An Asset-Based Approach to Literature and Composition Studies

by

Laura I. Romaine

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Doctoral Committee:
  Professor Theresa Tinkle, Chair
  Associate Professor Laura Aull
  Professor Evan Chambers
  Assistant Professor Emily C. Rainey, University of Pittsburgh
  Associate Professor Emeritus Karla Taylor

Laura I. Romaine

lromaine@umich.edu

ORCID iD: 0000-0003-1094-9466

Table of Contents

List of Tables iii

List of Figures iv

Abstract v

Chapter 1 Introduction 1

Chapter 2 Touching Wounds with Thomas: The Sensory Experience of Healing in the Cursor Mundi 21

Chapter 3 (In)Equities in Directed Self-Placement 47

Chapter 4 From Gatekeeper to Informant: The Roles of Academic Advisors in Aligning Directed Self-Placement 80

Chapter 5 A Developmental Approach to Institutionalizing Community Engaged Learning: English 126 Evaluation 113

Appendix 164

List of Tables

Table 1 Effect Sizes for student characteristic variables based on placement recommendation 64

Table 2 Mean Grade in English 125, According to DSP Recommendations and Students' Conformity to the Recommendations 66

Table 3 DSP Questions for students most proficient in academic writing in EnglishTable 3 86

Table 4 Focus Group Question Guide 89

Table 5 Advisors' Years of Experience 91

Table 6 Advisor and Writing Construct Codes 93

Table 7 Student learning objectives 125

List of Figures

Figure 1 First and final question and responses on DSP. 54

Figure 2 Student enrollment patterns for 2014-2019 57

Figure 3 DSP Score Recommends pre-FYW or pre-FYW-I, 15.2% of Student Body 59

Figure 4 Students enrolled in pre-FYW 60

Abstract

This dissertation is composed of four article-length pieces, and has a wide historical reach, employs diverse methods, and consists of both single author and co-authored works. “Touching Wounds with Thomas: The Sensory Experience of Healing in the Cursor Mundi,” attempts to comprehend how we might understand embodiment and the senses in the Middle Ages. Reading the Thomas story with a hermeneutic of medieval belief in spiritual tangibilities, such as the sacraments, problematizes and complicates the act of touch. “(In)Equities in Self-Placement” and “From Gatekeeper to Informant: The Roles of Academic Advisors in Aligning Directed Self-Placement” are systematic qualitative and quantitative analysis of the Directed Self-Placement process which has been used at the University of Michigan to guide students into first-year writing or transitional writing courses. Both of these pieces were a collaborative, co-authored effort with an interdisciplinary team. “(In)Equities in Self-Placement” concludes that, in its current form, the format of the directed self-placement process would benefit from revision, since the evidence suggests that the DSP process at this institution results in the unintended disproportionate placement and enrollment of domestic minoritized students and women in a pre-first year writing course. “From Gatekeeper to Informant” highlights advisors as a key part of the DSP process, and suggests a deeper acknowledgement and interaction between writing center administration and advisors while simultaneously modeling this communication in our research process. “A Developmental Approach to Institutionalizing Community Engaged Learning: English 126 Evaluation,” is a qualitative evaluation of the Community Engaged Writing Program, which pairs writing instructors with a non-profit community partner to collaborate on a student writing project. The data focuses especially on the outcomes for community partners. The project was conducted in collaboration with the Ginsberg Center for Community Service and Learning. The data suggests that it is an attractive course for instructors to teach, has effective learning outcomes for students, and creates valuable relationships with community partners. However, having students do public-facing projects, or providing too much student writing for partner feedback, seemed to make the relationship quite burdensome on the partner without corresponding benefit.

Chapter 1 Introduction

This dissertation is composed of four article-length pieces, has a wide historical reach, employs diverse methods, and consists of both single author and co-authored works. “Touching Wounds with Thomas: The Sensory Experience of Healing in the Cursor Mundi” is a single-authored work which explores how we might understand embodiment and the senses in the Middle Ages through a close reading of the doubting Thomas narrative in the 14th century *Cursor Mundi*. “(In)Equities in Self-Placement” and “From Gatekeeper to Informant: The Roles of Academic Advisors in Aligning Directed Self-Placement” are co-authored pieces with an interdisciplinary team evaluating the Directed Self-Placement (DSP) process used at the University of Michigan to help guide students to a First Year Writing Requirement course or a transitional course. My contributions to this collaboration included formulating research questions, determining methodology, designing surveys and interview protocols, preparing data for analysis and writing and member-checking the conclusions we drew from the data. The “(In) Equities” article examines quantitative student outcomes through statistical analysis such as time to degree, grades in First Year Writing Requirement courses, and grades in upper level writing courses to see if students following the DSP recommendation resulted in consistent benefits for students across the spectrum of gender and background. “From Gatekeeper to Informant” is a co-authored article with a research team. It is an inquiry into the role of academic advisors in the DSP through coded interviews: how they use it, how they perceive students responding to it, how they direct and guide students in conjunction with the instrument, and their recommendations for the process. “A Developmental Approach to Institutionalizing Community Engaged Learning: English 126 Evaluation,” was a collaborative project with the Ginsberg Center for Community Service and Learning, though I am the principal investigator and primary author. It uses interviews and course evaluations to assess the past three years of a new pilot First Year Writing Requirement course at the University of Michigan, English 126: Community-Engaged Writing, that pairs instructors with non-profit affiliated community partners to create a writing-based project that benefits the students and the partners. The course was evaluated on whether the project met the community-defined priorities, equitable partnerships were formed, instructors and partners were satisfied with the partnership, and students achieved the learning goals defined for the course.

This scholarship is driven by Engaged Michigan’s “Principles for Community and Civic Engagement”: Recognition, Respect, and Equitable partnership. The three principles are framed with a beautiful philosophy:

> By learning from communities, we develop connections with new ideas that challenge us and confront us with the new questions that allow us to create, communicate, preserve and apply knowledge, art and academic values to the challenges of the world.

The approach of this dissertation is centered around this philosophy, sparking its driving questions: How can the ethics of our civic attitudes manifest in concrete ways in our scholarship and pedagogy? How can we “practice what we preach” so to speak? In the DSP scholarship, this was realized by the inclusion of voices (advisors) that aren’t typically included in scholarship, even though they are primary stakeholders, and by critically examining disparate outcomes that the DSP can have on underrepresented minorities at the University of Michigan. The community engaged writing project looks beyond student outcomes and prioritizes the voices of the community partners. Only incredibly rarely does scholarship examine the effects of working with university writing classes on the community, rather than the students alone, so this project attempts to put partners at the center and critically approach the interactions that these classes are having. And though it is not possible to listen and develop connections in the same way across centuries, the reading of the medieval Doubting Thomas narratives attempts to avoid infantilization and to proactively read sympathetically. After examining the Engaged Michigan philosophy more deeply in context, this introduction will examine how each section of this dissertation follows its guidelines.

1.1 "By learning from communities, we develop connections with new ideas that challenge us and confront us with new questions."

As people are learners in community this work looks to communities for growth and generative knowledge. Through community, we "develop connections with new ideas," encountering and embracing new perspectives. The university community has been critiqued as being insular, esoteric, the ivory tower of exclusionary power. The influence of Frankfort School encourages pairing the critique of privileged knowledge and assumptions of objectivity with the oppression and marginalization of the "other." In their Dialectic of Enlightenment, Hokheimer and Theodor Adorno highlight the erasure of experience (1994). The English Department Writing program at the University of Michigan and many leaders in its English department, aware of this phenomenon, work tirelessly to present the academic community, with its customers, beliefs, and especially language, as one among many equally valuable communities. This dissertation's contribution is to focus more on possibilities of exploring and connecting community experiences than offering extensive critique of the oppressive powers at play. Focusing on the experiences, rather than the experiences' place in a hegemonic hierarchy, may in itself be a radical act of decentering power. Olesen describes experience as “the process whereby we as human beings, individually and collectively, consciously master reality, and the ever-living understanding of this reality and our relation to it” (1989:6–7). Relaying of experience most often occurs through the medium of language; English classes become "cultivators of compassion” (Zunshine, 2006). Embracing this responsibility, one of the goals of the first year writing course of the English Department Writing Program echoes the guiding philosophy of the Engaged Michigan principles: “To cultivate practices of inquiry and empathy that enable us to ask genuine questions, engage thoughtfully and rigorously with a wide range of perspectives…” This is a deeply relational learning goal, centering on experience as the point of learning (inquiry and empathy) and human connection its fruit (engage…with a wide range of perspectives). It also creates a platform for honoring the first Principle of Civic and Community Engagement: the “Principle of Recognition” which calls us to recognize and seek “the expertise and knowledge within the community” (Engaged Michigan, n.d.).

1.2 “We develop connections …that allow us to create, communicate, preserve and apply knowledge, art and academic values to the challenges of the world”

The natural outcome of effective empathetic, community-based learning is a mutual benefit, a growth flowing from the rich connections between bodies of experience. This ties in intimately with the groundwork of writing as a social act. The University of Michigan is promoting what Mirra (2018) calls “Critical Civic Empathy,” an empathy motivated by “mutual humanization” and “orientated towards social/political action.” Learning becomes a lived experience, and again drawing on Olesen, is both individual and collective. Note that the language is participatory and actionable.

The second and third Principles of Civic and Community Engagement ask the learner to avoid unidirectional change. The Principle of Respect demands that “Community members must be recognized as having agency in their own decisions in their own community…U-M scholars must be aware of power structures, both hidden and explicit, that might influence community members and U-M scholars” (Engaged Michigan, n.d.). The implications of respect in academic work are far reaching. A community member might be studied, their data analyzed, and then their contribution published for an academic audience, who then may go on to use that research to spearhead community-driven change. This cycle is inherently driven by the scholar, the university remains a fulcrum of power, and even a cursory reflection on this model reveals the potential dangers of colonialism and saviorism. The Principle of Respect attempts to decentralize the agency in university-based work. At the most basic level, this may include member checking, ensuring that the voices of any stakeholders in the work are satisfied with their representation. More radically, the methodology of Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is increasingly used in community health fields in deference to the ethics of such work. CBPR “represents a shift from regarding individual community members as research subjects to engaging community members and the organizations that represent them as research partners” (Shore et al., 2008 p. 2). Israel et al., explain CBPR as partners contributing their expertise to enhance understanding of a given phenomenon and to integrate the knowledge gained with action to benefit the community involved (1998). The principles published by Engaged Michigan situated themselves within the University of Michigan, and most work at the university is conducted in that mode. But this scholarship invites a multidirectional perspective where the “we” includes communities and scholars, and in fact creates little distinction between the two, instead treating the university community as one of the partners working towards the shared goal. The natural consequence, then, of the Principle of Respect is the Principle of Equitable Partnership “which must be founded on relationships and mutual benefit” (Engaged Michigan, n.d.). This final principle demands that “All members of a partnership must see and understand the evolving benefits to themselves, their organizations and their communities, … and have effective recourse in case of concerns. They must have full visibility to the motives, needs, and concerns of others, and must be mutually accountable to meet these needs and address these concerns” (Engaged Michigan, n.d.). These conceptual frameworks pair with the theory of writing as, “a process born of and manifesting human relationships " (Sperling 1996). There is a great deal of scholarship about writing and reading as a communal experience (Bazerman, 2012), which is reflected in the inherently collaborative nature of this dissertation.

1.3 Moving from “The challenges of the world” to an Asset-Based approach

A central tenet of critical pedagogy, and critical theory generally is a focus on change, and that often invites a focus on specifically changing the state of some sort of deficit, but this work attempts to bring the philosophy of Assets Based Community Development to critical engagement. For example, Horkheimer defines a primary goal of Critical Theory as “emancipation from slavery” (1972 p. 246). Freire, one of the foundational theorists and practitioners of critical pedagogy, emphasizes pedagogy as a means to challenge oppression and colonization (1972). Malot describes critical pedagogy as working “against the hegemony for social justice or humanistic revolution,” intertwined with revolutionary acts and finding ways to reform and transcend an “increasingly unjust and cruel world” (p. 156). The focus on change through difficulty is found in these examples and across many other areas of critical scholarship. The deficit mindset is apparent in University’s language of “challenges” and more broadly the orientation of “change” as a primary goal.

An Asset-Based approach shifts the goal from changing to building. Instead of deficits, oppressions, and injustices, it focuses on relationships, preexisting resources and strengths, agency, and opportunity. This approach originates from the community development work of Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), who found that a traditional need-based approach (focused on "fixing" or "changing" unsatisfactory approaches) to interventions in communities in the United States could be detrimental. Anti-deficit and anti-otherizing language is already encouraged in broad range of scholarship, and the asset-based approach offers a concrete substitution for the deficit mindset. McDonald calls it "half-full glass"-approach to intervention (McDonald, 1997, 115) creating and rebuilding relationships between individuals, associations and institutions (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993, 7).

It is worth emphasizing that an assets-based approach is not a philosophy of pure positivity. A key premise is that humans are not deficits, and they exist in ecosystems which contain both assets and deficits. There may still be problems, there are still victims of institutions and systems, but it becomes secondary and asks us to think about what we are working towards, rather than working against. The following sections explain, in brief, how learning from communities, respect and equal partnership, and assets-based thinking manifest in the four projects that make up this dissertation work.

1.4 The Three Principles at work with the Medieval Senses

"Touching Wounds with Thomas: The Sensory Experience of Healing in the *Cursor Mundi*," attempts to comprehend how we might understand embodiment and the senses in the Middle Ages through a close, sympathetic reading of the 14th century *Cursor Mundi*. Catherine Brown, in a forthcoming manuscript about Iberian scribes, writes "It's a worthy experiment to take their labor seriously and allow [the manuscript] to remake us as readers if it wants to"

(2023). This work offers the contribution following this experiment and taking the labor of the *Cursor Mundi* poet seriously and offers room to let them speak, and have the explicit intentions of the manuscript unfold.

David Matthews offers that "in medieval studies we are always only dealing with representations of the Middle Ages, not delivered presences" (2006 p. 17). To Matthews, medieval studies is a form of medievalism—a helpful term for describing the intersection between the realities of two different time periods and their constructions. Such an awareness is vital for a topic like the senses, which have a rich, changing, cultural existence in all human history, a kind of universality of experience, and yet such widely varied modes of interpretation based on its contexts, even when one of those contexts is not temporal. The sheer weight of the term "medieval touch" demands medievalism to conceptualize the conjunction of both its alterity and its familiarity, and because of its usefulness, variations on medievalism's approaches, whether acknowledged or not, have begun to appear across disciplines. In *Medievalism: A Manifesto,* Utz writes "reception studies, feminism, women's studies, and medievalism studies...have managed to challenge the pastism of Medieval Studies, whose practitioners still prefer to see an insurmountable otherness in medieval culture" (2017, p. 82).

The invocation of medievalism, with its associations with cosplay and Lord of the Rings, may seem out of touch with a work that primarily engages with the work of medieval Studies. However, medieval touch as the historicist understands it cannot survive the modern touch. Once it leaves its pre-sixteenth century confines, its annihilation begins an even more noticeable change than perhaps a text would undergo. Matthews describes this phenomenon as a conflict of *survival* and *retrieval:*

> “Medieval studies today operates with a tacit criterion that is engaged in a pure investigation of the surviving artifacts of the Middle Ages and it therefore regards medievalism as an unholy form of retrieval and reinvention... Survival would imply… leaving medieval artifacts where they are, letting them erode like so many natural features. Where the medieval artifact only survives, there is no medieval studies.” (Matthews, 2011, p. 714)

The discourse on medieval touch is inseparably bound with its mediation, the mediation which the present-day scholar imposes by necessity. Situating touch in the broader context of medievalism increases the opportunities for critical self-awareness. Without projecting manipulations for our modern, without the hubris of thinking the real, factual medieval is accessible, this project can enter into a “third space” where the construction of touch happens.

Homi Bhabha's concept of “third space” was not intended to be a primarily temporally entwined space, but rather a geographic (political) and linguistic space where construction could be new, rather than belonging to one or the other.

> “It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew” (Bhabha, 2004 p. 55).

The third space can destabilize the homogenization of medieval sensory cultural, hierarchical systems, and body-spirit dualism. Most importantly, it becomes a place where the medieval-modern binary itself can resist a hierarchical structure. It is “a space that can accept and regulate the differential structure of the moment of intervention without rushing to produce a unity of the social antagonism or contradiction” (Bhabha, 2004 p. 25). Touch, as it emerges in this project, is translated from the text into an intercultural space which is not confined to a single temporal moment. In the third space, touch can be co-constructed with the medieval text and the twenty-first century scholar.

In the context of sensory history, which we have already seen connected with cultural history, the third space also brings the epistemological importance of sensory knowledge. Textual interpretation suffers without close attention to sensory epistemologies. As Daniela Hacke explains:

> [Bhabha's] approach also draws attention to the question of the actors having the sensory experiences, acquiring knowledge, and processing and recording what they have experienced. In this respect, a sensory history perspective, which links forms of perception to the acquisition of knowledge, addresses the epistemological core of colonial writing (2017, p. 169).

I argue that, while certainly not synonymous, colonial writing bears important analogic resemblances to medieval writing. I build off Carol Syme's argument to this effect: "Colonization begins with the seizure of un-Modern property facilitated by the legal and moral arguments of Modern intellectuals" (2011, p. 715). Whenever we do our work, we can never write from the un-Modern perspective, and leave behind the victims of whatever impositions we wish to inflict. Construction within the third space is necessary whenever cultural difference intersects with a privileged commentator. Such is the case when this project examines the medieval text—an artifact whose first creators (rather than translators and transposers) and eyewitnesses of its contexts can no longer speak for themselves.

1.5 Directed Self Placement Evaluation--Communities within the University

Directed Self-Placement (DSP) refers to an increasingly utilized approach to writing placement in both two- and four-year institutions that both informs students of their writing course options and expectations at their institution and allows them to decide for themselves what course best fits their needs. One reason for its popularity as a method is its purported ability, when locally designed and maintained, to serve as a more equitable and antiracist form of writing placement than some alternatives. By its very nature, Directed Self-Placement is an attempt to decentralize power from the university and give autonomy back to the students who are using placement services.

In order to test these claims, (In)Equities in Self-Placement examines five years of placement, enrollment, and GPA data from first-year writing (FYW) classes. Descriptive data analysis reveals that DSP as locally administered has different social consequences for domestic minoritized students and women than for non-minoritized students and men. The data also reveal that student non-conformity to DSP placement recommendations does not result in significant underperformance in FYW. It would appear that at the University of Michigan "an admitted student is a qualified student."

DSP often culminates with general advisors facilitating students' final classroom choice. Despite the frequency with which advisors are employed to aid with DSP and the influential position advisors hold in being perhaps the only individual students interact with in this process, the scholarship on DSP and placement has typically portrayed advising sessions and advisors as homogenous or not worthy of deeper examination. "From Gatekeeper to Informant: The Roles of Academic Advisors in Aligning Directed Self-Placement" seeks to correct the near complete exclusion of advisors' voices from the DSP scholarship in order to highlight the need for more careful consideration of the challenges involved in creating an equitable placement process. In doing so, this article demonstrates the multifaceted approaches and beliefs that advisors bring with them into the DSP process and how their input shapes student decision making, toward unanticipated ends.

The evaluation of the DSP started with stakeholders--it started with conversations with the individuals who used the DSP: instructors, students, and advisors. The asset-based approach advises looking to all stakeholders as experts and collaborators, fully utilizing their assets, so my contribution to this decision was informed by the principles and asset-based development scholarship, relying on the input of the stakeholders to guide the inquiry of the research. We organized a meeting with academic advisors and asked "What do you want? What are your questions about the DSP? What would be useful for you to know?" The only theoretical or internal criteria that was discussed amongst the research team was disparate outcomes for underrepresented students and non-underrepresented students. Aligning with the Principle of Equitable Partnership, internal reports were circulated to ensure "mutually accounta[bility] to meet these needs and address these concerns" (Engaged Michigan, n.d.). The decisions to match DSP outcomes with grades in future writing courses and time to graduation were spurred by the advisors' insight that students asked these questions, and they were unable to give them answers. Not all of this data/input (for example, the usefulness of the DSP essay to instructors and students) made it into the articles, but they shaped the new directions for the DSP. By learning from these communities, we applied knowledge to address a "challenge of the world."

Our team was hyper-aware of deficit language and attitudes when speaking about students and their interests. We discussed our language explicitly: the use of "transitional course" and "underrepresented minority" for example. We included evaluative criteria governed by the student's choices--were our DSP recommendations aligning with actual student course choices? Our team had a heavy background in education scholarship, which made avoiding deficit-mindset about students somewhat natural. Harder, however, was an asset-based mindset with advisors. The project was definitely framed with advisors in a position of expertise, in alignment with the Principle of Recognition. The paucity of scholarship that includes advisor voices highlights the importance of recognition and the unfortunate tendency to overlook those who play such a huge part in the placement decision process. In the evaluation of advisors' interviews, however, it was difficult to avoid a critical focus on gendered language, seek out racialized attitudes, or discount priorities that did not align with that of our research team. One of my primary contributions to the advisor article was carefully seeking out any representation or critical attribution that could not be shared with complete transparency. This rewriting, since it was an attitude shift as much as a language shift, shaped the conclusions of the article and the project as a whole to be a collaborative relationship with advising.

One of the main points of critique came in examining how advisors evaluated writing, and how it differed from the expectations and language used within the English department. In the interests of equitable partnership and recognition, I framed the problem in "misalignment" which could primarily be solved by communication. Rather than demanding a shift in perspective in belief from the English Department or advising, our article recommends communication and more communication. It concludes: "In any design or redesign efforts of DSP instruments, advisors should be recognized by administrators and scholars alike as an important part of that process and given intentional, thoughtful attention." It is, in short, a call to action in the direction of equitable partnership.

1.6 Community-Engaged Writing Project--Connecting beyond the University

"A Developmental Approach to Institutionalizing Community Engaged Learning: English 126 Evaluation," is an evaluative administrative report. English 126 began in 2018 as an effort in the English department to support investment in community-engaged work, and for students to learn engagement practices rooted in social justice and mitigate inequities. I was one of the first instructors involved in this process, and in 2019, helped form a formal collaboration between the English Department Writing Program (EDWP) and the Ginsberg Center as part of its commitment to ethical practice. The Ginsberg Center staff helped the EDWP define the course goals, which I drafted, and offered training, consultations, and resources for instructors in alignment with the Ginsberg mission: "to steward equitable partnerships between communities and the University of Michigan in order to advance social change for the public good" (The Edward Ginsberg Center for Community Service and Learning, n.d.). Ginsberg staff helped pair instructors with community partners in their network and supported those relationships, making sure the courses responded to *community-defined* priorities.

Two to four classes of English 126 have been taught each semester. Each summer, Ginsberg has offered training to new English 126 instructors and matched new partners. Instructors and partners have come up with class projects to benefit their students and partners. Three years and a pandemic later, a research team comprising both English department and Ginsberg Center scholars has reached out to community partners, instructors, and students to see if equitable partnership and positive social impact were indeed the fruits of this course.

In brief, our research team has found that the training and format of the course have led to positive relationships between instructors and community partners. Partners also love working with students and enriching their learning experiences. Students find the class a valuable learning experience and speak glowingly about the class as an opportunity to engage in “real” change. However, we have also found that the course is a time-consuming commitment for both instructors and community partners, sometimes causing undue burden. And for community partners, this time commitment often comes with little tangible benefit—a student-created deliverable that is only marginally useful to the mission of their organization.

The practical skills of qualitative and quantitative research that helped make the evaluation project possible are less important to my scholarship than its central method--letting the research participants (community partners) and research beneficiaries (the Ginsberg center and the EDWP) shape our inquiry. This method is rooted in the Principles for Civic and Community Engagement (Engaged Michigan, n.d.). Quite a number of community-engaged courses take place at the University of Michigan without putting the principles at the forefront. Because of its benefit to students and the attractiveness of creating social change through pedagogy, service-learning courses are often advocated by departments or spearheaded by instructors. The Ginsberg Center helps educate students, faculty, and external community partners in the best methods for creating equitable partnerships with the least harm. The design of the course was informed by Mabry’s (1998) findings that simply adding a service-learning component to a course not only fails to serve community partners but also can create confusion and frustration in students. My work of inviting the Ginsberg Center into the English Department Writing Program’s service-learning initiative was designed to mitigate, or even avoid, this problem. Both the course objectives and the training attempted to frame English 126 as a unique approach to writing instruction that allowed students to interrogate and explore what it means to write for different purposes and audiences, while simultaneously creating a mutually beneficial relationship for community partners.

From the development of learning objectives to the systems of support and accountability for instructors, English 126 is designed to represent a social-justice approach to community engagement and informed by Critical Service Learning (Grain & Lund, 2017; Mitchell & Chavous, 2021). Mitchell (2008) describes Critical Service Learning as containing three key components: a social change orientation, working to redistribute power, and developing authentic relationships -- all of which should be integrated through active reflection that ties together the academic and community components of the course. Not only do all new instructors of English 126 not only read and discuss Mitchell's CSL article through the Ginsberg training but also learn to apply CSL through reflection prompts and best practices for equitable partnership development. The structure of the course is predicated on a relationship between the instructor and community partner, who together decide how they can be of benefit to each other. Partners are never framed as deficits--vacuums of need which students and instructors attempt to fill--but rather as generous experts in their field (knowledge of a community, organization, or service) who are there to teach and collaborate.

The evaluation of English 126 was built around the three principles, particularly that of mutual benefit. Was it being achieved? The inquiry, and the lack of attention on students, was informed by Tryon et al., (2008), who pointed out that many scholars recommend short-term service-learning solely on the basis of its impact on students without questioning the impact of the course on community partners. They diagnosed several common challenges associated with short-term service-learning through open-ended interviews with 21 staff from small- to medium-sized community organizations A number of structures were built into the English 126 program to mitigate some of the problems that Tyrone et al., found in their study (2008) such as burdensome time investments, ethical concerns which arise from asking students to work directly with vulnerable community members, limited capacities for supervision and administration, and project management logistical difficulties.

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Chapter 2 Touching Wounds with Thomas: The Sensory Experience of Healing in the Cursor Mundi

The *Cursor Mundi*'s Thomas is the protagonist in two narratives of disbelief. In the first, Thomas is the unbeliever who comes to believe through the sense of touch. He does not get to see the resurrected Christ along with the other apostles. Without this visual experience, Thomas becomes full of doubt and wanhope—theological despair—and demands to feel Christ's wounds as an assurance. Christ submits lovingly to Thomas's touch. As Thomas feels and sees the wounds, his faith is strengthened and wanhope overcome—he acknowledges that it is Jesus in front of him and his trust in Jesus is restored. In the second narrative, Thomas is the believer who helps others believe through a visible sign. Thomas becomes the only apostle to witness the assumption of Mary into heaven, and the other apostles do not believe in the assumption until Thomas shows them the girdle of Mary. In Thomas's story, we see the sense of touch offering multiple overlapping purposes: it is expository in providing empirical evidence; it is relational in bringing Thomas closer to the holy figures Mary and Jesus; it is healing to Thomas's sinfully wounded soul. Touch is the unique bridge that lets the fault of Thomas's doubt become an instrument of his belief and faith. The influence of touch also extends beyond the narrative, working in conjunction with the love of Jesus and Mary to be a healing balm to the poet and his readers.

