnerable. Research has shown that for-profit students are even more likely than

their community college counterparts to have GEDs, be single parents, to be first-generation college students, and to come from low-income backgrounds or receive Pell grants (Deming et al., 2012, p. 140). Of the 14 participants who completed my own study, 12 were first-generation college students and 5 participants received a GED instead of a high school diploma.

Importantly, I want to reiterate again that my own conclusions about literacy sponsorship to a certain extent differ from some participants who did not perceive their writing courses' focus on standard conventions as necessarily negative—they sometimes expressed pleasure in “knowing” the grammar rule, or being able to definitively say they knew how to cite a source. However, when students are also configured by their own for-profit universities as well as news media as customers, then their satisfaction becomes a priority, not necessarily challenging them to learn (although of course there may be overlap between those two goals).

Narrowing and disciplining means that students at Promise and Turner are often unsure of the purpose of their writing assignments, the complexity of genre, or the context of writing assignments whether personal, professional, or academic. Students question the value of writing courses, and more broadly having to learn about writing for their future career goals. Some of these participants wanted to be teachers or doctors, but their experiences engaging literacy at Promise and Turner University did not give them a sense of how writing might help them to achieve those goals. If the model of good writing at one's higher education institution is simply to follow standard conventions, then of course writing becomes irrelevant for any future career. Unfortunately, this literacy sponsorship model leaves for-profit students who enter college already unprepared in terms of literacy skills in even more vulnerable positions—students remain unaware of what's missing in their courses, and regardless tuition dollars are collected by FPCUs.

Chapter V: Individualized Literacy Sponsorship at FPCUs: Writing on Your “Own”

When I teach first-year writing at the University of Michigan, I begin by showing students the following images on a PowerPoint on the first day:



Figure 2. Social Model of Writing vs. Individualized Model

This is a simple activity, and my goal in teaching it is to encourage students to think critically about what writing *is* or how they conceptualize it. Usually, students say on day one that they see writing as similar to the image on the left—a nondescript student probably working under the pressure of a rapidly approaching assignment deadline as the clock looms over them—most importantly—alone. My hope as a teacher, however, is that by the final day of class students will begin to see writing more like the image on the right—a sort of complex triangulation between an author, the author’s text (which might be nontraditional itself) and a living and breathing audience, all operating in a specific context or place and time. I want my students to have a sense of writing as a social activity—or a means of communication with real consequences for both authors and audiences. In my class, I build in ways of making writing more explicitly social through the circular arrangement of desks, the extensive peer review activities students engage in, and by offering frequent feedback on student writing as well as regular one-on-one conferences about student writing.

In this chapter, I talk about how online writing courses at FPCUs could be “social” in two different ways. First, on a basic level I discuss **sociality in terms of interaction** or contact between online college students and each other, as well as with their instructor. As I have mentioned above, this is the kind of social environment that group activities in a writing class, and one-on-one conferences can promote—where a class becomes a community. Many previous studies of online college writing courses have found that more frequent student interaction with the instructor, but also with fellow students connects to student satisfaction and perhaps course success (Finlay, Desmet, & Evans, 2004; Fortune, Shifflett & Sibley, 2006; Mehlenbacher, Miller, Covington, & Wilson, 2000; Yagelski & Grabill, 1998). Secondly, I consider how online writing courses could be **social in a rhetorical sense**. As I mention above, this is what I hope to pass on to my first-year writing students—an understanding of audience and rhetorical awareness. The importance of interactivity in online courses demonstrated by research nicely aligns with best practices in composition studies and rhetorical theory. In the previous chapter, I use the *Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing* to evaluate for-profit writing courses. The *Principles* extensively focus on the importance of understanding writing as social in the context of college composition classrooms. The *Principles* assert that college writing instruction should recognize “writing as a social act” and that sound writing instruction: “considers the needs of real audiences” and “depends upon frequent, timely, and context-specific feedback from an experienced postsecondary instructor.” The *Principles* imply that these two definitions of sociality reinforce one another then: when students have opportunity for interactive feedback activities and social interaction in writing courses, they may gain a sense of audience awareness and rhetorical understanding.

By contrast, my participants enrolled in online writing courses at FPCUs report that they write and read individually, or on their “own” as many put it during our conversations together. In fact, several of my participants pointed out to me that what we were doing during our interviews—skyping and talking while using video to see each other’s faces—was something they had never done before as online college students. In this chapter, I argue that literacy activities—in particular in online courses at FPCUs—are often **asocial**, and I use participants’ reports to define and describe what it means for writing to be asocial in this context. My argument reinforces one recent study (Boyd, 2008) that suggested that most students in first-year composition courses online indicated that they were dissatisfied with the amount of interaction

with both the instructor and other students and would prefer more opportunities for interaction overall. Likewise, participants in my study reinforced these research findings in expressing their desire for more interaction in their writing courses. I suggest that this asocial model of literacy sponsorship lacks 1) opportunities for basic social interaction, and 2) rhetorical and audience awareness that enacts a model of writing as social.

My argument that students' literacy practices at these two FPCUs are asocial builds from an expanding body of higher education research pointing to the unique difficulties of English coursework online in open access college contexts. Xu and Jaggars (2014) argue that it is not perhaps that writing or English courses online need to be more social to be successful, but perhaps instead the already social practices instructors apply to writing and English courses such as peer review activities lead to worse course outcomes for students—specifically students in community college settings already struggling with the online format of courses. The Community College Research Center released a research overview in 2013 entitled “What We Know About Online Course Outcomes” which asserts, based on extensive data from two large statewide community college systems, that students enrolled in developmental English or first-year composition courses online are twice as likely to fail or withdraw compared to students enrolled in the same courses face-to-face. My critique of online writing as asocial at FPCUs then builds from this existing research that questions the ways in which writing may be both a social and a productive experience for students enrolled in online English courses in open access contexts.

In the second section of this chapter, I suggest that within the unique context of FPCUs, not only is online writing asocial, but the consumer model of for-profit institutions reinforces this individualistic model of writing. It is not simply that the online learning environment at FPCUs makes social interaction in writing classes difficult. Even further, I argue that the individualized literacy sponsorship at for-profit universities means that participants tend to place responsibility on the individual for literacy practices. Again, in making this case, I am reinforcing previous research from the field of higher education that has suggested students have greater responsibility for their learning in online courses and that to be successful in online courses students must engage in self-directed learning (Azevedo, Cromley, & Seibert, 2004; Corbeil, 2003). However, I uniquely point to the ways this shift for the responsibility for learning aligns with broader trends to privatization in higher education. Writing courses then become an

individual consumer good, rather than a cooperative, discursive community-based activity to benefit the entire class. Participants place the responsibility solely on an individual student's effort when it comes to 1) learning from literacy activities and 2) one's overall educational experience at a for-profit college. I argue that this shift to an individualized literacy sponsorship model ends up exacerbating larger inequalities in higher education. In making this claim, I align with higher education researchers who suggest that "the continued expansion of online learning could strengthen, rather than ameliorate, educational inequity" (Xu & Jaggars, 2014, p. 651).

I also then problematize research from writing studies that remains, I suggest, overly optimistic about the possibilities of online college writing courses. Writing studies researchers suggest online writing courses expand access to writing instruction to diverse students (Griffin & Minter, 2013, pg. 147). Composition researchers Sapp and Simon (2005) assert "In higher education, one of the attractions of online teaching...is its potential to serve diverse and hard-to-reach student populations" (par. 1). Warnock's (2009) book *Teaching Writing Online: How and Why* implies that online courses are here to stay, pointing to their growth and stating, "Technology is increasingly becoming a given in instructional design—the question now is not *if*, but *how* teachers will use it" (p. x). Warnock goes on to suggest that:

Online instruction itself opens a number of opportunities, but I specifically find online *writing* instruction promising because I believe—and this a core premise of this book—that online writing instruction provides the opportunity for not just a *different* approach, but a *progressive* approach to the way teachers teach writing—an evolution of sorts in writing instruction...I see the possibilities of a progressive step toward, perhaps, a 'better' composition class...Why *better*? Because the online format—by its very nature—requires students to learn to use writing to interact with others. (p. x-xi)

In response to the "promise" and perhaps more progressive nature of online college writing coursework opening access to diverse students and encouraging students to write to communicate with one another, I argue that it is important to maintain specificity in research with regard to institutional context. A meta-analysis conducted by the US Department of Education finding similar outcomes for college students enrolled online compared to those enrolled in face-to-face classes focused almost solely upon universities "rated as 'selective' or 'highly selective' by the U.S. News and World Report, and all seemed to involve relatively well-prepared students" (Jaggars & Bailey, 2010, p. 8). On the other hand, two-year colleges have

been the sites of the largest expansions of online course offerings and enrollments: in 2008, 97 percent of two-year colleges were offering online courses while only 66 percent of all post-secondary institutions were offering any online courses (Jaggars, Edgecombe & West Stacey, 2013, p. 1). Likewise, most of 4-year undergraduate students or 62.3% at for-profit colleges are enrolled in programs fully online (in comparison with 7.1 percent of students at 4-year public universities and 11.9 percent of students at private not-for-profit 4-year institutions) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). FPCUs also offer a large proportion of two-year or certificate degrees, and are open access or accept all students with GEDs or high school diplomas. Online writing courses in this context may be quite distinct from online writing courses at elite colleges.

I also argue that part of the optimism about online courses in writing studies has glossed over differences in institutional context, but also between types of online courses. Hybrid or blended online courses require a major online learning component, but also involve face-to-face class time. Writing studies researcher Warnock's (2013) Writing Program Administrators (WPA) Compile Bibliography groups fully online and hybrid courses together in asking: "Do hybrid and online courses offer the same educational experience, opportunities, and, most importantly, outcomes as onsite courses?" when it comes to writing (p. 1). But hybrid and fully online courses must be separated in research. In the Department of Education's meta-analysis of studies of online higher education, students did not perform better in fully online courses in comparison to face-to-face courses. While students did perform similarly or even better in hybrid online courses than face-to-face courses "of the 23 hybrid courses that were examined in studies included in the meta-analysis, 20 required the students to physically attend class for the same amount of time that students in a face-to-face course would attend" (Jaggars & Bailey, 2010, p. 3). Although online learning enhanced these courses, they seem best described as face-to-face courses with extra online learning components. In terms of providing access to diverse or non-traditional working students with families who may be unable to attend onsite-writing courses, hybrid courses certainly are not comparable to fully online courses. Furthermore, when considering the social aspects of online writing courses, fully online courses also seem, at least theoretically, as if they might offer less opportunities for social interaction than hybrid courses. In my own study,

all thirteen participants who enrolled in a writing course online took fully online²² rather than hybrid courses (one participant took her writing course in a face to face setting).

Writing as Asocial at FPCUS

The theme of writing as asocial in these fully online writing courses was pervasive throughout interviews with every single participant. Participants reported that at Promise University and Turner University in both writing courses, and the writing that they completed for other courses, they complete literacy activities on their own. In what follows, first, I suggest that the pretense for making online writing classes social exists at Turner and Promise University through 1) online discussion forums at both institutions and 2) team writing assignments at Promise University only and one-hour online seminars at Turner University only. Nevertheless, I call these attempts to create a social atmosphere a pretense, because participants report that they are ultimately unsuccessful in promoting a social model of writing. I analyze Turner University's standardized "Netiquette Rules" for online discussion boards to consider why these attempts to generate social interaction are unsuccessful. The online discussion forums involve low levels of interaction, and team assignments are often a source of frustration from the perspective of my participants as students do not effectively collaborate. Secondly, beyond any pretense of sociality, I outline the ways in which students describe writing as asocial at Promise and Turner. Opportunities for basic social interaction, and to generate a social model of writing or audience and rhetorical awareness are missing from participants' reports of their experiences. The most common audience students identify for writing assignments is their instructor. Peer review is a rarity at Promise University or at Turner, and the few students who report engaging in peer review see it as ineffective because other students fail to participate fully. Thirdly, I point out that this critique of online writing at FPCUs as asocial originates with students themselves as well as in best practices in composition studies outlined by the *Principles*. Participants report that they wish they had more opportunity for social interaction with other students in their writing courses.

²² Fully online courses may also be either synchronous or asynchronous. Synchronous online classes are those that require students and the instructor to be online at the same time participating together, whereas asynchronous online classes are the opposite. In asynchronous courses, instructors provide materials and assignments through an online portal, and students meet weekly deadlines to complete sets of assignments. Asynchronous courses also seem, at least theoretically, to offer fewer opportunities for writing to be a social activity. My participants reported that online writing courses (and all online courses) at Promise University are all fully online and fully asynchronous. Turner University's online writing courses (and all online courses) all involved a one-hour "lecture" each week which is synchronous, while the rest of tasks and assignments must be completed asynchronously.

Every single participant in this study brought up this view of writing as asocial specifically in the second interview. In the first and final interview sessions, this theme also surfaced extensively through my discussions with participants. In the second interview, I sought to find out about participants' experiences in writing courses specifically. I thus asked questions in the second interview that explicitly brought up the building of a social, rhetorical model of writing in online writing classes such as: "Would you describe writing as a social activity in your class?" and "Who are the audiences you wrote for in the class?". While participants then considered whether writing within their class reflected a social, rhetorical model that considered authentic audiences, I also asked more simple questions to gauge how much students interacted at all with one another in writing courses. I asked, "Would you say that students tend to participate equally in your class?" and "Can you describe your classmates for me?" as well as "Did your peers provide feedback on your writing?" I also asked questions to gauge the amount of interaction between the students the instructor. Nevertheless, as I suggest at the start of this chapter, a rhetorical sense of audience and writing as a social activity is closely connect with the "interactivity" that research suggests improves learning outcomes for online courses. Furthermore, while I collected data on this theme through more direct questions, this theme was so pervasive that it also surfaced in participants' answers to open-ended questions. For example, this theme surfaced when I began the second interview by asking, "Tell me anything interesting about your writing class," when I asked students about the "least useful" parts of class and when I asked, "Is there anything you would change about your writing class?".

The Pretense of Social Interaction in Online Writing Courses at FPCUs

Discussion forums seemed to be the unique space in for-profit online courses for social interaction, or what I argue in this section is a pretense for social interaction. Whitney, a student at Promise University saw writing as social in her introductory online writing course, but also qualified her response, suggesting that this particular online writing course was uniquely social compared to others. Whitney described, "Our instructor, she had mentioned numerous times that she was very happy with logging on and seeing all of these discussions from everybody. She said that the class that I was in was one of the only classes that she had seen where the participation throughout the discussions was outstanding." Another student at Promise University, Amala also offered a caveat in answering my question about if writing was a social activity within her class:

Somewhat. Only when we do the team activities. We do communicate with each other, but it's not super professional. You don't have to try really hard. I can post stuff from my phone. When I do the discussions in the classroom, it's not really writing to communicate with each other...Realistically I could do the assignments without talking to anybody and I'd be just fine, but they do require you to do participation points and that's the only reason I do the discussion board. If it wasn't required that I participate and talk to other people, I wouldn't, if I didn't have to.

For Amala then, the team activities at Promise University provide somewhat of an opportunity to engage in writing as a social activity. Nevertheless, rather than to further learning, she sees the discussion board or “participation points” as requirements to fulfill rather than learning opportunities. Most importantly here, Amala has not taken away a sense of what the *Principles* assert, that writing is a “social act” as she feels that she could complete all the writing assignments “without talking to anybody.” Rather than collaborative, she sees assignments as individualized. For Amala, the social interactions that do take place through the discussion forum with her classmates are not authentic or valuable for her, as she only does them because she must to fulfill course participation requirements. This then, is what I call the pretense of social interaction. But most important to my analysis here is that Amala ends up taking away a narrow, isolated view of what writing is—she does not even qualify her work as “writing to communicate.” A sense of rhetorical purpose or audience is entirely missing from her conceptualization of writing.

Several students echoed this theme of doing the minimum amount of online forum posts to get in their grades, but not really engaging in authentic discussion with one another that promoted learning. Like Amala, Rory confessed that “For the discussion boards, I feel like a lot of the participation was because we had to. Not because we wanted to. The seminars, we had to participate but only to a certain extent. The discussion board if you didn't do it you got a zero.” Rory attends Turner University, where online courses include a one-hour seminar in which the instructor and students are online together. During the seminar, the instructor speaks over a PowerPoint presentation, and students can type in questions. Maisha, a student at Promise University also suggested that social interactions were minimal when I asked her what her other classmates were like: “Honestly I really don't remember much 'cause I really didn't interact with them too much, other than what we were discussing in our class discussion just to get our credit.”

She went even further to suggest this lack of interaction remained similar for her instructor, “So I really didn't get to know anybody personally, not even my instructor. I barely spoke to my instructor unless it was something that I really needed or like a question that I needed to ask about the assignments.” Rather than considering the online discussion forum to be an engaging site for debate with one another, where writing might be social in an online class, it most often seems in these contexts to become just a task completed for minimum credit. By extension, however, students then are not taking away a view of writing that is inherently social, and the one space where participants identify writing might be social in the online class—discussion boards—seems a lost opportunity because of low student engagement.