The reading of Thomas in this article follows the implication of Thompson's claim that the Cursor Mundi is a "coherent" or perhaps more accurately, consistent, narrative with clear intentions stated in its prologue and accomplished in its body. The prologue offers the reader a deeper relationship with the Virgin Mary, to whom the work is dedicated, as a replacement for earthly paramours. The prologue also frames the Cursor as a nobler replacement for secular romance, yet one that retains all the excitement those worldly texts may offer. Most scholarly interest in the Cursor Mundi has been linguistic, but its narrative is rich and diverse (Barootes, 2018; Witalisz, 2001; Kivimaa, 1972). Ernest Mardon calls it "the most comprehensive poetical treatment of all the important events in the religious history of the world written in the vernacular during the late Middle Ages... the first long, complete poem on a religious topic written after the Norman Conquest in the English language" (Mardon 1970). The Cursor Mundi's 30,000 lines of engaging narratives of biblical history, devotional material, and theological commentary are offered to both men and women (Cursor line 882), learned and unlearned, for listening or reading (line 25). As Thompson notes, despite its length, the work is quite scholarly and adheres to its purpose consistently throughout. The formulaic construction of the poem was "designed to stand daily close scrutiny by university-trained clerks," (Thompson, 1998, p. 8) but this structure also contributed to its popularity as an orthodox text to teach and read, giving it merit in the eyes of clerical authorities while still retaining its accessibility. I look at these pastoral intentions of the prologue, directed to a broad flock, to frame the two Thomas narratives and his experience of the senses. Touch is presented to the reader as a complex act, and touching the divine as an achievable goal. The narrative offers the reader belief, healing from sin, and a deeper relationship with Jesus and Mary as both an effect of touching and reading about the touching.

Thomas's two expository narratives show touch as a complex act. In the first narrative, Thomas deems sight of Jesus's body insufficient evidence of his resurrection, and in the second, Peter deems touching the girdle insufficient evidence of Mary’s assumption. The senses are more than simple empirical evidence of material or spiritual realities, otherwise Thomas and Peter would not need different senses to confirm the verbal reports. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht establishes that “there had to be something about the role of the human senses in the Middle Ages that was profoundly different from the ways in which modern cultures relate to their material environments” (Gumbrecht, 2008). The words of the lexical field “touch” were metaphorically more productive in the medieval period than they are today, and thus Thomas’s narrative moments demonstrate the ways sensual perception provokes and interacts with a spiritual response.

Thomas’s touch is also offered as a means of conversion and healing through the reader’s contact with the story--but while the reader knows Thomas touches the wounds of Christ, the reader cannot touch Christ in the same way. Thomas’s didactic purpose seems ambiguous. There is an ironic spatial and temporal distance between Thomas and the reader; he has Christ in front of him in human form, readers do not. How should the reader be believing and touching? In the layperson’s life, they may receive the body of Christ through sight in ocular communion, believe in the resurrection through the negative visual evidence of the empty tomb, and have faith in the Eucharist through hearing the implausible narratives of its miracles (Justice 2012). Is Thomas’ touch a cautionary tale against lack of faith, since Jesus seems to contrast Thomas’s example with the “blessed” who “have not seen and yet have believed"? (John 20:29) Or is it a positive exemplar, demonstrating the means to come close to the Lord through the senses? Glen Most describes the various receptions of Thomas’s doubt and his insistence on a physical confirmation citing Origen, Ambrose, and John Chrysostom among others:

> The polyvalence of Thomas's attitude and character, as presented by John, is clearly felt to be intolerable by much of the tradition. So it tends to be simplified in one direction or the other. Either Thomas is very good indeed, and is a model for what we must do and be in our lives....or he is very bad indeed and is a negative example teaching us what we must at all costs avoid (Most, 2005 p. 143).

Mize, commenting that the Cursor Mundi's Judas is a similarly complex case, says that an exemplar "must begin from some point of possible identification such that readers can recognize the case's relevance to their own circumstances and range of potential behaviors" (Mize, 2010 p. 81). Judas is a clear negative exemplar, but Thomas remained an apostle and went on to be a missionary to India. Thomas is dynamic because he models conversion; he offers touch as one possible means to redemption and intimacy with God. All readers can identify with an experience of touch, and touch can be a morally ambiguous act. Thus, the narratives offer readers a way to touch God (a morally acceptable goal) and outcomes, such as healing sin and intimacy with God, that would indicate the touch was positive.

The reader has no literal application for touching, but the sacraments offer a means to touch the divine, though in a different form than Jesus's tangible, resurrected body. Applying an incarnational and sacramental theology as a hermeneutic guide can close the distance between Thomas and the reader, mitigating the need to decide between the symbolic and the actual, the narrative and the allegoric. Thomas's touch is consistently a redemptive act that changes him from unbelief to belief. Sacramental culture, in which outward realities can not only represent but enact spiritualities, complicates the spiritual/physical dichotomy. Coolman describes the effect of the visible mediating the invisible—"Per visibilia ad invisibilia"—as "a theological pedagogy that fostered a certain symbolic mode of thought and a multilayered way of seeing reality" (Coolman, 2015 p. 203). Gail McMurray Gibson notes the "ever-growing tendency to transform the abstract and theological to the personal and concrete" as both were "the general characteristic of mind in the late Middle Ages" and "the center of raging controversy (Gibson, 1989 p. 7)." Beckwith situates Christ's body at the center of the controversy (Beckwith, 2016 p. 7). The body Thomas and his readers experience is a key point of tension, both intended for the individual person and universal in the Church, functioning in the historical past and the lived present and manifested in Eucharistic physicality as a host and as spirit-God. Beckwith also describes the tension that personal ownership of Christ's body and, by extension, theological realities could threaten the orthodoxical order. Putting aside the controversy for a moment and accepting the relationship between abstract and concrete as at least one possible orthodoxy, religious texts could offer an integrated reading, and at least some readers were probably looking for it.

The reader also had access to divine touch through sight. Thomas has both a tactile and visual relationship with Jesus and Mary. The senses of touch and sight are often atemporally universalized as a human experience, but to distance from the intimacy and ingrainedness of the cultural context of one's own senses and understand it from another time is almost insurmountably difficult. The eye makes a physical connection between lover and beloved, perceives beauty, and causes wounds. Medieval optics relied on the theory of extramission, tracing back to Plato's Timeus. Not taking into account its various forms, the theory of extramission explains sight by eye beams emitting from the eye, touching the perceived object, and then returning the vision to the seer. This "touch" grants the eye agency beyond seeing; two beings can be united through the physical touch of vision. The incarnational eye is both an eye of the body and an eye of the mind, so it functions as the organ of understanding for other sacramental realities, such as love, which also has simultaneous physical and spiritual aspects.

Through this loosely interpreted scientific causation, sight can make love, create love-sickness, satisfy want, and cause swoons. Most importantly, the sight of the beloved can wound, bind, or somehow change the lover. As Biernhofff explains, “Vision in the medieval world did not leave the viewer untouched or unchanged” (Biernoff, 2002 p. 136). Sight and touch, then, do not necessarily operate as discrete senses in medieval narratives, and yet some distinction is drawn because sight is explicitly insufficient for Thomas for Thomas to believe.

The narrative also offers readers a touch, or at least the effects of touch, through the reading of the narrative itself. Relating to the paradox of Thomas’s experience offers the reader a share in the healing, the revelation, and the relationship unfolding in the narrative. If both sight and touch play active roles in the readers’ prayer and religious testimony, and Jesus says that those are blessed who do not see and yet believe, does this bar the practitioner from being part of the “blessed?” How much is Thomas’s touch of the incarnate, resurrected Christ an invitation to imitation and how much is a symbol? A reader could be supposed to accept, or learn without questioning, theological realities expressed through the most quotidian of realities--a kiss, a touch, a piece of bread. Despite the obvious heterogeneities in religious practice and belief in medieval Christianity, Valenza notes that an additional characteristic of the period is a *desire* for unifying principles, a theology that could connect and explain every facet of physical and spiritual life (Valenza, 2009 p. 1). The interplay of tangible and intangible interacts with a desire for integration and unity; the outward actions, meditations, touchings, the acts of the mass, happen in conjunction with the spiritual realities. When touch happens in spiritual contexts, has the Lord as its object, or leads to sin or salvation, it serves as the visible means of encountering the deepest, most important reality of God. This renders the Thomas story extremely complex and multilayered. Employing an incarnational model of thought, Thomas, in the visible world, touches a wound of the incarnate Christ; but the act of Thomas, an interaction between a man and an incarnate God, is universalized both by readers encountering the narrative in the Cursor Mundi and by believers who interact with Christ's body in the Eucharist.

2.1 The First Narrative: Disbelieving Thomas Touches Jesus' Wounds

The first narrative reveals to the reader how touch, even a touch coming from a place of sin and woundedness, is a means to healing and intimacy. The narrative goes through the invitation of Christ, the touch, and the healing that happens to the sin-wounded soul. Thomas did not believe the Lord had risen and said, "For thing þat i mai here, Mai I trou he up-risen is, Til I mai se and fele his fexs, þe thirles bath o hand and fete And of his side þa wond wete; Quen I ha graped þir wit hand þe soth þan most i vnderstand" (*Cursor* lines 18684-18690). Then Jesus, in order to mend all suffering, let Thomas put his hand in at his side. In this scene, Thomas is invited to put a hand into Jesus's wound, and the reader is likewise invited, by the demonstration of Jesus's mercy, to come close to Him while still sinful and be healed. Because of touch, any wounds in Thomas and the reader become a means to holiness and love even when sin is clearly present.

The poet begins the story of Thomas by explaining why Thomas was excluded from seeing Jesus with the other disciples—Jesus wanted to have a model for generations to come who begins in doubt and woundedness but ends in trust and belief.

> Iesus him kidd til þaim all neu
> To frest of þai in trouth war tru,
> þair mistruing for to misprais,
> And vte o wan-hope for to rais.

> For son þar was o þat gedring
> þat troud nought wel his up-rising (lines 18671-18676).

Immediately, then, all that happens in Thomas's story is presented as the will of God. Jesus' purpose for interacting with Thomas is explained explicitly; to raise the faithful out of wanhope. Thomas's exclusion ignites his wanhope, so Christ can give him the intimacy of touching him, redeem him from his wanhope, and also free those of the human race who experience Thomas's tale. The work of Christ's revelation is not limited to the apostles, but strengthens the readers' faith too: "bot þair mistrouth, þe soth to sai, Es strenghing of vr trouth to dai" (lines 18677-18678). Readers' doubt, their affliction, attracts the great healer for all of mankind, so all who read the tale today receive not just a theological truth, but a deep commitment of love and devotion (trauþ). "Gret sikernes til us it was, þe mistruing o sant thomas," says the poet (lines 18679-18680). He includes himself with his readers as recipients of "sikernes," a word not only implying peace and security, but also "a means of spiritual safety...freedom from temptation" (Middle English Dictionary, 2001). The word "mistruing" is placed in apposition to silkernes, linking these two contrasting states. Thomas' mistrust benefits the reader. The grace of his story is both preventive by instilling a relationship with the merciful Christ and redemptive in healing wanhope.

In the moments before Thomas touched Christ, he was a sinner, afflicted with wanhope, a "wonde o sin" (line 26596). Wanhope plays into the intertwined function of sinfulness and woundedness that pervades early English literature, carrying both the properties of a sin and of physical malady. The first entry in the Middle English Dictionary defines wanhope as "the theological error or sin of insufficient faith in God's mercy, despair that denies the promise of salvation and divine forgiveness," but other definitions carry a more relational aspect: "lack of belief or trust in God's power or desire to act on one's behalf in time of trials, adversities, etc.," “lack of trust in one’s ability to win or hold a lover, romantic despair” (Middle English Dictionary, 2001). The overlap between the romantic and spiritual implications of wanhope is strengthened by the poem's framing as an alternative to reading romance, as does calling Mary, the alternate paramour, *medicina* (line 905). In many texts, wanhope, like lovesickness, extends beyond mental disposition into visible and symptomatic bodily ills. The donet by Reginald Pecock describes it as one of the “pains” to the soul, along with sorrow, heaviness, fear, shame, ignorance, etc. (Pecock & Hitchcock, 1921). Leahy argues that “the presence of medical language or references in [three medieval texts] sustains their affirmations of sin and forgiveness, or salvation, and that this is achieved by dint of a shared language between the spiritual and medical fields” (Leahy, 2017 p. 181).

Wanhope can be fatal not just through the symptoms of a wounded soul but directly: the despair of wanhope in its most extreme form can be the cause of suicide. A primer teaches us this:

> "y wold y were owt of þis world" / seid he / "y ne rouȝt how sone whan.
> "Sey nought so, good son, beware / me thynkethe þow menyst amysse;
> for god forbedithe wanhope, for þat a horrible synne ys
> (Furnivall, *The Babees Book,* 1868).

Even to a little child, wanhope is taught to be a horrible sin. Thomas bears this literally deadly sin, but the Cursor Mundi does not villainize Thomas. The Göttingen MS. contains a short description of Thomas along with a list of the other apostles. It first characterizes him by his sin, and then by his revelation/redemption, and then by the good he did after becoming more faithful—all three are bound together.

> [T]homas, didimus he hight,
> For lang he douted in þe right,

> þat he might noght trou wid ere,
> Wid eie was he mad lele truere.

Having established Thomas's sin, the narrative introduces the demand for touch that will lead him to redemption. Touch's close association with woundedness makes it the most redemptive sense. Thomas has a big ask--to confirm Jesus is risen, he wants to *touch* -- all of the things he asks to feel are not Jesus' body whole, but Jesus' body wounded. He focuses on feeling the wounded parts of Jesus' body. Why does Thomas not ask to hear Jesus' voice? To see Jesus' wounds? There is a duality in which there must be both the seeing *and* the touching. Sight alone is insufficient. Here, touch is a necessary means through which to see. Thomas is being asked to see, to confirm his faith through his sight, and yet this is not accomplished through his seeing the wounds, but through touch: "to put his hand in at his side / And for to grope his wounds wide." To an extent, is Thomas's transformation contingent on tangibility? Trust and belief are epistemological states, but Thomas's transition from doubt to belief is analogized with healing through corporeal language. He is in such a state of wanhope that sight alone is insufficient; he needs to touch. His transformation from wanhope to hope is contingent on his sensual, tangible experience of the wounds of the crucifixion. Wanhope is represented as a pit--one is raised out of it into hope. The risen Jesus raises Thomas from the depths of wanhope, and his vehicle of raising Thomas is not his healing touch, but his invitation for Thomas to touch. The narrative presents Jesus as the generous receiver.

Christ's own, physical wounds heal Thomas's wanhope by opening a place of intimacy Thomas can enter. Thomas describes his interaction with Christ's wounds viscerally: he claims that he may not trust in Christ's resurrection until he sees and feels his flesh, the piercings of his hands and feet, and "graped þer wiþ handþe" his wet wounds. There is an entering that occurs--Thomas put his hand into his side. The curious word "grope" coheres the Doubting Thomas narrative across multiple biblical retellings. Though conspicuously absent in Middle English Bible accounts of Thomas, popular retellings prefer “grope” over “feeling”, “handling”, “touching”--any number of other touch words when referring to Thomas. The abstract and metaphorical connotations of grope are intellectual compared to some of the more relational abstractions in the other touch words. In a variety of text types, groping is an act of discovery, easily replaced with “seeking” or “finding.” The image of groping in darkness strongly influences its range of uses, linking it over and over with ignorance and knowledge in the Thomas story. Every Cursor Mundi manuscript uses “grope.” It is used in the Southern Passion (Gropeþ and yseoþ al-so þat, noþer of flesch ne of bone, A gost naþ noþing..þat ich haue y-wis), Piers Plowman (Crist …took Thomas by the hind and taughte hym to grope), William of Shoreham (And þer thomas of ynde, a k[n]owes yfalle…Groped hys holy wounde;) , and Mirk’s Festial (Thomas of Inde helpys me to þe fayth þat wold not byleue, tyll he had hondelet and groped þe wondes of Cryst) (Brown, 1927, line 2096; Langland, 1978; William of Shoreham, 1902; Mirk, 1905). These texts have a pedagogical aspect: Jesus is teaching Thomas to grope, and the grope is an act of learning. This visceral physical act is paired with tactile imagery of flesh and fingers and wounds. Groping is more than a touch, but a touch that brings Thomas out of the darkness and into light, ignorance of Christ to knowledge of his resurrection.

Later in the Cursor Mundi, Thomas is martyred by a spear. Thomas’s spiritual wound is reflected in Christ’s physical wound. Thomas was martyred, “smiten thoru þer wit a sper,” and bear a physical wound mirroring the wound of Christ’s side, which was also inflicted by a spear (line 21103). When Christ was pierced, the spear and its wound were the means by which the soldiers knew Christ was dead, but it also was a wound of sin, blurring the distinction between physical and spiritual causation. For Thomas, piercing and groping the spear wound reveals that

Christ is alive and who he claims to be. Thomas comes into deeper knowledge of Christ, and then his martyrdom becomes an imitatio christi. Here, the wounds become a means by which Christ can know Thomas, but also reach readers. Thomas and Christ share a sin wound, but the reader and Christ share the same sin wound. Bernard of Clairveaux provides insight into the function of the dual spear wounds: “The sword pierced [Jesus’] soul and came close to his heart, so that he might be able to feel compassion for me in my weaknesses” (Bernard of Clairvaux, 1987). A relational, intimate knowing is linked specifically to corporeality. Christ’s wounds are not just a means of healing, but also relational intimacy, inviting the contact of the reader just as he invited Thomas’s contact. Peter Chrysologus writes “For he who willed to be born for us did not want to remain unknown by us; and so he discloses himself in such a way that the great mystery of his merciful Kindness may not become a great occasion of error” (Chrysologus, 2005). Paradoxically, the incarnation, Christ’s carnal self, is the remedy for misunderstanding, doubt, and faithlessness. Revelation and trust in that revelation happens by incarnate means. Readers may hope for external martyrdom like Thomas, but more realistically, they are invited to see their sin wounds as a means to imitate Christ and come to deeper intimacy with him.

Christ and Thomas’s reactions after the event confirm that the interaction is personal, rather than intellectual, about relationship and not belief. Christ offers his side so Thomas will know who he is: “thomas þou fele and se /quer i me-self or noght it be” (lines 18695-18696). Jesus invites Thomas’s inquisitive touch and offers his personal identity rather than a theological understanding of his resurrection. In the context of the wounded Thomas, Christ’s physical presence and love is a more direct cure for wanhope. Thomas has made the transition from being separated from the risen Christ and despairing of God’s love, to a physical closeness. At the moment of the touch, different manuscripts offer different types of Cristological identities. In the

Göttingen manuscript, the poet describes Jesus as "lovingly" letting Thomas touch his side which signifies the interaction as a merciful benevolence bestowed on a beloved. The Cotton reads "Bot Iesus that sli brest wald bete" with Jesus in the position of correction. The Fairfax presents Jesus as rescuer: "But ihesus that alle balis mai bete…" (line 18691). Though they are of different types, every manuscript reveals an aspect of Jesus's identity. Thomas's response isn't one of believing in resurrection or raising, but interpersonal knowledge. Thomas emphasizes Jesus's identity in relationship to himself when he says: "þou art lorde mine. & þou art als my dere driȝtine" (line 18701).

The end of the narrative describing this touch highlights Thomas's seeing and its type, emphasizing its connotation beyond sensory perception--discovery, encounter, and personal knowledge. After Thomas's profession of faith, Jesus says:

> "For þou," coth he, "þe soth has sene,
> Nu þou it wate wit-vten wene
> Bot þa men sal be benedight
> Sal trou in me wit-vten sight" (lines 18703-18706).

Through both the beams of sight emitted from the eye and his reaching fingers, Thomas has entered into Jesus and seen him as he is. The interwoven acts of seeing and touching create the intimacy Thomas needed to know who Jesus is, not only as a man in a body, but as spiritual Lord, as well. Jesus' body is a means of coming to know him in his entirety, not just in his incarnate manifestation.

Thomas's sin of wanhope was transformed to be a means of deep intimacy, trust, and healing, a *felix culpa*. In the tradition of "*felix culpa*"-- happy fault--sins may both be valued and avoided. John Mirk, for example, in his Advent sermon, compares the honor accorded the wounds of a knight, to those of confessed sins: "For ryght as a knyght scheweth be wondys þat he hape yn batayle, yn moche comendyng to hym; ryght so all pe Synnys pat a man hath schryuen hym of" (Mirk, 1905) And Julian of Norwich, describing saints (Thomas included) whose sins have been a source of redemption and healing says: "Sinne is behovely, but alle shalle be wele, and alle shalle be wele, and alle maner of thinge shalle be wel" (1998). Without sin, there would be no redemption, no savior, and by extension, no Virgin Mary. According to Bararba Newman, after Pope Innocent III, this paradoxical doctrine "became a linchpin of orthodoxy" (2013 p. 14)--so well known that it appears in the popular song, "Adam lay i-bowndyn":

> Ne hadde the appil take ben
> the appil taken ben,
> ne hade never our lady
> a ben heueven qwen (Wright, 1856 p. 32).

It is reasonable, then, to read Thomas as a participant in *felix culpa*--experiencing doubt so he can experience Christ's salvation, which would otherwise have been unnecessary. Wanhope is healed not only by revealing the theological truth of the resurrection, but also restoring man's faith in Christ's mercy, thus the poet's claim that Thomas's doubt is "sikernes." The poet first says that Thomas was explicitly called because he would doubt, and coming to believe would lead to preaching in India and would bring help to many others (line 21094). In the same passage, the poet mentions Thomas's passion and mirrors it with Christ's by alluding to the spear. Newman distinguishes between weak and strong forms of *felix culpa*: "in the strong-form *felix culpa* tales, the sinful act itself is rewarded or even commanded by God rather than being a human-instigated affront to God" (2013 p. 16). The origin of Thomas's wanhope bears resemblance to this strong type because Christ singled Thomas out for exclusion. All the other apostles witnessed the risen Christ: "and alle to-geder þai whore / sauf Thomas of ynde allone" (lines 437-438). If this segment is read as a strong form of *felix culpa*, Jesus's intent was for Thomas to experience the wound of doubt, and touch the wounds His own body bore from mankind's sins. Thomas's spiritual wound makes contact with Christ's physical wound. The wanhope becomes the means by which Thomas comes into a twofold intimacy with Christ--a relational, knowledgeable intimacy facilitated by physical intimacy. Thus, being wounded does not bar Thomas from sainthood, but it is a holiness of conversion, of *felix culpa* because it demands the sacrifice of the Savior. Thomas's wound of sin, of wanhope, is healed by entering into Christ's wound. His demand to touch the wound, then, is an act of faith, depending on Christ as the means of his salvation and healing.

Devotional practices surrounding Christ's wounds allow a devotee to pay a similar reverence to Christ's wounds that Thomas did, but usually by means of intermediaries such as images. Speaking of a 15th century woodcut, Vibeke Olson writes:

> The wound, and by extension the body, is a tactile object to be touched and kissed by the devotee who was invited to physically participate and interact with it. The reference to the true measure reinforced the idea that this *is* Christ's wound and Christ's body, not merely an abstracted representation. Touching or kissing this image is, to the believer, the same as touching or kissing the real thing (Olson, 2016 p. 325).

The means by which a devotee could make contact with Christ's wounds may be through a physically manifested intermediary, but it could also happen during prayer in the devotional space of the soul. Influential figures like Augustine and Bonaventure describe corporeal touches occurring in a prayerful space. Through the spiritual senses, the prayerful penitent makes contact with Christ and especially His blood, which cleanses sins.

Wounds have a particular healing connection to wanhope, more than other ailments of the soul. They directly counter wanhope by demonstrating the Lord’s mercy. Christ’s blood flowing from the wounds is “squete” because it manifests the sweetness of His mercy. Bernard of Clariveaux writes: “Through the openings of these wounds... I may taste and see that the Lord is sweet….Where have your love, your mercy, your compassion shone out more luminously than in your wounds, sweet, gentle Lord of mercy?” (1987). Experiential knowledge of the Lord’s mercy--here both touch and taste—counters the wanhope that despairs of His mercy.

2.2 The Second Narrative: Believing Thomas Touches Mary’s Girdle

The Cursor Mundi links the more well-known story of doubting Thomas touching Christ’s wounds with faithful Thomas seeing the Virgin Mary assumed into heaven. In the mirror episode of the assumption, Thomas exhibits knowledge and faith beyond his fellows which shows the full impact of Thomas’s healing. Thomas depicts how one transformed by touch then interacts with the world as a witness and preacher of gospel truths. It also introduces Mary as an object of wholesome love for both Thomas and the reader.

The second narrative offers a second intimacy to Thomas through Marian touch and devotion. Mary drops her girdle down to Thomas, and he takes it to show his fellow apostles. Mary's girdle is closely identified with her body and the most intimate aspects of her motherhood--childbearing and nursing, but still contrasts sharply with the intimacy Thomas experienced with Christ. With Mary there is no body-to-body contact. Instead, the girdle serves as an indirect touch, the work of Mary’s hands coming from Mary’s body, “abowte hure myddel” to Thomas’s body “in his honde” (lines 793 & 797). The girdle’s mediation preserves Mary's status of purity. Gary Waller notes the distance in Marian devotion: “She remains untouchable, causing pain even when most loving. She is at once merciful and solicitous and yet immaculate and unapproachable" (Waller, 2011 p. 46). Mary's physical distance in this scene extends to lay devotion; Mary's assumption left no relics, so objects that touched her were the means by which her power was conveyed. Through treatments of Mary in the various assumption plays and the Marian objects (girdles included) owned by clergy and laity, Waller concludes that "not only Mary's body but her accouterments have a transformative quality" (p. 72).