Since students perceived online discussion boards as the only (possibly) social parts of their online writing courses, I want to turn to examine Turner University's standardized explanation of online forum posting rules or “Netiquette” Rules. Since both Turner and Promise Universities have standardized syllabi for courses, the “Netiquette” rules were turned in to me by all six of my participants who were enrolled at Turner. Turner University's guidelines, while they may have important pedagogically purposes, seem to limit the scope of social interactions in online courses:

Interactions in an online classroom are in written form. Your comfort level with expressing ideas and feelings in writing will add to your success in an online course. The ability to write is necessary, but you also need to understand what is considered appropriate when communicating online.

The word "netiquette" is short for "Internet etiquette." Rules of netiquette have grown organically with the growth of the Internet to help users act responsibly when they access or transmit information online. As a Turner University student, you should be aware of the common rules of netiquette for the Web and employ a communication style that follows these guidelines.

- Wait to respond to a message that upsets you and be careful of what you say and how you say it.
- Be considerate. Rude or threatening language, inflammatory assertions (often referred to as "flaming"), personal attacks, and other inappropriate communication will not be tolerated.

- Never post a message that is in all capital letters—it comes across to the reader as SHOUTING! Use boldface and italics sparingly, as they can denote sarcasm.
- Keep messages short and to the point.
- Always practice good grammar, punctuation, and composition. This shows that you have taken the time to craft your response and that you respect your classmates' work.
- Keep in mind that Discussion Boards are meant to be constructive exchanges.
- Be respectful and treat everyone as you would want to be treated yourself.
- Use spell check!

Perhaps students at FPCUs who are non-traditional students unfamiliar with college environments need reminders within their first writing course about what is “appropriate” writing in online classroom settings, and need to focus on appropriate behavior and decorum, grammar and citations. One might argue that learning will not be able to take place until students engage respectfully with one another in an online setting. Indeed, online writing courses, especially at FPCUs are in some ways unique environments where students’ only way to establish their identities and social relationships is through their writing in online discussion forums, perhaps making decorum in online writing that much more important. Nevertheless, I would still argue that what is missing from this list is important, and that this list narrows the communicative aims of the online forum discussion. The netiquette list’s focus on appropriate behavior seems to replace language about using the online discussion board as a space to focus upon academic content, audience awareness, critical thinking, generating research questions, or engaging in analysis of texts, ideas, or images, or back and forth discussion with classmates. Even though again this seems to be an institutional attempt to create a cordial social environment in the online discussion forum, it is also quite constraining—suggesting that by using correct punctuation students will be demonstrating respect for one another.

While the items missing from this netiquette rules list seem important, its contents also hint at a patronizing attitude towards students’ identities. Beyond simply the online format of these courses promoting an individualistic learning model, here I suggest some ways an asocial model of writing is institutionalized through select course policies and practices. In the beginning

introduction to the netiquette rules, the syllabus states “The ability to write is necessary, but you also need to understand what is considered appropriate when communicating online” which again references what is “appropriate for students” and seems to take an authoritative or condescending attitude towards students. The list consists of seven assertive command statements, suggesting a dynamic in which the instructor or institution mandates rules or disciplines, and students must then follow their lead without any chance for response to them; commands do not leave any space for students to “speak back”—in fact even within the list the goal seems to be to generate more docile, well-behaved college students who wait before they speak back to their classmates. The dynamic of the course becomes less social if instructors simply mandate instructions and students simply follow them. Overall, this list suggests that students should separate their previous experiences from their online discussion work, and limit and censor their social interactions with one another. This leads to an isolated conceptualization of what writing is as following spelling and grammar rules and being polite. For example, a different sort of rules might encourage debate between students if it involved debating intellectual ideas. Argumentation need not be positioned as “flaming” but instead could be encouraged to the extent that it involves engaging with course content.

As I was eager to find out what students thought about this list of netiquette rules, or to give them the chance to “speak back” to the rules, I asked those participants who attended Turner how they interpreted these netiquette rules which were interestingly standardized across the standardized first-year writing syllabi and students had a variety of responses. Three students saw this list as necessary, while two others student read it as “redundant” or in some sense repeating things that students’ most likely had previous knowledge about in terms of writing online. Rhonda suggested that the list “was another thing that was pretty much redundant because you already knew how to respond on internet. I understand some people were just fresh out of high school, and some people never took an online class, but it’s one of those situations where it’s like common sense. It was an unneeded paragraph.” Rhonda suggests that the netiquette rules might go so far to condescend to adult college students. On the other hand, another participant Janice suggested that while the netiquette rules were necessary to encourage students to avoid discussing their personal lives rather than the academic material, but she was not sure if they were necessary to prevent students’ demonstrating disrespect towards one another:

But a lot of people go on there and they talk about some personal things. They get off the subject of the class and start to discuss other things with them. The teachers don't like that, and they would say hold off until the end to ask a question, and avoid being rude or saying things that we already discussed or using inappropriate language. I hadn't seen that yet. The only problem we do have is people discussing personal issues during class. But I think it's [the netiquette rules are] a really good thing to have. People need to understand that, you know. You can't just say, "Hey I want to talk about whatever."

Janise says that she has not seen students being rude or using inappropriate language "yet" in her writing courses completed at Turner. However, she clearly identifies students' discussions of personal issues disconnected from the class material as a problem. However, this could be interpreted another way: students want the course to be more social and thus engage with one another on the online discussion board. Two other students described students' conflicts on the online discussion board, and said there was a need for the netiquette lists. The netiquette rules do seem important in setting boundaries for class discussions that may not be as easy for instructors to convey in an online setting. At the same time, netiquette rules may set up a dynamic that distances students from one another—suggesting that students must learn a different way of interacting than what is already familiar to them. If argument were not singularly positioned as negative, the netiquette rules might create space for positive, productive debate. Instead, the rules seem to suggest that students at FPCUs cannot engage in appropriate arguments, so students should refrain from any type of argument. But if writing is to be conceptualized as a social act, this online discussion environment does not necessarily promote this conceptualization of writing.

Several students at Promise University specifically suggested that team activities also further the pretense of social engagement, but are finally unsuccessful in generating social interactions between students or with the instructor. Unlike at Turner, at Promise University specifically, team or group activities are frequently required in online writing courses for students in Bachelor's programs. However, rather than positive interactive learning opportunities, participants suggested that these were the worst part of their online writing classes because they did not function well. Blanche described:

We do class discussions, where you just post messages, but it's not a classroom, per se. I do remember that one of the classes, we had a group project, and those can be quite

frustrating. Like, in the first week, the teacher will divide you into groups, so you do interact with the classmates when you're doing the group projects. Like I said, that's frustrating because everybody has different schedules, and everybody has different writing skills, and the fact that your grade depends on the contribution of other people can be very stressful.

For Blanche then, she went on to suggest that her course might have been improved by not having team activities at Promise University. Blanche differed from other participants in that she was not a first-generation college student, and she entered college confident as a writer. For Blanche team activities seemed like extra work, and often involved providing extra assistance to other struggling student writers. Likewise, when I asked Jane the open-ended question of how she felt about the class, Jane responded: "I enjoyed the class itself. The learning team, it was something I could have done without because you have to depend on other people to participate. And if they don't participate, then you know you're just pretty much out of luck." Both Jane and Blanche then view attempts at making writing social as the worst or least valuable parts of their online writing courses. While these activities are required and may reflect a pretense of social engagement, they clearly fail to further the development of a cooperative learning environment.

However, the dissatisfaction with team assignments at Promise University does not seem to be because Blanche and Jane do not want writing to be social within their class. Instead, this seems to be a result of the lack of cooperation occurring during team activities and the very diverse skill levels of students in a single class. Jane explained that she still did not see writing as social in the context of the learning teams because "Even though, if we had a team assignment, each person would do their own part and then send it to the other person that was putting it all together. It still wasn't really any interaction about, "Well, we'll do it this way, this way, this ..." Jane then identifies team writing as not a strength, but a hindrance to her experience within the online writing course because other students' participation levels were often low, and writing together is not really a collaborative activity. Again, while the team assignments might have been structured or scaffolded in such a way as to better support a social model of writing, this does not seem to be the case. When I asked Blanche the open-ended question of what her classmates were like, she described how:

Because we did do the group projects, I could say that it did run the gamut. I mean, there were a lot of people who, you could tell they weren't comfortable with writing. I had one

person hand in to me, literally her paper was just quotes. There was no original writing whatsoever...I had to kind of get her to write on her own, something.

For Blanche then, the team activities were difficult because of the different skill levels and familiarity with academic writing of different students. In fact, Blanche asserts that some students blatantly plagiarize and during team projects she has taken it upon herself to help other students avoid plagiarism. Again, this difficult situation might have been avoided through better scaffolding or support from instructors on team assignments. This speaks to the pretense toward social engagement where team assignments are mandated but then advanced writers are left struggling on their own to manage unequal skill levels and even plagiarism issues within groups. Brenda, who I describe in the previous chapter as an outlier, made similar comments about team activities as Blanche, particularly in the courses she took online. While as I mentioned Brenda loved Promise University overall, she did say “I’m not satisfied with the teams. I really think that that is something they [Promise University] should rethink. You never know if you have 3 or 4 people, and online they are not as good at all. The team projects are not good.” When I followed up to ask Brenda more about what was challenging about the team projects, she responded:

That’s the problem with teams at Promise University, is they put groups of people of different levels together, and the strong people are carrying the backs of these people that are in the group. Some people are not an asset because they need so much help, they can’t write effectively, not if you are plagiarizing, you know? So, it’s just every experience that I’ve had is usually to be the person who is the leader, and I do my part and then it ends up at the end and it’s like you are turning something in, I say if my name is going to be on it. Then they send it to me and I still have to redo it for them. They say, “Oh, this is great, “and it’s barely edited, they didn’t do anything with it, and they still turn it in.

When I asked another participant at Turner University, Rhonda if she felt that writing was social, she qualified her answer by stating, “I would say discussions were social” and that on the other hand “Writing was just whatever the teacher said was good.” For Rhonda then, if writing had been more social in her class, she might have gained a sense of rhetorical awareness or audience that pushed her to consider how writing could be “good” beyond simply what the instructor asked her to do. As Rhonda did not have a sense of a community of writers within her class holding her accountable or reinforcing a broader sense of audience for her, good writing seemed like a whim on the part of her instructor. When writing is asocial then, students’ views of good

writing narrow just as their audience narrows. Their conceptualization of what writing is more closely resembles the image of the student working alone under the clock that I started this chapter describing. This isolated asocial view of writing is no coincidence, but instead the direct result of the pretense towards social engagement on the part of their institutions. These two FPCUs mandate online discussion boards, one-hour seminars (at Turner), and team assignments (at Promise), but fail to provide the instruction, support, modeling, community-building, or scaffolding that might make these attempts at social engagement more successful.

Writing as Asocial in Online Courses at FPCUs.

Several students outright stated that writing was not social in their online writing courses. Cassie was a student at Turner University enrolled in a first-year composition course during our interview. When I asked her directly if writing was social in her class, she responded:

No, not really. Not really at all. The only form of social interaction you had was that discussion board and that was between your classmates. Socially being interactive, no. They didn't teach you how to communicate socially effectively through writing, no, in neither situation.

Importantly, here Cassie seems to be talking about both definitions of social that I mention at the beginning of this chapter. She does not see writing as social in terms of it being an “interactive” process with classmates. She also does not see writing as social in terms of gaining a sense of how to use writing “to communicate socially effectively” or to display audience awareness and effectively communicate or connect to others through writing.

Jane, a student at Promise University, echoed Cassie’s response that writing was not social as she responded to my question of whether writing was social in the class, “No, not really.” Jane elaborated:

Because the way that the class is set up on there, you're basically working on your own. You will send maybe an email to someone with your assignment for them to check over and send feedback, but that's really all the social interaction you have other than the discussion board. That's usually, you comment on a couple of things, and that's it.

Jane’s feeling that she was on her “own” repeated throughout my interviews with other students. While Jane does identify the discussion board as a possible place for interactions, it is too minimal in her view to make writing a social activity within the class. When I asked Jane if she felt that students participated equally in the class overall, she responded with an emphatic no,

and elaborated, “There were many students who didn't participate at all for the first couple of weeks until they were made to participate.” Rather than an opportunity for back and forth dialogue or cooperative learning, she suggests that writing assignments are completed in an isolated manner, and students only participate if forced to by the instructor. Likewise, another participant Jeanie attending Promise University emphatically responded no to the question about if writing was social “No, I don't think it was social.” Jeanie went on to qualify her response by suggesting that online discussion boards were spaces where writing perhaps could have been social, but that did not work out in practice.

While I identify discussion boards earlier as having at least potential for social interaction, online discussions are also identified as problem sites where instructors' attempts to make the course social definitively fail. Reagan who was taking her first two writing courses at Turner University throughout our interviews brought up the lack of student participation as an issue without my prompting her. When I asked Reagan initially in the interview about anything interesting in her writing course that she wanted to share, she brought up:

Well, the first time we talked, there was about, I think I told you, about twenty-one people or something pretty close to that; we were down to seven by the end of the class....Seven people's a little hard when the ones that stayed are the ones that are struggling with the class, and when stuff is due Tuesday night and there's still no discussion posts that are posted, besides your own, it's really hard to get the two replies in for the grade, even though she said she can't really deduct us points if there's nobody there to answer.

Reagan's point about the enormous amount of students dropping the course aligns with the research on first-year writing online at community colleges I reference earlier, where the dropout rate online is twice as high or 20% compared to 10% in face to face courses (Xu and Jaggars, 2014). In Reagan's case, the dropout rate is a full 2/3 or 66% of the class as it shrinks from 21 to seven students. For Reagan then, she cannot complete her individual writing assignments through the discussion posts because her peers have dropped out or are not doing their work, and she has no one to respond to. When writing is asocial then, it makes it more difficult for students to stay engaged who do try to participate and persist. Reagan hopes it might be a source of learning. But Reagan ends up feeling isolated as a student or that “there's nobody to answer” her

online writing. Ultimately, she is also deprived of authentic audiences for her discussion posts or writing who might push or encourage her to improve her writing.

When I asked Reagan if writing was a social activity in her FYC course she said maybe, but went on to describe: “there was the want for it to be more involved and social-ness with it” on the part of the instructor “but the students really lacked a lot of want to participate.” When I asked for another example of what she meant besides the discussion board, she described: “Well, when there came time to seminar, even in the first couple weeks, a lot of people weren't even showing up to the seminar, and the seminar is like three hundred points of the thousand points you need to pass the class.” The seminar or the synchronous one-hour lecture and Q & A at Turner was poorly attended. She also explained that she even discussed the issue of students dropping out and failing to participate with her instructor:

She's like, "Yeah, it's really frustrating to me, because I'm the instructor, and my students aren't participating, so I don't know how to get them involved." I'm like, "I'm not really learning anything, because nobody is putting forth their effort." She did tell me, and I could tell, she was very thankful that I was one of the seven that stayed and participated. Because I told her, "I dreaded this class up until the last two weeks." She was like, "Well, thank you for being honest." She was like, "It probably would have made it a little easier, had we had more participants, but," she was like, "you did good for what you had available.”

Crucially then, Reagan identifies the lack of participation and opportunity for positive interaction with other students as the reason why she herself did not really learn anything within her writing course, and further why she dreaded the course overall. Echoing the theme of “good enough writing” from the previous two chapters, Reagan’s own writing instructor suggests that she must settle when it comes to learning about writing as a result of peer disengagement. Ultimately, while Reagan seems to wish writing was social within her course, as does her instructor, that is not the reality, and she herself views this as negatively impacting her own learning. Reagan’s experiences support my argument that the online discussion forum is a pretense for social engagement because the dropout rates for online introductory writing have been shown to be quite high. Thus, although FPCUs are likely aware of high dropout rates that will make online discussion forum activity difficult, they include these mandated assignments to suggest a class community and team environment might exist.

While classmates often did not serve as authentic audiences for student's writing, participants also rarely identified any other audiences for their writing beyond the online writing instructor. Jeanie responded to my question, "Who are the audiences for your writing?" with the response: "We didn't have an audience, we just had to write the paper for the professor." Jeanie's tone in her answer even sounded surprised that I might ask about audiences for writing assignments, as she did not see the application to her online course. Likewise, Jane suggested that audiences for student writing in the online course included, "Just our teacher. She didn't say, "Well, this will be your audience." In a few cases there did seem to be attempts on the part of the instructor to create a sense of audience awareness other than the instructor. Janice said that audiences for her writing course included "Mostly it's my professor. Mostly. But, she wants us I guess to look at it to where we're writing for ... like I'm writing for my community and this person is writing for whoever, I guess that is how she wants to look at it." While Janice suggests that this is her instructor's desire for the online course, it does not seem to be the reality. The *Principles for the Teaching of Postsecondary Writing* asserts that sound writing instruction "considers the needs of real audiences." But for students at Promise and Turner, they are often left with only the instructor as an audience.