The circumstances of the second narrative set Thomas apart as a man of superior holiness now that he has touched Christ. He is now granted intimacy with both Christ and his Mother. When Christ came first to the apostles, Thomas alone was away. At the Ascension, Thomas is with the other disciples. And now for Mary's assumption, Thomas is again set apart. He alone sees "a briȝtnesse bi him glide" (line 780). Jesus already transformed Thomas, and now Thomas conveys a physical sign to the other apostles by bringing Mary's girdle to them. The other apostles exhibit some spiritual deficit by admonishing him for not being present, and mourning Mary's death. The contrast between the revelation Thomas received and the (unjust) admonishment emphasizes Thomas's privilege. He alone of the apostles saw the queen of heaven ascend. Thomas, paradoxically, was not somehow lacking in virtue or holiness for coming to the knowledge of Christ's resurrection through touch. He is a chosen apostle--chosen to witness the assumption but also chosen to *not* witness Christ's first appearance to the apostles. The passage itself brings that moment to mind through the apostles' accusation and dismissal of Thomas on the ground that "Thou ne woldest leue, thomas, That oure lord fram deth ras." They ridicule Thomas by saying "Euer art þou bi-hynde." The quality of disbelief was the means by which Thomas was allowed to intimately touch the Lord. The quality of being "behind" was the means by which Thomas missed seeing the Lord, but also what allowed him to see Mary's assumption.

Calling him last, behind, acknowledges that Thomas is following the Lord's injunction that "the last shall be first and the first shall be last" and that "every valley shall be exalted." Thomas's rebuttal affirms his converted humility and holiness because it holds no pride, no boast. His immediate thanks to God that he got to witness such a holy event, that he "sawe hure with flesche & blood," affirms God's goodness and mercy in opposition to wanhope.

The healed Thomas now uses touch as a means of witnessing to the Gospel. In this second narrative, Thomas again asks for a physical sign as confirmation of the event, but this time it is not for himself, but for the other apostles. Thomas begs Mary to "Sende me token þis ilke day, What þinges þat I say may / To myn felawis þer I hem fynde" (lines 787-789). Thomas is a visual witness to Mary ascending, but he knows his verbal testimony is insufficient evidence. When Thomas shows Peter the girdle, Peter affirms the truth of Thomas's testimony based on the physical presence of the girdle:

> Quath seynt Petir, "þat is sothe,
> This seynt sche hure-self wof,
> We dide it on hure in þe beere,
> Wonder me þinkeþ þat it is here" (lines 835-838).

The truth of the event centers around the girdle's physical interaction with Mary and with Thomas. Then Peter demands that they see with their own eyes confirmation of what Thomas has said:

> Go we swiþe in to þe vale,
> To wite þe sothe of þis tale
> That he haþ vs here yseide,
> For it was in þe tumbe ylaide (lines 839-842).

The ambitious pronouns of “*þis* tale,” that “*he* haþ vs here yseide” and “*it* was in þe tumbe” help recall the earlier seeking of Christ in the tomb. Peter’s response to physical affirmation contrasts with Thomas’s. Thomas’s affirmation of Jesus as Lord occurs immediately after the touch. Peter goes to seek more--the sight as well as touch. However, through touching Christ, Thomas was able to see *and* feel, satisfying both senses.

2.3 The Fruits of the Narrative

The Cursor Mundi poet expressed a desire for the reader to also change in the following two ways: at the beginning of the poem, to replace the hearer or reader’s earthly paramours, the paramours of “foly” and “fantum”, with Mary the Mother of God; at the end of the poem, to heal the reader’s wounds. The story of Thomas as set in the poem accomplishes both these ends. We have seen Thomas’s transitions: from distance from Christ to closeness, from wounded wanhope to healed love and faith. In conjunction with other themes of popular devotion, because Mary and Jesus span physical and spiritual existence, their touch and their love are offered as a healing mechanism in both the life of Thomas and the lives of the readers.

At the beginning of the poem, the poet indicates that drawing near to Mary and holding her as paramour will make the reader like her: “Ur dedis fro ur hert tas [take] rote, Quedur thai worthe to bale or bote / For be the thyng man drawes till / Man schal him knaw for god or ill” (lines 43-46). When a man is drawn to Mary, the poet explains, he shall be known for her qualities: unchanging love, loyalty, sweetness, giving Christ his flesh, goodness, truth, pity, love, charity, mildness, meekness without gall, nearness to a needy neighbor, raising the sinful from fallenness (lines 97 & 104). The Marian dedication indicates that Thomas as a didactic figure teaches the sinner to leave worldly loves and draw close to the divine paramour. Thomas’s story should produce the qualities of Mary, and give the lover of Mary “luve hir suette Sun amang” (line 88). Devotional literature and love lyrics had thoroughly commingled by the 14th century (Perella, 1969), which explains why Thomas could come to know Mary through sight alone. After his wanhope had been healed, his eye had an agency beyond seeing. A lover, seeing either an image or the sight of his beloved, and her appearance, once completely material, can strike the heart and mind through an eyebeam. Thomas, simply by gazing on Mary, was able to “touch” her in a relational, bonding, romantic way. By introducing Mary as paramour, the reader broaches the complexity of divine love. The poet describes her love as unchanging and loyal, such as cannot be found on earth, even in the face of his unfaithfulness, yet she takes every reader as lover, and is already mother, impregnated by the Holy Spirit. Emma Maggie Solberg has examined the Mary as an erotic love object, noting the paradox in the N-Town plays of her virginity and purity with the many scandalous names (“scowte”, “quene,” “bolde bysmare”), and the controversy of reception to such bawdy treatments of the Mother of God (Solberg, 2014 p. 192). Mary is not the distant, untouchable Victorian virgin, but a virgin who bore the fruit of the sex act with God himself, suspect in her own time and in the future because she had a child, both God’s lover and mother. The poet’s purpose of making Mary into a lover, requires the reader to accept the complex love that lets every man to take Mary as paramour.

Two healings are invoked at the end of the poem, uniting the poet’s two aims. The poet includes a prayer asking Christ to heal the poets’ wounds: “lorde þou hele woundis mine/ wiþ þi squete medicine.” Broadly, the “medicine” could be Christ’s love, but in the Thomas story, it is contact with the wounds. For the wound of wanhope, at least, Christ’s invitation to touch serves as medicine. Mary, also, is medicine. The poem concludes with “Celi regina sit scriptori medicine,” “The queen of heaven is the writer’s medicine.” The desire that Mary be the reader’s paramour, Thomas’s experience of woundedness and contact with the Virgin, and then the final invocation of Mary as medicine cyclically cohere a narrative of woundedness and healing. If Mary is paramour, she has the ability to heal the lovesickness of all her devotees by her reciprocation. She also is healing the readers (and poet) from love of the world and its allures by being part of the narrative that, in its excitement and goodness, should replace popular romance.

For the reader trained to approach devotional reading with the aim of personal transformation, the experience of reading Thomas's story is consistent not only with the purposes stated in the text itself, but also in the life of the reader. The simple act of touch, universal and yet deeply embedded in historical and cultural practices, is a generative point of access for exploring historical implications of medieval narratives. It offers a point of consistency between what, in this case, the poet may have imagined his reader experiencing, the experience of the medieval reader, and the contemporary scholarly reader. A reader seeking a sacramental experience in their devotional reading would not be disappointed--Thomas's story is deeply personal. It is an opportunity explicitly offered to the reader for their benefit. The quotidian experience of touch offers the reader consolation and relationship with the divine figures of Jesus and Mary, since in both narratives their love for humanity, reader included, frames the story. The reader is invited to reflect on and "touch" their own woundedness as a means to touch the wounds of Christ in a real way. While not every reader gets to touch the body of Christ in the same human-shaped form Thomas did, every reader experiences the fault, culpa, that can be the means to their redemption. Touch could, perhaps, be a fraught act, a source of carnality that may be decried in other circumstances, but here the Cursor Mundi demonstrates these overlapping spiritual and material functions of touch which are a means for a person to interact with Christ and his mother. The reader themself, then, is sacramental, because they are an outward manifestation of a spiritual reality. They participate in incarnational theology by perpetuating touching Christ in the tradition of Thomas.

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Chapter 3 (In)Equities in Directed Self-Placement

As the inaugural director of the Gayle Morris Sweetland Center for Writing at the University of Michigan, the lead author of this chapter implemented Directed Self-Placement (DSP) for first-year writing (FYW) in 1999. At the time, Royer and Gilles had recently devised a DSP that they proposed had several benefits over existing alternatives (use of standardized test scores, portfolio assessment, and placement essays): the process gave students agency in selecting FYW courses, which created a better teaching situation; it enhanced students' satisfaction with their courses; it improved completion rates for first-year writing; and it was workable (that is, not excessively expensive or labor intensive) (Royer and Gilles, 1998). Michigan's DSP has been examined and revised several times since it was introduced (Frus, 2003; Gere, Aull, Green, & Porter, 2010, Gere, Aull, Escudero, Lancaster, & Vander Lei, 2013), leaving an excellent record with which to compare recent data. Of course, research has advanced considerably since Frus and Gere et al.'s several assessments of Michigan's DSP. Many scholars have come to agree with Royer and Gilles that DSP is a fairer practice than use of standardized test scores and that student agency is a strong point in favor of DSP (Jones, 2008; Inoue, 2009; Inoue et al., 2011, p. 2; Moos and Van Zanen, 2019, p. 69). "Fairer" than existing alternatives is not, however, the same as "equitable."

Student agency is not always and everywhere experienced in the same way, and DSP is not exempt from the sociocultural impacts of race, gender, sexual identity, language of origin, disability status, and socioeconomic background. Scholars have accordingly called for and published research into how race and gender affect DSP outcomes (Inoue, 2009; Inoue et al., 2011, p. 2; Ketai, 2012; Balay and Nelson, 2012; Moos and Van Zanen, 2019, p. 70; Toth, 2019; Poe, Inoue, and Elliot, 2018, p. 406; Anson, 2012). This article responds to the need for ongoing assessments of equity in DSP by reporting on a quantitative, empirical self-study at Michigan that draws on developments in the field of race and writing assessment. We report on a number of important findings based on data analysis of the percentage of incoming students who receive a recommendation to take a pre-FYW (preparatory) course, the percentage who follow that recommendation, and the FYW grade outcomes for students who do or do not conform to the recommendation.

We find evidence that the DSP process at this institution results in the unintended disproportionate placement and enrollment of domestic minoritized students and women in a pre-FYW course, which means that they take two courses rather than one to fulfill the FYWR. Existing research evaluates similar patterns of inequity by using the legal model of disparate impact analysis (Poe, Elliot, Cogan, and Nurudeen, 2014; Poe and Cogan, 2016; Moreland, 2018; Gomes, 2018; Henson and Hern, 2019). According to Poe et al. (2014), “disparate impact” refers to a specific legal standard, called the 4/5ths rule. Our data do not demonstrate the degree of inequity defined by this legal standard. Instead, we describe the disproportionate impact on racially minoritized as compared with non-minoritized students in terms of effect size, that is, meaningful differences among demographic groups. By the standard of effect size, we discover inequities in the racial and gender impact of the DSP process, although these differences do not always meet the threshold for meaningful difference. The data, moreover, show that Michigan’s DSP placement recommendations do not align with students’ demonstrated ability to pass FYW, which suggests that the recommendations are unreliable. In short, Michigan's DSP results in inequitable social consequences and does not achieve its intended purposes of accurately identifying students who are or are not prepared for FYW. If this instance of DSP is to function in an equitable, reliable, and valid way, significant revisions to its structure and implementation need to be considered. The "Michigan model" has been used as the basis for other schools' versions of DSP, so it is likely that our data analysis might be replicated elsewhere and reveal similar inequities.

3.1 Review of Scholarship

Research into local instances of DSP focus on the validity of the tool (Gere et al., 2010; Gere et al., 2013), students' experiences with DSP (Das Bender, 2012; Ferris and Lombardi, 2020; Saenkhum, 2016), and student outcomes with DSP (Inoue, 2009; Kenner, 2016; Ketai, 2012). DSP has been lauded as perhaps one solution to challenging questions concerning writing placement and institutional power (Inoue 2009; Inoue, 2011; Gomes, 2018; Moos and Van Zanen, 2019). Some scholars have found evidence that DSP can advance equity (Inoue, 2009; Kenner, 2016; Toth, 2018). Indeed, as Toth (2019) neatly summarizes, because of its emphasis on student agency over and against top-down institutional processes, "from its first articulations, advocates have advanced DSP using the language of *rightness*, *fairness*, *agency*, and *choice.*" In interviews with students at a two-year college, Kenner (2016) found that the social justice goals of DSP were clear to students and that the process helped them to reflect on their abilities and grow as writers. Similarly, scholarship examining specific student populations' experiences with DSP has shown some positive results for various racial, linguistic, and gender groups—relative to alternative placement methods (Cornell & Newton, 2003; Inoue, 2009; Reynolds, 2003; Saenkhum, 2016; Toth, 2018). As promising as these findings may be, assuming DSP always functions as an equitable form of placement is problematic, in part because it is impossible to generalize from conclusions about a specific model to multiple institutions with varying models (Bedore & Rossen-Knill, 2004; Ketai, 2012; Toth, 2018). The assessment tool typically includes some combination of questionnaires, essay writing, and advising sessions to help students contextualize their writing experiences relative to the demands of the institution–but different questions, essay prompts, and advising contexts create considerable local variation in DSP. Michigan's current version of DSP involves all of these elements (Gere et al., 2013).

Even with its many varieties, the structure of DSP does not escape the inherent power dynamics of other placement mechanisms (Bedore & Rossen-Knill, 204). More recently, Ketai contends that assumptions about students' individual agency built into DSP make it a "racialized project" (2012, p. 146). From Ketai's perspective, the questionnaires create the illusion of a universalized, decontextualized self that actually represents white, middle-class values and opportunities. She cautions that DSP rhetoric about students' agency in choosing courses "risks sending the message that racial inequalities in writing programs are student-generated" (2012, p. 150). DSP means to offer students choices and agency in course selection, but their decision-making process is constrained by the typical hierarchical structure of the classes they can select into—defined by what counts for credit or fulfills a requirement, how many credits attach to various options, and how long it takes to fulfill requirements (Poe et al., 2018). Additionally, the DSP process can be compromised by students' negative school experiences with respect to racial disparities (Lewiecki-Wilson, Sommers, and Tassoni, 2000; Das Bender, 2012; Schendel and O'Neill, 1999; Toth, 2018). Simply giving students a chance to participate in DSP is not enough to ensure equity.

Toth (2019) encourages scholars to investigate beyond the structure of DSP to examine DSP's effects on equity through disaggregating student outcome data according to race, gender, and other demographics. The findings from studies that have attempted to disaggregate DSP data potentially trouble DSP's claims of equity and fairness. Balay and Nelson (2012), for example, discover that DSP functions to disadvantage African-American and Hispanic students. As more and more institutions elect to use DSP—as evidenced by the spread of DSP practices into both four- and two-year colleges (CCCC Committee, 2014; TYCA, 2016)--the tools we create and the methods we utilize demand assessment of equity for students who have been historically marginalized and deemed unprepared for FYW. Disaggregating data from DSP processes is essential to test whether and the degree to which any particular version is equitable in local contexts.

The present study offers an empirical, quantitative method for analyzing the impact of Michigan's DSP on specific demographic groups, which other schools may use as a model for self-study. As Toth (2019) writes, "there is a pressing need for greater scholarly attention to the experiences of structurally disadvantaged students in the design and validation of DSP" (n.p.). Numerous scholars of writing assessment have in recent years proposed that the social consequences of placement should be part of validity arguments (Ketai, 2012; Poe, 2014; Elliot et al., 2012; Elliot, 2016; Lederman and Warwick, 2018; Poe, Inoue, and Elliot, 2019; Poe, Nastal, and Elliot, 2019). Gere et al. acknowledge this principle in one assessment of Michigan's DSP (2010, p. 168); however, far too often the research neglects to disaggregate data to determine the possible unintended racialized or gendered social consequences of the tool. By calling attention to the inequities in Michigan's highly researched version of DSP, we hope to encourage others to question the equity of their own versions.

3.2 Research Methods and Scope of Study

At present, about four thousand students a year interact with Michigan's DSP instrument before they matriculate in a number of colleges within the university. We analyze data from all students who participated in the DSP between April 2014 and March 2019 (*n=21599).* This study presents descriptive and inferential statistics about student placement within the DSP system. Specifically, this study reports how students navigate the DSP process, with the data disaggregated by the reported identity characteristics of race and gender. Students are categorized as minoritized (Hispanic; Native American; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander) or non-minoritized (Caucasian; Asian) groups. These categories are defined by the university's data transmission office. The study also reports the outcomes of a test for "disparate impact" (no significant results), and a test for effect size (significant, but moderate or small effects).

The data analyzed parallel a previous assessment of Michigan's DSP (Gere et al., 2010): both studies evaluate 5 years of data, and both examine the relationship between placement recommendations, students' course selections, and FYW GPA. Our sample period from 2014-19 is not long enough for analysis of long-term retention and degree completion rates. To understand the student perspective, these statistics were supplemented by a survey of FYW writing students contemporary to the study's writing (*n=448*).

While this study shows clear inequities in outcomes, it does not seek to find causes. Descriptive and correlative data are presented and discussed, but causal estimates would require different methodologies. Therefore, any observed inequities in student outcomes should not be interpreted as being caused by the DSP tool; a number of factors are at play in the effects shown. While this study does not pinpoint one particular cause of inequity, it does find unintended negative outcomes that signal the need for revisions in the instrument.

3.3 The Current DSP Tool

Incoming first-year students interact with Michigan's online DSP by reading a short article or two, writing and submitting an essay in response to a prompt about the reading(s), and answering ten questions (for details, see Gere et al., 2013, pp. 606-10). The writing task is intended to give students an immediate experiential context for thinking about their writing and to contribute to writing program development. The writing is not scored or read as part of the placement process, but it has a potential educational function in that FYW instructors are expected to use the writing samples in their courses, and a programmatic function in that analysis of the essays can be used to improve the writing program. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the DSP essays are not always integrated into FYW courses. To get a better sense of how many instructors integrate the DSP essay into their courses, we surveyed fall 2021 FYW students. Over half of respondents (58.74%) report that the DSP essay was not used or intended to be used in their classes. Further surveys of students and instructors would reveal how representative these data are, but the existing sample is at the least suggestive of a disconnect between the design and implementation of DSP.

The questionnaire that students turn to after submitting the essay focuses on how often they completed writing tasks in high school that will be required of them in FYW courses, presenting them with multiple-choice answers about their experiences and confidence with reading, writing, research, selecting evidence, integrating quotes, peer review, and revision. The more frequently a student reports performing specific tasks in the last two years of high school, the more points they are assigned. The final question asks for a holistic self-assessment (see Figure 1)

1. During your last two years of high school, how often did you write academic essays longer than four pages?
    a. Never
    b. Once or twice
    c. Three or four times
    d. Five or more times
9. How would you rate your proficiency in academic writing?
    a. In need of more development, regardless of discipline or topic.
    b. Average or stronger in some disciplines or topics than others.
    c. Very strong, regardless of discipline or topic.

Figure 1 First and final question and responses on DSP.

The questions are the same for international students, with the addition of a question about students' ability to write in Standard English. An algorithm translates each student's total score on the questionnaire into a recommendation for one of 3 types of course: for domestic students, a total score below 16 leads to a recommendation for pre-FYW, while 17 and above correlates with the standard FYW course (we have not been able to discover the rationale for the individual question scoring or the cut-off score). For those students most comfortable with a language other than English for academic purposes, a score below 16 generates a recommendation for pre-FYW-I, a course designed to orient international students to writing in academic English. The student who follows a recommendation for pre-FYW or pre-FYW-I must later take FYW, so the pre-FYW recommendation is in effect directing students to take a stretch or two-term sequence. Students do not see their numerical scores but learn about their placement recommendations during summer orientation, when academic advisors use the DSP recommendation as a starting point for a discussion about appropriate courses. According to the principle of *self*-placement, students can decide to go directly into FYW, regardless of a placement recommendation for pre-FYW or pre-FYW-I.

The next sections of this argument concentrate primarily on pre-FYW and FYW recommendations for domestic students. Pre-FYW-I enters into the discussion as a small fraction of placement and enrollment figures, and is hard to mesh with larger findings. The data for international students do not include information about race or gender, making it impossible directly to compare international and domestic students. The impact of DSP on international students needs further study.

3.4 Empirical, Quantitative Analysis of Student Data

3.4.1 Enrollment and Conforming to Recommendation

Placement recommendations for the entire student body break down as follows: 1) the vast majority (83.4%) of students are advised to enroll in FYW; 2) a minority (15.2%) of students are advised to take a pre-FYW course before enrolling in FYW; and 3) a smaller minority (1.4%) are advised to take a pre-FYW-I before taking FYW. The current mean 15% placement recommendation for pre-FYW is essentially the same as the rate for an earlier version of Michigan's DSP (see Frus, 2003, p. 185). Gere et al. (2010, 2013) do not report comparable data about recommendations, but the recent data indicate that Gere et al.'s modified DSP has not (at least over the long term) changed the percentage of the student body that receives a pre-FYW recommendation.

Most students who receive pre-FYW placements enroll instead in FYW: 75.8% of the students with pre-FYW recommendations enroll in FYW, while only 24.2% enroll in pre-FYW. Moreover 15.2% of all students are placed in pre-FYW, but only 5.45% of the student body takes the course. In other words, the vast majority of students whose DSP score recommends pre-FYW do not conform to the recommendation. The current recommendation (15.2%) and conformity rates (5.45%) are almost identical with what Frus discovered in 2001-2 data (c. 15% recommendation and 6%, 5.5% conformity rates), despite substantial revisions of the instrument in 2009 (Gere et al., 2013, p. 610). Clearly, factors other than the DSP instrument are at play inconformity to the recommendations.

There is another important factor that needs to be considered in interpreting conformity rates. Michigan has not historically offered as many pre-FYW seats as needed for the students advised to take the course, so student non-conformity is built invisibly into the system. There is no existing data that would allow us to measure this effect, but the match between seats offered and recommendations for particular courses clearly needs to be considered for an assessment of conformity rates to be reliable. At present, we cannot know whether the conformity rate would be higher if more courses were offered. Institutional policy on closing classes that are less than full, and on budgeting each year based on enrollments from the previous year, may well have made it impossible for many students to follow the recommendation for pre-FYW. This reminds us that writing assessment and placement are part of complex ecosystems, and can be impacted by external factors.

An enrollment pattern this consistently contra to recommended placement suggests, on average, students' ability to act as non-conforming agents, choosing their own course in the writing program. However, it also shows that the placement may not be calibrated to student expectations or to academic advisors' independent judgment. (Advisors' roles in DSP have received little attention in existing scholarship; we examine their roles in a separate article.) Gere et al. conclude that a 15-25% conformity rate lacks substantive validity (2010, pp. 162-64), and that judgment applies to the most recent Michigan data. In fact, students appear to ignore placement recommendations in multiple directions, and as we will demonstrate later, non-conformity with pre-FYW recommendations correlates with improved course grades. Those with a recommendation for FYW typically follow it, but some take pre-FYW or pre-FYW-I. Likewise, most students with a recommendation for pre-FYW take FYW instead, but some take pre-FYW-I. The complicated enrollment patterns are visualized in the sankey plot below (see Figure 2).

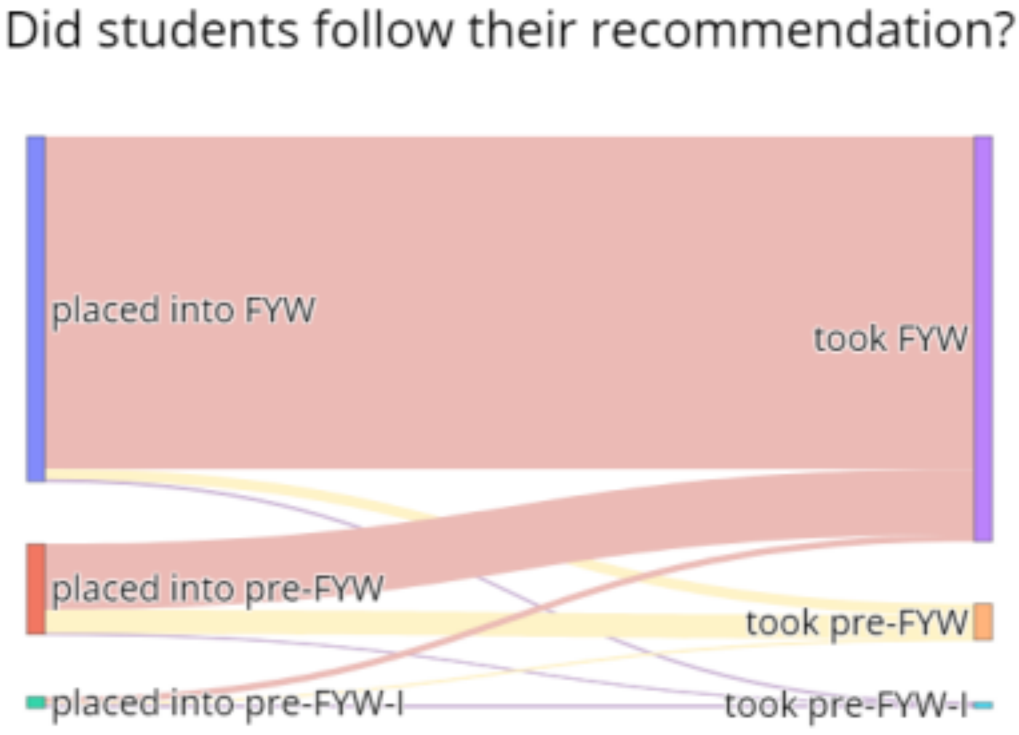

Figure 2 Student enrollment patterns for 2014-2019

Given the high number of students who disregard placement recommendations in multiple directions, the DSP process appears to be marginally relevant to their decision-making. Gere et al.'s (2010) remark on an earlier version of Michigan's DSP is once again relevant: the high "non-compliance rates reflect problems in the … DSP process," indicating that the instrument "could have stronger substantive validity" (p. 164). This conclusion is true today despite serious scholarly efforts to improve validity and conformity (Gere et al., 2010; Gere et al., 2013). From another perspective, the high level of students' non-conformity with DSP recommendations to enroll in pre-FYW may mitigate some of the harm usually associated with mandatory placements into remedial or developmental courses (Godfrey, 2021).

3.4.2 Non-conformity and Student Identities

Although most students do not follow placement recommendations for pre-FYW, different domestic demographic groups are not equally distributed in the placement and enrollment data. Let us start with the racial composition of the domestic student body in the period of study: 12.65% (n=2,733) self-categorized as belonging to underrepresented minority groups (URM), and 81.69% (n=17,644) identified as belonging to non-minority groups (non-URM). We have no data on racial, ethnic, or gender identity for the 5.66% (n=1,222) of students who are international, so they cannot be combined with domestic students in the disaggregated data and must be left out of the following analysis of racialized impact. This is, obviously, a majority-white student body.