The lack of authentic audiences for students was visible in my interviews through the emphasis on online software or grammar checker programs provided by both Promise and Turner that students described using to assist them in writing. Again, I want to clarify that I never specifically asked students in my interview protocol about grammar checker software, or even any online programs to help in avoiding plagiarism or fixing citations. I did ask student participants about outside literacy resources in the final and third interview, but discussions of these automated feedback programs often came up organically in the first and second round of interviews with every single participant. Katherine mentioned that she had received assistance improving her grammar from two of these programs: "Grammarly also helped me with that. We had to run it [our writing] through Grammarly and Write Check." When I asked her to describe what Grammarly was, she stated: "it lets you know when you have your sentences are in, your words like your verbiage and stuff was in a wrong order or if a word didn't need to be there." These programs provide automated corrections of conventions, and thus can provide more frequent feedback to students than instructors might be able to manage themselves. Nevertheless, looking back at the *Principles*, this seems to conflict with the idea that teaching writing well

“depends upon frequent, timely, and context-specific feedback from an experienced postsecondary instructor,” although students did also report that they received feedback on their writing from their instructor. Instead, these software programs seem to suggest a decontextualized form of feedback and an automated audience that cannot replace the nuances or authenticity of real audiences that would form a part of professional writing audiences.

While students did report receiving feedback from instructors, my participant Janice, nonetheless, questioned the level of interaction and feedback from her writing instructor in her second composition course. When I asked Janice how her writing course might affect her she responded emphatically: “I don't feel like that class inspired me, and I don't think it's going to like change anything in my life.” When I asked Janice why she felt this way, she responded:

My paper sucked. It was just not good at all. I really wanted it to be good, I really wanted the feedback to be exactly what I was needing, and I didn't get that kind of feedback. At the end, you know, I built up everything to get to the end where we do our essay and you know half the stuff I put in my essay she said, "You shouldn't really ... you didn't really need this. You should have went to this." I said, "Why didn't you tell me that before?" It just doesn't make any sense to me... Each unit I would show her what I wanted to write about and she had a chance to comment on it and she didn't really say much so I would think it was okay to put in my paper and when I finally did it was like, "Well you didn't need that." It just made me feel like I was just not any good at writing.

Janice said that her instructor in the second writing course was slow to respond to questions, and did not give extensive feedback throughout the course, which to Janice signaled that each piece of the final essay she was working on “was okay” to place within the final product. While “frequent, timely, and context-specific feedback from an experienced postsecondary instructor” is recommended as a best practice in our field in the *Principles*, Janice felt this was noticeably absent from her experience at Turner. Janice was deprived of an engaged audience for her writing until the end of the writing course, when she received her final grade. This meant that she was never able to gain perspective about how another person perceived her writing until she received a low grade. Ideally, a community of writers and frequent instructor feedback could provide context for students in introductory courses about what others are thinking and writing about, and about how to improve over time. But instead, Janice is left with the sense that she is writing for no one. Although this led Janice to feel that she is “not any good” at writing, I would

suggest that instead she is simply a student writer deprived of an attentive audience and frequent constructive feedback that might push her to improve along the way.

While I earlier identify what I refer to as the pretense for social interaction via institutionally mandated online discussion posts, team assignments, and seminars across all online writing courses at Promise and Turner, peer review activities were by contrast infrequent or not institutionally mandated. The rare attempts at peer review also seemed like examples of individual instructors' attempts of theoretically generating a more social model of writing, which often failed in practice. When peer review did occur, students often did not post their drafts to one another, or give useful feedback to one another. When I spoke with Katherine she mentioned that her writing course at Turner did not involve any team activities. Furthermore, Katherine mentioned that her writing instructor asked students to participate in a peer review but, "Um, I posted it [my draft] but I don't know if I got any... Yes. I don't know, let me look... I think I was the only one that posted...I was the only one that posted a peer review like she told us to." Katherine seemed shocked herself at this realization during our interview—that the reason she had not received any feedback or given feedback was because none of her other classmates posted drafts as her instructor requested. Katherine described how she engaged more than other students did in her course: "Yeah, I think I was the one that posted the most because like I said, I was always posting." Like Reagan's comments earlier, this lack of audience for Katherine leads her to feel isolated as a writer and a student.

Several students also mentioned feeling that social interaction with other classmates was not encouraged by their universities. Turner's writing class purports to establish as a competency: "Engage in a team setting with professional integrity and respect." But when I asked Rory to describe what her classmates were like in her first-year writing course, stated, "Honestly I don't really know. We never got to associate with the other kids." She also stated that she had never participated in group assignments at Turner, and when I probed what she meant by not associating with one another she asserted, "I'm not sure what Turner's policies are on it but I do know they have an emailing system within the online portal and you could get in a lot of trouble for emailing a student on their personal email." Again, if above all writing is a social act, this odd institutional philosophy fails to convey this view of writing to students as it isolates them from one another.

Students' Views of Online Writing Courses as Asocial.

In the last chapter, I describe the literacy sponsorship model at Turner and Promise as focused upon conventions, but suggest that students themselves did not always identify this as a “problem” at the universities. By contrast, most participants themselves did identify the lack of social interaction as a problem or issue they might change in their writing courses at FPCUs. Several students said they would change their online writing class to include more interactions between one another. When I asked Katherine if there was anything she might change about her online course she mentioned:

No. I wish more of the class would have participated more, but I understand that other class members have work and they're not all home like me and that they're little bit busy and they do what they can. I just wish we could all work together more and I'd like to try the team assignments out because I like working with people in a group. I get to know them and then once you get to know the people around you, you feel a little bit more comfortable and not so nervous.

Part of the importance of making writing social, whether online or in face-to-face courses, Katherine asserts, is that students then feel more comfortable and open to learning in a more social environment. Even further, in this quote, Katherine demonstrates that she has a social imagination as she considers her classmates in social terms, and reflects on how their lives outside of the online class might be different from her own as a stay-at-home mother with multiple disabilities. And yet, that capacity to imagine others, to intellectually engage with an audience through writing has not been nourished within the introductory writing course itself. Katherine attended Promise University, and was told by her advisor that she would be completing team assignments, but her introduction to writing class did not include team assignments. When I asked another participant Jeanie who was attending Promise College the same question about changing anything in her online writing course she responded, “I don't think so. I think more ... Well, just like with all the classes I think team assignments are good, because you're able to see what the other students are thinking and doing.” Likewise, when I asked Reagan what she might change about her online writing course, she responded, “The people, the ones that dropped, because when you have seven people you're not really getting too much accomplished.” For these students then, their overall experience in online writing courses and learning suffered because of the lack of participation and the lack of social atmosphere. Students

themselves then feel that writing should be a more social activity than it currently is in online writing courses at these two FPCUs.

Individualized Literacy Sponsorship

While I suggest that certain policies and procedures at FPCUs reinforce an asocial model of writing, here I also point out the ways in which the for-profit model specifically of these institutions promotes what I call an individualized literacy sponsorship model. As I describe in my literature review, a large body of scholarship exists that more broadly points toward the commodification of college degrees, intertwining of higher education industries and private industries with one another, and the shifting focus even of students who attend college to enter a career pathway rather than to learn for the sake of learning or to become civically engaged. And, of course, FPCUs fit all of these trends as for-profit corporations rather than public or even private non-profit organizations with condensed, vocational degrees, and expensive tuition price tags. Nevertheless, here I seek to answer a question that research has not directly addressed thus far: what do these organizational, political and economic shifts mean for students' literacy practices and literacy learning? Educational studies scholar Ambrosio (2013) makes the important point that "Neoliberal culture...has deep roots in classical ideals such as freedom and individualism" (p. 322). So also, neoliberalism suggests the development of an entrepreneurial attitude and self. Peters argues that the entrepreneurial self:

Reveals that it is a relation that one establishes with oneself through forms of personal investment [including education, viewed as an investment]...In this novel form of governance, responsabilized individuals are called upon to apply certain managerial, economic, and actuarial techniques to themselves as citizen-consumer subjects—calculating the risks and returns on investment in areas such as education, health, employment, and retirement. (p. 134)

The "responsibilized" individual who must make a calculated investment in education but then is also responsible for risky investments seems to accurately describe the view of for-profit students within US news media that I describe as the literacy catch 22 in chapter one. Even further, this seems to describe the sort of self-sponsorship model of literacy learning that I have suggested is characteristic of my participants' experiences. Students at FPCUs are held accountable for making a poor choice of college, but at the same time seek to gain the literacy skills from college that might have enabled them to make a "better consumer choice" in terms of

college. In the analysis that follows, I articulate what an individualized literacy sponsorship means—students are often required to engage in self-sponsorship of literacy activities. Freedom and flexibility for students are top priorities within this model which makes asynchronous online writing courses common, but at the same time literacy learning is more challenging because accountability for literacy activities shifts almost entirely to the student. Ambrosio further describes how “self-reliance, personal responsibility, and risk-taking behavior...is essential to the effective functioning of market culture and society” within this privatized system that he suggests extends its influence throughout the K-12 system in the US as well as throughout the higher education industry (p. 323). There is then an emphasis on the individual in this system, with a priority placed on the individual’s ability to function alone and take on responsibility independently.

By extension, within my own study, participants placed a high premium on the ways that their for-profit university allowed them to work independently. Almost all, or 11 out of 14 participants repeatedly mentioned flexibility and convenience as the most important, or at least one of the most important factors contributing to their decision to attend a for-profit university specifically in online courses. While this most frequently came up during our first round of interviews when I asked students why they decided to attend the universities that they did, it also came up in the second and third interviews. Rory identified flexibility as the thing she liked the most overall about being a student at Turner. She elaborates:

I think the flexibility, because there are a lot of moms who not even just moms, there are a lot of people who have very busy schedules and having the option of going completely online, doing the classes whenever you can, is a very big plus for me. I normally do my school work when my son is asleep, at nighttime.

Amala reiterates this theme in describing her favorite thing about Promise University as the flexibility: “It's just, it's awesome. I work full time, and I have a family so it's nice for me to be able to be convenient with when I want to log on and stuff like that.” Over and over, students describe flexibility and convenience surface as the greatest strengths of the educational models provided by both Promise University and Turner, and a huge factor in participants’ decisions to enroll. Maisha describes how:

I was working a lot, and didn't have enough time or a vehicle to go to a traditional local college around where I am, so I sought out online school to be my best option. I was

always like a busybody so I really didn't have time to just go sit in class. Online college offered me the convenience and more so the freedom to be able to do things on my own schedule. I also help take care of my grandma as well as being married myself, so I was just busy all the time.

Maisha's reference to freedom then outlines what I mean by an individualized literacy sponsorship model, where top priorities become freedom and an independently completed course of study. Jane put it this way: "Well, first of all, you're not having to adjust your schedule to the college experience. The college experience is adjusting to your schedule. That's the main difference right there. If you are a fast learner, you can do your classes a lot quicker that way." The difference with an individualized literacy sponsorship model is that the students have the freedom and convenience of choosing when to complete work independently and progress rapidly through the degree. Students can balance work, families, and other responsibilities at FPCUS because of the freedom and flexibility available to them as students. But at the same time, as is clear from students' comments, students often need that flexibility because of transportation or geographical limitations and extensive caregiving responsibilities for children or family members. In this sense, students are already experiencing the inequities of higher education privatization personally in their lives as they struggle to make a living wage and take care of their loved ones in a political system in which, as Sociologist McMillan Cottom (2017) has pointed out—financial, employment, and healthcare risks are shifted onto the individual (p. 16-17). Important to my own analysis, student participants describe flexibility as their overall favorite thing about their colleges, rather than courses, course experiences themselves, academic subjects, or even friends, or community at their colleges.

Whereas the "freedom" and convenience of this unique individualized literacy sponsorship model draws students to FPCUs, at the same time the prioritization of convenience can also make collaborative engagement with classmates or group activities challenging. When I asked Blanche what was challenging in about the team writing projects at Promise University, Blanche responded:

Part of it is because we're an online class. You know, the whole basis of being online is that you have a whole schedule of your own, and so you work when it's convenient for you, so when you're in a group, everybody has their own schedules. So I know one person, she was like, "Well, I don't usually start my assignments until Friday," and our

assignments are due on Mondays. It's like, "Well, we kind of need you to start on Tuesday so we can kind of get everything together, and by Friday and Saturday, proofread stuff."

Blanche then explicitly associates some of the difficulty of the social interactions with the online format itself. But that does not seem to be the only issue impeding social interactions between students around writing. She also mentioned that communicating through the online messaging system for the class about team assignments could be very challenging if team members did not respond right away. While the online format lends itself to flexibility and convenience which students identify as a strength of Promise or Turner, Blanche implicitly sets this flexible individualized online literacy model at odds with productive social interactions between students. The individualized literacy sponsorship model with its flexibility and convenience seems to conflict with the enactment of writing as social where students might collaborate around writing assignments. When students have their own individual schedules and a priority is placed on independence and convenience, adjusting to the sort of give and take compromise of social interaction may be difficult.

Many of my participants pointed out that writing on their "own" or with this individualized model meant that online literacy activities and degree programs were even harder than they might have been in face-to-face settings or at traditional institutions where social engagement might have been more frequent. This reflects the sort of individualism and freedom, but also the self-reliance that is characteristic of what I call an individualized literacy sponsorship model. Maisha put it this way:

I honestly feel like, hey, if you made it here [at Promise University], you got to be good. Not everybody can just, let alone, keep up with online school, let alone just writing assignments and just having the ability to turn them in a week after you're assigned to them. Some people can't stay focused or determined and put the work in. I feel like, hey, if you're here, you got to be good.

Thus, Maisha points to the personal responsibility and the self-reliance necessary to make it in her for-profit "online school" as "you got to be good." Maisha then to a certain extent seems to buy into this individualized framework as a way of seeing herself as a student, as she places a premium on her own freedom, her efficiency in completing condensed 5-week courses, and her determination in working independently and persevering while at the same time she has seen

many other students drop out. Maisha had already completed an Associate's degree at Promise University when we spoke, and was well on her way to finishing her Bachelor's degree. Another student Blanche echoed this theme that personal responsibility is crucial in this unique context:

A lot of people kind of think of the online classes as just an easy way to earn credit. And they're not. They're just as involved as the other ones. And I think harder, in the fact that you have to try to do a lot on your own. You know there's an instructor there, that you can contact but you're not guaranteed a fast callback or anything, so you need to be organized and able to figure a lot of stuff out on your own.

Blanche seems to be describing a self-sponsorship model for literacy, where the instructor serves as a sort of "troubleshooter" when a problem arises and students essentially teach themselves how to complete writing assignments. Amala also echoed this sentiment when she told me: "the student's going to make it [their online writing course] as effective as they want it to be. If you want to be more effective and you want to learn better on how to do something, you're going to be the one asking questions." When I asked my participant Jane what she thought made for-profit universities different from more traditional schools, she reiterated this emphasis on the individual over the classroom or collective atmosphere: "It's geared more to the individual than it is to the whole classroom." Jeanie also mentioned throughout literacy activities for different courses this sense of individual work at Promise University: "You have the professors, but at the same time, for those five weeks you're responsible for getting all that done. Sometimes you feel like you're by yourself." There is greater responsibility involved when the students' literacy activities are completed alone. Brenda also saw the writing course as highly individualized: "I think teachers look at each student individually." Within an individualized model literacy sponsorship model then, as I have described above, writing is not social or cooperative. Students do not engage in back and forth dialogues with one another on discussion boards for the most part, or peer review, or even have very many audiences for their writing. Instead, these institutions offer students freedom and flexibility generally in the form of mostly asynchronous online courses and in exchange literacy activities are individualized instead of focused upon "the whole classroom."

The value of literacy activities shifts within this sponsorship model, and rather than a community of student writers who might share and build together, the value becomes what the individual student puts into the online writing course or the written assignment which they complete alone. As Brenda put it: "Writing classes depend on the students...the roles of students

in their learning are most important.” Individual responsibility overtakes a cooperative or social writing model. With this individualized literacy sponsorship model—as with the neoliberal capitalist system it operates within—there are a small number of winners, but many more losers. An individualized literacy sponsorship model exacerbates achievement gaps between different groups as well as already existing inequities among students. When students at FPCUs already arrive as disproportionately minority, low-income, and first-generation college students (all but one of my participants is a first-generation college student), providing a literacy sponsorship model that shifts responsibility for learning onto the individual results in drastically different outcomes for different students. When students are forced to engage in self-sponsorship, then of course those students who arrive at FPCUs prepared and focused with significant experience with writing flourish, and everyone else flounders when it comes to developing as writers. As I suggest at the beginning of this chapter, research in online education at open access institutions like FPCUs and in particular with regard to English or first-year writing classes has suggested that educational inequalities are exacerbated (Xu and Jaggars, 2014). I build on this research to suggest that this also means that literacy activities themselves are imbricated in this exacerbation of inequality. Of the 16 students who I spoke with in total for initial interviews, two students dropped out of my study because they dropped out of their writing courses before they finished, two students dropped out of their for-profit universities by the end of the study, and three more students were considering dropping out or transferring from their for-profit university. This means that almost half of all the students I spoke with either left their for-profit university or were strongly considering it within the time span of the study itself. Of those students who did drop out, several expressed extremely negative experiences with learning in their writing classes that prompted their desire to leave. On the other hand, the three students who I describe in the last chapter as outliers arrived at college feeling confident about writing, graduated since my study ended and felt positive about their learning experience, and are currently working in their chosen fields.

To give a sense of how drastically different two different students’ literacy experiences at FPCUs could be, below is the reflection of Riana who was attending an online writing course at the time of our interview at Rogers University (another large publicly traded for-profit institution). My purpose in providing Riana’s reflection is to demonstrate how this individualized literacy sponsorship model isolates and fails students who arrive at college needing extra help.

Riana self-identified during our conversations as African American, and lives in New Jersey. She also revealed to me during our conversation that she was struggling financially and could not attend a community college because she could not afford transportation back and forth to school. She only completed one interview, and then dropped out the study because she left Rogers University. Riana described her short-lived experience at Rogers this way:

I haven't been really focused. I mean I'm doing half assignments, and I know I could do more and ... Like when I'm assigned a page in my English class I do like a half a page and not even because I'm not engaged in it and like I know ... Right now the assignment is to write about a positive experience with writing we've had at Rogers. That's not that hard. But I'm not engaged in it. They don't do anything on their end to encourage me or help me or be in my corner. Right now I'm scheduled to graduate next August. I don't know who's who because I haven't seen any person ever. We'd obviously meet for the first time on graduation day. What would happen to me on graduation day? That's weird...It's just...I just think I need one-on-one help as far as classes. I wish I could get more help doing it. I wish I could go to a campus and maybe go to an actual tutoring center and get help. Because at Rogers there ain't nobody that can help you while ... It's, you're more excluded when you're online than when you're on campus. That's what I think. They cannot be on the phone with you...Like how we are chatting right now... they don't allow that...I would like to be actually attending the school on campus, but I'm online but I'm not happy at that school, I'm not. I want so much more. I deserve better... They don't even show any interest in me...They are just going through the motions, it's not fair [cries]. I cannot even get them to answer the phone

Riana broke down crying on Skype with me about her experience at Rogers, and said the reason she had enrolled was the promise of a free laptop, transportation issues that prevented her attending a local college campus, and because her previous transcripts were tied up at the community college she attended before. Most important for my own analysis, Riana here specifically connects her own lack of engagement with literacy activities to the lack of social support overall at Rogers and the individualized model of literacy sponsorship which makes her feel “excluded” and like there is not anyone “in her corner.” Riana’s description of her experience at Rogers almost sounds like an abusive relationship, as she feels she cannot communicate effectively with the institution and that they do not show an “interest” in her as the

university seems to be just “going through the motions.” Ironically, Riana’s writing assignment asks her to describe a positive experience at Rogers, and she is having trouble completing it. As I mentioned earlier, Riana was not the only participant who reflected on the fact that although they were enrolled in online school, they would never have been able to Skype with instructors or staff at their online schools as they did with me because that kind of interaction or contact was not available to them. Riana also reflects on the fact that on her future graduation day from Rogers, she would oddly not recognize the faces of anyone else at the graduation ceremony. Thus, she is imagining this future academic success that she might accomplish, but her intense experience of isolation at Rogers confounds her attempts to see herself as successful. Riana even before attending Rogers was experiencing financial difficulties and transportation limitations that already limited her choice of college, but her experience at Rogers only makes her feel more marginalized and excluded. Riana feels cheated by the literacy sponsorship model at Rogers because she recognizes that she needs one-on-one help or more feedback and audiences to engage with learning about writing.

By contrast, several other students had outstanding experiences taking all online or mostly online courses and completing literacy activities mostly on their own at Promise University in particular. Blanche who I described earlier as also an outlier in terms of her previous experience maintained that her overall experience at Promise as “one of the best experiences that I ever had educationally.” Brenda, who I describe in detail as an outlier in the last chapter, and briefly in this chapter, herself identified the unique individualized literacy sponsorship of Promise as a perfect fit for her learning style. While Brenda took her writing course and several other courses face to face, she also took courses online at Promise. She said:

I can tell you one thing; in comparison to being in class at a brick-and-mortar school, I learned more at Promise University than I did at Cal State. I learned more at Promise University than I learned when I was at the community college. I think it’s just because the functionality of the processes that are used to teach somebody, are very self-driven with instruction. If you’re not a person who can sit down and spend five or six hours on the computer reading text, and then applying that text to an assignment, then Promise University isn’t for you. But, that’s the way I like to work, so it’s fine. It worked great for me. It’s not for everybody, for sure.

In other words, Brenda implies that unless you can self-sponsor literacy activities or thrive with this individualized literacy model, working on your own to read and write online, then Promise University may not be a good fit for you. Brenda's experience however was so positive that she asserted "I learned more at Promise University than any school I've ever been to" and even went so far as to say that "If they [Promise University] asked me to do some ad or advertisement, I probably would."

Unfortunately, most students who enroll at institutions like Promise University and Turner University are very different from Brenda and Blanche, lacking confidence and experience with academic writing. Participants in my own study suggest that most students they have seen arrive at FPCUs unprepared for college-level literacy activities. Unlike Blanche, students at FPCUS are disproportionately first-generation college students, and 12 other participants were first-generation college students. While Brenda is a first-generation college student, she had nine years of experience working as a Director for a non-profit before starting college. By contrast, Riana's experience feeling unhappy and deciding to leave Rogers University is all too common for students at for-profits. Of students who started attending a for-profit college in 2008, only 27 percent graduated in 6 years with Bachelor's degrees overall, compared with 58 percent of students at public institutions and 65 percent of students at private non-profit institutions. In terms of student writers' practices, the individualized literacy sponsorship model means that some savvy student customers like Brenda and Blanche come in with more preparation, take advantage of the flexibility and can complete literacy activities on their own or to self-sponsor their progression as writers and to graduate. On the other hand, for most students who do not arrive well-prepared to partake in college-level writing, they fall through the cracks like Riana—in part at least because the responsibility for engaging in literacy activities is entirely placed upon them. Even further, within the context of privatization, higher education is an investment or risk that student-customers take on by themselves, and all student-customers must pay for their decisions in the form of hefty tuition bills—whether this literacy sponsorship model works for them or not. While for some students like Blanche and Brenda, the hefty price tag seems worth it, and they have since the study reported to me that they have been able to find jobs in their fields, for the rest of students this individualized literacy sponsorship model shifts the risk of the investment in education onto the students—only they can make

literacy activities worthwhile for themselves. If they drop out, they are blamed for making a poor choice of institution and still saddled with expensive tuition debt.

Like Riana who I describe above, Janice also suggested that Turner University did not always closely attend to students. Janice dropped out of Turner and then returned more recently to Turner, and she suggested that Turner had improved as a result of more scrutiny from negative press about FPCUs. Janice asserted: “They’re definitely paying attention to what you’re doing now as before I didn’t feel like they were paying attention to what I was doing.” This description harkens back to Riana’s suggestion that Rogers University was not paying “attention” to her, almost like an abusive partner. While Janice suggests things have improved, that a college would fail to “pay attention” to their students might seem ludicrous, but this is how literacy sponsorship feels for some students at FPCUs. Janice elaborated that before “I think before that they were just getting people in there, and they were passing them and they will be like, ‘Oh yeah you did good.’ But you really didn’t. They just wanted the money and the people there.” Janice points out that in many ways it is easier for Turner University, or Rogers University to shuffle students through and not pay attention or interact with them—in fact it is more financially profitable than failing students who might then leave. In fact, generating a social model of writing, or even on a basic level “paying attention” is difficult from an institutional or instructor perspective. This also speaks to the pretense of social interaction that I argue may be characteristic of literacy sponsorship in this context. While some institutional policies gesture towards generating a social model of writing, these FPCUs do not seem to ultimately commit to this difficult pedagogical goal.

I started this chapter by describing how I try to make writing social in English 125 or First-Year-Writing at the University of Michigan, and it is important I also acknowledge that this is a challenging and time-consuming activity for me as an instructor. It means that I read students’ essay drafts and give feedback and then give feedback again on final essays (my 18 students write 4 essays totaling 25 pages of writing per student each semester). It means I spend 20 minutes twice a semester (at the least) conferencing individually with 18 students about their writing outside of class or at least 12 hours in conferences per course. It means that I painstakingly model and set up peer review groups in class so that they function well. But it also means that students are held accountable, or paid attention to quite closely in my class, and their confidence as writers and readers often improves leaps and bounds through our semester.

But with this individualized model for engaging with writing, even Brenda and Blanche as well as other outliers are deprived of the insights that the *Principles* recommends in which “writing is recognized as a social act.” Even the brightest, most hard-working self-sponsors miss out on opportunity for peer review or cooperative, community-based literacy activities that are absent within the online writing courses at the FPCUs my participants attend and describe. Rather than a social community of writers, students at FPCUs view college writing as something they must do on their own, that is their individual responsibility at the end of the day.

I do not mean to outline the divide between social and asocial writing courses as a sharp binary, with social writing instruction as outstanding and asocial writing instruction as very bad. Although the *Principles* does assert that “Sound writing instruction...recognizes writing as a social act,” writing studies scholars have troubled this principle. Writing and disability studies scholar Price describes Kairotic spaces as “the less formal, often unnoticed, areas of academe where knowledge is produced and power is exchanged,” and Price includes online communication within this definition: “an online discussion, a professor–student conference taking place via instant message, or a job interview held by telephone would all qualify as kairotic spaces.” Online instruction can certainly be transformative and create spaces for a variety of kinds of sociality between students and with the instructor. Even further, some researchers have pointed to problems with a pedagogy that recognizes writing as a social act. Writing researcher Heard argues that within the context of community-based or sharing practices in writing classrooms: “we need to develop practices that call attention to sharing as an ethical act—an act of vulnerability, exposure, and even uncertainty,” pointing to the tensions that can accompany social writing practices such as peer review. Heard highlights the “the possibility that writers might also experience significant fear, anxiety, anger, and confusion as part of the experience of peer review or conferences” and interrogates the sharing that seems to form an integral part of a social model of writing. Heard goes so far as to assert that: “it is so important that composition scholars and teachers continue to explore alternative practices that confront, rather than simply utilize, the emotional engagement of writers through ‘shared’ practices of writing instruction.” In fact, one of my participants—Rory—suggested in our discussions that the lack of social interaction in her writing class was a plus for her: “I didn't really understand how online schooling worked, I thought that I was going to have to video conference with people, talk with other people. I have very bad anxiety when it comes to talking with other people.” Rory

preferred not video conferencing, and was pleased to find out that Turner University did not require this as part of online courses. Thus, in some instances, for students the lack of face to face interaction may be a strength.

But the specific model of individualized literacy sponsorship at FPCUs here means that the institutions themselves are not responsible for literacy sponsorship—in fact as sponsors they are only quite loosely involved in students’ literacy activities. I began this chapter by underscoring how my argument here reinforces the large-scale quantitative research conducted by Xu and Jaggars (2010) who also argue that “the continued expansion of online learning could strengthen, rather than ameliorate, educational inequity” (p. 651). Their study—tracking 500,000 courses taken by 40,000 students over five years in the Washington State community college system—found an “online performance gap” across the board, indicating that all students performed more poorly in online courses than they did in face-to-face courses, implying that online courses are more difficult for the average student. But even more worrisome, this gap was especially pronounced for “males, younger students, Black students, and students with a lower prior GPA” (Xu & Jaggars 2014), and academic achievement gaps that existed in face-to-face courses between different subgroups of students were also exacerbated online. But their quantitative study cannot answer the question of why online coursework, particularly in introductory writing courses, exacerbates inequities in higher education?

In this chapter, I tentatively suggest that—at the least in the specific cases of my participants at Turner, Promise and Rogers Universities—the individualized literacy sponsorship model of online writing courses is to blame in part for this exacerbation of inequality. This seems perhaps intuitive—of course it might be more difficult to write and read on your own. But even further, the stakes of being asked to engage with literacy alone are quite high at FPCUs. FPCUs differ drastically from community colleges in how much they cost. In the year 2016-17 the average cost per year of tuition and fees at FPCUs was \$16,000 or over five times the average community college yearly tuition and fee cost at \$3,520 (College Board). Ultimately, my participants’ reports describe what it feels like and looks like to engage in literacy sponsorship on one’s “own” and just how devastating the consequences may be for students like Riana who have already been systematically marginalized, and are only further marginalized through attending a college that charges exorbitant amounts and shows little “interest” in the students.

Chapter VI: For-Profit Colleges as Privatized Literacy Sponsors: Consequences, Findings and Implications

The promise of for-profit colleges is that through their open enrollment policies and flexible online learning degree programs geared towards working adults—they provide access to college to a much wider swath of students than traditional public and private institutions can. For-profit colleges disproportionately serve students who have historically been—and are still—underrepresented in higher education in the United States, including first-generation college students, students of color, and low-income students. In fact, for-profit college ads as well as some of the news media I analyze suggest that large, publicly traded university corporations offering condensed, vocational degree programs may be able to serve students more efficiently and effectively than traditional or non-profit institutions. This seems perhaps particularly important against the backdrop of the current policy push towards “college for all” as well as privatization movements in higher education that position the private sector as the solution to problems of access and excessive costs in American higher education.

Nevertheless, critiques of large publicly traded for-profit colleges have proliferated in recent years. While higher education research (Deming, Goldin, & Katz, 2013; Iloh, 2016; McMillan Cottom, 2017; Riegg Cellini & Turner, 2018; US Senate, Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, 2012) and news reports (Berrett, 2012; “The Fear and Frustration,” 2011; Wright, 2013) have taken big FPCUs to task for corrupt admissions, advertising and recruitment practices, as well as bleak student and alumni outcomes, what happens in between—students’ learning in courses—has been largely unexamined thus far by researchers. In fact, as I have already pointed out, course curriculum at FPCUs is distinct from traditional institutions in that it is copyrighted and thus considered the property of the institutions, making research on classrooms at FPCUs challenging to undertake.

This dissertation study intervenes to examine what happens in between admissions and student outcomes at FPCUs—or to break open what I have called the “black box” of for-profit writing instruction. The questions this study interrogates center upon student learning at for-profit colleges, specifically literacy learning. How do students describe their learning in writing

courses at large publicly traded FPCUs? What gets valued in terms of student writing at large corporate FPCUs? While this project prioritizes students' perspectives of their own literacy learning, it also acknowledges that outside factors influence perceptions of literacy at FPCUs. How do students' reports of writing courses at FPCUs compare with best practices in writing instruction established by the field of writing studies? Even further, news representations of literacy at FPCUs influence how the American public perceives literacy at FPCUs. In considering these outside factors, this study also examines how US news media reports describe writing and literacy at FPCUs. Where does public discourse locate value in terms of students' literacy practices at FPCUs, and when and how does this differ from what students say about their personal experiences?

Ultimately, when considering the promise of for-profit colleges through students' reports and news, I conclude that rather than expanding opportunities for marginalized students, the literacy sponsorship provided by FPCUs may in certain ways risk further stratifying an already bifurcated higher education system. Within this for-profit literacy sponsorship model, the few well-prepared and savvy student consumers enroll with clear career goals and already possess strong writing skills; these students engage in literacy activities autonomously, mostly in asynchronous online courses, and often succeed. In contrast, the less-prepared students at FPCUs—who enroll in college unsure of what they want—flounder with a literacy sponsorship model that requires that student consumers take individual responsibility for their learning and engage with literacy on their own. Oddly, at the same time, some public discourse in news media blame for-profit students who are also considered consumers for their poor “choice” of attending a for-profit college; the implication is that students' negative classroom experiences are their own fault. In short, this dissertation concludes that student consumers stand to lose the most in this high-stakes corporate, for-profit literacy sponsorship system, where the instructional model requires students engage with literacy alone. While students struggle to teach themselves, they are also the ones left with overwhelming student loan debt, limited career opportunities, and the blame for their poor experiences at for-profit colleges.

This chapter outlines the contributions this study has made to the fields of higher education and writing studies. I explore the key findings about literacy sponsorship at FPCUs that emerge out of this dissertation project. These findings offer nuanced details about how students engage with literacy at FPCUs or learn, as well as details about how large corporate for-

profit institutions function as sponsors of literacy or providers of writing instruction. Finally, I suggest future areas for research and final implications of this study.

Contributions to the Field

This study responds to current public policy conversations about for-profit colleges as well as research within the field of higher education about how well for-profit colleges serve their students (Deming, Goldin, & Katz, 2013; Iloh, 2016; Lechuga, 2008; McMillan Cottom, 2017; Riegg Cellini & Turner, 2018; US Senate, Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, 2012). Moreover, this dissertation fills the gap in previous higher education research on FPCUs that has neglected to speak directly with students about their learning experiences in for-profit classrooms. The non-profit research organization Public Agenda (2014) points to this hole in existing research: “So far, we don't know what for-profit students themselves have to say about their schools. What draws these students to a for-profit college? What do they think about their classes and instructors...?” Public Agenda in turn conducted its own study of for-profit students and alumni using surveys. Public Agenda then provides statistics about the students surveyed, and positively suggests that most current students feel their for-profit universities have caring instructors, keep class sizes small, and give effective guidance.