The following Figure 3 represents those students for whom pre-FYW or pre-FYW-I is recommended, which is a small subset (15.2%) of the student body. Here the data show that domestic URM students are more likely than non-URM students to receive a recommendation for pre-FYW compared to their proportion in the overall student body. To be specific, 77.44%

(n=2540) of the students who receive a pre-FYW recommendation are non-URM, while 16.86% (n=553) are minoritized.

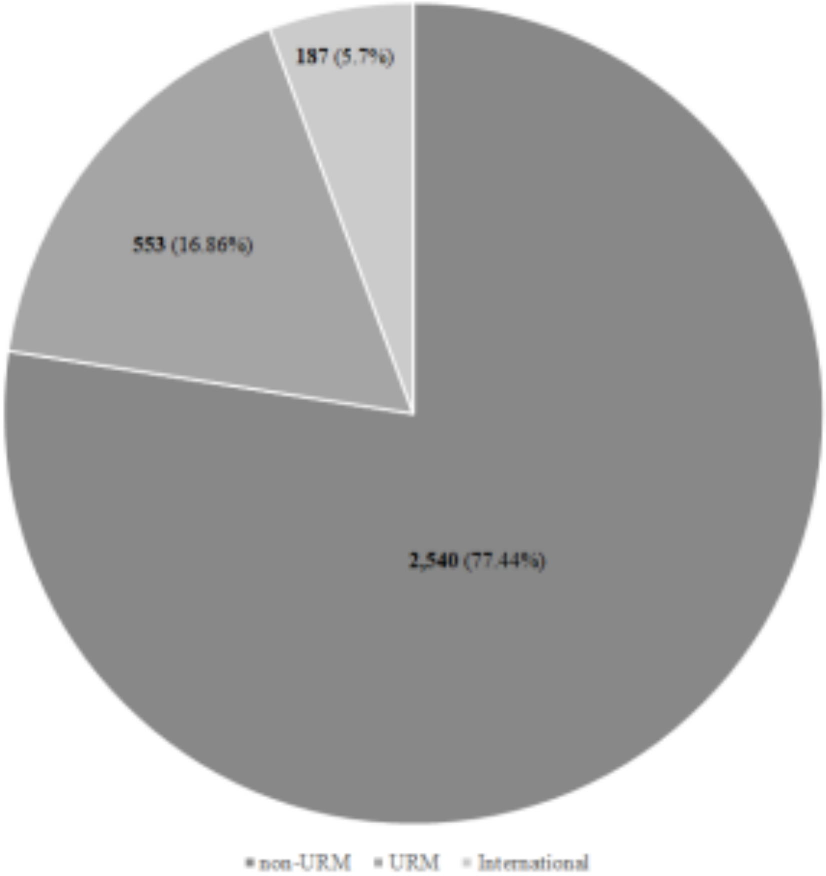

Figure 3 DSP Score Recommends pre-FYW or pre-FYW-I, 15.2% of Student Body

Minoritized students represent 12.65% of the student body but 16.86% of those for whom pre-FYW is recommended (and less than 1% [n=13] of those for whom pre-FYW-I is recommended). Non-URM students make up 81.69% of the student body but only 77.44% of those for whom pre-FYW is recommended. In other words, non-URM students are disproportionately favored in the DSP recommendation. The data could be further disaggregated to discover the proportional impact on specific racial and ethnic groups among minoritized students, but that analysis would not change the presence of racial inequity, the identification of which is the goal of this study.

Despite persistently low conformity rates, domestic minoritized students are not only more likely to receive a recommendation to take pre-FYW, they are also more likely than their non-URM peers to enroll in pre-FYW, as shown in Figure 4.

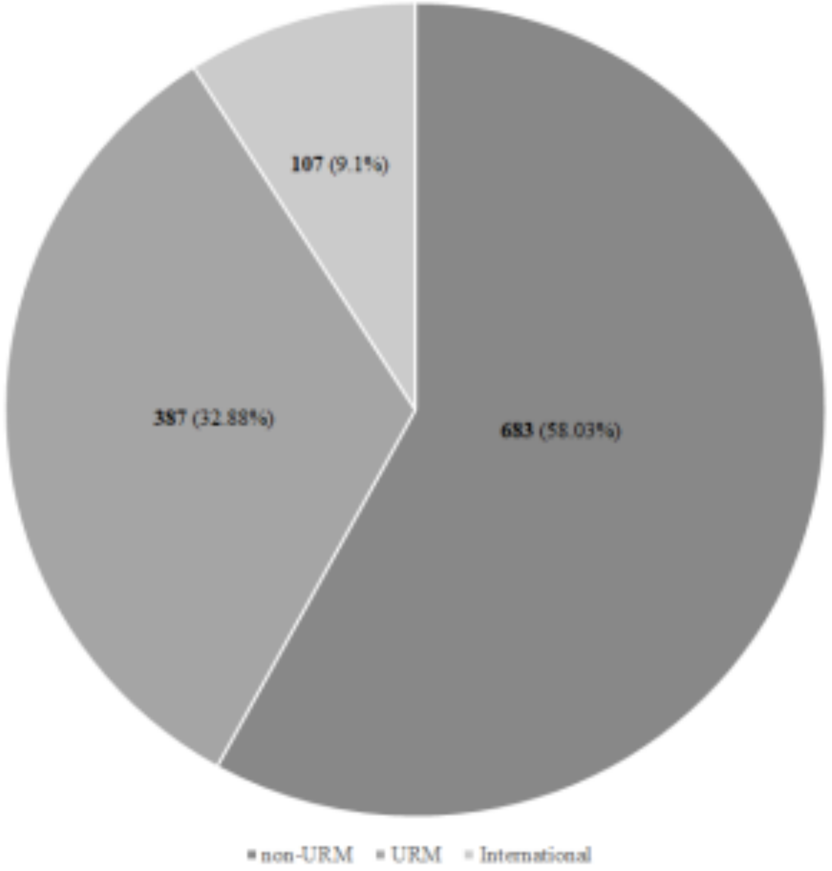

Figure 4 Students enrolled in pre-FYW

Regardless of DSP Score, 5.45% of Population Non-URM students make up 77.44% (n=2540) of those who receive a pre-FYW recommendation, but only 58.03% (n=683) of those enrolled in the course. On the other hand, minoritized students make up 16.86% (n=553) of the group for whom pre-FYW is recommended, but 32.88% (n=387) of the students enrolled in the course. Clearly, non-URM students are more likely than URM students to disregard a pre-FYW recommendation, while minoritized students are more likely to conform to the recommendation. Since minoritized students are both more likely to receive pre-FYW placement and to accept the recommendation, the DSP's function of agency, intended to have a mitigating effect on the placement inequities, is less effective than we would wish it to be. Instead, the student agency exhibited by non-URM students seems to contribute to greater inequalities.

Further, while most students enroll in FYW rather than the recommended pre-FYW, the reverse is also true: a small number of students (1.6%) take pre-FYW when their DSP score recommends FYW. According to the DSP score, they underplace themselves. In this relatively rare situation, minoritized students are again more likely than non-URM students to take pre-FYW: of the domestic students who enroll in pre-FYW when FYW is recommended, the majority (51.56%, n=182) are minoritized, while a bit over a third (38.81%, n=137) are not. Once again, the agency of minoritized students seems to contribute to increased inequity in FYW course enrollments.

The logic of DSP does not anticipate this result; we assume that students will take FYW in preference to pre-FYW if they can, and most do. The data nonetheless suggest that the recommendation for FYW does not correspond to some students' self-assessment and/or with their advisors' judgment, a discrepancy particularly apparent with minoritized students. The data demonstrate that minoritized students are more likely than their non-URM counterparts to receive pre-FYW placements, conform to pre-FYW placements, and not conform to FYW placements. There is an apparent inequity leading to higher likelihood of a minoritized student taking a pre-FYW course, but the data do not explain why this pattern exists or what causes it.

These results are particularly troublesome when we consider the consequences of pre-FYW enrollment we explore later in this paper.

Similar findings have been initially proposed in other fields that have experimented with self-placement techniques (Parent and Rhee, 2019). This finding points toward the complex ecosystem within which DSP is situated. The placement process involves multiple influences apart from the DSP recommendation, including input from peer, academic, and non-academic advisors; students' interest (or lack of interest) in particular course descriptions; the constraints of time schedules; and the availability of seats in a desired course. Many of the numerous negotiations students work through in the pre-enrollment period have nothing to do with their preparation as writers or ability to succeed in the course they select. We should accordingly be cautious about interpreting the decisions of the 1.6% of students who elect to take pre-FYW when FYW is recommended. Still, the racialized bias of these decisions suggests a need for further research into how diverse student groups understand their own agency in the course selection process.

There is also a gender disparity in the 1.6% of students who enroll in pre-FYW when FYW is recommended. Women make up 56.88% (n=12286) of the student body, and men 43.12% (n=9313). These binary designations do not accurately represent the range of students' gender identities, but the available data are nonetheless interesting. By disaggregating data for course enrollments by gender, we find that women (61.19%) are more likely than men (38.81%) to take pre-FYW when they score above the cutoff. The disproportionate representation of women in pre-FYW appears particularly lopsided in light of the fact that women as a group score higher than men in the DSP: the mean for women is 21.30 and for men 20.58. We imagine that intersectional gender, ethnic, racial, and sexual identities are simultaneously at play in students' decisions to take pre-FYW when FYW is recommended, and that is an important topic for further research.

Lastly, we examine effect sizes for the previously observed patterns. The table (Table 1) below shows appropriate measures of central tendency by characteristic variable. For example, the first column in the first row shows that overall 56.8% of students are women. 59.9% of students recommended to take FYW are women, and 52.9% of those recommended to take pre-FYW are women. The third column reports the difference between the control (FYW) and the treatment (pre-FYW). The final column reports the effect size and its significance. In all cases the effect sizes are significant beyond $p < 0.000$. However, according to the What Works Clearinghouse, only ACT score surpasses the 0.25 threshold for magnitude. Interpreting these results, we find that there exist significant effects across student placement based on gender, race, high school GPA, and incoming ACT scores. Specifically, women and non-URM students are significantly more likely to be placed into FYW. However, the magnitude of these effects is small. The only finding with significance and magnitude is that students with high ACT scores are likely to be placed in FYW. The DSP questions are based on writing experience and attitude, intended to capture a broader capacity than a standardized test. Despite fundamental difference in nature, the DSP questionnaire aligns with a particular measure of skill capacity reflected in the ACT.

	All	FYW	pre-FYW	Diff	Effect Size
Women	0.588	0.599	0.529	-0.070	0.141***
High School GPA	3.822	3.828	3.794	-0.034	0.185***
ACT Score	30.126	30.308	29.142	-1.166	0.389***
URM Student	0.131	0.121	0.184	0.063	0.186***
N	15004	12673	2331		

*Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$*

Table 1 Effect Sizes for student characteristic variables based on placement recommendation

In short, descriptive data analysis reveals that the current DSP corresponds to racialized and gendered inequities, which likely replicate and reinforce existing social and economic hierarchies. The vast majority of students (93.72%) take FYW, whether or not that aligns with their DSP recommendations. A small group (5.45%) of students enrolled in pre-FYW before taking FYW. Our data suggests that the DSP process impacts domestic non-URM, URM, and women students differently. It is important to note, however, that the data analysis is agnostic about the causes of DSP's disproportionate impact on women and minoritized students. DSP is, we are continually reminded, one part of a pre-enrollment process that involves multiple sites of negotiation between individual students and the institution. The DSP recommendations are not necessarily well understood by all the various program and academic or non-academic advisors with whom students meet as they put their course schedules together–indeed, advisors may well disagree with the recommendations, and their influence on students' choices may not align with DSP values.

3.4.3 Consequences of Pre-FYW Enrollment

Gere et al. (2010, p. 168) find that various external measures of students' academic potential (high school GPA, SAT, DSP recommendations, FYW grades) were not aligned before the modified DSP was introduced in 2009 (Gere et al., 2013). Admittedly, GPA is a highly problematic standard for success, especially in writing courses. Conversation surrounding writing assessment is varied, highlighting the complexity and difficulty of evaluating and expressing various writing competencies (Poe and Elliot, 2019; Perryman-Clark, 2016). At Michigan particularly, a high and narrow grade distribution makes it difficult to recognize differences in students' achievement levels and tells us little if anything about their core competencies or writerly growth, or about the extent to which they achieve the learning goals for the required course. A similar difficulty exists in the larger collegiate scale—though easily accessed and tracked, GPA and standardized test scores do not capture important experience and capacities (Mould & DeLoach, 2017) and are not unequivocally linked with career success (Bretz, 1989; D'Agostino & Powers, 2009; Riley & Claris, 2008). However, GPA still remains an important predictor of graduation and retention (Attewell, Heil, & Reisel, 2011; Braunstein, 1997; Gershenfield, Ward Hood, & Zhan, 2016; Jesse & Ellersieck, 2009; McGrath & Rogulkin, 2011; Mettler, 2011; Reason, 2003), and remains a requirement for scholarships, internships, etc. It is, at the very least, an indicator for how acclimatized the student is to the expectations of school environments.

Unfortunately, the modified DSP placement recommendations do not align any better with FYW grades than the earlier version of DSP did: recommendations for pre-FYW currently underestimate students' potential for successfully achieving high grades in FYW courses. FYW courses have a high mean GPA, with a floor of about 85 across all sections. The current mean is close to those reported by both Frus (2003, p. 186), and Gere et al. (2010, p. 170). Michigan's grade inflation has clearly remained relatively static from 1999 to 2021. The grade distribution for 2014-19 is exhibited in Table 2 (this table represents the version of FYW taken by the greatest number of students, not the entire array of courses, which exhibit similar distributions). The analysis translates letter grades into numeric values and excludes Incomplete and Pass grades, resulting in the loss of 234 students from the sample.

(Recommendations for pre-FYW and pre-FYW-I Are Grouped Together)

Recommendation and Student Choices for FYWENG 125	**Mean FYWENG 125 grade**
pre-FYW recommended and taken (n=626)	88.17
pre-FYW recommended but not taken (n=1647)	89.40
FYW recommended and taken (n=10574)	90.49
FYW recommended and pre-FYW taken (n=289)	87.91

Table 2 Mean Grade in English 125, According to DSP Recommendations and Students' Conformity to the Recommendations

Over 98% of students pass English 125 with a mean grade of B- or higher. Over 99% of students pass with a mean grade of C- or higher (C- is a passing grade). It appears that, with or without pre-FYW, virtually all Michigan students are "highly likely to succeed" in FYW, to borrow a concept from Henson and Hern (2019). This grade distribution indicates that the DSP questionnaire and related algorithm are not reliable tools for grade-based student success in writing courses. Grade distribution and pass rate data call into question the need for such an extensive placement process and a preparatory course that does not fulfill the FYW requirement.

When we disaggregate the grade data and define groups in terms of placement recommendations and enrollments, we find that the placement recommendations do not strongly correlate with or predict students' success in FYW. Students who score above the cutoff and enroll in English 125 have the highest mean grade (90.49). Those who score below the cutoff and enroll in pre-FYW before taking English 125 have the second lowest mean grade (88.17) in English 125. These data points are potentially confusing since 90.49 and 88.17 are relatively close and both represent passing grades. The slight differences between groups are nonetheless meaningful in an assessment of DSP reliability.

Though our data cannot predict how well students who took pre-FYW would have performed in FYW without that preparation, it is troubling that enrollment in pre-FYW correlates with a slightly lower mean grade in FYW for students on both sides of the cutoff. Those who score below the cutoff but go directly into FYW gain a higher mean GPA (89.4) than those below the cutoff who take pre-FYW before going on to FYW (88.17). Ideally, a student who takes pre-FYW would be more prepared and earn a better grade than a student who declines to enroll in such a course. In the opposite direction, those who score above the cutoff and enroll in pre-FYW before taking FYW earn a lower mean grade (87.91) than those who score above the cutoff and take FYW (90.49). In other words, regardless of what course their DSP score recommends, students who enroll in pre-FYW earn a slightly lower mean grade in FYW than those who do not take pre-FYW. Grades from FYW thus raise questions about the reliability, accuracy, and predictive value of the DSP scores and algorithm. These statistics suggest that in the period 2014-19, Michigan's DSP recommended pre-FYW to hundreds of students who did not take it and went on to earn a high grade in FYW.

Interestingly, the same patterns emerge when we analyze mean GPA for courses that fulfill an upper-level writing requirement (ULW): students who enroll in pre-FYW show the same very slightly depressed writing achievement in both FYW and ULW, while students who do not take the recommended pre-FYW earn very slightly higher grades in both FYW and ULW. Since this study concerns only 5 years of data, further longitudinal analysis is needed to evaluate upper-level grades and degree completion rates more fully.

3.5 The Unintended Social Consequences and Limited Institutional Value of DSP

The generally accepted purpose of writing placement is to identify students who would benefit from a preparatory course or stretch sequence designed to minimize their risk of failure and maximize their likelihood of success in FYW. However, the statistical analysis presented here demonstrates that Michigan's DSP process has unintended and potentially negative social consequences for some women and domestic minoritized students. Indeed, the Michigan preparatory student is created by the placement instrument (to appropriate an idea from Toth 2019, p. 3), which despite substantial scholarly efforts (Gere et al., 2010, 2013) does not meet the standards of fairness, reliability, and equity established by writing assessment theorists (Elliot, 2016; White, Elliot, and Peckham, 2015; Poe, Inoue, and Elliot, 2018, pp. 3-38). Moreover, the proportion of students who do not follow recommendations for pre-FYW further indicates that the tool has little practical functionality. The vast majority (75.8%) of students that the DSP instrument recommends for pre-FYW have disregarded the recommendation and nonetheless passed and even received high grades in FYW, suggesting that the DSP scoring does not align with the FYW curriculum and grading norms. As such, our statistical analysis raises questions about the value of DSP in its current design for this institution.

Given the high GPA in FYW and the low course failure rate, we cannot justify pre-FYW recommendations based on the grading criteria and current instrument. The pre-FYW course was originally invented in 1978 to address the diversity of students entering the institution. Although the course has been extensively revised since then, as have placement methods and theories, the assumption that some students are not prepared for FYW has persisted. The data, however, suggest that in fact Michigan students with very few exceptions are prepared for FYW. Gere et al. (Aull 2020, 2013, pp. 620-23) argue that there are meaningful differences between the DSP essays of students recommended for FYW and those recommended for pre-FYW. Perhaps these differences persist, but they do not necessarily correlate with grades in FYW.

Furthermore, our 2021 survey of FYW students reveals that 55.35% of respondents found DSP “not very helpful” or “not at all helpful” to them. By contrast, they consider academic advisors and peer advisors as having the most significant influence on their decisions about FYW. The two most important factors in their enrollment decisions were their interest in a course (60%) and how the course fit into their schedule (64%). The value of DSP to this group appears minimal. The survey responses suggest that future DSP research at Michigan and elsewhere needs to consider students’ and advisors’ perspectives as offering important information about functionality and validity. Surveys and focus group interviews may serve to refine scholars’ understanding of students’ experiences with DSP.

The goal of DSP is to give students information upon which to base decisions about which FYW course they think best fits their needs and interests. Since the data show that an admitted Michigan student is likely to succeed in FYW, it will be reasonable in future to dispense with the “directed” part of self-placement (that is, the recommendation for pre-

FYW). Doing so will not guarantee equity, but it may reduce impact from structural social inequity. This conclusion complements and reinforces those of Balay and Nelson (2012), who determined that DSP disadvantaged minoritized students and was unreliable in predicting students' success in FYW in the local context; they too decided to eliminate DSP. Since, at Michigan, we see negligible variation across FYW grades for all students, the pre-FYW course provides no measurable benefit when evaluated by grade outcomes. The data for our institution lead us to support the conclusions of a number of scholars who reject the practice of segregating students in basic or preparatory writing (e.g., Elbow 1996; Peckham 2009, p. 537). Instructors and writing program administrators have other and better ways to support students at various skill levels working to improve their writing in the classroom setting. Our findings that, even with recommendations to take FYW, minoritized students were more likely to take pre-FYW, indicate a need or desire for additional support. Both Reynolds (2003) and Balay and Nelson (2012) indicate self-image and confidence are tied not only to self-placement outcomes, but also to writing outcomes. Our data align with the speculation that "maybe non-white students, intimidated by college and subtly influenced by generations of covert racism, are less likely than white students to give themselves credit for their skills and background" (Balay and Nelson, 2012). A possible solution can be to re-orient students away from a binary decision between pre-FYW and FYW, and towards defining their academic goals and interests, with the purpose of helping them find the kind of writing class that best matches their ambitions and desires for instructional support. Then, students can be directed to additional forms of curricular and extra-curricular support aimed specifically at addressing self-image and confidence.

3.6 Conclusion

Our research goal was to discover whether or not our version of DSP was associated with unintended racialized or gendered disadvantages for some students. Data analysis indicates that our version of DSP does not always live up to its promise for all students, even though it might be a more equitable instrument than some alternatives studied by scholars of writing assessment (e.g., Elliot et al., 2012). The statistical analysis presented here reveals patterns of inequity but does not reveal why the patterns exist or what would remedy the inequities discovered in the numbers. The finding of inequity is, however, important and should serve to qualify scholars' optimism about DSP's relative fairness. A commitment to social justice requires that we test our placement instruments, theories, and methods to "better support diverse writing goals and students in higher education" (Aull 2020). Inoue makes continual, reiterative self-assessment the "programmatic center" of FYW (2009). This appears to be a necessary commitment for those designing and administering DSP processes. As Wright (2019) points out, we must work intentionally and purposefully to discern the ways writing program administration impacts equity, diversity, and inclusion--and actively work toward a greater measure of social justice. Once a DSP process is put in place, only regular assessments will reveal its reliability, fairness, validity, and equity across demographic groups.

The present study has a number of limits, beginning with the question of how well DSP and the curriculum serve multilingual students. Gomes (2018) examines placement data that reveal a problematic impact on international/multilingual FYW students; this segment of the student body has not received much attention in DSP research and requires further research in local contexts. In addition, a student body is impossible to classify into neat identity groups. Our data do not speak to intersectional or linguistic identities, gender and sexual identities, or the very real diversity within groups--all of which have bearing on questions about equity and implications for which groups of students are able to exert which types of agency. These are important topics for future research into the complex social consequences of placement recommendations in a large and various writing program.

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Chapter 4 From Gatekeeper to Informant: The Roles of Academic Advisors in Aligning Directed Self-Placement

Directed Self-Placement (DSP) refers to a purportedly more equitable measure of assessing student writing for placement into the appropriate first-year writing (FYW) class (Inoue, “Self-assessment as programmatic center”; Inoue, “WPA-Comppile Research Bibliographies”; Toth, “Directed Self-Placement at ‘Democracy’s Open Door’”). Unlike other placement methods that rely on individuals or assessments using external knowledge to evaluate the student’s ability (such as programs that use SAT scores or automated algorithmic-based programs like *ACCUPLACER*), DSP is “any placement method that both offers students information and advice about their placement options (that’s the ‘directed’ part) and places the ultimate placement decision in the students’ hands (that’s the ‘self-placement’ part)” (Royer and Gilles 2). By utilizing DSP, students can gauge whether they are ready for the challenges of a FYW course (Gere, Aull, Green, and Porter; Gere, Aull, Escudero, Lancaster, & Lei; Toth & Aull).

Enactments of DSP differ from institution to institution. While this study responds to assessment concerns that tools such as DSP be designed specifically for each institutions’ unique local student population, the local particularity of DSP makes it challenging to evaluate the method and, at times, broad claims concerning its equity. From the very first discussions of DSP in writing studies scholarship—e.g. Royer & Gilles—as Toth notes, “advocates have advanced DSP using the language of *rightness*, *fairness*, *agency*, and *choice*” (“Directed Self-

Placement at 'Democracy's Open Door'" 147). Past research has explored and continues to explore the ways in which DSP processes may disproportionately impact certain student populations (Balay & Nelson; Gomes; Kenner; Ketai; Toth, "Directed Self-Placement at 'Democracy's Open Door'"). Studies examining DSP have identified promising findings in support of DSP's potential for equity regarding various marginalized student populations (Inoue, "Self-assessment as programmatic center"; Kenner; Saenkhum). However, scholars have cautioned against taking for granted DSP as being equitable (Bedore & Rossen-Knill; Ketai; Toth, "Directed Self-Placement at 'Democracy's Open Door'"), insisting that the complex nature of each enactment of DSP for each unique student population makes these kinds of claims challenging to study and potentially misleading.

In his review of the DSP literature, Inoue called attention to this issue, noting that many scholars in their examinations of their local enactments of DSP have yet to respond fully to the question of what "failure" looks like in a DSP process ("WPA-CompPile Research Bibliographies" 2). While conceptualizing what failure looks like in DSP may need further theorization, the success of DSP may depend on the alignment of all components that constitute the institutions' goals for equitable placement. As Blakesley describes, all of the individuals and components involved in the DSP process—the questionnaire, the essay prompt, advisors, course descriptions, et cetera—must be working in-sync with one another for DSP to be successful. Moos and Van Zanen argue, "a valid and equitable DSP process requires robust commitment from stakeholders, including academic support services, orientation teams, and advising" (69). The advising process, a significant component of the DSP process, remains neglected by much recent scholarship. It is this gap in the scholarship that this study aims to address through speaking directly with advisors about their experiences guiding students through the DSP process.

Our study focuses on the facilitators of the final step of the DSP process—the academic advisors who help students to reflect on their writing experiences before selecting a course. In spotlighting advisors' voices, beliefs, and experiences with DSP, we interrogate the assumptions much of the DSP literature has made about how the advising component of DSP functions and where opportunities may exist for better collaboration and increased alignment to reduce the potential for inequity for student populations. In the sections that follow, we first briefly discuss the scholarship concerning advisors' roles within the DSP process. We then turn toward explaining our institutional context, including our process for facilitating focus groups with advisors. Finally, we turn toward discussing our findings from the focus groups and how we will be using the data from this project to revamp our methods for guiding students into FYW courses.

4.1 Advisor's Roles

Though meetings with academic advisors are not universal (Ferris, Evans, & Kurzer; Toth & Aull), they are often asked to inform and advise students about their DSP options (Bedore & Rossen-Knill; Blakesley, Harvey, & Reynolds; Moos & Van Zanen). The few studies that have examined advisors have shown how influential they are on the process. Blakesley et al. found that 53% of their students surveyed (n=15) took into account their advisor's advice when selecting a course. The influence of these advisors may be greater for vulnerable student populations, like the students Gere, Aull, Green, and Porter noted self-placed into the preparatory writing course (162). The multilingual students Saenkhum studied cited advisors as the most influential part of the DSP process, even though they were also frustrated by a perceived lack of concrete answers as to which course they should select.

The advising process may be influential, but it does not always function smoothly for the students. Gere et al. noted in their research at our institution an "evident disconnect" for the students between the questionnaire and essay portions of the DSP and the advising process. In Gere et al.'s survey, students commented that they did not believe they received a DSP recommendation or result from their advisor. Instead, they reported being told they "should take this class" (162). Cornell and Newton similarly discussed students' negative experience with advisors "forcing" them into certain classes as opposed to being allowed to self-place (176). These miscommunications are indicative of the challenges that program directors and DSP designers face in trying to get stakeholders outside of writing programs to facilitate the process of student choice. Blakesley et al. note the lack of shared knowledge as a particular challenge in enacting DSP, and remark that this lack of shared knowledge may contribute to advisors and other stakeholders' reluctance to embrace DSP due to concerns about students' ability to self-place (40-42).

Communication may be key to the enactment of the self-placement component of DSP during advising sessions. Writing program administrators at GVSU, the site of Royer and Giles' initial enactment, emphasize the importance of continuing training to ensure that advisors' understanding of both the DSP process and curricular goal are aligned (Moos & Van Zanen). Toth speaks to the necessity of continuing conversations with advisors, noting how leaders at two-year colleges recognized the importance of this work given the constantly changing conditions institutions face:

> Participants with longstanding DSP processes emphasized that working with advisors to facilitate conversations about DSP should be on-going, in-person, and dialogic. Otherwise, staff turnover and changing institutional conditions could lead to confusion over DSP's purposes and principles, particularly its overriding commitment to student choice ("Directed self-placement at two-year colleges").

Advisors must be included both in conversations and research into DSP to ensure enactment of the DSP principle of self-placement. Otherwise, advisors may be unable to enact the stated purpose of DSP, potentially subjecting students to problematic power dynamics (Blakesley et al.). Students could perceive the DSP process to be contradictory and the DSP itself could adversely impact student populations. Only when carefully implemented and continuously attended to, can DSP be a placement method that empowers students to choose the course that they believe is most beneficial to them (Caouette; Saenkhum).

This study contributes to that research in writing program administration and other self-placement instances, such as the math courses Kosiewicz and Ngo consider in their acknowledgement that "we have a limited understanding of the role and influence of college advisors or faculty on student self-placement decisions" (1382). Given this limited understanding, further research into advisors' beliefs and practices—and how those beliefs and practices intersect with the DSP process—is essential to better discerning how DSP is or is not functioning as an equitable method for guiding students into FYW.

4.2 Research Questions

Although some studies have interacted directly with advisors (see Blakesley et al.; Saenkhum), much of the relatively little DSP scholarship on advising relies on student, faculty, or WPA perceptions of the advising process (Gere et al., "Assessing the validity"; Toth). Given that we know so very little about how advisors perceive their roles, how they interpret and act on the information provided by the other components of the DSP, or even how and why these advising sessions play out in the ways that they do, this study aimed from its conception to center advisors' voices, concerns, and beliefs. The focus of our exploration into the ways the advising portion of this DSP process is aligned or not with the rest of the process centered around the following four research questions:

1. How do the roles advisors take on in advising students impact the DSP process?
2. How do advisors describe the structure and nature of the DSP advising sessions?
3. How are DSP materials perceived by advisors and used in advising sections? On what other questions and information do they rely?
4. What constructs of writing and writing students do advisors draw on during advising sessions?

4.3 Institutional Context

We conducted this study at a large midwest research institution, where DSP has been utilized (with various revisions) for over twenty years. While little research centering the voices of advisors in the DSP process has been published, some efforts have been made at this institution to foster lines of communication concerning DSP with advisors since the DSP was first introduced at the institution. This has included efforts such as consultations with advisors about their experiences, training on the DSP process, and assigning liaisons to work between advising and the writing center. These efforts paved the way for the continued collaboration with advising that has contributed to this paper.

To understand the importance students place on advising in the DSP process, we recently surveyed first-year students (*n=449*). According to our survey results, 57% of students find academic or peer advisors to be the single most important contributors to their placement decisions. Meaning students value input from advisors far more than any other input, including their placement recommendation. In contrast to the strong support for advisors, a nearly identical proportion of students (56%) responded that the "DSP for Writing" was either "not very helpful" or "not at all helpful." From these student results, it is clear that students cede paramount value to the human-to-human guidance from skilled, trained advisors over other steps of the DSP process.

Currently, at this institution, the DSP consists of a prompt for a 4 to 5 page essay based on a reading, followed by a questionnaire. Placement recommendations are based on a questionnaire that consists of nine multiple-choice questions for "students most proficient in academic writing in English" and ten multiple-choice questions for "students most proficient in academic writing in a language other than English" (Sweetland Center 26-28). The only difference between the two questionnaires is the addition of the question, "How prepared are you to write in Standard English, including the appropriate forms of grammar, punctuation and sentence construction?" and an emphasis on English language proficiency in questions one and nine.

Table 3 DSP Questions for students most proficient in academic writing in EnglishTable 3

DSP Questions for students most proficient in academic writing in English

1. During your last two years of high school, how often did you write academic essays longer than four pages?
2. In the last two years, how often did you analyze/respond to texts like the article you just read?
3. The article you just read made an argument and referred to research. In the last two years, how often did you respond in writing to texts like this?
4. While you were completing this task, how much trouble did you have finding examples from the article to support your argument?

5. After you selected quotes or ideas from the reading material, how prepared were you to integrate them into your own writing and argument?
6. While you were completing this task, how often did you go back and look over your writing to revise?
7. Part of college writing involves peer feedback. How prepared are you to provide constructive feedback to your peers about their writing?
8. Which of the following statements do you think *best* represents academic writing?
    a. Writing that expresses a balanced stance and allows room for alternative views and voices
    b. Writing that offers a thesis and at least three supporting claims or examples in structured paragraphs
    c. Writing that expresses a definite stance and argues assertively
9. How would you rate your proficiency in academic writing?

These questions address students' familiarity with academic writing in English, experience incorporating sources into their writing, providing feedback to others, and revision. Student responses are given a score ranging from 1 to 4, except for an unscored question asking about their view of academic writing and a heavily weighted question (-3 to +3 points) asking them to rate their own writing proficiency.

After completing the essay and questionnaire, students meet with advisors during summer orientation to discuss the results before the students *themselves* opt into one of the writing course options. Based on students' responses to the online questions, the DSP program generates a recommendation for FYW courses. Roughly 84% of students are recommended to enroll in a standard FYW course, approximately 1% are recommended to enroll in a course designed for international and multilingual students, and the remaining students (about 15%) are recommended to take an ungraded, credit-bearing transitional writing course.

At this institution, "DSP is not a placement test…. DSP does not place students into a writing course…. [And] DSP essays are not evaluated as part of the placement process"

(Sweetland Center 3). The aim of the DSP at this institution is to give “students the experience of doing the kind of writing that will be expected of them at UM…. [and to help] them notice gaps between the kind of writing they did in high school and the kind they will do in college” (30). Thus, DSP recommendations are not binding, according to the principle of *self*-placement, and the vast majority of students (about 75%) choose not to follow them if the recommendation is for the transitional course.

4.4 Research Methods

This IRB-approved, qualitative study draws from multiple data sources to understand advisors’ experiences with DSP. First, the lead researcher invited all advisors to an initial meeting to introduce the study and solicit general feedback on the DSP. Following this meeting, a survey was sent to all advisors to collect information on how they interpreted DSP placements during advising sessions and what they would recommend for improving the process. This 10-item online survey was developed by the research team, hosted via Qualtrics online survey, and distributed through the advisor listserv by the director of the writing center. The survey aimed to discover 1) what DSP and writing center materials advisors were relying on for information for themselves and students, 2) how the assessment of preparedness in the DSP questionnaire corresponded with advisors’ assessments of preparedness, 3) insight into their conversation with students about deciding between FYW courses, 4) differences in advisor approaches between students most proficient in English and those most proficient in a language other than English, and 5) variation in advisors’ experience and its impact on responses. In the survey, advisors reported their years of advising experience. There were also open-ended questions asking advisors to comment on the effectiveness of the placement instrument. The data collected from these surveys and the initial meeting were then analyzed by the research team to inform the structuring of and protocols used in the focus groups, which were the final stage of data collection.

Due to COVID restrictions, three virtual focus groups were held over several months, each with 4 to 5 advisors. We adapted a protocol from Liamputtong for each 1-hour focus group to guide the researcher teams leading each session. The protocol included a question guide with a series of open-ended questions that addressed participants' overall experiences with DSP, the kinds of questions advisors ask of students and the questions students ask of advisors related to DSP, how advisors make recommendations for the FYW and transitional courses (see Table 4). A sample recommendation, like those generated by the DSP instrument, was also prepared as a stimulus for discussion. The focus group sessions were video recorded with the consent of participants, and the audio from the recordings were then transcribed. The videos and transcriptions were imported into NVivo for qualitative analysis.

Table 4 Focus Group Question Guide

Questions and Follow-up
Can you tell us briefly about your experiences with Directed Self Placement discussion during advising sessions?
How do you use the Directed Self Placement recommendation during your advising session?
What other information, if any, do you consider during the advising session related to writing placement?
What kinds of questions, if any, do you ask students related to writing placement?

What kinds of questions, other than the ones we've discussed, do you ask students related to writing placement?

What kinds of questions, if any, do your students ask about writing placement?
How do you respond?

How do you decide which students are ready for FYWR courses?

How would you describe students who are ready for FYWR?
  - Which students are you most likely to recommend for W100?
  - Which students are you most likely to recommend for W120?
  - Do you gauge students' proficiency with standardized English? How?

Is there anything else you would like to add about your perspectives on the first-year writing requirement or the Directed Self Placement process?

What comments do you have about your experience in the focus group today?

Note: W100 and W120 are transitional writing courses. W120 is for multilingual students.

We approached data analysis from a grounded theory perspective (Charmaz). Three researchers read through each of the transcripts, generating independent lists of open codes to describe how advisors participate in the DSP process. Then, we reviewed the more than 90 open codes to inductively create thematic categories for advisor responses based on what they said: advisor role constructs, writing construct, student characteristics, and making recommendations within institutional constraints. Within each theme, we generated definitions for a set of analytic focused codes (see Table 3). Two researchers then independently applied focused codes to each transcript, and we discussed differences in coding until consensus was reached. Finally, we used NVivo to explore correlations between advisor characteristics, including years of experience, and the emergent themes in how advisors approached and understood their role in the DSP process.

4.5 Results

4.5.1 Survey Findings

We collected 31 survey responses, representing 84% of advisors. Advisors most frequently reported 1-3 years of advising experience (n=13), although a significant number reported greater than 10 years (n=8, see Table 5).

Table 5 Advisors' Years of Experience

Years of Experience	Survey Participants	Focus Group Participants
< 1	2	1
1–3	13	4
4–6	6	2
7–10	2	2
> 10	8	5

Several areas of consensus among advisors emerged from responses to the open-ended questions in the online survey. First, many advisors requested information about the performance of students receiving transitional course recommendations who choose the transitional or FYW courses; advisors were most interested in student grades as measures of performance. Second, advisors requested greater transparency about how placement recommendations are determined, wanting to know "how it works," and "why students receive the placement that they do." Advisors also requested more information about how DSP essays would be used in students' writing courses, learning goals for the offered courses, and the topic of each course section. While advisors reported discussing FYW course options in most advising sessions (*M*=83.26%, SD=23.64), the time spent in each discussion was limited—due, perhaps, to their need also to discuss a variety of other course placement options and exams (e.g. math placement). Advisors reported a typical DSP discussion duration ranging from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 9 minutes (*M*=4.23, *SD*=2.17). Advisors were most likely to report that students' placement recommendations provided some of the most useful information for their advising sessions (n=13). When taking into consideration the nine advisors who chose students' responses to the DSP questionnaire as the most useful information (n=9), more than half of the advisors found elements of the DSP provided the most useful information. Some advisors selected the advisor handbook (n=3) and the writing program website (n=3) as their preferred information sources. We use these survey data to situate the findings from the three focus group sessions as well as further inform continued writing center developments, detailed further in the conclusion. The following five subsections detail the major themes identified within our focus groups.

4.5.2 "A Battle Among Other Battles"

Advisors at all experience levels assume a variety of roles when discussing the DSP with students: informant, questioner, persuader, negotiator, and gatekeeper (see Table 4). All at some point reported acting as an informant, providing students with information about the DSP process and writing course options. Advisors also provide students with important context on the general writing demands of a students' course load. As one advisor noted:

> If they're picking courses that tend to have a good bit of writing and a combination like several history courses or history and English or philosophy or some of those that are going to have higher writing, I usually will inform them of that combination and just let them know that, 'Hey, you picked a couple of classes that are going to have a fair bit of writing. So just want to put out there that it might be more time intensive.'

This kind of contextual information, which might also include other available writing resources, how different courses tend to be taught, and how writing might fit into "the context of their majors," can enrich students' decision-making processes.

Table 6 Advisor and Writing Construct Codes

Code	Description
Advisor roles constructs	
Gatekeeper	Advisors using readily identifiable markers in student materials and interactions with students to quickly signal to them students' preparedness or lack of preparedness (e.g. red flags, presence of AP classes, GPA, etc.).

Negotiator	Advisors needing to weigh multiple, competing responsibilities and requirements of their work in advising students to make the most ideal (but not necessarily perfect) recommendation to students (e.g. “a battle among other battles”).
Persuader	Advisors’ use of directive guidance (e.g. “You should take this class.”) in advising students’ course selection.
Questioner	Advisors’ use of facilitative, question-based guidance (e.g. “How prepared do you feel?”) in advising students’ course selection.
Informant	Giving students information on courses, programs
Writing construct	
Higher-Order Concerns	Values thinking about argument, audience, and organization
Process	Values include the processes of writing: planning, drafting, feedback, peer review, revision
Technical Skills	Values elements of the finished writing product: citations, grammar, length, mechanics, punctuation, lack of typos

Negotiating the demands of these shifting roles is a challenge one advisor described as a "battle among other battles," explaining, "We have to look at what is the best situation I can get this student to, but also being transparent that these are your decisions." Most advisors reported assuming questioner, negotiator, and persuader roles at different moments in the advising session. As questioners, for example, advisors work to contextualize students' placement results by asking questions that expand on questionnaire responses and can broaden students' view of writing as they make their enrollment decisions. Were students, for example, answering the questionnaire based "on that particular essay" or "thinking holistically about their writing?"

In the persuader role, advisors encourage students to enroll in transitional or FYW courses, and as we will demonstrate below, rely on more than the placement recommendation. Often, advisors work to persuade students to enroll in the transitional course based on both their skills and their future professional needs. As one advisor explains:

> One of the effective arguments that I've had, and particularly for people who are STEM is, I know, this isn't your strength. And yet, if you really are serious about this, you have to have that reflection, that's going to make you a better doctor, and help you write that application. And that's cynical, but it's true, and you can help yourself because of that. I think that kind of story line, and I have enough of those stories that I can say that pretty convincingly would help persuade people of the value of doing Writing 100 [the transitional course].

Part of the DSP effectiveness relies on students being able to choose their writing course, but advisors mentioned that full sections (i.e. sections at full student capacity) were a common occurrence. So, advisors act as negotiators who weigh multiple, often conflicting responsibilities to make their best possible recommendation for students. An advisor might encourage a student who they would otherwise recommend to take Writing 100 to choose FYW classes when transitional course sections are full. One described a suggestion, “Let's take a 200-level history class where you can get some exposure to writing, and then do first-year writing next semester.” That strategy used the advisors’ contextual knowledge of courses to help a student develop writing skills outside the DSP system. Advisors must also negotiate the time during the advising session: “I spend about 20 seconds talking about the DSP when we have such little time in orientation.” Several advisors said they would like to discuss writing more than they do, or they would spend more time on the DSP if they had more time during orientation.

4.5.3 “Red Flags,” “Green Flags,” and the Race Against the Clock

Importantly, advisors can also act as gatekeepers, easing or restricting students’ course selection. Furthermore, our data suggest that advisor experience may correlate with the likelihood that they assume the gatekeeping role. The advisors tend to use the placement results as “very quick red or green flag[s]” that signal whether a conversation about writing placement is necessary. Advisors reported using the FYW recommendation to quickly screen students *into* FYW classes. Because of the time constraints in an advising session and since students tell them they are satisfied with the FYW recommendations, most advisors tend to rely on the FYW placement with relative certainty: “You don't need a prep course, that's what I say, and then we move on.”

Advisors’ reported use of the transitional recommendation was less homogenous. When they encounter the “red flag” of a transitional writing course placement, the discussion becomes more nuanced. Some treat the recommendations equally and encourage students to enroll in the recommended course. Others cite the recommendation as a useful place to begin discussion, “us[ing] it as a jumping off point” or for “dig[ging] a little bit” if the student has questions. Still others approach recommendations skeptically because of contradictions with their own judgments of student readiness: “For instance, if a student places into writing 100 [a transitional course], but they have a lot of evidence of strong writing support.” For transfer students, advisors “don't find much use for it [DSP] at all.” Because more students are recommended for transitional courses than there are spaces, the advisors reported trying to “screen out” those who are prepared for FYW.

Almost all advisors with ten or fewer years of experience reported gatekeeping behaviors, such as identifying “red flags” for students who should enroll in a transitional course. However, less than half of advisors with the most experience described gatekeeping moves. Training may play a role in this difference. One early career advisor explains:

> I was never trained on that specifically, either it was just kind of something I learned as I went, as you talk to the students and you just start sorting them in your own head. Do I think you’re prepared or not?

Given the large proportion of early career advisors, training to help advisors assume DSP roles other than gatekeepers seems salient.

4.5.4 “You Need to Work on Things”

Some advisors expressed doubts about the usefulness of the recommendations and the questionnaires. Advisors expressed concerns that students responded to the questionnaire based only on the DSP essay rather than their writing career as a whole, not remembering particular writing experiences or interpreting the questions differently than intended. The questions, one advisor explained, are not “particularly helpful or useful in a conversation,” nor are they “persuasive” in getting students to enroll in transitional courses. Additionally, advisors questioned the FYW placements for international and international transfer students who might already have upper-level writing courses.

The advisors provided insight into what they perceived as additional interpersonal influences in student decision making, especially during the pandemic:

> It seemed that they were a little bit more open to Writing 100 [a transitional course] in the virtual setting because it was like oh, this is what I placed into, whereas oftentimes in in-person orientation they had heard that the other five students or six students at their table were first-year writing And so even if you had this great conversation with them about the pros and cons, in person, when they walked into orientation, or registration the next day, they head into first year writing.

The contrast of virtual and in-person decision makings suggests the importance of peer influence. This finding is supported by recent student surveys at the institution that found that students rate peer advisors as the second-most important influence, after advisors themselves. Advisors also mentioned parental and sibling influences pushing students to a particular writing course. Some students may receive counsel from institutional sources who lack background or training with the DSP or writing courses. One advisor, for example, mentioned that some students are encouraged by their athletic advisors to “take Writing 100 regardless of what their placement was.”

To better understand how the student might measure up to the writing construct valued by the advisor, advisors reported integrating several additional sources of information. Several advisors described using writing materials outside of the DSP essay (which advisors cannot currently access) to better understand a student’s writing ability and direct them appropriately. As emails are both a concise and accessible material to the advisors, advisors discussed them as useful for understanding how skilled international students in particular might be as writers and how fluently they might use English. “You could definitely tell in the email, ooh, you need to work on things,” one advisor explained, “and they strongly resisted when [placed] into English

[FYW] and then had problems." For domestic students, advisors reported using admissions essays as evidence of writing skill.

To address what they saw as a too limited view provided by the DSP instrument, advisors also described prompting students to reflect on other writing experiences. Some of these questions align with the DSP questionnaire. For example, advisors' questions about paper length and confidence overlap with the DSP "how many pages" and "how prepared for college writing do you feel" questions. Three advisors mentioned asking about the number of pages students wrote in their past papers, and in the survey, 64.51% indicated that the question about writing academic essays over 4 pages was useful. Some advisors used students' answers to the questionnaire as a tool for explaining the placement results. One advisor stressed the importance of "the act of asking students to reflect on their writing" that the questionnaire facilitates. The advisors who use and consult the questionnaire explained that the questions helpfully indicate a lack of readiness for the FYW course and give contexts to begin the discussion about placement.

4.5.5 "It's for me just about . . . what their comfort level is"

While not initially a focus of this study, advisors described depending heavily on their understanding of a student's "confidence" and "comfort" in determining how they should advise or respond to students. Building off the last item of the DSP questionnaire, advisors ask students to "rate their proficiency in academic writing." Ten advisors indicated they ask a variety of affective questions in addition to the confidence question on the questionnaire (if they like writing, how do they feel about writing, comfort level, confidence, etc).

In the focus group interviews, confidence generally functioned as a student's stated comfort level with writing, with advisors at times using the words *confidence* and *comfort* interchangeably. According to the advisors, it was this perception of the student’s confidence or comfort in their writing that guided how/if advisors would encourage or discourage students from taking certain classes. “I barely look at the questions. Honestly, I look at the placement, and I ask the student how they feel about writing.” Similarly, another advisor related that they “rarely go through the questions one by one. And will, instead, talk about their confidence level in writing.” This emphasis on confidence over other factors was not perceived by advisors to be out of line with the DSP process. In fact, advisors understood confidence as being one of the most important aspects of the DSP questionnaire.

> I'm totally transparent with students that these questions are rated on your level of your confidence in your writing. And so we would discuss the fact that nobody actually read their essays and so that the placement was based solely on their confidence in their own writing.

Beyond simply asking students how confident or comfortable they felt about writing, advisors typically relied on a number of proxies to measure and guide their perceptions of a student’s confidence level in relation to “actual” ability. Advisors cited using students’ AP scores—or the existence of AP classes on a student’s transcript—to indicate whether a student should be more confident in their writing or not, as well as students’ experience writing longer papers, their proficiency with English—i.e., non-English as another language (EAL) status, how passionate advisors perceived them being, and if they graduated from a “well-resourced” high school. When asked to describe a first-year writing student, one advisor said:

> Like the part inside of me that's incredibly passionate about social justice and equity is really mad at myself for this being the first word that came to my head, but the first word that came to my head is like the typical [university] student…we have a lot of folks that come from well-resourced high schools.

> They have a lot of college prep stuff. We also have students who come from, maybe not as well-resourced schools that just have a lot of passion and dedication and commitment to things.

Confidence—or an abundance of confidence—was not always seen by advisors as a positive. In the focus groups, advisors noted gender discrepancies in the level of confidence students displayed about their writing, with advisors perceiving male-presenting students at times as being “overconfident” when compared to their female-presenting counterparts. Advisors at times perceived the female-presenting students’ underconfidence to lead to more frequent self-placement into transitional courses.

In their discussions of over- versus underconfidence, advisors’ responses indicated a fine line that students have to walk between coming off as confident (but not too confident) and humble (but not too humble) about their writing ability, or their advisor might assume a more persuasive role. When presented with an “overconfident” student, advisors described pushing the student to reconsider their course decision and all of their options more carefully, especially if the student was making a decision that went against their placement recommendation.

> So sometimes the students will be overly confident and might place into [the transitional course]. But they're like, you know, I'm not gonna take that I'm, I'm a good writer, you know, and then you start to ask them in that case, then I'll dig in a little bit deeper, because like, okay, you asked, you answered the questions. And based on the way you answered those questions, it sounds like maybe you're not that confident.

Humility—or a student downplaying their writing skills and ability— was not necessarily described positively by advisors either. In instances where students received a placement recommendation for the FYW course but expressed hesitation or doubt about their writing skills, advisors described urging students to consider the transitional course: “Humility. That's the one word [to describe] the people who will go into [the transitional course]...” Other advisors offered descriptors like “insecure” or “laid back” to describe these students who “question themselves” and their writing abilities, and who—based on these attitudes—are perceived by the advisors to be better suited for the transitional course.

On a very practical note, two advisors mentioned why a confident student may perform better in a writing class—seeking help:

> I think if the student is somebody who's comfortable talking to people that can support them or who are in positions to help...I think they're going to be fine in first year writing because they will go and meet with their instructor. They will go to [the writing center] and get additional help, you know they'll have, they'll make use of the resources that are there to help them.

While not based specifically on confidence in writing skills, this advisor presented a scenario where interpersonal confidence, and perhaps comfort navigating the systems and power structures of the University, have a direct impact on performance in a writing course.

4.5.6 Higher-Order Concerns beyond “Grammar and Things Like That”

When asked to discuss specific features of students’ writing that they consider during the DSP process, Advisors, especially those with FYW teaching experience, discussed higher-order concerns and technical skills—and also mentioned viewing writing as a process. However, more experienced advisors tend to emphasize technical skills over process and higher-order concerns in describing the kinds of writing constructs they view as being prepared for college writing:

> If they don't really know what citations or a bibliography are, they're not ready for first year writing.

> I am concerned if day one you started in [FYW] and there's certain kind of structural or grammatical things that they're still sort of contending with.
>
> [I’ll ask] how do you feel about your mastery of structure, syntax, or whatever.

Technical skills also came up as a student expectation that advisors would have to redirect because “that’s what they had in high school.” One advisor mentioned a student’s self-assessment as not a “good writer” because they did not “know how to diagram a sentence or those things.” A primary focus on technical skills suggests a significant difference in advisor and program writing constructs, especially in regards to the writing process. The FYW goals include process skills such as self-assessment, reflection, revising, and synthesis, without any technical skills, and the DSP questionnaire mostly focuses on writing experiences rather than any specific skills. However, some of the range of writing construct expectations may be due to expectations about the course itself, or rather, the variations that instructors bring to the writing course.

Despite the FYW goals, one advisor noted their experience as an instructor included seeing classes where technical skills were emphasized:

> I tended to focus primarily on higher order concerns, and I honestly didn't care that much. If you couldn't use proper punctuation, you know, we would talk about it, of course, why you need to, and then I had, like, you know, fellow grad students who were teaching who were like, great punctuation fascists, you know. So, I think the range is, they're going to experience that when they get into the classroom, it just depends a little bit on who they get as a teacher and what that emphasis is going to be in terms of writing.

Similarly, several advisors indicated that encountering a demand for technical or higher order skills in a class would depend on instructor or discipline.

The advisors varied in the degree to which they valued technical skills over process and higher-order concerns. Some expectations and student-facing questions aligned very closely to the questionnaire. For example, “Did you do a lot of peer review? Was there an editing process?” both of which rearticulate DSP questions. Four instructors mentioned the revising and editing *process* of writing. Advisors also mentioned “critical reasoning,” “think[ing] about who your audience is,” and “critical analysis.” However, the comments about audience and critical thinking were presented as benefits provided by the FYW courses, rather than a prerequisite to taking said courses, unlike the technical skills that were framed as necessary to enter the college writing environment.