While surveys importantly capture broad trends about students’ opinions on FPCUs in a single moment, on the other hand, through three separate open-ended interviews with students, this study provides rich details and nuanced descriptions of students’ experiences at FPCUs over time. This study illustrates what engaging with literacy at a for-profit college looks and feels like according to those who are doing it—students. I interviewed students over the course of two months to six months, and students often began their introductory writing courses and degrees optimistically, whereas by the end of the study students frequently shared negative experiences. This may be a result of participants’ changes in opinion about their classes and college over those months, or of their sense of knowing me better by the third interview and feeling comfortable sharing critical stories. If I had limited this study to only one survey, my understanding of students’ experiences would be narrower. This study’s narrative-based, qualitative methodology and my intention as a researcher to stay true to the narratives shared with me by participants has guided my prioritization of students’ voices in this project, and added depth and insight to overarching trends identified by previous quantitative research

investigating FPCUs. This study then reinforces the importance of qualitative, interview-based research for understanding and influencing higher education policy and practice.

At the same time, the smaller qualitative methodology of this project does present limitations. The experiences of 14 women at two different large publicly traded FPCUs certainly cannot and should not be extrapolated to draw conclusions generalizable to all students' experiences at for-profit colleges, or even all publicly traded FPCUs. Instead, the details and nuances of students' experiences can add to existing quantitative research that points to generalizable trends at FPCUs. Although participants in this study were all attending two of the largest for-profit colleges, they live in different geographic regions and were all enrolled in different online courses. In fact, the similarities in students' reports, and the obvious standardization of syllabi (several participants submitted the exact same syllabus for first-year writing to me from Promise University even though they were in different courses and likewise several participants submitted the same syllabus from first-year writing at Turner University) may appear to point to more generalizable conclusions. Nevertheless, I hope to draw out the complexity and differences in students' experiences of for-profit instruction, even if their experiences reflect the standardized curriculum of FPCUs.

Another limitation of this study was the lack of inclusion of instructors' reports about the literacy sponsorship model at large publicly traded for-profit colleges. Since instructors at FPCUs are often asked to sign nondisclosure agreements that prevent them from participating in research projects, I was unable to recruit instructors to participate in interviews for this study. Instructors' perspectives might provide more in-depth insights about FPCUs as literacy sponsors, as instructors navigate using standardized course syllabi and responding to mandates at the institutional level.

While instructors' reports fall outside the purview of this project, students' narratives within this dissertation are uniquely contextualized by the inclusion of analysis of news media reports about literacy at FPCUs. While research has critically analyzed for-profit advertisements (Iloh and Tierney, 2014; Hermansen, 2016), no study so far in any field has analyzed news coverage of FPCUs. Moreover, corpus linguistic analysis of news media coverage allowed in this study for the identification of important key themes or "agendas" as I call them in the way public discourse describes student writers at FPCUs, while Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) enabled

this dissertation to delve into how specific news articles located value in terms of writing and positioned student writers at FPCUs.

While this project then adds to higher education research on FPCUs by providing a needed focus on students' voices and student learning at FPCUs, this study in turn contributes to writing studies research by offering a needed focus on students' literacy experiences as impacted by the economic trend of privatization in higher education. Brandt (1998) points out that attention to economic forces is often lacking among writing studies scholars: "The field of writing studies has had much to say about individual literacy development...Less easily and certainly less steadily have we been able to relate what we see, study, and do to these larger contexts of profit making and competition" (p. 166). In response to Brandt's call, this project is only the second within the field of writing studies to look at FPCUs, and it is the first to examine student literacy learning in writing courses at FPCUs.

The mixed methodological structure of this project innovatively examines two different kinds of literacy at FPCUs—1) literacy as a socially situated reading and writing activity that students individually engage with, as well as 2) literacy as a global skill or tool that can be traded and often involves powerful sponsors. Literacy theorist Street (2003) distinguishes between *literacy events* (Heath, 1982) as specific situations where individuals engage with reading and writing and *literacy practices* as the "broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts" (p. 78). This project uniquely attends to both literacy events and literacy practices at FPCUs, offering multiple and varied views of literacy sponsorship at FPCUs. As I have already pointed out, Brandt and Clinton (2002) argue that "Literacy in use more often than not serves multiple interests, incorporating individual agents and their locales into larger enterprises" (p. 338). The mixed methodology of this study then provides a unique research model accounting for not only individual student's experiences, but also considering the "larger enterprise" of literacy at FPCUs. Corpus linguistic and critical discourse analysis of US news media contextualize the broader landscape of higher education privatization at large publicly traded FPCUs, allowing this study to glean insights that take into consideration national and global perspectives on literacy at FPCUs. Each finding that follows incorporates data and evidence from both news media analysis AND qualitative interviews, providing a fuller, more well-rounded understanding of literacy sponsorship at FPCUs than either piece of data provides alone.

Thus far, the few studies considering how the for-profit status of FPCUs impacts the classroom have been conducted within the field of higher education, with scholars more broadly pointing to instructional practices associated with FPCUs. These for-profit practices include the sector's disproportionate reliance on adjunct instructors who do not have the power to change curriculum or instructional methods (Tierney & Hentschke, 2007; Tierney & Lechuga, 2010), delivery of mostly online courses (Bell & Federman, 2013), and highly standardized, condensed course and degree models (Breneman, Pusser, & Turner, 2006; Iloh, 2016; Lechuga, 2008). Many of these practices can be interpreted as efficient, instructional cost-cutting measures, and research has confirmed that FPCUs spend significantly less than traditional institutions do on instruction (US Senate, Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, 2012). As large, publicly traded corporations, FPCUs undeniably have dual purposes, with the goals of 1) generating profit for investor shareholders and of 2) serving students. By extension, students are configured as consumers of college more broadly in higher education, but perhaps especially at FPCUs, which function in many ways like businesses.

This study then contributes to the existing research that has pointed to the ways FPCUs restructure university curricular practices to generate profit; this project considers what it means for students to be configured at once as both *consumers* of for-profit colleges in the broader landscape of higher education privatization and *learners* of literacy skills within for-profit writing courses. Finally, the structure and findings of this study provide evidence that the trend toward privatization in higher education and the coinciding shift in positioning students as consumers of college *does* impact students' literacy learning. Brandt's concept of literacy sponsorship lends itself to this study's focus on literacy, economic trends, and ideology. As I acknowledge earlier in the theoretical framework: "an examination of literacy sponsorship, then, is also an investigation into the power relations that exist between sponsors and literacy's initiates" (Thomas, 2011, p. 9). Thus, this project uniquely engages with FPCUs as powerful corporate businesses *and* as institutions of learning that sponsor students' literacy practices.

This project offers evidence of how the trend to economic privatization so radically exemplified through FPCUs furthers an increasingly divided system of higher education: a system in which students who come to college unprepared and in the most need end up losing the most—both financially and as literacy learners. In short, this project suggests that the shift to student-consumers in higher education can be devastating for some: vulnerable college students

who struggle in writing courses that require that students teach themselves may leave college overwhelmed by enormous debt and without skills to show for their time.

In fact, the relationship between higher education privatization and college writing has recently become a hot topic in composition studies with the publication of Scott and Welch's edited collection *Composition in the Age of Austerity* (2017) and the theme of composition in the age of austerity at the 2017 Writing Program Administrators (WPA) Conference in Knoxville, Tennessee. Welch and Scott highlight the ways that privatization—along with its co-occurring austerity measures or cutting back of public funding—has impacted the field of writing studies. Scott and Welch (2017) assert that “composition as a field needs to grapple with how the material conditions and mandates of privatization and austerity are shaping our scholarly assumptions, commitments, and horizons” (p. 12), yet their edited collection does not analyze FPCUs. This dissertation then furthers this important and timely new thread of research by also considering privatization's impact on composition studies via FPCUs as literacy sponsors. This dissertation intervenes to chart higher education privatization in the ways that for-profit college students' themselves engage with literacy and the model or theory of writing offered to them by for-profit colleges.

A Turn to For-Profit Students as Literacy Learners

I sought in this study to answer the research question: *how is the model of literacy sponsorship provided by for-profits described in public discourse, and how does this compare with student writers' own experiences of literacy sponsorship at FPCUs?* In response, I show in chapter three that the positioning of FPCUs as literacy sponsors cheating students within news media reports often extends to position students attending for-profit colleges as entirely illiterate individuals unprepared for college, ignorant victims of aggressive recruiting tactics or even worse as quasi-criminals complicit in federal financial aid fraud. This study intervenes to point out that the incredibly negative positioning of for-profit colleges in news media often results in negative and at times problematic positioning of for-profit students. This positioning of students is at times reinforced by higher education research implying that for-profit college students have been duped or coerced into attending a for-profit college.

In contrast to portraits of students at FPCUs as ignorant victims in news (Berrett, 2012; “The Fear and Frustration,” 2011; Wright, 2013) and the implication that students are victims in some research (Riegg Cellini & Turner, 2018; Public Agenda, 2016; US Senate, Health,

Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, 2012), most participants in this study report engaging in extensive writing and literacy practices outside of the classroom or before entering a for-profit college. The learners in this study have complex understandings of writing that have not been previously represented in research on FPCUs. For example, two of the participants in this study started writing their own novels even before enrolling in college, and another student won an online poetry contest. Another participant worked for nine years as a director of communications for a major non-profit organization before enrolling in a for-profit college and another student already regularly blogged about her life and her experiences with an incarcerated husband. All 14 participants reported that they enrolled in their college to learn and improve their lives, much like students at other higher education institutions. This dissertation demonstrates that students at FPCUs are often eager to engage with writing and to learn more about writing.

As I have demonstrated, some news media (Alderman, 2001) and some previous research (Kinser, 2007) suggest FPCUs have more practical or vocational missions; by extension, it seems students at FPCUs might place a premium on vocational education. However, my participants report that the desire to learn sometimes trumped practical or vocational considerations. For example, one participant Jeanie is a full-time business owner and in addition works part-time as a CNA at night at the same time she pursues her BA online in Psychology. Jeanie's kids had grown up, and she said that going back to college, "Basically, it was just for me to push myself a little further and actually have a degree that I wanted ever since I was younger. It's not that I'm ever going to use a psychology degree. I probably never will." Instead, she laughed and said that getting her Bachelor's degree was a personal goal, "A \$50,000 goal." Another participant Blanche who was a stay-at-home Mom of three described her fellow classmates' goals this way: "I would say 99% of us have families and we're trying to better our home life that way." The great lengths to which participants in this study went in order to be college students and better their lives are demonstrated through their unwavering commitment to this challenging goal: all but one of my participants worked while attending school, and several participants worked multiple jobs while also juggling caretaker responsibilities at the same time they attended college.

One key finding of this dissertation is that students are in fact incredibly dedicated learners at FPCUs, not simply trying to take advantage of federal financial aid as news reports might suggest, or illiterate victims of corrupt recruiting practices. In fact, students at FPCUs

often overcome personal challenges in order to stay in college; for-profit students' stories stand in stark contrast to those more traditional stories of 18-year-old undergraduate students attending elite 4-year colleges and living on college campuses. I identify the narrative in news discourse of infantilizing, insulting, and condemning for-profit students, and contradict it by pointing to participants' reports of their perseverance to overcome obstacles, their commitment to learning, and their extensive previous experience as writers.

“Good Enough” Literacy at FPCUs: Narrowing and Disciplining

Nevertheless, none of these rich outside literacy experiences of participants had been drawn from in for-profit writing courses participants described to me in this study. I sought to answer the following two research questions in my project:

1) *How do undergraduate students currently enrolled at FPCUs describe their perceptions of the model of literacy sponsorship provided based on a writing course taken as well as literacy activities completed in non-writing courses?*

2) *What are the theories²³ of writing espoused through writing courses and literacy activities at FPCUs?*

In response to these questions, I demonstrate in chapter four that at these two large publicly traded FPCUs the primary theory of writing is: 1) **narrowing** writing to mean only conventions for students and 2) **disciplining** students' writing as either right or wrong. A theory of writing is an understanding of what writing is, and what writing is for; theories of writing are implicit within instructional and curricular models. I conclude that at the two FPCUs where participants of this study attend, writing is equated with standardized conventions, and writing serves the

²³ I make the case that every writing course at any postsecondary institutions reflects the “theories of writing” of the instructor and perhaps also of the department or the university. I thereby suggest that whether explicit or implicit, all teaching of writing is informed by theories about what writing is for and what writing is. Importantly, this is another way in which my study intervenes to view writing courses not as simply providing decontextualized skills, but also as also political and existing within a model of literacy sponsorship where literacy practices in writing courses have dire economic and personal consequences for students. Theories of writing influence the purpose, content, and delivery of writing courses. In making this assertion, I build quite directly from the National Council of Teachers of English's (NCTE) position statement entitled “Principles for Teaching Postsecondary Writing” meant to serve as both a reflection of best practices and research and a guide for those running writing programs. NCTE is the largest professional organization in the field of rhetoric and composition, and the collective authors of the statement suggest: “Sound writing instruction extends from a knowledge of theories of writing (including, but not limited to, those theories developed in the field of composition and rhetoric),” thus highlighting the importance of understanding theories of writing for teaching writing. Importantly, the position statement is flexible in terms of prescribing a particular theory of writing for writing curriculum. Even further, the statement even goes so far as to suggest that instructors may use theories outside of the field of rhetoric and composition. Ultimately, this statement also supports the notion that each instructor may have a highly individualized approach to writing which may extend from a variety of theories. Central to NCTE's assertion is the notion that instructors must be aware of and deliberate about the theories of writing they employ in their own teaching. Thus, NCTE also implicitly suggests that, whether deliberate or not, all writing courses espouse certain theories of writing in terms of the way the class is framed through the syllabus, the purpose and learning objectives of the class, and the underlying assumptions about writing that inform instruction and learning in the classroom.

purpose of disciplining student language use. Here, conventions mean rigid attention to Standard Edited American English grammar, APA citations, and mechanics; these conventions then narrowly discipline student writing as correct or incorrect. The trend of narrowing that emerges in students' reports aligns with depictions of literacy instruction as narrow and disciplining within news media articles. For example, in one article in which an editor described working with graduate students at FPCUs on their dissertations (Canchola, 2011), the author suggested that the for-profit model of was marked by a lack of rigorous engagement with student research and writing, where instead obscure grammatical rules became the focus.

Many characteristics mark this theory of writing, which I argue is pervasive at the two large publicly traded FPCUs my participants described, including: minimal course objectives, a total of two pages of polished writing required in an introductory writing course over a condensed semester of five or 10 weeks, half of the points in grading rubrics being relegated to formatting and citations. Participants talked repeatedly about their writing course's emphasis on conventions—Reagan even identified attention solely to APA citations as the trademark “Turner format” for writing at Turner University. I further argue that this narrow model of writing also subtly disciplines students to consider writing as either right or wrong—grammatical and citation concerns enable instructors to mark student writing as correct or incorrect. By extension, data from my student participants suggests that students internalize this discipline: when they offer feedback to one another about writing they also discipline their classmates' language use as right or wrong. Student writing in for-profit writing courses is disciplined unfortunately at the expense of attention to more complex writing concerns such as rhetorical awareness, and in turn, this is how students' view college writing.

Since narrow conventions replace more complex, rhetorical concerns in the writing curriculum, this narrowing results in a low standard for student writing in introductory courses at FPCUs. In analyzing both students' reports from interviews, and the news corpus, I identify the trend of “good enough literacy.” News media imply that literacy standards may not be high at FPCUs, and that instruction may be just adequate or “good enough,” but not outstanding, with one article even comparing the option of a for-profit college to a sub-prime mortgage. In chapter four, I outline in detail how narrowing can lead to a low literacy standard based on in-depth reports from my student participants. These reports often echoed this sense of “good enough” literacy; for example, Amala said that Promise University isn't “the God of all schools.... It's a

good school, don't get me wrong, but it's not the best thing that I've ever experienced in my life. If it was the best thing I've ever experienced, I wouldn't have issues with it." Chandra ended up dropping out of Turner University by our third interview, and she stated that her greatest reason was the large tuition price and dubious academic standards: "Because they do focus on you trying to finish, but they want you to finish because they want that money.... You know what I mean, I can tell a little bit, they're a little lenient, as far as grade wise." Likewise, Cassie expressed concerns that Turner was not holding her to a high standard or providing her with a broad knowledge base about writing: "I don't know that I'm getting all the information I need. That's a concern." She went on to suggest that Turner University was too lenient on her writing: "I feel like there's certain things that should be required, should not be overlooked and grades should be ... I made a perfect 4.0 last [semester] like I made a 98.6 in one class, or something, and a 97.9 in the other class...I just think they're a little too lenient." Some participants reaffirm the existence of low literacy standards at their colleges, pointing to "good enough literacy" as part of the narrow theory of writing prevalent at these two FPCUs.