These differences are most pronounced for advisors with the most longevity. Four of the five most experienced advisors (> 10 years of experience) referred to technical skills as being something they focused on when considering a student’s potential preparedness, whereas only two of the five new advisors (0-3 years of experience) did so. This pattern may connect to the observed pattern in advisor experience and use of the DSP placement recommendation and questionnaire, where new advisors tended to stick more closely to following the DSP tool verbatim and more experienced advisors tended to rely more on their judgments of students' writing skills.

4.6 Implications

Though the DSP process relies on a commitment from its stakeholders, advisors, some of the most direct users of DSP, have been almost entirely excluded from scholarly conversations. Decision makers and developers of the placement instruments have few models in scholarship to understand the nuanced roles advisors play in DSP and how they use the instrument. It is clear from their generous participation with this project that the advisors at this institution are a passionate and committed part of the DSP process, and the exclusion of their role from past DSP conversations and research contributes to a lack of alignment, and thus, possible inequities within the DSP.

Our research indicated several key components of misalignment—the writing center's understanding of the roles advisors play in an advising session, advisors' knowledge of the center's writing construct, insufficient information attached to transitional placement, missing information about how placement scores are generated and what the outcomes of placement are, and the DSP's unintended role in placing students based heavily on problematic assessments of confidence.

The DSP process is usually theorized within writing centers and programs with little understanding of the nature of advisors' contributions. In discussions previous to this research, we had expressed some vague expectations of advisors only as informants, giving more information about writing courses and placement to students, or as questioners relying heavily on or reiterating questionnaire questions to help students reflect on their writing experiences and choices. The focus groups challenge rather than confirm this simplistic view. As a consequence, the multifaceted functions advisors contribute to the process should be included in DSP design intentions. For their informant role, advisors need to have greater access to underlying DSP rationales and the educational goals and purposes of transitional writing courses. Advisors have received inadequate information about writing course goals (especially the differences between the transitional and FYW course), the use of the DSP essay, and the rationale behind the questionnaire and placement generation. Furthermore, the distribution of DSP materials seems to frustrate students and advisors both, in that advisors are not given access to the DSP essay and students do not receive any feedback on their essay before deciding on course placement.

The lack of information given to advisors not only disrupts interdepartmental alignment, but may also have negative equity implications, especially for students who rely heavily on advisor information. In their role as questioners, advisors ask students about issues that do not align with the intentions of the DSP design, such as performance in advanced placement courses. Knowing the time constraints within which advisors typically discuss writing, and recognizing that advisors' follow-up questions help students to recontextualize their responses to the DSP questionnaire, DSP designers can collaborate with advisors to develop a framework of self-reflective questioning that aligns the DSP instrument with the advising context. Better information about the experience of taking the DSP from both the student and the advisor perspectives can also equip advisors to construct questions based on that philosophy.

As negotiators, advisors offer clear and practical insight into various constraints on students' autonomous decision making. The DSP relies on some basic conditions--that students can truly choose their desired course, for example--and advisors can provide information about when those conditions are not being met. They have knowledge about both the most basic logistical constraints, like course availability and scheduling, as well as where and how they hear about students being pressured institutionally into a particular course of action.

Students' confidence, not an original focus of our study, emerged as a formidable theme throughout the interviews. As Balay and Nelson note in their discussion of the role of confidence in DSP, "confidence is elusive, subjective, and very hard to quantify or study" (p. 10). However, confidence in writing is not necessarily reflective of skill or writing ability, instead perhaps being more closely linked to comfortability in academic environments, which can be "uncomfortably close to gender, race, and class identifications" (p. 3). This potential closeness has clear implications for (in)equity; however, despite such cautions against confidence as an equitable measure for writing placement, both the instrument and advisors rely heavily on perception of confidence and comfort with writing. While the questionnaire's most heavily weighted question asks only how prepared students feel for academic writing, advisors' complex use of students' self-reported or exuded confidence demonstrates how problematic such a measure is for placement. Advisors take on a role of correcting what they perceive as gendered or background disparities related to confidence or humility. While the DSP may not have intended for confidence to feature so prominently in student placement, since it is used so heavily by advisors and the DSP instrument, we hypothesize that it also plays a role for instructors, the wider university setting, and students themselves. Further theorization on its use and ethicality in future research is necessary.

4.7 Limitations and Conclusion

In this study, we relied on advisors’ recall and reporting of their advising sessions. While this helped to foreground advisors’ understandings of the DSP and their roles in the process, our approach significantly limited our ability to make claims about what actually occurs during advising sessions. Additional studies might use direct observation of advising sessions to compare advisor perceptions with actual events. This limitation is especially pronounced in terms of advisors’ perceptions of student confidence and comfort with writing. Surveying and interviewing students might provide comparative insight into advisor and student experiences during DSP discussions. Where past work has examined students' use of DSP (Gere et al. “Assessing the validity”), students' perceptions of the DSP in advising sessions remain unexplored.

Our discussions with advisors have helped us identify the kinds of information they need to work effectively with DSP. Some of their initial questions have guided our yet-to-be published statistical research into DSP outcomes. Specifically, at the beginning of our research, advisors asked for information about the FYW grades of students for whom a transitional course was recommended, including a comparison of students who took the transitional course and those who elected to go straight into FYW. After analyzing 5 years of placement, enrollment, and grade data (reported elsewhere), we find that there is no meaningful difference between the two groups; we also find that the failure rate in FYW is less than 1%, suggesting that students have a high likelihood of succeeding in FYW, regardless of their DSP recommendation. This data analysis reinforces some advisors' early comments that they find the DSP recommendations unreliable, and argues for close collaboration with advisors to improve the functionality and reliability of DSP. It is also clear that advisors need more information--and more regular dialogue with the writing center--about the FYW writing construct, expected competencies, and course outcomes. Fostering that dialogue should be a high priority for writing center directors interested in how DSP functions. Finally, recognizing the time constraints on advising conversations about writing placement, we will give students and advisors more specific information about the somewhat complicated curriculum, which includes FYW courses in biology, history, English, comparative literature, and more. The writing center can do much in the pre-enrollment period to clarify the choices students can make and enable them to follow their interests and develop their learning preferences--but to do so they and advisors need more concrete and specific detail about the curriculum and course guidelines.

A successful DSP necessitates continuous, frequent, intra-institutional communication to ensure that all parties share goals, understand the function, and are able to successfully use the placement instrument, and, as Ferris, Evans, and Kurzer note, advisors are not a magic solution for solving or fixing issues in the DSP process (3). Our current DSP process and the assumptions our writing program relies on highlight the misalignment and lack of information between the writing center and academic advising. Advisors need more information about course goals, writing construct, and functions of the DSP questions. Writing centers and programs need up-to-date information about the institutional constraints on advisors that impact student placement and, most importantly, need to be in ongoing conversation with advising about how the instrument is being used and how placement conversations play out in "real time." In any design or redesign efforts of DSP instruments, advisors should be recognized by administrators and scholars alike as an important part of that process and given intentional, thoughtful attention.

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Chapter 5 A Developmental Approach to Institutionalizing Community Engaged Learning: English 126 Evaluation

5.1 Executive Summary

English 126 began in 2018 as an effort in the English department to support investment in community-engaged work. Community-engaged classes further LSA's goal to "foster the next generation of rigorous and empathetic thinkers, creators, and contributors to the state of Michigan, the nation and the world" by allowing a space for that generation to extend their formative selves beyond the university and begin their social impact ("Mission, Vision, Values: U-M LSA"). English 126 is also a place to learn engagement practices rooted in social justice and mitigate inequities.

In 2019, the English Department began collaboration with the Ginsberg Center as part of its commitment to ethical practice. The Ginsberg Center staff helped the EDWP define the course goals and offered training, consultations, and resources for instructors in alignment with the Ginsberg mission: "to steward equitable partnerships between communities and the University of Michigan in order to advance social change for the public good." Ginsberg staff helped pair instructors with community partners in their network and supported those relationships, making sure the courses responded to *community-defined* priorities.

Two to four classes of English 126 have been taught each semester. Each summer, Ginsberg has offered training to new English 126 instructors and matched new partners. Instructors and partners have come up with class projects to benefit their students and partners. Three years and a pandemic later, a research team comprising both English department and

Ginsberg Center scholars has reached out to community partners, instructors, and students to see if equitable partnership and positive social impact were indeed the fruits of this course.

In brief, our research team has found that the training and format of the course have led to positive relationships between instructors and community partners. Partners also love working with students and enriching their learning experiences. Students find the class a valuable learning experience and speak glowingly about the class as an opportunity to engage in “real” change. However, we have also found that the course is a time-consuming commitment for both instructors and community partners, sometimes causing undue burden. And for community partners, this time commitment often comes with little tangible benefit—a student-created deliverable that is only marginally useful to the mission of their organization.

This section summarizes our main findings from interviews with community partners and instructors, a focus group of instructors, and student surveys and course evaluations. Full details about the method of this study can be found in Appendix A. All quotes in this report have identifying information redacted, spelling standardized, and vocal fillers omitted.

5.1.1 Positive Outcome Highlights

Students report enjoying the course and learning. The study authors found consistent and multifaceted benefits for students based on their surveys and course evaluations, including:

- Increased motivation to take a required course
- Positive feelings associated with producing impactful work
- Better understanding of writing
- Increased interest and/or involvement in engaged work

Instructors expressed appreciation for teaching the course and reported the following benefits:

- Adding to the variety of courses taught on their CV
- Opening up additional career opportunities
- Becoming a better informed citizen in the community
- Receiving training in community engagement work

Community partners and instructors enjoyed working together interpersonally. They expressed respect for each other as experts in their respective fields. Instructors appreciated access to non-profit spaces and insight, and partners appreciated access to the university and its resources.

5.1.2 Aligning Expectations

Our research team discovered some common misunderstandings with both our community partners and instructors about the expected deliverables of the course. To align expectations, all stakeholders should know that:

- The class/instructors have a great deal of flexibility with project types.
- Student writing does not need to be published.
- The students will produce first-year (not professional) writing.

For instructors, this means not agreeing to projects that would expect professional work from them and clearly communicating their students' capabilities and limitations. For community partners, this means recognizing that most students are only a few months out of high school, often undecided about their majors, and may not be like other more specialized classes they have worked with at the university.

5.1.3 Projects and Deliverables

Each class produced writing, research, or volunteering intended to support the work of the community partner. The projects were collaboratively chosen by the community partners and instructors. We evaluated the success of the projects based on their usefulness to the partner, benefit to the students, and logistical feasibility for the instructor.

The most successful project types tended to:

- *Not be published*, but instead were directed to the organization or the students' network
- *Provide information* the organization could use over time
- *Inform and involve the students* with the organization's work

Instructors also contributed to the project's success when they:

- Heavily edited the students' work
  - The most successful projects tended to be those which had not only been revised several times by the students but also carefully proofread and corrected by the instructor. Instructors may also need to check that the student work fits the partners' directions. Introducing more editing into student work as part of English 126 may be a mindset change for instructors.
- Limited the length *and* number of pieces the partner needed to review
- Checked in with the partner through the stages of the project

Our classes offered non-writing project types—research and volunteering—in addition to articles/posts for publishing and fund development writing.

Research was most successful if it used university databases and was clearly organized. Partners appreciated research as a time-saving measure and pulled from the research beyond the timeline of the class, usually as a quick reference material for multiple topics.

The *volunteering* project was sometimes logistically difficult for students and instructors, but the partner had some key elements of success that made it more successful:

- A robust structure is in place to manage and train student volunteers
- A management of expectations document
- Remote volunteering, which was thus more accessible to the university students
- Options for different volunteering types and times

The difficulties, which were consistent with common challenges reported in the literature, included:

- Balancing workloads for students
- Expectations about completing the volunteering commitment
- Different timelines for the organization and university calendars
- Partners also requested *interview* projects for the future, raising the question of how these skills can be taught in English 126 courses.

5.1.4 Writing Content Critiques

Partners pointed out some recurring trends in student writing that made it less useful to the organization.

- The topic and content were not always relevant to the audience because of outdated information, or too much research/ academic jargon or content.
- The writing was too long, flowery, and complex. It was not concise.
- The limited perspective and experience of our first-year students restricted the written content.
    - When student writing was intended for other students or for internal use by the community partner (rather than publication or broad organizational use), partners welcomed the students' perspectives and counted it as an asset.
    - Students' lack of understanding about the context of the communities connected to the community partners showed in their writing.
    - Partner-Instructor Relationships

Interpersonally, partners and instructors enjoyed working together. However, power dynamics and communication issues impacted the success of the tangible outcomes of the course and caused both parties some stress.

- Partners did not always feel empowered to express their needs, desires, or critical feedback because they didn't want to risk their reputation with the university and felt like the class structure didn't have room for their needs.
- Instructors are hesitant to impose on partners' time, and while our partners did face enormous time constraints, this also led to a lack of communication.
- Ongoing feedback between partners and instructors helps support useful projects and minimizes miscommunication.
- Expectations about the course are still unclear for both partners and instructors. On the EDWP end, the expectations are still being formalized and defined.

5.1.5 Additional Community Partner Needs---Student Engagement

Partners appreciated the opportunity to engage students; some cited it as an even more important benefit of working with English 126 than the project.

Partners viewed the chance to work with their organization as a beneficial learning opportunity for students and expressed a deep investment in the students' education.

Partners also saw benefits for their organizations in working with students. The type of benefit varied from organization to organization, such as learning about young people's interests as an audience, recruiting volunteers for the future, or spreading information about their organization and mission to the student population.

5.1.6 Additional Instructor Needs--Time and training

Preparatory work for the course was very time-consuming for instructors because of the new subject matter (community engagement), coordination with the partner, and the need for flexibility and adaptation. This time is on top of the initial required community engaged course design training and the typical work of organizing a new course.

The Ginsberg Center training supported instructors in learning foundations for community-engaged pedagogy, creating networks of support, creating expectations, and providing materials. This evaluation confirms the importance and necessity of continuing training with the Ginsberg Center.

5.2 The Background and Challenge

The design of English 126 reflects the course's unique position within the undergraduate curriculum at the University of Michigan. Because English 126 fulfills UM's requirement for first-year writing, it has the potential to serve as a foundational course not only for introducing students to writing composition but also for establishing an early commitment to civic engagement. While there are many opportunities for first-year students to participate in community engagement or service-learning experiences at UM, these opportunities are rare in 100-level courses. In fact, English 126 is not only the sole community-engaged course that fulfills the first-year writing requirement but also one of the few community-engaged general education courses at UM.

For all these reasons, English 126 is an excellent opportunity for the English Department to draw students who are interested in community engagement experiences and potentially increase interest in the major. Because the course is designed to demonstrate to students how writing can be a political tool for social change, students may become motivated to take additional English courses as a result of taking English 126.

Further investment in English 126 may help the course to better fulfill the needs of community partners. The Ginsberg Center identified some key areas of support that community partners frequently request and that English 126 is positioned to fulfill. These frequently-requested areas of support include marketing and communication, research, and volunteering. For these reasons, Ginsberg was highly motivated to partner with the English Department to meet its mission of stewarding long-term, equitable partnerships that meet community-defined needs.

5.2.1 Theoretical Foundations of English 126

Ginsberg Center staff drew on three key principles/frameworks to inform their recommendations for English 126 instructors.

- **Howe et al.'s Three-Phase Model for Course Design:** The Howe Model recognizes that younger students or students who are earlier in their academic careers may not be ready to practice the skills required for deeper, more involved partnerships with communities. For this reason, Ginsberg staff focused their efforts on supporting instructors to scope and manage developmentally-appropriate assignments for their students and to actively mediate between their students and their community partner.
- **Social Justice Approach:** From the development of learning objectives to the systems of support and accountability for instructors, English 126 is designed to represent a social-justice approach to community engagement (Grain & Lund, 2017; Mitchell & Chavous, 2021). In the training, instructors are introduced to several tools and readings that take a critical approach to community-engaged learning.
- **DEAL Model:** The instructor training for English 126 applies the DEAL Model recommended by Sarah Ash and Patti Clayton. The DEAL Model consists of 3 parts -- Describe, Examine, and Articulate Learning -- and offers recommendations for designing and assessing reflection exercises that will not only document students' critical thinking but also serve as a vehicle for deepening their learning.

5.2.2 Challenges of Short-Term Service-Learning

Another key influence on how Ginsberg staff developed their recommendations for the course was Tryon et al.'s study of community partners' perspectives on the challenges of short-term service-learning. Tryon et al. (2008) point out that many scholars recommend short-term service-learning solely on the basis of its positive impact on students without questioning the impact of these courses on community partners.

Tyron et al. found that short-term service-learning created challenges or burdens for community partners, such as 1) the high time investment required from their staff 2) the negative effects of student turnover on relationships with community members 3) the difficulty of scoping helpful projects that can be completed in a short period of time, and 4) the misalignment of the academic calendar with the needs of their organizations.

English 126 was intentionally designed to limit students' direct interactions with the community partners in alignment with the Howe model. In doing so, the English Department and the Ginsberg center hoped to provide a foundational learning experience for first-year students while circumventing many of the challenges of short-term service-learning identified in the literature.

5.2.3 Research Questions

Our study sought to understand the "overlapping impacts" English 126 had on instructors, students, and community partners (George-Paschal et al., 2019). Our team collected survey data from students about the extent to which the course met its learning objectives. We included several open response questions in the student survey and compared these data with past course evaluations. In addition to measuring student outcomes, we also conducted semi-structured interviews with instructors (n=5) and community partners (n=8) of the course.

The authors of this report aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. Does the evidence suggest that applied and pedagogical social justice practices are supported in the 126 program model?
2. Does the evidence suggest that instructors and community partnerships are functioning in relationships of mutual benefit and respect?
3. Does the evidence suggest that instructors and community partners are supported by EDWP and the Ginsberg center?
4. Does the evidence suggest that students and community partners are receiving mutual benefit from the collaboration?
5. Does the evidence suggest that students are responding to and benefiting from the learning goals of the course?
6. How do community partners perceive the course and project fitting in their ability to fulfill their organization's mission?
7. What recommendations do stakeholders have for improving English 126?

5.3 Positive outcomes

5.3.1 Students find the course valuable and attractive

Our evaluation of English 126 was similar to past research which has found ***consistent and multifaceted benefits for students in community-engaged and service-learning courses.*** Such courses attract student interest, increase motivation in academic performance, increase involvement in service, influence career preparation, and encourage students to become involved in the social problems facing their communities (Bringle & Kremer, 1993; Cohen & Kinsey, 1994; Giles & Schmiede, 1996; Furco & Billig, 2002; Gray, Ondaatje, & Zakaras, 1999; Hesser, 1995).

Students are motivated to take the course because of its community-engaged component. As a first-year writing requirement course, English 126 attracts students who take the class out of obligation. However, in course evaluations, 54% of students reported a "strong desire" to take the course, while the other two first-year writing requirement courses were 40%

and 41%. While our team was not able to obtain waitlist data, anecdotally, multiple instructors mentioned their waitlist for the class. In their comments, multiple students asked for more sections of the class, more frequency of the class, or more classes working with their specific community partner.

Students praised the real-world application, that their work actually mattered, as both something that motivated them and helped them understand writing better. On course evaluations, students repeatedly mentioned that the work they did for the community partner was the most valuable of their assignments. In our survey, students made explicit connections between their motivation to learn and the course work. "It made me realize that writing for a purpose greater than a grade is so much more fulfilling," said one student. "Your writing can make a real difference in the world and not just be used for an assignment for a class." Explaining how their opinions on academic writing changed, students said that they realized academic writing can "actually help communities and solve problems," "made us have a real impact on a non-profit and their future," have "impact on another individual/organization," and be an "opportunity rather than a tedious assignment." One student mentioned that the "tangible community engagement experience... solidifies the abstract concept."

The course increased student interest and involvement in community engagement work. On course evaluations, 71% reported that their interest in the subject of the course increased (compared to ~60% for the other first-year writing requirement courses). Some of this interest may come from learning "all the different ways I can be involved in the community," and " to look for opportunities to help" as students mentioned in their surveys. 89% agreed that they plan to become involved in their communities. Offering opportunities through the community partner and creating that network slightly increased involvement after the course.

Some students praised the specific type of work they got to do with their community partner. One community partner mentioned that a student from the course became a regular volunteer and that another student continued their work with them as part of another class. One student mentioned their hope to do an internship with the community partner in the future. An instructor who taught a volunteering-oriented class reported that some students had told them they were hoping to continue volunteering with the community partner. The development of this course has mostly taken place during Covid-19 pandemic conditions, so we may see increased involvement and reports of students volunteering as in-person opportunities become less restricted.

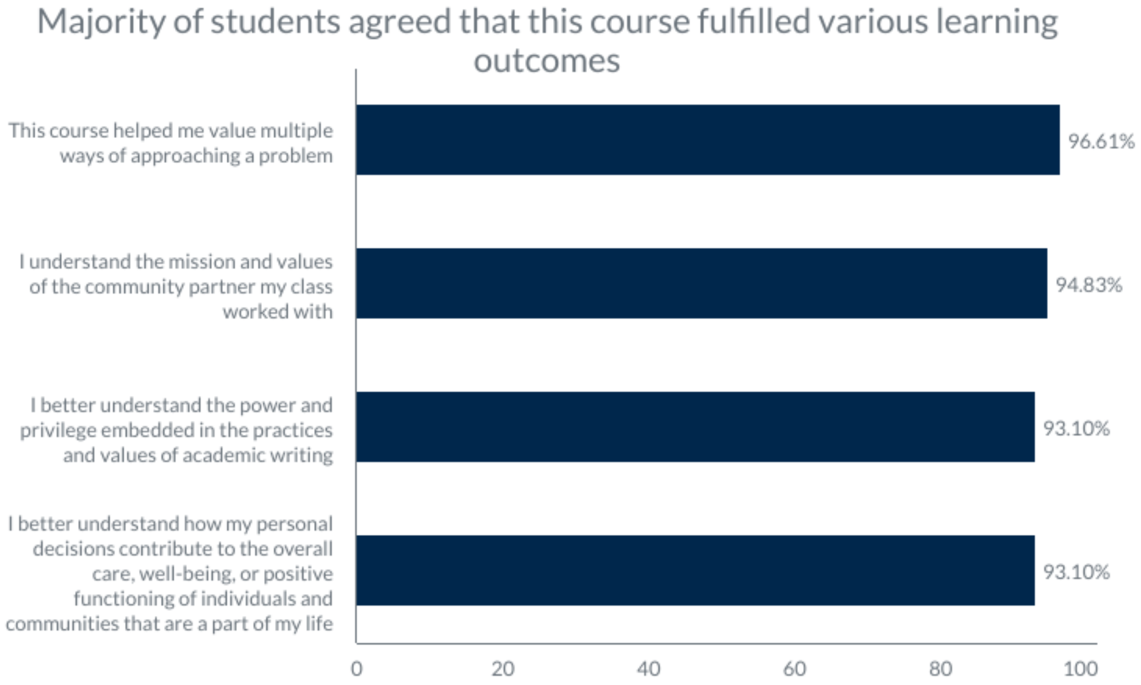
5.3.2 Students achieve the learning outcomes

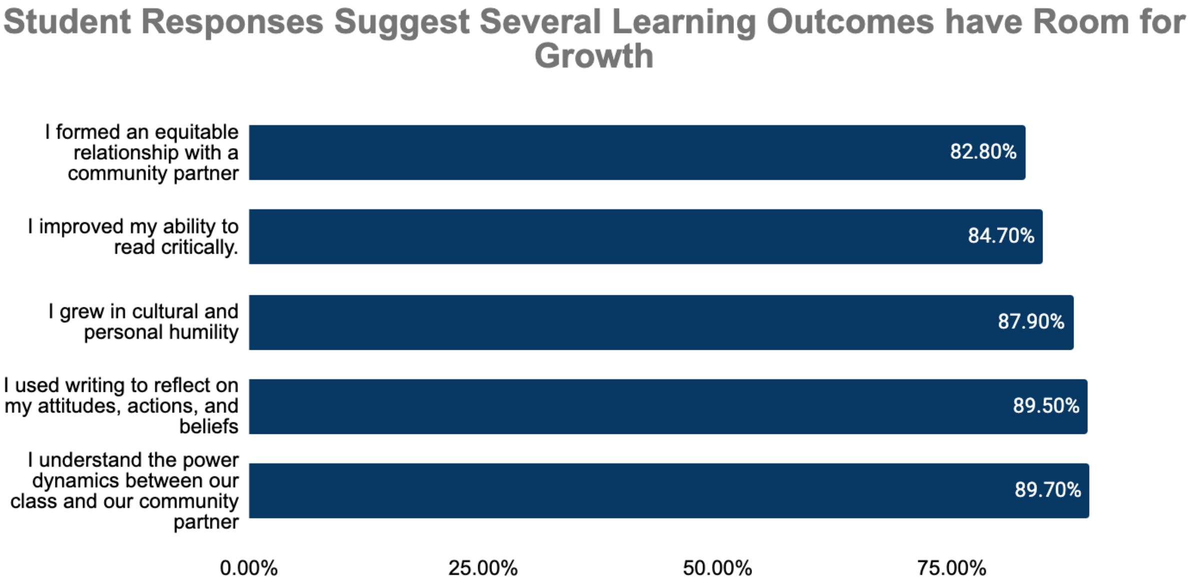
In our surveys, many described a change in attitude about writing--**that writing could be "creative" and "flexible" and offer "freedom."** These terms describe their work with non-academic writing genres which they produced for their community partners. Students may have written non-academic genres before, but perhaps the high stakes, use of the work outside of the classroom, and community partners' writing feedback helped solidify their understanding. As we see later in section 5: Writing Content Critiques, the work in this class asked for a very different style of writing than many students were used to.

We surveyed students, asking them if the course helped them better understand or practice the learning goals of the course.The complete results can be found in Appendix B. The majority of students agreed that English 126 fulfilled the learning goals. Table 7 below shows the percentage of students who responded "4-Slightly Agree" or "5-Strongly Agree."

The lowest rated objectives still had under 20% of students responding with disagree or neutral.The table below reflects the lowest rated learning outcomes.

Table 7 Student learning objectives





Despite the high agreement with understanding the mission and values of the community partner and understanding power and privilege embedded in academic writing, 12% of respondents did not agree that they grew in personal humility, 10% did not agree that they used writing to reflect on their attitudes, actions, and beliefs, and 10% did not agree that they understood the power dynamics between the class and community partner. Some of the contradiction between understanding the power and privilege of academic writing and not understanding the power dynamics between class and community partners was reflected in the student feedback, in which some students mentioned that the academic writing work and the community partnership work felt unconnected. One student commented that the work was "all over the place."

5.3.3 Instructors find it helpful for their career needs

In our interviews with instructors, they mentioned many benefits of teaching the class: adding to the variety of courses taught on their CV, opening up additional career opportunities, developing administration skills, becoming a better informed citizen in the community, and learning about the Washtenaw community.

Graduate student instructors expressed that working with English 126 shaped their academic interests and directions. Several mentioned that finding a place where they could practice community engagement work was now a priority for them as they went on the job market.

All of the instructors teaching the course had a preexisting interest in community engaged teaching practices, but most had not had the opportunity to have "hands on" experience. All the instructors also discussed ways their approach to community engaged work had improved because of the training and support of the Ginsberg Center.

5.3.4 Community partners and instructors form positive relationships

All the instructors and community partners, without exception, talked glowingly about working together interpersonally. The process of achieving a particular outcome had, as we see later, much more mixed success, and our program hopes to improve. But the quotes below indicate the success the instructors and community partners had in developing positive relationships--a key foundation for sustained work and impact.

- It was good to work with them professionally as well as personally.
- With English 126 in particular, the instructors just seem to be really engaged, really thoughtful, really hands on and making sure their students are meeting their objectives and moving through the process and are thinking critically about their collaboration.
- I got matched with a really great community partner. I really enjoyed corresponding with them, and I wanna try to stay involved with them personally, too.
- We've had an awesome experience working with instructors. They're all super thoughtful people who are coming in with the really strong intention to make sure that this is a mutually beneficial partnership and that the students engage respectfully.

5.4 Projects and Deliverables

Since this is a first-year course, we are discovering the importance of establishing realistic goals about what the students can produce, finding a balance between their capacity with what can actually be useful for an organization. Based on the (admittedly limited) projects classes have completed over the past few years, we are finding that non-writing assignments like research and volunteering are welcomed by the community partners and can still suit the learning goals of the course. Successful deliverables are small in scale and heavily edited by the instructor by the time they are delivered to the partner.

5.4.1 Aligning Expectations 1: Assignment Types

In our interviews, we discovered that both instructors and community partners often shared high, rigid expectations for the project – that it would be published, of professional quality, and that every student would have their writing material delivered to the community partner.

When partners and instructors would meet to decide on the deliverable the class would produce, expectations about what the course required created unnecessary constraints.

At the time of this study, our English courses had done the following projects:

- Articles (1 article per student) for a special edition newspaper
- Personalized donor letters (1 per student) on behalf of the community partner
- (6) co-written blog posts for a health organization
- Draft of a grant proposal for a sports and education non-profit
- List of grants fitting the non-profit
- Background research for specific article topics
- 3 co-written articles for a newspaper
- List of transportation resources for specific populations
- Volunteering tutoring 1x per week

All of these assignments are not typical of other first-year writing courses at the University of Michigan. Since English 126 is still in its nascent stages, there were false assumptions that the deliverable needed to be an assignment like those in other first-year writing courses. Some community partners had experience with or had attended the university's writing courses, which shaped their ideas about the partnership:

> “There are so many restraints because it is [a required class]… everyone has to do this, and it needs to be similar, in at least the bare bones way… you need to write a piece that's this long, you need to do this type of activity. And so figuring out *how we could still check those boxes while still producing something that would make sense for [our organization] was kind of the battle.*”

Communication (or a lack of communication) about the course may have contributed to this misunderstanding. Instructors and community partners had also been given a list of potential assignment ideas during the matching process such as blog/social media posts, articles, and research, though the guidelines for these genres were open-ended. In the absence of clear communication about what is and is not expected of English 126 instructors, both instructors and community partners assumed that students needed to achieve the same types of skills that are developed in English 125, a course that focuses explicitly on *academic* writing, inquiry, and argumentation. We saw partners trying to offer instructors projects that would suit their understanding of an academic writing class but were not particularly useful or suited to the organization’s mission. Instructors, in turn, lacked experience in scoping projects with community partners and felt pressure to teach students the same academic genres they taught in English 125 while also adding a community-engaged component. Instructors, accustomed to a one-assignment-per-student format, equipped with varying experience in public-facing writing, and guided to defer to the partner, wouldn’t question the viability of the English 125 model within English 126. One partner, after explaining the burden of looking through the class’s eighteen articles, said, “I think everybody just assumed that all the students would write one [article].”

As the program evolves, our research anticipates that instructors and community partners will feel the freedom to interpret the course goals broadly and will be guided by the findings about successful deliverables in this report. Ginsberg's training now focuses more on guiding instructors to manage both their own and their partners' expectations and to avoid applying assumptions from English 125 to English 126.

5.4.2 Non-writing assignments are appreciated by the community partners

Though partners and instructors felt some pressure to assign a research-based article as the main deliverable, projects that were not centered around writing were just as useful, if not more so. We found that **successful research deliverables make use of university resources and are clearly organized. Volunteering was extremely useful to our partners, but difficult logistically on instructors.** Our evaluation is, of course, limited to the projects completed by our classes, so further work may be necessary to explore the kinds of non-writing work that would fit with English 126's objectives for both student learning and community partner impact.

5.4.3 Interviews may be a successful project in the future

At the time of this evaluation, no classes had conducted interviews as a deliverable. However, multiple partners mentioned that they had hoped interview content would be in the class-produced articles or research. One partner suggested interviewing as a completely independent project as a form of research deliverable.

5.4.4 Successful research makes use of university resources and is clearly organized

Research is quite time consuming, so partners expressed appreciation for research-based deliverables, especially when they accessed university-specific resources and were accessibly organized. Perhaps obviously, the topics of the research were chosen by the partners. Two classes presented research as the main deliverable to the community partner, and one offered research as a summary of a course assignment. One class assembled a list of transportation resources from internet sources in a format intended to go on the community partner's website. Another class assembled information on certain local public figures intended to be background research the organization's writers could use in their articles. Though not the main deliverable for the partner, one class assigned students literature reviews as an academic writing assignment, and then the students made a list of brief (one sentence) research summaries organized by topic intended to be supporting research for the organization's grant proposals and general reference. This was the only research project that was limited to traditionally "scholarly" sources.

Critiquing the research summaries, partners mentioned they were hoping for access to university resources but instead received generic or easily accessible research. Classes gave them information that had been Googled, or the partner already had, or was otherwise a quick search, indicating a need for instructors to provide additional support for students to develop research skills that would be more useful to partners. While Googled research still may save some time, partners mentioned that they were looking forward to access to database resources, like LexisNexis, or other types of access specific to the university. Both partners involved in these research projects stressed that if they had been able to see the students' research in progress, they could have both steered the project in the direction they wanted, and adjusted their own expectations for the type of research a first-year class could accomplish.

Deliverables that used scholarly materials and databases (Foundation Directory, in this case) had great success, but this success is also due to the organization of the material.

5.4.5 Clear organization

Partners praised the research for being time saving, organized, and easy to access; they had no criticism for the research formats. We feel it's important to emphasize this moment of success and encourage future research assignments to maintain similar structures that match the ways partners use the material.

Partners pulled from the research beyond the timeline of the class. The research, then, can be a long-term benefit. When they are working on grants or articles, partners can go back to the students' work and access what they need, as this work is ongoing. Thus, some classes may not experience the immediate gratification of seeing their project in use.

Partners used research for quick reference material for multiple topics. One partner mentioned that multiple members of the organization had used the students' research across a number of articles. Another partner discussed the different kinds of grants for which they would apply and the usefulness of having a number of relevant topics. Both these partners did not use the research in its entirety. The partner who had requested transportation wished that there had been more content and also shared an extensive list of other topics that would have been helpful to their organization.

Partners used class research as a time-saving measure. One partner shared enthusiastically how excited their organization was to have a class willing to help them with the labor of research. Some partners shared about their many responsibilities and time constraints to illustrate how valuable it was to have a class take on some of that time burden. We see later that time constraints were a main reason partners withdrew from writing projects.

5.4.6 Partners desired volunteering, but managing logistics can be challenging

Only two classes did volunteering at the time of this evaluation, but in the course of the interviews, several other partners shared that they would appreciate student volunteers and are hoping that English 126 will bring more volunteers into their organization through university connections. Both classes were matched with a community partner who has extensive experience with student volunteers. According to the instructors, students “really, really enjoyed” the volunteer work.

5.4.7 Key elements of success: the capacity and training to manage volunteers, virtual work, and flexible volunteering types and times.

The organization has a dedicated team to coordinate, train, and support volunteers. They have a system to log students’ volunteer hours. Minimal training and coordination was left to the instructors, who said it was easy to have students “fit into their existing structure.” Describing the experience, one instructor explained, “Because they've been doing this with students, they knew how to take my class of students, train them, get them scheduled to do their [volunteering]. And then they would send me their hour reports…[They] tracked it very, very well for me… And then we always checked in… frequently about how the students were doing… what else I should be touching on with them in the classroom.”

Beyond the simple logistics, the organization was set up to prepare students and the instructor for participating in their programming with a two-session training program. **They were prepared to work with first-year students.** The partner explained that their organization views working with volunteers as an opportunity to accompany them in a learning process and that they are able to teach and support volunteers at different stages of experience and comfort level.

In supporting instructors, the partner described a “template for service learning partners” designed to establish checkpoints, lay out the responsibilities for each partner, and communicate the dates of the volunteer trainings. This document helped the partners create good boundaries and clarify expectations with the instructor, and the students by extension.

The partner explained that without some of these structures, developed over “years and years”, working with class partners can be too burdensome on the organization. For example, instructors sometimes ask for more trainings and additional support for students that falls beyond the scope of the organization’s responsibilities. Without clarifying that it’s the students’ responsibility to keep track of their hours, students would “bombard” the organization with constant requests for records of their hours.

“We're happy to support the students,” explained the partner, “and we're also able to put boundaries in place when we need to. We can say… ‘we've offered you what we can offer you and you can talk with your instructor about alternative assignments at this point.’” This attitude was critical to the success of the partnership. Not all partners were comfortable establishing these kinds of boundaries, as we discuss later in section. Also, not all organizations have the staffing, resources, and size to implement a similar structure of support for volunteers.

5.4.8 Balancing workloads for students was challenging

Students, instructors, and the community partners all acknowledged the difficulty of adding service hours to a course. Hours and service are not typical assignments in an English course. Grading structure, class times and logistics, and other course elements are designed with written assignments in mind. Instructors relied on their own creativity to support class-related work hours outside the classroom. The instructors relied heavily on the community partner for this support, but the partner expressed the desire for instructors to offer alternative assignments or options if the partner was unable to accommodate a particular student. The partner shared that they sometimes encounter “a few students in the class are not actually doing service learning... who just can’t.” The responsibility then falls on the instructor to figure out what alternatives to offer students. At the time of this evaluation, however, all students were able to participate in the volunteering opportunities.

Students and instructors worried about the course load balance. In evaluations, students repeatedly shared about the burden of the time commitment. One student explained, “The four hours of volunteering (during normal school hours), plus class meetings and long class assignments quickly became overwhelming, especially in a difficult online semester. I think our workload for the class could have been reduced because we were putting in so many volunteer hours.” One instructor shared that figuring out an appropriate combination of hours of volunteering per week, reading, and writing was difficult: “It's a lot of gauging and asking for feedback from the students.” Instructors were unsure how much time to expect of students and expressed worry that it may be too much.

5.4.9 The timing of the organization's work and the university school year did not overlap, leading our two instructors to choose partner’s timing needs over the students’ schedules.

Though the community partner tried to meet the needs of the class, one instructor explained that the students were continuing to tutor beyond the academic calendar: “That’s a matter of, really, respecting and meeting the community partners’ needs. Not trying to shift out…when they still have that need from [volunteers].” The second instructor explained the timing as a learning opportunity: “[The students] had to provide the [volunteering] around the hours that were needed. It wasn't… because it's convenient for them and for their schedule. … I think I was pretty, maybe, strict with them about that. And I think that they learned a lot in that regard.”

5.4.10 Successful deliverables were small in scale and heavily edited by the instructor

Successful projects tended to be internally focused instead of public-facing, short and low quantity, and edited and screened before going to the community partner. However, some instructors were unaccustomed to heavily editing student work. A partner who was experienced working with the university explained their history of working on projects with university partners:

> "If a professor comes to us and says, we want our students to create marketing content for you, or to create a new volunteer training, we can say we have tried doing things like that. Many times, it never really works out. There's just not enough lead time for the students to have enough of a deep understanding of our organization, enough context, enough skill to produce something that we can actually use. And it takes a lot of our time."

This partner's experience can inform the scope of projects for all classes, though partners who are new to working with UM students may need more support from instructors anticipating the limitations of first-year students. Writing intended for a public audience -- usually professional work, like "marketing content" -- requires a high skill level. Most large scale projects would also require this "deep understanding" of the organization and also expert knowledge of the organization's service area (e.g., K-12 education, public health, environment and sustainability, etc). Getting student work to professional and informed quality requires time, time from someone experienced and knowledgeable.

5.4.11 Internally focused

In one class where individual students each submitted a deliverable, the partner was pleased with the project because it was very short (<1 page) and didn't have a public audience (students' friends and families). The partner praised the project for being "personal," commenting that they could tell the students "really took their time." When the audience for student work was their own communities and networks, partners commented that students "found different ways to connect to the person they were writing to and connect the organization… And it was really very heartfelt."

Partners appreciated projects that informed and involved the class with their work. For many partners, getting to educate well-resourced, often privileged, university students about their work was a primary benefit, as we explore more in section 7. For some partners, having a class produce articles was more a means to expose the university to their mission rather than an end in itself. This benefit, we think, could be achieved without the expectation that students produce a public-facing writing project.

Writing projects intended for a general public tended to be less successful. Partners didn't use the projects, or used them even though they did not suit their readership.

5.4.12 Aligning Expectations: Publishing

Community partners and instructors both tended to view publishing student work as an implicit goal of the course. "It was the hope, but it wasn't something explicit," one partner explained. But this led partners to make more compromises than is acceptable to our team and created unrealistic ideals of quality for the students' work. **Though publishing student work may seem appealing, it does not generally seem to be a good fit for first-year writing courses.**

Some partners who received public facing writing expressed pressure to publish student work. Partners expressed sentiments like "it would be nice to guarantee that everyone's gonna be published in the paper after doing this work, " "we tried to publish all of them," and "we were able to publish all but four students' pieces." One partner described balancing their capacity with the pressure to publish: "Many of the ones that were just too overwhelming to deal with at the time, we eventually published."

The motivation for publishing student work was rarely for the sake of the organization, but for the sake of the students. "They had put a lot into it…we wanted it to be a positive experience for the students." One instructor described the attraction and benefit publishing holds for students: "I thought that was a very successful project because they could actually produce a tangible product, but then…when the article was published, they could send it to their families, they could show their friends...And I think it was really helps them process and deal with what is going on at the time. And to feel like they're all representing their fellow students' voices on campus."

Partners who did not publish student work, or only some student work, expressed tension and guilt over that decision. "Everyone else got published, so we gotta publish this guy. And so I felt like there was a little tension there of like…I do feel a bad, but not bad enough to, to publish it just for the sake of that student…but it definitely was like something I was thinking about…Did he even care if he was gonna be published or not? Did he...buy a paper and was it devastating that he wasn't in it? That was kind of tough."

Some partners made extreme accommodations in order to publish students. For most partners, this took the form of putting more work into the students' project to raise them to publishable quality--work that consumed time. One partner even dedicated a new type of publication to the students' work. The partner explained that this extra work and new publication material was created with the intention of publishing all students: "If we didn't do it in that format, we definitely wouldn't have been able to publish them. So we kind of took that extra step so we could do something or do as many people as we could.” Another partner shared that they thought about creating publication space for some student work that otherwise would not be appropriate for their format and audience, but they decided against it.

5.4.13 Short and low quantity

A partner recommended **“reduc[ing] the number of pieces and work to get higher quality of the ones that they're actually doing.”** Having too many pieces, especially lengthy, public-facing pieces, tended to produce lower quality work and be an extreme time burden on the community partners.

One partner received a total of 60 pieces as part of their collaboration--the sheer number of pieces left them overwhelmed and overworked. Another partner explained that a larger scope of articles had been initially discussed, but they set a boundary to match their capacity: “I can't take on 10 extra stories…I can throw in an extra one a month…But pushing beyond that is just a lot of unpaid work for me.” A third partner explained that the students’ writing was twice as long as they had requested; this made it not only time consuming to read but also labor-intensive to edit down to an appropriate length for their publication.

All the community partners who received writing projects spent time looking over the work and providing feedback. In the classes that produced only a few pieces, community partners described the work as “polished” or “[in] a pretty solid state.” In the classes that had one piece per student, partners commented on the low quality of the writing and the amount of editing they would require. One class had enough time for the partner to give feedback to the instructor before the final submission. The partner shared, “The writing was bad…And [the instructor] even agreed…[saying]... I'm gonna get on them about this.” Too many projects seemed to prevent the community partner, instructor, and students from putting in the time necessary to produce quality work.

5.4.14 Instructor editing and screening before submission

The level of editing of the final product before it came to the partner varied depending on the course and instructor. **The most successful projects tended to be those which had been not only revised several times by the students but also carefully proofread and corrected by the instructor.** Having feedback from the partner about content and the direction of the project as it was being developed or written was also important, as we discuss in section 6.3. But when the final piece was delivered, community partners praised carefully-edited work, and expressed frustration at the time necessary to proofread work. This editing would include making sure that sources are cited (though not in excess, as we see in section 5.3) and the work conforms to the proper length, spelling, and grammar conventions for the partners' needs.

Introducing more editing into student work as part of English 126 may be a mindset change for instructors. The English Department Writing Program does not heavily emphasize standard English grammar structure in its course goals, focusing instead on the importance of revision, perspective, and content. This curriculum alignes with anti-racist teaching practices, since standard English can be and is often used as a tool of oppression, discrimination, and white supremacy. Instructors are often cautious about policing students' language. However, the stakes of grammatical inconsistencies are very low in a class assignment. At the very most they result in a lower score on the work, and reflect on the student alone. But for work that will be given to community partners, particularly those intended for publication, even a single proofreading oversight can have high stakes, reflecting negatively on the organization. Partners, then, who received only lightly edited work took on the extremely time intensive task of editing and proofreading.

Two of our community partners had opposite experiences of editing student work. “They were pretty close to being ready for publication,” said one partner. “I think [the instructor] may have edited the pieces herself…before they got to me.” This partner said they did “light editing.” The other was unable to consider publishing the work as it was given to them and said it needed to be either “tossed out or… totally edited by us.”

Instructors may also need to check that the student work fits the partners' directions. While we discuss the more difficult aspects of this task in section 5.6, at least one partner mentioned that the student work was much longer than the clear word count they had specified. One partner explained that student work “needs to be edited, reviewed, maybe sent back to be looked at again, or fixed a little bit.” Careful screening and editing by the instructor may shorten the time burden on the community partners.

In cases where the students write individually, instructors should consider delivering only the highest quality work to community partners.

5.5 Writing Content Critiques

Community partners had some consistent critiques about the students’ writing products. **Its content or topic was not suited to the organization’s audience, reflected the limited perspective and experience of a university freshman class, was too long and complex, and did not align with the community partner's ideas for the project.** These findings may help instructors guide their writing instruction in the classroom. More importantly, we hope it can guide expectations for what first-year students are able to produce. We found that community partners had some implicit expectations for excellence, especially those who had worked with graduate courses in the past. Instructors, who are themselves trained in academic writing, seemed to sometimes have expectations about writing quality more suited to the academy than the community, indicating a need for greater reflexivity. Instructors generally expressed positivity about the student writing, sometimes noting that it seemed higher quality than other first-year writing classes. They attribute this to the self-selected nature of the class and the students' passion for "real" writing projects.

5.5.1 Aligning Expectations: Quality

In the partnering phase, community partners who were new to working with early-career students were not given enough information to make a free choice to work with a first-year class. **Many partners requested clearer information about what to expect from a freshman writing class in the future.** For example, in the interviews, several partners expressed a desire for a class where students had a specific interest in journalism or other work/skill specific to the organization. However, the student body of first-year writing classes are interdisciplinary, and many students haven't formed clear ideas about their areas of interest. Meanwhile, English 126 instructors need to be prepared to inform community stakeholders about what can and cannot happen in a first year class. Learning to scope developmentally-appropriate assignments and communicate clear expectations has a steep learning curve for both instructors and community partners.

Partners were not informed about the different course types and levels. Multiple partners explained that they didn't know that English 126 was a freshman class, or if they did, hadn't considered the implications of that level of writing. Not all partners had been told in a clear way that the course was a freshman course--the terminology of "126" and perhaps even "first-year writing requirement" may be too specific to the university. One partner explained that they wish that it had been clearer that it was a first year class, and that “they were just in high school a few months ago.”

The product is a class project, not a professional product. Especially when the project was intended to be professional-type work, partners did not know what to expect from a University of Michigan freshman class. Some instructors felt that the partners did not understand what kind of writing to expect from that age and experience: “I think [the community partner] wanted the writing to actually come across as polished professional journalist writing, but when [they] got it, it's like an 18 year old wrote this.” While English 126 is not restricted to a certain year or age of students, most of the students who take the course are freshman, and indeed eighteen years old. Partners were still willing to work with freshman classes, but emphasized that they wanted to understand what working with a first year class would be like.

The first-year writing class is not representative of the university as a whole. Six out of the eight interviewed partners had worked with university classes before, had relationships with university programs, or were otherwise affiliated with the university. **Partners who had only worked with graduate students or even upperclassmen may have found it difficult to adjust their expectations for first-year writing students.** Some partners had worked with graduate classes whose students were training in their organizations’ field. They worked specifically with upper level classes in journalism, healthcare, etc. They had hosted interns. Some had partnered with university programs aimed at supporting the types of communities their organization served (e.g., a nursing class with a healthcare organization). All of these prior experiences may have created a certain set of expectations about what the partnership would provide. One partner explained their perspective when they first started working with English

126: “Oh, U of M, great, they’ve got money, they’ve got these resources, they are really selective about their students ….It's unrealistic expectations.”

5.5.2 The topic and content was not always relevant to the audience

Students chose their own topics and/or content for some projects, but there were problems with the **relevance of the topic, timeliness of the material, and tone or style with which writing was presented.** Published student pieces didn’t “click” for one organization’s audience: “The stories were not huge performers.” Another partner said they hoped instructors would help students “find topics that are broadly interesting...or to take a topic and find a way to make it interesting to a broad group of people.”

5.5.3 When writing about current events, the information became outdated

Some students chose to write about current events and ended up producing information that was outdated by the time it was delivered to the community partner. One partner explained that they were interested in seeing what topics students were interested in so they could better reach the college student demographic. However, the time-sensitive nature of the topics made them ill-suited as a project. “I would have pushed them towards different topics,” the partner suggested retrospectively, explaining that it had already been decided that the students would choose their own and that the instructor seemed to want students to have autonomy over their topics.

5.5.4 The writing was too complex and long

Explaining public writing, partners noted that having some research content was fine, but students struggled to adapt research for public audiences. One partner explained that reading student writing was like reading an academic journal or a research paper and that they “weren't really interested in content like that.” Another partner made a similar statement: “a lot of them tended to be with references and research.” Students didn’t seem to recognize that **research in public writing is fundamentally different, or at the very least differently presented.** One partner described “millions of footnotes,” while another partner noted that some students hadn’t cited at all. Overall, this study found that students need a lot of support translating research into a format and style that would be appropriate for broader audiences. **Instructors should be prepared to develop these skills in their English 126 course.**

From the perspective of the community partners, students really struggled to keep their writing clear and concise. According to some partners, the students’ writing was too complicated, filled with “big words and long sentences and lots of data.” As one partner put it, “That's the goal. We don't need redundant intros and conclusions …What we wanna do is grab the reader's attention.” Most partners were looking for content, but the length was an obstacle to usable content: “Students were writing too much, and then you need them to distill it down and think about what's really relevant. The writing was “too complicated for our audience” said one partner. While this partner found the topic of the writing interesting, they ended up not using the student work because they “didn’t want to rewrite it.”

5.5.5 Students’ unfamiliarity with community audiences

Partners made it very clear that they appreciated and valued students’ perspectives. **When projects were written on behalf of the student, rather than the organization, the students’ perspective was often an asset rather than a hindrance.** When students were tasked with connecting with a broad audience, or an audience which was also targeted by the community organization, the project was rarely successful.

One partner explained that the appeal of what the students chose to write was limited to other students. Partners and instructors saw students struggling to adapt to an audience who was unlike themselves. Another partner recommended that instructors guide students to think about how their work might be read by someone who is not from the university.

Multiple instructors emphasized the importance of teaching power and privilege, or personal development more broadly, as part of the course:

> "It seems to me like a lot of students are walking away with a more nuanced understanding of what it means to enter into this work, knowing that they are University of Michigan students with a lot of power and privilege and a lot of different kinds of historical context that they're walking into."

The students' writing sometimes reinforced community partners' expectations about students' perspective and experience. One partner explained, "It's difficult to be a student at U of M and write about [redacted: organization's mission] and not sound very privileged and very ignorant of that experience." All of the organizations who partnered with our classes worked with communities with a different socioeconomic makeup than the typical University of Michigan demographic. Partners found this difference showed up in student writing.

Exploring power and privilege is a large part of the learning goals of English 126. Both instructors and community partners noticed students learning in this area appropriate to their development. One community partner from a different class tied students' understanding privilege to better writing:

> "Getting them to understand that everything is a privilege…. is definitely a need. I think the professor definitely had them look and see, analyze themselves and see how much privilege and how many things they have …. that they never

> really looked at….Looking at it from a different perspective can help them with their writing."

Partners and instructors commented that, through working with the community partners, students were exposed to different perspectives and experiences than most of them were accustomed to, and this was an asset to their writing.

5.5.6 Articulating what was expected out of the final product was a key challenge noted by community partners

It is worth mentioning here that five of the partners explained that the content of the project was not what they had in mind. Occasionally, the partner had a specific instruction (like word count) that was overlooked, as we discussed in section 4.4. More often, however, the final product did not align with their vision in ways less difficult to define. Partners described explaining to the instructor what they wanted in broad terms but then having more specific ideas in mind. Or, communicating less measurable objectives (like making work "relatable") multiple times and repeatedly getting work that did not meet those objectives.

5.6 Partner Relationships

Instructors and community partners often mentioned navigating and figuring out how to work with a group external to their organization. There was a learning curve for everyone, and second or third time partnerships tended to have clearer expectations and more comfort expressed about communication. However, our research team did see that the relationships built through the 126 partnerships were described in overwhelmingly positive terms. Working with the Ginsberg Center has successfully kept English 126 from undermining community expertise and priorities. Partners were asked if they felt listened to and respected by the instructors, and even prompted to think of a time when they did not feel that way. Every time, they were all quick to praise their interactions with the instructor, and assure us that they felt listened to. Difficulties surrounded expectations, frequency of communication, and the project itself, but as we saw in section 3.4, the relationships themselves were positive.