As I have already pointed out, Brandt (1998) suggests that literacy sponsors may not only encourage but also "recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy and gain advantage by it in some way" (p. 166). I then suggest that FPCUs as literacy sponsors seem to not necessarily withhold, but perhaps to regulate literacy through the narrowing and disciplining of student writing. A model of writing and curriculum focused upon conventions regulates students' views of literacy to become similarly narrow. As I outline in chapter four, students' understanding of genre and longer pieces of writing is limited; by extension, students' question the relevance of literacy for their future careers. Previous authors have identified the unequal power dynamics given in the notion of literacy sponsorship (Thomas, 2011; Pinder, 2011)—sponsors clearly are gaining from their sponsorship and may have varying motives and purposes for the ways they engage with literacy initiatives. Literacy initiatives may be required to take up the purposes or models of literacy that sponsors elect without an enormous amount of decision in the matter. While then my participants did not always identify this focus on conventions as narrow or disciplining, their unequal power position puts them at a disadvantage in evaluating their institutional experiences with writing.

In short, in identifying narrowing and disciplining as two negative, key characteristics of literacy sponsorship at FPCUs that fail to align with best practices for writing instruction

outlined in our own field of writing studies, I am also suggesting that students may be at times unaware of what is missing from their writing courses or literacy experiences at FPCUs. Several participants did point out the narrowness of this focus on conventions during our conversations, or question the literacy standards of their institution, but not all. Most of my participants did agree that most students at FPCUs are underprepared for college-level literacy activities, and this sense of unpreparedness may have left them hesitant to criticize their institutions. I identify two consequences of this narrowing and disciplining—student participants seemed unclear about more complex concerns like genre and audience within their writing at FPCUs, and often do not see the importance of writing for their future careers, even when those careers will involve extensive writing.

The Literacy Catch 22

Nonetheless, in this context of privatization in higher education which my project identifies as a central part of American higher education, for-profit students are often simultaneously still positioned as customers with choices, and news media repeatedly hold students accountable for their poor choice of college; numerous pieces suggest for-profit students should have “done their homework” in picking a college in the first place. I sought in this study to answer the research question: *how is the model of literacy sponsorship provided by for-profits described in public discourse, and how does this compare with student writers’ own experiences of literacy sponsorship at FPCUs?* The recent study by Public Agenda points to a severe disconnect between public discourse on FPCUs and students’ knowledge of that public discourse. Public Agenda found that 65 percent of current students at FPCUs are unfamiliar with the term “for-profit college,” and nine out of 14 of participants in this study were also either unaware or unclear about the meaning of the term “for-profit college” in our first interview. I theorize and describe this situation as the “literacy catch 22,” by which adult college students want to attend college to gain valuable literacy skills and learn, but may not always possess the specific literacy skills in the first place to sort between the often conflicting and difficult to find information about FPCUs that exists. The literacy catch 22 points out the conflict inherent in asking college students to be savvy customers or consumers, when they may want to attend college precisely in order to learn to engage in the kind of information-gathering and information-evaluating literacy activities required to do this. The literacy catch 22 also asserts that certain literacy skills are required to be a savvy customer and “choose” a university that is a

good fit. This may be even more so the case for students at FPCUs who are disproportionately first-generation students as well as non-traditional students. In short, these students have less knowledge about college in general that might aid the college selection process: for-profit college students are not usually 18-year-olds touring institutions with Mom or Dad to help them. Instead, like participants in this study, they tend to be single Moms or grandparents working multiple jobs while also providing care for their grandchildren. Moreover, many of participants reported that their “choice” of college was limited for geographical reasons, as several participants did not have vehicles or could not drive. In fact, one intervention of this project is to suggest that the literacy catch 22 creates a situation in which already marginalized college students are oddly the ones held accountable if a for-profit college does engage in corrupt or poor practices.

However, participants often also themselves seemed to reinforce this consumer model of higher education: 10 out of 14 participants agreed that the prospective students at for-profits should be using writing and literacy skills to research and select a high-quality university in the first place. Students themselves subscribe to this consumer model of higher education that suggests they are customers making a choice, even when their own lack of awareness of the for-profit status of their schools suggests they never had accurate information about their institutions in the first place—during the admissions process—to be able to make an informed consumer decision to enroll.

An Individualized Literacy Model: Exacerbating Inequality

Ultimately, in this study, I sought to answer the overarching question: what is literacy sponsorship like at FPCUs? While Brandt’s concept of literacy sponsors suggests that sponsors are “usually richer, more knowledgeable, and more entrenched than the sponsored, sponsors nevertheless enter a reciprocal relationship with those they underwrite” (Brandt, 1998, p. 167). However, this study highlights the ways that students at FPCUs are called upon regularly by their colleges to self-sponsor their own literacy practices. In fact, as I demonstrated in the preceding chapter, for-profits are so loosely involved in online course literacy assignments that to identify them as literacy sponsors in these situations seems a stretch. This is not to suggest necessarily that students then are not learning at FPCUs, but instead I argue that with this individualized literacy sponsorship model, an enormous amount of responsibility is placed upon individual students—often working alone in online courses from their homes—for their engagement with

literacy. Participants frequently reported that they engaged in literacy activities “on their own” in online courses specifically. Even further, this individualized model had consequences for student writing, including that: 1) participants did not view writing as a social activity in a rhetorical sense and 2) participants gained a limited sense of audience awareness.

This individualized literacy model means that outcomes are drastically different for different students at FPCUs, and marginalized students may be left with the feeling expressed by several participants that their school was not really “paying attention” to them. Indeed, in the preceding chapter I discuss the difference between Rianna’s experience in her introductory writing course at Roger Williams University—feeling isolated and eventually dropping out overwhelmed by tuition debt with Brenda’s experience obtaining her Bachelor’s degree in Business at Promise University and gaining a job she wanted in her field. But Rianna and Brenda also entered college with drastically different amounts of preparation and experience with literacy. Rianna lived with her mother, was unemployed, and had dropped out of community college because of transportation limitations. On the other hand, Brenda maintained a job as a director of communications for a large non-profit organization for nine years before enrolling at Promise University. Part of the individualized model of engaging with literacy then is that the responsibility for successfully engaging with literacy shifts to the individual. For those outlier students like Brenda who as a student-customer arrived at Promise University with a clear goal and a great deal of experience and confidence as a writer, the individualized model worked to her advantage. For the right type of self-motivated, goal-oriented student, this individualized model provides exactly what the customer needs: the flexibility and opportunity for someone like Brenda to obtain a Bachelor’s degree while working full-time and supporting her family. By contrast, Rianna’s experience seems to be more common one at FPCUS, with the overall graduation rate for students seeking Bachelor’s degrees at 23 percent in six years at for-profits, compared to 59 percent at public 4-year colleges and 66 percent at private nonprofit institutions (National Center for Education Statistics). Likewise, while FPCUs account for about 10% of all undergraduate college students, their students account for 35% of all student loan defaults (National Student Loan Data System).

In short, this dissertation adds complexity to news media that broadly condemn FPCUs for corrupt practices. Instead, I argue that perhaps for students who are like Brenda—the literacy catch 22 fails to apply. Some students are savvy consumers of college, as they have clear,

focused career goals, outstanding writing skills, enjoy writing alone, and they choose a for-profit college and make the for-profit literacy sponsorship model work for their needs. These students may even, like Brenda, be first-generation college students. But I argue that the for-profit literacy sponsorship model's prioritization of independence and individual accountability leaves most students, like Riana, floundering.

Implications for Future Research

This project has begun to consider what it means for college students to have dual identities as consumers and learners in the context of writing classrooms, but there is still much work to be completed on this important topic. While FPCUs may be extreme examples of the commodification of the college degree, traditional public and not-for-profit institutions have likewise begun to adopt many of the same practices pioneered by FPCUs. As the notion of the student-consumer or customer becomes pervasive not only at FPCUs but at not-for-profit private and at public institutions as well, research in writing studies should examine the ways this positioning of students impacts student learning in other institutional contexts. For example, how do students at large public research universities, or not-for-profit private universities perceive their identities as student consumers, and how do they see this role influencing their literacy learning, if at all? As I have already pointed out, this study did not involve interviewing writing instructors about this topic for access reasons: instructors at FPCUs are often required to sign non-disclosure agreements which prevent their participation in research studies. Future research might ask instructors at other types of institutions how they view their roles within this consumer model of higher education? How do instructors see students as consumers of classes—if at all, and how do they believe this impacts learning?

Research in composition studies that ignores this more expansive view of the college writing classroom as impacted by the economic trend of higher education privatization risks neglecting the myriad factors outside writing classes that trickle in to influence the ways students engage with literacy. This dissertation suggests that growing economic inequality among students in college writing courses across US higher education influences writing classrooms, both how writing classrooms are managed, staffed, and structured, but moreover—as I have argued throughout this dissertation—in the ways in which students learn within them.

In part then, this dissertation points to the need for more research attending to open access college writing classrooms like those at for-profit colleges where marginalized students

disproportionately enroll. The tendency in writing studies research—often generated at research institutions—is to focus on the elite students who attend these same institutions. Even more dangerous, this research may generate the illusion that these students—mostly wealthy, white, privileged college students—become the invisible “norm” in writing studies research, or who we assume inhabit our writing classrooms when we make important recommendations for writing pedagogy and practice. As I point out in chapter four, a large meta-analysis conducted by the US Department of Education finding similar outcomes for college students enrolled online compared to those enrolled in face-to-face classes focused almost solely upon universities “rated as ‘selective’ or ‘highly selective’ by the U.S. News and World Report, and all seemed to involve relatively well-prepared students” (Jaggars & Bailey, 2010, p. 8). On the other hand, two-year colleges have been the sites of the largest expansions of online course offerings and enrollments: in 2008, 97 percent of two-year colleges were offering online courses while only 66 percent of all post-secondary institutions were offering any online courses (Jaggars, Edgecombe & West Stacey, 2013, p. 1). This project then points to the danger of making pedagogical recommendations for writing instruction based on practices at elite schools that may have very little to do with community colleges or FPCUs where the majority of online college courses are offered. As I have already pointed out, FPCUs educate a growing and disproportionate percentage of first-generation college students, low-income college students, and students of color. New research in writing studies should explicitly focus on FPCUs, adding to the expanding field of two-year college research that investigates the actual college contexts where marginalized college students often gain access to college.

Conclusion

Since 2010 for-profit colleges and universities have shrunk in size and come under greater scrutiny from the US government, with the Obama administration introducing new regulations designed to hold for-profit colleges accountable for the many alumni left with overwhelming student loan debt and few career prospects. Former US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in 2015 went so far as to assert, “The clock is ticking for bad actors in the career college industry to do right by students” (US Depart. of Ed.). For-profit colleges and the federal policies impacting them have become ripe political battlegrounds, with the new Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos in 2017 reversing pieces of the Obama administration’s regulations (Camera, 2017). But on the political right and left the defining of college as an “industry” and

the view of students as consumers remains the same, with debate only about how much the federal government should step in to regulate and protect “consumers” or students from predatory practices viewed as industry corruption. The view of college as an industry and the student as consumer, while most extreme at big FPCUs where generating profit for shareholders is the primary goal, has extended across the broader landscape of higher education. But, how then do we determine if a college is a “bad actor” or where college value lies?

As I have already outlined in this dissertation, research from economists and higher education has likewise interrogated for-profit colleges as an industry via alumni earnings and student loan debt—implying that college value lies in students’ future earnings. In fact, a recent study co-authored by US Treasury Department economist Nicholas Turner (Riegg Cellini & Turner, 2018) found that students who attended for-profit colleges would have been better off not attending college at all, or attending a not-for-profit community college program instead. This study found that students who obtained vocational certificates at for-profit colleges made an average of \$900 less annually after attending college than they did before. This study—like other research I have outlined (Deming, Goldin, & Katz, 2013; US Senate, Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, 2012)—also implicitly reinforces a consumer model of higher education where value is defined according to what student consumers earn after their degrees.

This project intervenes in the discourse on for-profit colleges to problematize the consumer model of higher education so prevalent in both research and the public view of universities. This study responds to the contentious public policy debates on FPCUs as well as higher education research that measure college value in terms of earnings after the degree through the reexamination of for-profit college value from students’ reports of their experiences of literacy learning. After all, FPCUs are still institutions of higher learning. This project points to specific problems with the consumer model of higher education: the literacy catch 22 suggests that many prospective students may not be in a position to make a “consumer choice” in selecting a college, and it then seems unfair to hold students accountable for this choice. Even further, this dissertation suggests that the hyper-individualized literacy learning model in online writing courses at FPCUs forces student consumers to be further accountable for their own literacy learning outcomes. Even the concept of literacy sponsorship that I have used throughout this project to understand FPCUs seems to reinforce this consumer model in some ways as Brandt’s theory shifts to focus upon interactions between sponsors and learners in “economies of

literacy learning” as “literacy's buyers and sellers” (Brandt, 1998, p. 183). But, this study points to issues that arise when the operating “economy” of literacy is hyper-focused on students’ roles as consumers, and universities are by extension focused on profiting from literacy sponsorship.

In February 2017 Apollo Group, which owns the University of Phoenix, was sold to a group of private investors and is now no longer publicly traded. Also in 2017, Indiana’s public research flagship university Purdue bought for-profit Kaplan University, and DeVry University was sold to a much smaller company after losing half of its students (Kamenetz, 2017). The rapid-growth era of large publicly traded FPCUs may be waning as these institutions’ reputations come under fire. But at the same time, the learning models pioneered by FPCUs seem to keep expanding to public and non-profit universities. Higher education journalist Kamenetz (2017) argues: “There are now a group of big nonprofit and public institutions targeting working adults with workforce-focused, on-demand learning. In other words, these companies are following the playbook laid out by for-profits, but with a better reputation — at least for now.” Huge higher education institutions like Arizona State, Purdue and Southern New Hampshire are rapidly expanding their online student enrollments. Ultimately, this dissertation cautions that simply closing, downsizing, or selling big for-profit universities may not solve all the problems presented by FPCUs. FPCUs may in some cases do a disservice to students not only through high tuition, corrupt admissions practices and poor student outcomes, but also in some of the specific ways that students engage with reading and writing within their literacy learning model. This dissertation concludes that the consumer model of literacy sponsorship which FPCUs have employed—and even popularized—perhaps furthers a stratified system of higher education learning, a system in which vulnerable and marginalized college students stand to lose the most.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Survey Monkey Title: Eligibility Survey: Interview Study on Writing Courses
at For-profit Universities

Q1 Are you currently enrolled as a college student?

Answer Choices

Yes, full time in graduate school

Yes, part time in graduate school

Yes, full time at a four-year undergraduate college/university

Yes, part time at a four-year undergraduate college/university

Yes, full time at a two-year undergraduate college/university

Yes, part time at a two-year undergraduate college/university

No, I am not currently enrolled as a student

Q2 What is the name of your university or college?

Open-ended Response

Q3 Are you currently or about to be enrolled in a writing, English, or communications course?

Answer Choices

Yes, I am already enrolled in a writing course.

Yes, I am about to enroll in a writing course.

No

Q4 Are you interested in participating in a confidential research study where you participate in 3 interviews either in-person or through online videoconferencing about your experiences in writing courses at this college (participation is entirely voluntary and will be reimbursed at a rate of \$75).

Answer Choices

Yes.

No.

Q5 What is your full name (first and last)?

Open-ended Response

Q6 What name do you prefer to be called?

Open-ended Response

Q7 What city and state do you live in?

Open-ended Response

Q8 What is your race/cultural background?

Open-ended Response

Q9 What is your age?

Open-ended Response

Q10 What gender do you identify with?

Open-ended Response

Q11 What is the name of your writing course?

Open-ended Response

Q12 What is your email address?

Open-ended Response

Q13 What is the best phone number to reach you at?

Open-ended Response

Q14 Where did you get the link to this survey from?

Answer Choices

Reddit
Facebook
Instagram
A paper flyer
A writing instructor at my school
Other (please specify)

Q15 Do you use Skype?

Answer Choices

Yes.

No.

Q16 If so, would you be able to participate in an interview through it?

Answer Choices

Yes.

No.

Appendix B: Participant Study Consent Form

July 29, 2016

Dear Student:

Who is doing this study, and why?

My name is Bonnie Tucker, and I am a graduate student researcher at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. I am inviting you to participate in my research project entitled: **For-Profit Postsecondary Institutions as Literacy Sponsors: A Turn to Students' Voices**. This dissertation research project examines undergraduate students' experiences in writing courses at for-profit universities through interviews and document collection. By speaking directly with you and others, I hope to gather a more complete picture of your experiences in writing courses at your university in this study. You are helping me out enormously in participating in this study, and sharing your story with me. This research is important because students' like yourselves opinions and experiences about their writing courses at for-profit universities are important for educators, administrators and other students to know more about.

Who is sponsoring this research?

This study is funded by support from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

Why have you been asked to participate in this study?

I have identified you as someone from whom I can learn a great deal. You have been invited to participate in the project because you are an undergraduate student taking a writing course at a publicly traded for-profit university.

What do you have to do to participate?

In short, first, answer some brief survey questions. I'll also interview you about your experiences with writing in your class and doing homework, about your view of your writing class and how those writing experiences in class have influenced you. We will meet (or if that is not possible conduct a video Skype meeting with you) for three interviews at three different times, and I'll ask your permission to audio record. Each interview should last about 60 minutes, and I'll ask some questions to understand your experiences with writing and your ideas about college writing in each interview. Hopefully, we can schedule each interview a few weeks to a month apart so you have time to finish the writing course by the final interview. In the first interview, I will ask you to send me your writing course syllabus, writing assignments, and writing samples from your course. In the second interview, we will talk through those documents together from your class. In the third interview, I will share with you a summary of some news reports and ads about writing and literacy at universities like yours, and ask you to compare those to your experiences. Throughout the interviews, you can ask for clarification, choose not to answer certain questions, or tell me if anything confuses you and I'm happy to explain more!

Is this study confidential?

This study will be confidential, and your name, college and exact location will not be included in my write-up of the dissertation. However, the information collected about the ages, race/cultural background, region of the United States and gender of participants will be included collectively in the final written report to make sure diversity of backgrounds is represented in this study.

Is my participation voluntary?

Your willingness to participate in an interview is greatly appreciated and it is strictly voluntary. Please know that your participation is desired only if you are fully comfortable and willing to do so. You, of course, are free to stop participating at any time for any reason.

Are there any risks involved in participating?

There shouldn't be much risk associated with this study. Of course, I can't guarantee participating will be totally risk free. For one, being recorded can certainly make anyone feel nervous. I'll try to make you as comfortable as possible. You can skip any question you don't feel comfortable with, and we can even stop the interview whenever you want and/or destroy any answers you've already given. There aren't risks associated with this study because the data collection is completely anonymous, and this topic is not sensitive. This study has been already approved by an institution called the Institutional Review Board or IRB at the University of Michigan as exempt.

How will you benefit from this study, and why is it important?

A couple ways. First, I hope the survey and interview themselves will be fun and interesting for you! This is not a "right answer" situation at all, and it can be really interesting to think about the issues involved in this study. Ultimately, I want to learn from you. Second, although you may not directly benefit from being in this study, others may benefit when the research is published and students like yourself, educators and policymakers have more information about writing courses at for-profit universities.

Will there be any tokens of appreciation for participating?

Yes, you will be given as a token of appreciation for your participation (but not as a formal salary), \$75 total for your participation this study. This will be paid in three installments. A money order for \$15 after the first interview, then \$25 after the second interview, then \$35 after the final interview made out to you will be mailed to you.

Will this study be published?

I plan to publish the results of this study, but will not include any information that would identify you in the final publication. There are some reasons why people other than the researchers may need to see information you provided in the study. This includes other organizations that make sure the research is done properly, such as the IRB at the University of Michigan.

How will the researcher keep information confidential?

To keep your information safe and confidential, throughout the study and afterwards I will:

- Keep audio and written recordings and all notes and documents from our interviews that you share voluntarily with me on only one personal laptop and one desktop which are both password protected.
- The audio recordings will be saved for up to 6 months, only as long as I need to write down everything said in the recording. Then they will be destroyed.
- Save your interview and document information electronically using a fake name or pseudonym to protect your anonymity.

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in the study. You will be given a copy of this document for your records of your written informed consent, and one copy will be kept by me. Be sure that you have gotten answers to all the questions that you want to ask about the study before you sign, and that you understand what you are being asked to do.

I agree to participate in the study.

Printed Name:

Signature:

Date:

If you agree for your interviews to be recorded, please let me know.

I agree to allow all interviews to be audio recorded.

Printed Name:

Signature:

Date:

If you have any questions about the study, including compensation or scheduling, you may contact me at (828)289-4272 or bmtucker@umich.edu or Professor Anne Ruggles Gere at argere@umich.edu . Please feel free to contact me with questions at any point during the study.

Thank you for your time and assistance! Your involvement and insight are deeply valued and will contribute greatly to this research project.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bonnie Tucker". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bonnie Tucker
Graduate Student Instructor, English Department Writing Program
Doctoral Student, Joint Program in English and Education, University of Michigan

Appendix C: Initial Open-Ended Interview Protocol with Students Enrolled in Writing
Courses across FPCUs

How this Protocol Advances My Research Questions:

My goal is to uncover the literacy sponsorship model or models provided at the various large publicly traded FPCUs my students are enrolled in. This interview protocol answered my first research question: *How do undergraduate students currently enrolled at FPCUs describe their perceptions of the model of literacy sponsorship provided through a writing course taken at a large publicly traded for-profit university corporation?* This initial interview allowed me to find out how much students know about the “for-profit” status of their school, and what the implications of that status are according to them for their educational experiences—enabling me to draw some conclusions about literacy sponsorship at FPCUs. This interview served my purpose of getting to know participants’ and their backgrounds before delving into more specific questions about their experiences in writing courses in the second and third interviews.

My Intro:

Good morning/afternoon. My name is Bonnie. I’m from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. I’m here/video conferencing with you today as part of my dissertation research project on students’ experiences in writing courses at for-profit universities. By speaking directly with you and others, I hope to gather a more complete picture of your experiences in your writing course. I’m essentially here to ask questions and listen to what you have to say. There are no right or wrong answers, I just want to hear more about your experiences. I will record the interview and will also take notes as you speak. This will help me later to identify any prominent themes emerging from your and the other participants’ responses. During this first interview, I will be focused on getting some background information about you and your school. Before we get started, I want to stress to you that any comments you make here today are *completely confidential*. Your name will *not* be included in our report. I will combine your responses with those of other participants, so please feel free to speak freely. If you feel comfortable sharing your course syllabi, writing prompts, and a writing sample, please send them to me after this interview.

Interview #1 Protocol:

1. Tell me about yourself and your education path to X University.
2. Tell me the story of why you chose your college.
3. Tell me what your university is like. Elaborate as much as you can.
4. Have you heard the term for-profit college before?
5. Are you aware that your college is for-profit?
6. How do you feel that for-profit status make it different to or similar to other colleges?
7. Have you ever heard or read any stories about for-profit schools in the news or on social media? If so, what?
8. How have these news stories affected your decision of choosing your school, or your view of it, if at all?
9. Do you feel the for-profit status of your school changes the classroom at all? If so, how?
10. Has that for-profit status affected your writing course at all?
11. What do you like best about your college?
12. Describe the mission of your college, or its goal for students.
13. What is your purpose or mission in going to school?
14. How does that mission match your own mission in attending college?
15. Tell me how you would define a customer.
16. Tell me a story about a time you felt like a customer at your college in any way.
17. Tell me a story about a time being a customer affecting your learning as a student, if it ever has?
18. Have you ever felt like a customer in your writing class? Describe it.
19. What do you think is unique about your college? Can you describe that in detail?
20. Have you attended any other colleges? If so, how have they been similar or different?
21. Can you describe anytime you felt challenged at your institution?
22. What has been the most challenging part of your college?
23. Can you describe what has felt easy for you?
24. What is the easiest part of X University?

25. Is there anything that you would change about X University?
26. Can you describe the format of your classes?
27. What is your GPA overall so far?
28. In what classes do you make the best grades? Why?
29. In what classes do you make the worst grades? Why?
30. Anything else you want to add?

Appendix D: Second Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Students Enrolled in Writing
Courses across FPCUs

How this Protocol Advances My Research Questions:

This cognitive interview helps further my first research question: *How do undergraduate students currently enrolled at FPCUs describe their perceptions of the model of literacy sponsorship provided through a writing course taken at a large publicly traded for-profit university corporation?* It also helps to answer my second research question: *What are the theories of writing espoused through writing courses at FPCUs, and furthermore what do the theories of writing suggest about the model of literacy sponsorship provided by FPCUs?* I also adjusted this interview protocol based upon the answers to my earlier open-ended interview with students. This second lengthy interview focused upon finding absolutely everything I could about students' experiences within writing courses at their different institutions. I crafted the questions with a particular framework of comparing narratives about the writing course with NCTE's Principles for the Teaching of Postsecondary Writing. Importantly, as this was a cognitive interview, I interviewed students using the artifacts they turned in to me during the first interview to sharpen their memories of experiences, including course descriptions, syllabi, objectives and essays.

Interview #2 Protocol

1. Tell me any story about your writing course that you think is interesting.
2. Describe a typical class session in your writing course.

Ok, thank you! I have the syllabus here with me, and I am just going to ask you to provide some detail about the requirements of it, and we can look through it together?

3. How often do classes meet?
4. Here is the course description. How did you interpret this course description?
5. Why did you take the course?
6. What did you expect to get out of the class?
7. Before this class, how did you feel about writing?
8. Before this class, how much writing did you do on your own for any reason?
9. What kind of writing do you do during class?
10. How many writing assignments have you had? Can you describe them?

11. Here is one writing prompt you gave me. Can you tell me how you tackled it?
12. Can you describe your process for then completing the writing assignment?
13. Do you think these assignments on the syllabus will help you write later for other classes or for work? Any in particular that seemed helpful?
14. Who are the audiences you have to write for in the class?
15. Is writing a social activity in this class? Why or why not?
16. Can you describe the writing process you engage in during class?
17. Has this course changed the way you write at all so far? How?
18. Describe a typical homework assignment in your class.
19. What does your teacher emphasize about writing in the class?
20. Describe your classmates.
21. How much do you read each week, and what?
22. How much do you participate in class each week?
23. What does participation look like in your class?
24. Do students tend to participate equally do you think? What makes you think that?
25. Do you think the students understand the teacher's expectations? What makes you think that?
26. Do you think the class is equally accessible to all students, or do some students seem to struggle more than others? How so?
27. Do you feel engaged in learning about writing in the class? Why or why not?
28. Can you describe what you think an expert writer might be able to do?
29. Have you been encouraged to be or become an expert writer in your class? How so?
30. Do you like your writing course? Why or why not?
31. Do you like your writing teacher? Why or why not?
32. Did you ever meet one-on-one or face to face with the instructor? What is that like?
33. What kinds of activities do you do in class?
34. Do you ever work in a team in the class? What kinds of things do you do in a team?
35. Do you receive instructor feedback on writing?
36. Describe instructor feedback. What kinds of comments do they make? How often do you get it?
37. Do you receive peer feedback on writing?

38. What is peer feedback like?
39. Here are the course objectives on the syllabus. What do they mean to you?
40. What do you think the goal for the course is according to the teacher?
41. Do you think the teacher is accomplishing that goal?
42. Based on this class, what do you think writing is for?
43. Are your goals for the class being fulfilled? Can you explain more?
44. Has anything surprised you about the class?
45. What has been the most useful part of this class and why?
46. The least useful, and why?
47. Can you describe the most challenging part of the class? Why?
48. What has been easy about his class for you? Why?
49. Anything else you want to add?

Appendix E: Final Interview #3 Protocol

How this Protocol Advances My Research Questions:

This interview helps further my first research question which is: *How do undergraduate students currently enrolled at FPCUs describe their perceptions of the model of literacy sponsorship provided through a writing course taken at a large publicly traded for-profit university corporation?* It also helps to answer my second research question: *What are the theories of writing espoused through writing courses at FPCUs, and furthermore what do the theories of writing suggest about the model of literacy sponsorship provided by FPCUs?* This will be the final interview and will focus on students' reflections and final opinions about what and how they learn within their respective writing courses. In this interview, I will also show students the summary statements that I create about literacy sponsorship at FPCUs in the news media, on college websites, and via advertising. I will use the summary statements to engage in questions with my participants.

Intro:

Thank you so much for your participation in my study! Today is our final and third interview. Again, I want to stress that there are no right or wrong answers, I just want to hear your experiences and final reflections on your writing class and degree. I also want to give you a heads up that at the end of this interview I will be sharing some summaries of news stories and ads about reading and writing at for-profit colleges with you.

Interview #3 Protocol

1. What have the results of this writing course been for you? (academically, personally and professionally)
2. What do you feel you have learned overall about writing in the class now that you are no longer enrolled in it?
3. What do you see as most important about writing as a result of this class?
4. Can you describe any times when this class has already helped you, or will help you write for other classes at your university?
5. Did this writing course change you? If so, how?

6. When we last talked, I asked you if you felt like you were encouraged to become an expert writer in your class? Would you call yourself a writer now? Why or why not?
7. Did you take a placement test to get into your writing class at your school, what was that like? How confident did you feel as a writer during that placement test?
8. Do you feel confident in your authority as a writer now? Why or why not? Has X University helped you to have that confidence?
9. How would you compare yourself to other student writers at X University?
10. What kinds of writing did you do in other classes at X University? How did writing in other classes compare to what you did in your writing course?
11. Have you had any writing instruction or help with writing in other classes? What was that like?
12. Has this course (or courses/degree) changed or improved your employment status at all? If so, how? Do you think it will in the future? Why or why not? (***)There is recent research that suggests students with degrees from for-profit colleges do not earn more after their degree, should I share this?)
13. Did you have to write in your previous job? If so, describe what you wrote then.
14. Did you work during your writing course full-time or part-time? Did the class help you write for work purposes? Do you write in your current job? Describe what you write.
15. Do you feel like a satisfied customer with the writing course overall? How so?
16. Was this course worth the money? Why or why not?
17. Will your degree be worth the money? Why or why not?
18. Are you one of the first people in your family to go to college?
19. Finally, I have collected news stories about reading and writing at for-profit colleges like your college that I want to share with you. First, I also just want to get on the table a definition of a for-profit college. A for-profit college is financially set up like a business and has shareholders. I have summarized the things that these news stories have to say about reading and writing at for-profit colleges into 10 numbered statements. I want to make it very clear that these statements DO NOT represent my view of your college or of for-profit colleges overall. I have simply attempted to represent these news stories. My goal in this exercise is for you as an expert on your own experience to have the chance to

disagree or agree or some combination of the two with the statements being made in the media about reading and writing at your school.

20. Please pick any statements that you think accurately represent your own experience at your college, or the experiences you noticed among other students. Explain to me why you chose those statements.
21. Can you describe the similarities and differences you see between these statements, and your own story at X University.
22. I have also collected ads involving reading and writing at Promise University and Turner University that I want to share with you. I have summarized the statements that these ads make about reading and writing into 5 numbered statements. Keep in mind ALL of these statements have been produced by Promise or Turner themselves.
23. Please pick any statements that accurately represent your experience, or the experiences you noticed among other students.
24. Describe the similarities and differences between all of these statements and your own experience with reading and writing at X University.
25. Any final reflections you have on anything?

Appendix F: News Media Summary Statements for Interview #3

Below is the set of summaries that I presented to students in the order in which I presented the statements, including the setup script I used to describe my process before introducing these summaries to my research participants:

Finally, I have collected news stories about reading and writing at for-profit colleges like your college that I want to share with you. First, I also just want to get on the table a definition of a for-profit college. A for-profit college is financially set up like a business and has shareholders. I have summarized the things that these news stories have to say about reading and writing at for-profit colleges into 9 numbered statements. I want to make it very clear that these statements DO NOT represent my view of your college or of for-profit colleges overall. I have simply attempted to represent these news stories. My goal in this exercise is for you to have the chance to disagree or agree or some combination of the two with the statements being made in the media about reading and writing at your school.

- 1) Student's reading and writing practices at for-profit colleges are hands-on, geared towards their career goals, and involve smaller classes, reflecting the goals and needs of non-traditional or adult college students.
- 2) Students who are accepted to for-profit colleges are severely unprepared for reading and writing on a college level.
- 3) Students who choose to attend for-profit colleges should be using reading and writing skills to research and find a high-quality university before attending.

Example: "Students should always carefully research a school -- whether for-profit or non-profit -- before enrolling, but that is especially true now, advised an industry group." ~Jahna Berry, *Arizona Republic News*

- 4) Reading and writing activities are engaging and of higher quality for students at for-profit colleges than those reading and writing activities at traditional universities.

Example: "We are investing in academics like no other higher-education company can do,' says Joseph L. D'Amico, who as president of Apollo Group Inc. oversees the campaign it calls 'Reinventing education, again.' The goal, he says, 'is to take our business to a new level.'" ~Goldie Blumenstyk, *Chronicle of Higher Education*

- 5) Writing and reading activities at for-profit colleges are of lower quality than other writing classes at traditional schools, and thus students at for-profit colleges may be cheated out of a quality education, and unable to find better jobs afterwards.

Example: “Countless examples from my years at a for-profit college show that these colleges exploit students... Faculty then routinely rate as "passing" or even "excellent" work that would not have passed muster when I taught high school. Yet while assigning passing grades to students who do not master the material may seem altruistic and supportive, it is an extreme disservice to those students. They will have earned a degree, but that degree will not represent actual learned skills. Those students will not be able to make it through a job interview or fill out job applications” ~ *Anonymous, The Chronicle of Higher Education*

- 6) Student plagiarism is more common at for-profit colleges than other colleges and there are not severe consequences for student plagiarism.
- 7) For-profit colleges are able to teach writing and reading more effectively and more quickly to students than traditional schools.