5.6.1 Community partners do not always feel empowered to express desires or needs

Many instructors expressed that meeting the partners’ needs was a priority for them and assumed that they were meeting the partners’ needs. However, instructors are accustomed to being student centered and, because they were new to community engagement, had difficulty envisioning and enacting mutual benefit. At times, instructors did not proactively communicate because they were concerned about imposing on their partners’ time. They also seemed to have a hard time establishing the sort of rapport that enables productive conflict and conversation about power with their community partners. Thus, partners did not always feel empowered to express their needs, desires, or critical feedback. Sometimes partners would make self-harming compromises or take on undue burdens. This was because they didn’t want to risk their reputation with the university and felt like the class structure didn’t have room for their needs. Partners expressed a sense of obligation from receiving “free help.” Even in the interviews, partners hesitated to offer constructive criticism lest they seem unappreciative or that they didn’t want to work with classes.

Both instructors and community partners need to feel empowered to enforce boundaries. Coordination of an English 126 class puts demands on very busy individuals--both instructors and partners. While, as we see in section 6.2, instructors were hesitant to impose on partners’ time, they could not always anticipate the types of requests that were more burdensome to their partner. Because of their experience working with university students, one partner already knew that other organizations `` might not feel empowered to say, “I am at the limit for how much time I can invest into this.” Their own system of success relied on being able to say “no.” This attitude was critical to the success of the partnership

Partners didn’t want to jeopardize the opportunity of receiving university affiliated help, and they also wanted students to have a positive impression of their organization. One partner explained that they were worried about giving negative writing feedback to students because it might “put a bad taste in their mouth about [our organization].” For this reason, another partner felt comfortable sharing critical feedback about writing quality and student’s perspective with the instructor, who could advocate on their behalf, but not with the students themselves. For some partners, a goal of the partnership was sharing the mission of their organization with students, perhaps even having these students or their friends end up working or volunteering with them.

Partners expressed a sense that the class structure didn’t have room for their needs. Some partners felt like it wasn’t their place to suggest or request any changes. Others felt that even if they had spoken up, the course was not flexible enough to adapt. The following reasons for this feeling came up in the interviews:

- The instructor already had a plan.
- The class was supposed to benefit students first, them second, if at all.
- The class was rigid. It worked a certain way and required certain assignments.
- The class belonged to the instructor, and they didn’t want to interfere.

Some of these beliefs were implicitly reinforced by the instructors and our program. One instructor talked positively about students choosing their own topics and then asked the partner for input about resources the students could use to write about the topics. They did not ask the partner for input on the topics themselves. The partner, who wanted to guide the students’ topics, didn’t feel like there was room to do that. Like other instructors, this instructor didn’t proactively ask for the feedback in part because they were trying to avoid burdening the partner, the danger of saying “yes” when they didn’t have capacity, as we explained earlier. **Many instructors were also not sure where and to what extent to invite the partner into the course, indicating a need for greater specificity and support during the English 126 training.**

Overall, instructors talked in very student-centered ways in the interviews, which may have contributed to partners feeling, as one put it, second place. Significant portions of the instructor interviews comprised them discussing students learning and the students benefits, rather than the impact on the community partner. One instructor was explicit about this point: “I like to keep things as student centered as possible, right? Even before the community partner enters the picture, I want the students to sort of determine where the class heads as much as is doable.” However, instructors may need more support to develop an equally deep understanding of what it means to center community in their courses.

Both because of this evaluation and research on service-learning courses, the authors of this report believe that classes can be flexible and meet the organizations’ needs without compromising student learning. One of the goals of the course is forming “equitable partnership,” defined in part through “mutual benefit,” both partners getting what they need out of their shared work. Students are having fantastic learning experiences, but it may require a mindset change for both the partners and the instructors to make the organization’s needs an equal priority.

5.6.2 Instructors are hesitant to impose on partners’ time

Instructors sometimes excluded partners from the course out of good intentions: they wanted to respect the partner’s time. Community partners are, indeed, usually working under time constraints, and instructors should be aware of and supportive of their boundaries. One partner even shared that the time they spent on the class was uncompensated. However, successful partnerships rely on communication and feedback. One instructor explained, “I don't know if I want to bother this editor of this big publication… I was trying to be conscious of that a little bit by not bothering them or following up with [them] too much.” Another explained that they were worried about jeopardizing the partnership or causing unintended harm to the organization. At the same time, many partners expressed that they wished instructors had asked for more of their feedback in the process of the project, shared more information about the course, or been invited to speak more directly to the students. Therefore, it appears that instructors unhelpfully censored themselves and inaccurately estimated their partners’ interest in their course.

Overall, satisfaction with the time commitment varied. Several partners also said the high time commitment kept them from working with English 126 a second time, while another said that “the time commitment was less and, and better than I was expecting.” What’s most important is that instructors learn to communicate with community partners about how they would like to be involved in the course, proactively invite their input and participation, and remain flexible and respectful of their partners’ boundaries.

5.6.3 Feedback was requested at key stages

Partners and instructors explained the importance of having feedback 1) before the project was presented to students (which might be in the form of an assignment sheet or description), 2) at an intermediate stage when some of the project had been completed, and 3) after the project was completed. Especially for new instructor-partner pairings, negotiating the content and format of the project may take ongoing discussions and alignment.

Unsurprisingly, projects were less satisfactory when the finished product was presented to the partner without checking in to align expectations along the way. When there were multiple check-ins about the project throughout the semester, both instructors and partners said that it helped them know what to expect and clarify expectations.

When partners were given the final deliverable at the end of the semester, there was no longer time for major corrections, or for the partner to explain that the project was not what they expected. Often, the partner would explain their idea of the assignment to the instructor, but the instructor would not explain the assignment back to the partner in a detailed way before it was presented to the students. In some instances, the community partners did not receive the assignment description or rubric that the students were given, and it was unclear to partners how the instructors were communicating to students about their project. Some partners expressed surprise at the content of the deliverables. However, one partner also explained that they wished they had a clearer vision of what they wanted their project to be at the onset. The expectation was that they had an articulated and perfectly-defined project concept to give the instructor. Ongoing feedback, including allowing the community partners to give feedback on assignment descriptions and rubrics, may lessen this pressure and give partners and instructors the flexibility to clarify, define, and adapt the project for the particular class and organization.

Some partners also did not have the opportunity to give final feedback that made its way to the students. One partner explained “I had all the blog posts, and they were done and off they went. And I thought I think I was, I thought, like well, maybe it would’ve been good to give them a little feedback on their final thing.” An instructor mentioned that they regretted not allowing more time to implement partner feedback at the end of the semester. Putting the project last, as a final assignment, limited the time the class had to make corrections based on partner feedback.

5.7 Additional Community Partner Needs: Student Engagement

Partners appreciated the opportunity to engage students; some citing it as an even more important benefit of working with English 126 than the project. They were interested in both helping the students and enriching their learning experience, as well as the help that students could bring to their organizations by becoming involved or learning about their mission.

Partners viewed the chance to work with their organization as a beneficial learning opportunity for students and expressed deep investment in the students' education. This was especially true for the organizations whose mission included raising awareness or educating the public in various capacities. All partners either praised the time they were able to talk to students or wished they had more engagement with the class in a teaching capacity. They articulated the value of sharing their mission, approach to social justice issues, or knowledge about the community with students. They had a rich and nuanced understanding of the way in which engaging in the project could help student learning, and in the interviews, they shared many ideas about how student learning could be improved. Over and over, partners expressed investment in the students' learning.

Partners also saw benefits for their organizations in working with students. The type of benefit varied from organization to organization. Some were motivated to learn about the interests of college students in order to better reach that audience. Others were hoping students would become involved in their organization beyond the capacity of the class. Some partners expressed that English 126 was an opportunity to spread information about their organization to the university student population, perhaps even beyond the scope of the class as students talked about it to their friends. There was a hope that raised awareness in the student population could give them access to more student volunteers, university resources, and programs.

5.8 Additional Instructor Needs: Time and Training

Preparatory work for the course was very time consuming for instructors because of the new subject matter (community engagement), coordination with the partner, and the need for flexibility and adaptation. This time is on top of the initial required community-engaged course design training, and the typical work of organizing a new course.

The Ginsberg Center training supported instructors in learning foundations for community-engaged pedagogy, creating networks of support, creating expectations, and providing materials. This evaluation confirms the importance and necessity of continuing training with the Ginsberg Center.

5.8.1 The course was time-consuming at multiple stages

Instructors expressed that the time commitment for English 126 was much greater than other first-year writing courses. They cited matching, training, coordinating with the community partner, and unfamiliar subject matter as primary reasons. Additionally, summer work is not compensated for most instructors, making this time commitment extra burdensome. (Summer commitments for instructors teaching English 126 for the first time include 8 hours of training, going through a matchmaking process with the Ginsberg Center, and reviewing Ginsberg Center readings and resources.)

Working with a community partner entails extra meetings, managing communication, and varying the class schedule and assignments based on community partners’ needs. One instructor explained that not being able to reuse material from previous classes because partners' needs change made the prep work more time consuming.

Instructors were accustomed to having all their planning work finalized far in advance of the class, but the nature of working with an outside organization necessitated ongoing planning. For new teachers of English 126, advance planning is also difficult because of the time it took to match with a community partner. Some did not find a compatible partner until the end of the summer. Organizing meetings with the community partner, adjusting materials or timelines mid-semester, or responding to unexpected feedback extended the prep time considerably. One instructor said that the prep time for 126 "felt at least.. double or three times the amount as 125."

Beyond training, instructors also found that learning about the organizations' context was time consuming. Not all the instructors had backgrounds in education, health, environment, etc, and had to find materials and information for their students in a field they were unfamiliar with.

5.8.2 Skilled training, support and resources were essential

Although training was an additional time commitment, instructors emphasized that it was a necessary support for them to feel prepared, equipped with resources, and knowledgeable about community engagement. Instructors commented on the ethical considerations that the training provoked and appreciated that the training explained the values they should bring to this work and how to impart them to students more generally.

Many of the positive remarks made by partners about their interactions with instructors parallel what instructors said they learned in training. Based on instructors' comments, training helped prioritize the partners needs and minimize the harm that working with university classes can often cause. One instructor explained "I didn't want to do anything that would jeopardize the partnership or that would really harm the community partner because of all the training that we've had.” An instructor who already had experience teaching community-engaged courses described their change in approach after the training: “[At first] I knew what I wanted to do, and I knew what I wanted to teach…. but I didn't ask the community partner what their needs were so much. It was me sort of coming in with my own agenda, especially the first time around. And I think the Ginsberg Center philosophically does a great service by reinforcing that you start with what the community partner needs. And then you try to meet those needs in a way that will also check the boxes over on the EDWP side.”

Instructors also cited training as a place where they learned about resources, support, and other helpful course materials. Three of them mentioned inviting Ginsberg workshops into their classes to help prepare their students for ethical engagement, and the opportunity to get ongoing support from Ginsberg staff and the EDWP course coordinator.

5.9 Next Steps

The authors of this report found that the English 126 course offers valuable benefits to students, instructors, and community partners. When offering feedback, all the stakeholders emphasized that, even if they were offering critique, they found great value in the program and wanted it to continue. Based on this evaluation, the English Department Writing Program and the Ginsberg Center have already begun implementing improvements to English 126 programming. Some of these steps were already ongoing when the evaluation began. The steps enumerated below are in various stages of completion.

5.9.1 Project and Deliverables

The English Department Writing Program is exploring the types of assignments and projects 126 can offer and communicating the range of flexibility that instructors have with assignments for English 126. The department is also offering clarification about to what extent instructors can edit student work.

The department is also distributing guidelines for projects and deliverables to new English 126 instructors. These guidelines, informed by this evaluation, include the following:

- Create the project in collaboration with the community partner based on their priorities
- Either 1) choose a single deliverable or several collaborative deliverables instead of a one-project-per student format or 2) expect to package the students' projects in a manageable way, perhaps only selecting the best projects to send to the community partners
- Make the content given to the community partner as short and well organized as possible, asking the partner for feedback on how they want things formatted and packaged
- Choose to write university or partner-facing material instead of public, published writing
- Think beyond writing projects: research, interviewing, volunteering, fundraising

The English Department is also developing a list of requirements for the project and providing sample student work to the Ginsberg center prior to matchmaking.

The English 126 admin are also sending specific project evaluation forms to English 126 partners that ask for their feedback on the project, not just the match. They may also follow up during the semester to see if partners are satisfied with the way the project and partnership are going.

Instructors will more consistently be showing the partner the project in progress (when applicable) to help align expectations and course correct. They can also allow time in the semester to apply any feedback the partner offers.

5.9.2 Writing Content Critiques

The *English Department Writing Program* will be providing more robust support and instruction for teaching non-academic writing genres. This includes adding readings, activities, and other related materials to the Canvas page where instructors already have access to course materials.

When recruiting partners to match with English 126 classes the *Ginsberg Center* is emphasizing that the deliverable can be decided between the partner and the instructor, and that it should ideally be something that would benefit the partner. They are also offering partners examples of past successful projects, and they are no longer including student-produced articles as a recommended project.

Instructors will be heavily editing deliverables before they are given to the community partner, and specifically addressing characteristics of non-academic writing in contrast to academic writing in the classroom.

5.9.3 Partner Relationships

The English Department Writing Program is continuing to require instructor training with the Ginsberg Center, as instructors report that it supported their understanding of ethical partnership. The department, in conjunction with the course coordinator, is developing a stable timeline for instructor recruitment, training, and matching.

To support long-term relationships, the department is hoping to have a consistent offering of 126 with a specific partner every fall, spring, etc.

*The Ginsberg Center'*s matching team can send a specific project evaluation form to English 126 partners that asks for their feedback on the project, not just the match. They may also follow up during the semester to see if partners are satisfied with the way the project and partnership are going.

During training, the Center is offering more materials to support project collaboration, suggested timelines for communication, and expectations templates for English 126.

The administrative email for the course, Engl126admin@umich.edu is being shared with partners so they can easily contact both Ginsberg and EDWP at the same time. They may also wish to offer additional avenues for anonymous feedback. The course coordinator is sharing syllabi, projects, and key dates with the matching team at the Ginsberg Center. They are also keeping notes from past projects and partners that can be shared with future instructors.

5.9.4 Additional Community Partner Needs

The English Department Writing Program, LSA, and the Ginsberg Center are working together to establish a clear source for financial compensation to partners for the time it takes to enrich the learning experiences of our students. An honorarium or other ethical compensation when partners speak to classes could both lessen the burden of the time and travel and ameliorate the power discrepancy by formally recognizing the partners' expertise. An additional stipend for their feedback on projects may also help encourage communication between instructors and partners.

The department is working to put the name of the partner into the course names to help connect students who may be interested in working with that partner specifically.

Instructors will be inviting partners to talk to students more frequently if that meets the partner's wishes. If instructors can offer compensation for the partners' role in educating students, instructors can feel free to create a plan with the partner that involves them more deeply in the pedagogy of the course.

5.9.5 Additional Instructor Needs

The English Department Writing Program is creating and offering an archive of materials for instructors and widely circulating a description of the course to attract new instructors. They may also wish to dedicate some funds for instructors' professional development in community-engaged pedagogy and partnership, including compensating for the hours spent working with the Ginsberg Center.

The Course Coordinator will be helping instructors connect with library subject specialists who can help the instructors find materials related to the community partners' work. The coordinator may also reach out to instructors through the semester to connect them to resources in EDWP and the Ginsberg Center specific to their class and partner.

Instructors will be asking partners if they have recommended materials, readings, etc. for themselves or their students. These can also be shared with the *course coordinator* to benefit future instructors of English 126.

To further support instructors through training, Ginsberg's Engaged Scholarship Manager made the following updates to the English 126 training:

- Emphasizing lessons from the pedagogy of community-engagement that argue that service-learning courses must go beyond merely adding a service component to a course. Because it was clear that instructors' expectations for English 126 were highly influenced by their experiences teaching English 124 or 125, the training was altered to emphasize the fundamental differences between the courses. Instructors are advised to avoid approaching English 126 course design by lightly adapting an English 125 syllabus.
- Developing English 126 instructors' ability to plan and scope appropriate projects for first-year writers. Instructors are given a list of acceptable project types, along with features of project types to emphasize or avoid. This includes

particular recommendations for managing community partners' expectations for what they can reasonably expect from first-year writers.

- Giving more explicit recommendations for communicating with community partners. The training now includes timelines for being in communication with partners and more detailed instructions on how and when to check in.
- Introducing scenarios that directly arise from the study. The study produced several examples of issues or tensions that the instructors are now able to explore through structured case studies during the training.

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Appendix

University of Michigan students who were currently in or had previously taken English 126 (n=188) were sent an anonymous self-administered Qualtrics survey via email in Fall 2021.

Participation in this study was voluntary and participants had the option to skip any questions they didn't want to answer. Participants were told that the goal of the survey was to assess the effectiveness of the English 126 curriculum and its impact on the student. The survey included questions about what students' learned, their experience in the class, and attitudes about community engaged writing.

More specifically, the survey included 13 questions about students' self-perceived learning outcomes of the course taken directly from the wording of the learning goals for the course. The last eight questions of the survey were a selection of 2 questions from the Diversity Attitudes, Social Justice Attitudes, Civic Action, and Interpersonal and Problem solving skills categories in Moely et al.'s (2002) Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (CASQ). The CASQ questions were used to measure correlations between widely-accepted outcomes of community engagement and the learning objectives of the course. These 21 questions were on a 5 point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). The survey concluded with two open ended questions asking students to share how the course had shaped their ideas about academic writing and community engagement. An additional feedback box was included in case students had additional comments or clarifications.

Past and current instructors of English 126 (n=8), and the primary contacts of the community organizations (n=9) who were paired with English 126 courses were requested interviews by email. One of the organizations had two different contacts who had worked with an English 126 class in different semesters. All the instructors and all but one of the community partners participated in 30 min to 60 minute, semi structured interviews over zoom. Partners and instructors were compensated for their participation. Two members of our research team were involved in the administration of the English 126 program, so interviews were divided so that no interviewee was interviewed by an individual with whom they had previously worked.

We approached data analysis from a grounded theory perspective (Charmaz, 2006). Two researchers read through each of the transcripts, generating independent lists of open codes to describe how instructors and community partners evaluated and experienced English 126. Then, we reviewed the open codes to inductively create thematic categories. We then applied focused codes to each transcript.

Our team also used course evaluations distributed to students by the English Department writing program and match evaluation surveys distributed to community partners by the Ginsberg Center. The course evaluation open responses were coded along with the open feedback responses to the student survey. The match evaluations were not formally analyzed, but helped inform our interviews with the community partners.

This project was IRB exempt since the research with students was conducted in established educational settings and involving normal educational practices, and with other stakeholders it only involved survey and interview procedures.

Survey and Interview questions

Before taking English 126: Community-Engaged writing, had you worked with a community organization?

Likert questions:

1. This course helped me value multiple ways of approaching a problem (for example, academic research, community-engaged partnerships, policy changes, etc.)
2. Because of this course, I improved my ability to read critically.
3. Because of this course, I improved in my ability to engage in sympathetic, respectful dialogue with a range of perspectives, including perspectives different from my own.
4. Because of this course, I better understand the power and privilege embedded in the practices and values of academic writing.
5. Because of this course, I grew in cultural and personal humility.
6. Because of this course, I improved in my ability to listen to others in order to understand that all their goals, interests, etc are being addressed.
7. In this course, I used writing to reflect on my attitudes, actions, and beliefs.
8. Because of this course, I better understand how my personal decisions contribute to the overall care, well-being, or positive functioning of individuals and communities that are a part of my life.
9. In this course, I formed an equitable relationship with a community partner.
10. I understand the mission and values of the community partner my class worked with.
11. Because of this course, I better understand the root causes and systems that create inequalities in society.
12. Because of this course, I understand the power dynamics between our class and our community partner.

13. I plan to become involved in my community.
14. I can listen to other people’s opinions.
15. I am committed to making a positive difference.
16. Cultural diversity within a group makes the group more interesting and effective.
17. When trying to understand the position of others, I make efforts to place myself in their position.
18. I enjoy meeting people who come from backgrounds very different from my own.

Instructor Interview Questions

1. What motivated you to pursue teaching an English 126 course?
2. In terms of time spent preparing and difficulty of preparing (syllabus design, partnership
3. management, lesson planning), how does English 126 compare to English 125?
4. To what extent did the community-engaged portions of your course help you achieve the stated learning objectives of English 126?
5. How would you describe your relationship with your students? How do you believe the course impacted them?
6. How would you describe your relationship with your community partner? How do you believe the course impacted their organization?
7. Were there any challenges you encountered while designing or implementing your English 126 course?
    1. What helped you navigate those challenges?
8. Were there any positive highlights that arose during the design or implementation of your English 126 course?

    1. What contributed to those positive moments?

9. Would you recommend teaching English 126 or a similar community-engaged course to a colleague? Why or why not?
10. How has your confidence teaching community engaged courses changed over time? What do you think has contributed to this change?
11. How do you think your experience teaching English 126 has helped/will help you achieve your career goals, if at all?
12. How do you think your experience teaching English 126 has helped/will help you achieve your personal goals, if at all? (If applicable, the interviewer can prompt the interviewee by reading their stated non-career related motivations from question 1.)

Focus Group questions

1. How did the training help you prepare to teach your course?
2. What else would you recommend to better prepare future instructors of English 126? What other topics or techniques do you wish were covered?
3. What was most helpful about the partner matchmaking process? What suggestions do you have to improve the process of finding a partner?
4. What suggestions do you have to inform our process of supporting partnerships once they are established?
5. Is there anything else you would like the English Department Writing Program or the Ginsberg Center to know about your experience preparing for English 126 that we have not already asked you about?

Ginsberg Match Evaluation Questions

1. Did this match affect your organization's capacity to fulfill your project/organizational mission?
2. (Yes/No/Unsure)
3. To what extent was this match useful to your organization? (1-10 Scale)
4. Please provide any additional context to help us understand your experience and quality of your match
5. Check all the contacts (email, phone meetings, zoom meetings) you had throughout your match. (Ginsberg Staff, Faculty Instructor, Student Team)
6. How satisfied (very unsatisfied-completely satisfied) did you feel with the following statements during your match? Please rate the quality of the partnership overall.
    1. [Understanding of needs (your partner understood what your goals were, the constraints you operated under, etc.)]
    2. [Transparency (to what extent did the partner share their goals and context, sufficient detail about process, reliable updates on changes/adaptations to timeline/project, etc.)]
    3. [Dependability/reliability (can be counted on, return calls/email, show up to scheduled meetings with materials promised)]
    4. [Communication - clear, responsive, timely, respectful/professional]
    5. [Shared decision-making (provided updates and opportunities to provide feedback on intermediate deliverables or project direction)]

    6. [Achieved project goals (the extent to which this partnership adhered to the plan agreed upon at the start)]

7. If you want to elaborate on your experience, we would appreciate examples from your match. Please note any specific comments here:
8. How likely are you to work with the campus partner you were matched to again on another project? (1-10)
9. How likely are you to engage with the matchmaking process with the Ginsberg Center again? (1-10 Scale)
10. The Ginsberg Center defines equity in partnerships as each partner getting a fair share of benefit and burden, based on considerations such as need, effort, and ability to contribute. Thinking about your answer to the distribution of benefit/burden question above, to what extent was your partnership(s) aligned with this definition of equity? (1-10 Scale)
11. Any Additional Comments

Community Partner Interview Questions

1. Please tell us about your instructor partner and what project their class did for you.
2. What was your coordination and planning with the instructor like before the class began?
3. To what extent did you participate in the design of the course and its content? What do you know about the students' learning goals, how the students were prepared to learn about your organization?

4. How did this match affect your organization's capacity to fulfill your project/organizational mission? (refer to their match eval)
5. Did your project produce outcomes helpful to your organization's mission?
6. Do you feel like the students learned about your organization's mission and contributed to it?
7. Can you describe some moments in the partnership when it felt like the instructor/students were aligning (or misaligning) with your org's mission?
8. To what extent was this match useful to your organization? (refer to their match eval)
9. Please tell us about your experience working with your academic partner and the quality of your match?
    1. Is it clear to you why Ginsberg staff recommended this course to you?
    2. Were you satisfied with the process of working with the course?
    3. Did you share mission/values with the instructor & students?
    4.
10. What were some challenges or opportunities related to working with a first-year course?
    1. Any comparisons with other first-year student experiences, upper level/graduate experiences?
11. Are there things about the course that you wish you knew but did not?
12. To what extent did the instructor and the students seem to understand your organization and mission? (relate back to match eval)
13. To what extent did the instructor and the students seem to understand your community/population you work with?
14. To what extent did the instructor and students exhibit humility and respect towards you and your organization?

15. In community and university partnerships, it is important to us that you feel valued and listened to. To better understand your experience, can you think of a time where you felt valued and listened to in your partnership/describe it for us?

    Can you think of a time where you did not feel valued or listened to in your partnership?

16. Okay, last question. Is there anything else you want to share that we haven't talked about?

Student Survey questions

1. This course helped me value multiple ways of approaching a problem (for example, academic research, community-engaged partnerships, policy changes, etc.)
2. Because of this course, I improved my ability to read critically.
3. Because of this course, I improved in my ability to engage in sympathetic, respectful dialogue with a range of perspectives, including perspectives different from my own.
4. Because of this course, I better understand the power and privilege embedded in the practices and values of academic writing
5. Because of this course, I better understand the power and privilege embedded in the practices and values of academic writing.
6. Because of this course, I grew in cultural and personal humility.
7. Because of this course, I improved in my ability to listen to others in order to understand that all their goals, interests, etc are being addressed.
8. In this course, I used writing to reflect on my attitudes, actions, and beliefs.

9. Because of this course, I better understand how my personal decisions contribute to the overall care, well-being, or positive functioning of individuals and communities that are a part of my life.
10. In this course, I formed an equitable relationship with a community partner.
11. I understand the mission and values of the community partner my class worked with.
12. Because of this course, I better understand the root causes and systems that create inequalities in society.
13. Because of this course, I understand the power dynamics between our class and our community partner.
14. I plan to become involved in my community.
15. I can listen to other people's opinions.
16. Individuals are responsible for their own misfortunes.
17. I am committed to making a positive difference.
18. Cultural diversity within a group makes the group more interesting and effective.
19. When trying to understand the position of others, I make efforts to place myself in their position.
20. We need to look no further than the individual in assessing their problems.
21. I enjoy meeting people who come from backgrounds very different from my own.