Example: “Freshmen at the University of Phoenix enter with reading, writing, and mathematical skills that are, on average, below those of other college students, but according to data from standardized tests, Phoenix students appear to improve in those skills at a greater rate than do students at other colleges.” Goldie Blumenstyk, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*

- 8) Students at for-profit colleges use reading and writing to advocate for themselves during grievances or lawsuits against for-profits.

Example: “A group of former Corinthian College students organised a debt strike last year, refusing to pay the part of their loan owed to the federal government before their debts were cancelled” and created a written online manifesto stating, “We are the first generation made poor by the business of education.” ~Rhys Blakely, *The Times*

- 9) Students at for-profit colleges use reading and writing to promote their colleges.

I also created the following two summary statements based on my initial coding of the news articles to provide to students:

- 1) For-profit colleges provide extensive resources outside of classes to assist students with writing.

OR

For-profit colleges do NOT provide extensive resources outside of classes to assist students with writing.

- 2) Students have frequent opportunities to work with technology, eBooks, and e-learning at for-profit colleges and are often assessed which IMPROVES their reading and writing skills.

OR

Students have frequent opportunities to work with technology, eBooks, and e-learning at for-profit colleges and are often assessed which NEGATIVELY affects their reading and writing skills.

Part 3: Statements from Video Ads for For-Profit Universities

Do any of these statements sound like what you have experienced, or your peers have experienced so far at your university:

1. Promise University students “defy the odds” to overcome obstacles and pursue their education, developing literacy skills to succeed.
2. Promise University empowers students of color to develop literacy skills to “rise” against discrimination and to be successful in the practical careers of their choice.
3. Promise University students have practical, real-life experiences and grit that is invaluable plus “a brain” and develop the literacy skills through college to be able to succeed in the practical careers they choose.
4. Turner University students “don’t blend in” when looking for a job, but instead stand out because their reading and writing skills are the “competencies” that employers are looking for, getting students the job they want.
5. Turner University students are non-traditional or adult students who may not have finished a degree or goal they started, but Turner’s career-focused, technology-driven literacy skills will enable them to finish what they started and move forward in their career. Turner also provides the extra support and tutoring to help students finish their degrees.
6. Turner University provides students who want a new career or to switch careers with the literacy skills that will enable them to “upgrade” their status in the world and obtain the career they want.

Appendix G: Tucker’s Codebook

Tucker’s Codebook			
Category and Frequency	Code	Definition	Example
Literacy at FPCUs			
Int. #1—8 Int. #2—60 Int. #3—28 TOTAL: 96 references	Focus on conventions	Any instance in which a participant describes how their writing course, instructor, institution, or assignments were focused on standardized conventions which could refer to Standard Edited American English or APA citation styles and formatting	“And, we really didn't do much on writing strengths, because none of us that were in this class knew that the mandatory format was APA, because we've all known MLA, but Turner's mandatory is APA, so that was completely different for us. I dreaded this class. Like after we got more into it I dreaded it, until the last two weeks, and then stuff finally started to make sense, like the in-text citations. My biggest fault was not alphabetizing my citations on my resource page, so I finally got that figured out.” ~Reagan
Int. #1—13 Int. #2—17 Int. #3—26 TOTAL: 56 references	Responsibility for literacy learning	Any instance in which a participant describes who they believe should have the responsibility for literacy learning, whether that be the individual student, instructor, or institution	“A lot of people kind of think of the online classes as just an easy way to earn credit. And they're not. They're just as involved as the other ones. And I think harder, in the fact that you have to try to do a lot on your own. You know there's an instructor there, that you can contact but you're not guaranteed a fast callback or anything, so you need to be organized and able to figure a lot of stuff out on your own.” ~Blanche
Int. #1—4 Int. #2—12 Int. #3—19 TOTAL:35 references	Preparedness of students for college-level literacy	Any instance in which a participant describes or evaluates their or their peers’ preparedness for reading and writing activities in college	“I’m taking College Algebra right now, and there's a lot of people in that class that just they've never really even taken algebra. I haven't but it depends on the person I guess on how old they are. If you're my age, you're going to have that kind of experience. I dropped out in 9th grade and I still had reading and writing experience. It depends on your age.... I would definitely say the older ones are. I don't think they've had, schools totally different for them. If my mom took a reading and writing class right now, I don't think she would be prepared for it because she never had that in her school. I don't think they were taught

			APA in the 70's, I really don't know but I think it's fairly new to them." ~Janice
Int. #1—11 Int. #2—16 Int. #3—10 TOTAL:37 references	Academic integrity with regard to literacy	Any instance in which a participant describes or evaluates their literacy experiences in terms of academic honesty/dishonesty of themselves, peers, instructors, or the institution overall	“So, I’ve seen students come into the university who were military. They would sign in on the roster...they would sign in and leave. Even if they’ve already missed a day, if they sign in, they’re considered there, but they wouldn’t stay in class. And what that enabled them to do was collect their military pay while they’re in college, but they never stayed in class. When I addressed that, they said that was the standard that was set in the contract with the military. As long as they sign in, they can’t make them stay there, which I thought was unethical. They’re holding us, who are not military, to a higher standard than those who were. And it affected grades, because if you’re in a team and they’re not there to hear what’s going on, they’re a less effective team member for the team grade. So then, the other team members have to pick up their slack.” ~Brenda
Int. #1—22 Int. #2—65 Int. #3—20 TOTAL: 107 references	Writing as social	Any instance in which a participant describes or evaluates how writing might be a social experience or not in college classes, either in a rhetorical sense in terms of audience awareness, or in a more general sense in terms of opportunity for interactivity between students or between the instructor and student, including peer review	“We do class discussions, where you just post messages, but it's not a classroom, per se. I do remember that one of the classes, we had a group project, and those can be quite frustrating. Like, in the first week, the teacher will divide you into groups, so you do interact with the classmates when you're doing the group projects. Like I said, that's frustrating because everybody has different schedules, and everybody has different writing skills, and the fact that your grade depends on the contribution of other people can be very stressful.” ~Blanche
Int. #1—4 Int. #2—19 Int. #3—4 TOTAL: 27 references	Student engagement with writing	Any instances in which a participant discusses either themselves or peers engaging with writing (or not);	“Honestly, I think it's just because of how I learn and my learning style, because my communications course wasn't too hard for me, honestly, because that's something I'm passionate about. When it comes to other courses that I'm not passionate

		could use the word “engage” or not	about, I feel they're challenging.” ~Amala
Int. #1—1 Int. #2—15 Int. #3—8 TOTAL: 24 references	Genre	Any instance of a participant describing or evaluating the longer types of essays or genres that they work with at their institution, either in writing courses or in other courses; any difficulty describing the genres of essays	“It was supposed to be like a, I think it was a, professional, academic, research paper, type of thing. It had to be in professional words, but educational, and in-text citations had to be in there. She didn’t want direct quotes...Once you asked her a hundred different questions about it, you finally started to understand...I mean, obviously there's instructions there, and some people need the giant paragraph of explanation, but like I didn't find half the answers to my questions, and she was like, “Use the writing center.” ~Reagan
Int. #1—7 Int. #2—14 Int. #3—6 TOTAL: 24 references	Institutional policies affecting literacy	Any instance of a participant describing or evaluating their literacies in the context of discussing the ways that institutional policies such as course length impacted their experiences with literacy	“We've had the discussion board, which is where the ... I don't know if it's the teacher who makes up the questions or the school that makes up the discussion board questions, but they'll ask a question.” ~Rory “It’s [the one-hour online seminar] at 10 o'clock at night. I've missed about three classes out of the whole week, and then we have to do an option two seminar if you ever miss class. You have to basically write a page paper about the class, whatever the seminar was about, and then she'll grade accordingly.” ~Rhonda
Int. #1—2 Int. #2—10 Int. #3—0 TOTAL: 12 references	Extracurricular literacy activities	Any instance of a participant describing or evaluating their literacy activities completed either outside of class for non-academic purposes, or before college for non-academic purposes	“I write pretty often. I write stories, I write letters, I write poetry, especially with my husband incarcerated. He's always liked my writing. I've even had some ... I guess you could call it blogging within my little support group here and there about stuff. . If it's something I'm interested in, it's much easier to inspire me to really get into it. I work a lot so I really don't have a whole lot of time to sit down and write, clear my mind with things.” ~Maisha
Int. #1—15 Int. #2—11 Int. #3—18 TOTAL: 44 references	Literacy assistance	Any instance of a participant describing or evaluating their use of extra assistance either inside or outside their university, including	“I think that they [Promise University] don't necessarily provide extensive resources outside of classes for writing. They do for other things but not necessarily for writing.” ~Jane

		using a writing center or a tutor; or the lack of outside assistance available to them	
Int. #1—0 Int. #2—5 Int. #3—3 TOTAL: 8 references	“Getting comfortable” with literacy	Any instance of a participant describing the need to “get comfortable” or become more familiar with reading and writing in college, or of feeling comfortable or uncomfortable with reading and writing	“The only thing that surprised me about this class was how comfortable it was. Previous classes I took was the feel of, there was a comfortable feel about it. In my previous class, critical thinking class, I was a little bit nervous when I did my post and I was always watching my Ps and Qs which made me have more mistake than I wanted. With this class, I just felt comfortable, I felt more relaxed and when you feel more relaxed you tend to let it flow and it comes out better than when you're all tense.” ~Katherine
Int. #1—4 Int. #2—22 Int. #3—24 TOTAL: 50 references	Relevance of writing for vocation/life	Any instance of a participant evaluating or describing the relevance or irrelevance of writing and literacy for their vocation or life	“I think the writing compositions themselves. Most of them [the writing assignments] weren't very useful at all for what I was going to get my degree for. I mean I guess in a way they would've had to have been or they wouldn't have been included in the curriculum. For me personally, I don't think that they were very helpful as far as me getting my degree in it.” ~Rory
Int. #1—1 Int. #2—4 Int. #3—4 TOTAL: 9 references	Student Writers Assisting Other Students	Any instance of a participant evaluating or describing their own assistance of other students, oftentimes also identifying themselves as advanced writers	“I would consider myself as almost like a TA because I've always been the team leader, always. I would always be the mother hen to the other students because they didn't know how to structure an essay, in regards to answering to a prompt. So, I had to teach them how to take a prompt and use the prompt as a tether to outline...and structure their paper to answer the prompt. Those are things that I did at my house with students around the table and some coronas and some pizza. We sat around and taught these children or young adults how to write a paper.” ~Brenda
Int. #1—7 Int. #2—18 Int. #3—1	Step-by-step literacy learning process	Any instance of a participant evaluating or	“My last course—It was a little difficult, but it was a course that helped you week-by-week, step-by-

TOTAL: 26 references		describing literacy learning as a step-by-step process at their university or in a specific class	step on how to write an academic essay that would be good for school. It was wonderful. But it doesn't prepare you for what another course syllabus is going to be. Like this one, when I think of writing a thesis statement, I'm thinking of writing the 3-part thesis like I learned in the last course and writing my opinion and then writing three supportive facts about it. This is something totally different.” ~Katherine
Int. #1—10 Int. #2—4 Int. #3—6 TOTAL: 20 references	Condensed literacy learning process	Any instance of a participant evaluating or describing the literacy learning process at their university as condensed or shorter compared to other university models or programs	“Once I found out that we were going to be writing a lot more than reading, I just was like, "Eh, okay," but the amount of research time and writing time and editing time, and the length the paper has to be, that was almost impossible to do in one week... The one-week time frame; a week and a half would have been fine, two weeks, that would have been too much time, but a week was almost ... Barely enough to get the minimum.” ~Reagan
Int. #1—2 Int. #2—16 Int. #3—8 TOTAL: 26 references	Literacy/Learning Self-Esteem	Any instance of a participant evaluating or describing their personal feelings about themselves as confident or insecure writers at the college level, or about the general learning environment at their university as inferior or superior; could overlap with “getting comfortable” with literacy	“Because that's the hardest part is to write something and think it's right. You know, most time when you write something you second guess yourself, or you rewrite, and rewrite, and rewrite, or reword, and rewrite.” ~Chandra
For-Profit Context/Administration			
Int. #1—22 Int. #2—2 Int. #3—2 TOTAL: 26 references	Student support (administrative)	Any instance in which a participant describes or evaluates the support they receive at their university from administration or student services or advisors, or the lack thereof	“The advisors are absolutely awesome. I have like three advisors, and they're called a graduation team. They help me with everything. I constantly am in contact with them through email. I have one for financials, I have one for my academic, and then I have one for ... I don't remember exactly ... Just like a general advisor type thing.” ~Amala

<p>Int. #1—27 Int. #2—3 Int. #3—3 TOTAL: 33 references</p>	<p>Flexibility/convenience of for-profit Program</p>	<p>Any instance of a participant describing or evaluating the flexibility or convenience of their for-profit degree program</p>	<p>“It's [Promise University is] great. I enjoy it. It's one class at a time. Each class lasts five weeks. It seems like it's taking forever to get done, but it all just fits into my schedule... It [the application process] was really simple. They made it really simple to do the application and I didn't have to write an essay. They just made it really simple. They gave me the first class thing that they give everybody and it made it to where you could see if that was going to work out for you.” ~Jeanie</p>
<p>Int. #1—8 Int. #2—3 Int. #3—2 TOTAL: 13 references</p>	<p>Vulnerability of for-profit college students</p>	<p>Any instance of a participant describing their struggles with finances, medical conditions, disabilities, dropping out of school, or gaining access to college</p>	<p>“It's another reason why I chose to write my paper on ADHD because just looking through the resources and trying to find my sources for my paper, I also learned a lot that could also help my son who we're still trying to figure exactly ... He's got the right form of medication for my daughter because she has ADHD/bipolar disorder and my daughter's medicine seems to be working really good for her. But, my son is still on the iffy part, and I was looking through the resources and I found that autism commonly runs with ADHD for children with ADHD especially in boys. I was talking to my psychiatrist yesterday and told him what I found and he said you're right. Asperger syndrome runs with boys with ADHD. It's common. It's very common and we agreed that it's possible that he might have that as well as everything else.” ~Katherine</p>
<p>Int. #1—13 Int. #2—7 Int. #3—3 TOTAL: 23 references</p>	<p>Family Influence on University Attendance/Literacy Learning</p>	<p>Any instance of a participant evaluating or describing their family's influence on university activities, including but not limited to literacy activities</p>	<p>“There's been a couple of times. My fiancé had a heart transplant 6 years ago and he was in the hospital because he'd had surgery. He had a reconstruction of his Achilles tendon. They decided to keep him overnight because of possible complications due to the surgery, and him having the transplants. He ended up staying, I think 2 days the first time. We weren't expecting to stay, so I didn't take anything with me. I didn't take my computer or anything like that with me. I didn't</p>

			<p>even take a change of clothes with me because we weren't expecting to stay overnight. It was like 2 and a half hours away from where we live... And you know, I emailed my instructor at the time. I told her, I said I understand that there's assignments due. This is what happened, I'm at the hospital. I don't have any of my stuff. His mom and dad were bringing stuff down to me the following day, but the assignment was due, you know, before then. She was awesome, she told me to take all the time I needed. Just to let her know what's going on. She would give me, you know, the extension and everything, and if I needed a longer extension than what she giving me, that was perfectly fine." ~Whitney</p>
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Assignment



Expressing Your Ideas for an Academic Audience and Plan for Additional Research

Apply what you have learned about formal language and academic writing to write your own 2 page article that could potentially be published at the reputable Internet website you used to locate the articles you used for the Assignments you wrote for Unit 4.

Select an article from a website that identifies a relevant change in your field of study. Write a 4-5 paragraph draft of your own academic essay that establishes a point about either the cause or effect of this relevant change. Develop your main point about this change using your own ideas, observations, and experience. This draft should be a revised version of the rough draft you submitted to the Unit 6 Discussion Board. Organize your ideas into approximately four paragraphs and develop your ideas using your own observation and knowledge.

You are encouraged to not utilize additional research at this point. Instead, include an additional one-paragraph Research Plan that identifies the claims you make that need to be supported by additional outside research. Identify what specific research information you would need to locate and incorporate in your article to prepare it for publication.

Utilize the following 5-minute video from the Turner Writing Center to format the title page of your paper:

[APA FORMATTING VIDEO](#)

Here is the list of [websites](#). If your field of study is not listed here or if you do not find an article in one of these websites you wish to use, visit the [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#) and locate a different professional website that you find more interesting or relevant to you and your field of study.

Find out how your instructor will grade your Unit 6 Assignment by reviewing the [rubric](#).

Review a [sample student Assignment](#).

Submitting your Unit 6 Assignment:

Remember that you must use Microsoft Word for this and all projects submitted for this class. When you are ready to submit the Assignment, go to the Unit 6 Assignment Dropbox and complete the steps below:

- Click the link that says Submit an Assignment.
- In the Submit to Basket menu, select Unit 6: Assignment Dropbox.
- In the Comments field, make sure to add at least the title of your paper.
- Click the Add Attachments button.
- Follow the steps listed to attach your Microsoft Word document.
- To view your graded work, come back to the Dropbox or go to the Gradebook after your instructor has evaluated it.

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