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Labor-Based Contract Grading in the Multilingual FYC Classroom:

Unpacking the Variables

by

Kara Kristina Larson

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English with a concentration in Rhetoric and Composition Department of English College of Arts and Sciences University of South Florida

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive, exploratory study’s purpose is to determine the effects of labor-based grading contracts on students whose historical exclusion results in their current day underrepresentation in higher education. A key component of this study is the emphasis on the student’s own perceptions and feelings about the use of labor-based grading contracts. Using a purposive sample of multilingual First-Year Composition (FYC) sections at an R1 university, I investigated the variables of labor-based grading contracts: demographics and written language characteristics, student motivation, ecological variables (i.e., perceptions of grading contracts), and academic performance measures. Research questions include: 1) How do labor-based grading contracts affect students’ motivation and attitudes toward writing? 2) How do labor-based grading contracts affect student perceptions of instructor feedback? and 3) How do students perform on academic performance measures in an FYC class that uses labor-based grading contracts? Using a mixed-methods approach, I collected data from six multilingual sections of FYC that included three sections using labor-based grading contracts and three sections using traditional assessment procedures, to provide comparison. Findings included that while the majority of students had positive reactions to labor-based grading contracts, a significant minority did not. While the small sample size (n = 114) precludes generalizability, this research provides an important heuristic for researchers and WPAs considering the adoption of labor-based grading contracts in their local settings. I conclude with five implications: labor-based grading contracts need to be implemented with an awareness of students’ affect, have
positive effects on students’ reception of instructor feedback, may have harmful consequences for students of color, require teacher training and support, and can be implemented without an explicitly antiracist curriculum.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Epigraph

We all may hate it, but most of us are still required to give grades, and those are the keys to opportunity. Just because our students of color are linguistically rich does not mean that by default those riches can be exchanged in your classroom economies if the economy is not set up to accept those riches.

Some of your students may be starving with pockets and purses full of useless coins in the bustling market of your classrooms, because you don’t accept their money, even though you tell them how valuable it is.

Hold on to it, you say. It’s your identity, your heritage.

But everywhere we go, those heritage coins ain’t worth shit in the White economies of the academy and marketplace. So, you tell them, you gotta exchange that currency, code-switch. But we tell you, I don’t have access to the money-changer, and he charges interest that I cannot afford -- there is value lost in the exchange.

And you say, try anyway.

(Inoue, “How Do We Language So People Stop Killing Each Other”)
Introduction

In April 1974 the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) officially adopted the Students’ Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL) resolution, drafted by the “courageous and enlightened” members of the CCCC Language Policy committee, and despite a pronounced lack of enthusiasm from some CCCC’s members (Perryman-Clark, et al. 4). “Born in the context of the 1970’s” and during a time when many colleges were “opening” admissions, the goal was to “take a stand on a basic educational question: what should the schools do about the language habits of students who come from a wide variety of social, economic, and cultural backgrounds?” (Perryman-Clark, et al. 3; STROL 20). This initially controversial reception did become more and more widely accepted, at least in spirit. However, actual classroom practices, especially around labor and grades, have largely not risen to STROL’s ideals.

In the 21st century, Writing Studies, the current discourse about language and students’ rights has moved into a sometimes heated debate over whether instructors who simply “affirm” students’ home languages are doing enough. An increasing number of scholars argue that without teaching students about the sociohistorical and political consequences of language hierarchies, of which, in the United States, “Standard” Edited American English (SEAE) is clearly on top, we recreate (and enforce) the oppression that people of color continue to endure (Young; Inoue; Baker-Bell). Meanwhile, outside of the university—and the field, first-year writing courses—and developmental writing courses—are largely taught by contingent faculty, the majority of whom do not have professional or academic expertise in Rhetoric and Composition/Writing Studies (Melonçon, et al.).
As the opening epigram by Asao Inoue states, we (writing instructors) tell students that their heritage languages and dialects are valuable and important—all the while we continue to enforce the strictures of SEAE as the only valuable language “in the White economies of the academy and marketplace” (Inoue, “How Do We Language” 367). The valorization of SEAE has material consequences for students of color, students who speak English as an additional language, and students from lower socio-economic status (SES), seen most especially in the shunting of students into non-credit bearing remedial or “developmental” writing classes, which cost students time and money, and contributes to students “stopping out” short of degree completion (Developmental Education; Bailey, et al.). The racial uprisings of the summer of 2020, brought on by the tragic deaths of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Daniel Prude, and too many others, suggests that the United States may, at last, be at a reckoning with its legacies of slavery, institutional racism, and the lasting structural barriers to academic and economic success for Black Americans and other people of color, including students with linguistically diverse\(^1\) backgrounds. It is in this context that I take up Asao Inoue’s challenge for antiracist assessment approaches and empirical research on labor-based grading contracts. The need for structural changes in the academy has never been so urgent, and this dissertation project is designed to meet the current moment.

**Problem**

Some background on student diversity as it is related to US postsecondary retention and graduation may be necessary for readers to understand the exigency for this study. Despite gains

\(^1\) I am defining “linguistically diverse” to mean not only students who speak English as an additional language, but also students who speak African American Vernacular English (AAVE) or any other form of English that does not approximate the Standardized Edited American English (SEAE) of the academy (Inoue, *Antiracist*).
in the late 20th and early 21st century, students of color, linguistically diverse students, and students from lower socio-economic status backgrounds still struggle to earn college degrees as compared to their White (and) Asian peers:

- Asian and White students have much higher six-year completion rates (63.2% and 62.0%, respectively) than Hispanic and Black students (45.8% and 38.0%, respectively). (Shapiro et al., “Completing College”).
- More than 40% of full-time, first-time-in-college students who enroll in a bachelor’s degree program do not graduate within six years; this is especially true for low-income, first-generation in college, and minority students (“Fact Sheet”).
- Approximately one in eight English Language Learners (ELLs) obtain a bachelor’s degree within six years compared with one in three of non-ELL (Bergey, et al. 8).
- Only 9% of students from the lowest income quartile graduate with a bachelor’s degree by age 24, compared to 77% for the top income quartile (“Fact Sheet”).
- In 2018, the percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds neither in school nor working ranged from lows of 7% (Asian) and 11% (White) to highs of 15% (Hispanic), 21% (Black and Pacific Islander), and 29% (American Indian/Alaska Native) (Hussar, et al. 209).
- Meanwhile, the trend of higher median earnings correlating with higher levels of educational attainment continues. For 25- to 34-year-olds who worked full-time, year-round in 2018, the median earnings of those with a master’s or higher degree ($65,000)

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2 While the overall percentage of Asian students performing at or above their White peers is considerable (Shapiro et. al; “Condition of Education”), I should note here that Inoue’s first grading contracts were implemented at Fresno State University in California, where, in the data he collected over 2009-2010, the majority of Asian Pacific Islanders (API) students were Hmong. Inoue noted that in this group, “half speak Hmong at home and half English” (“Grading Contracts: Assessing Their Effectiveness on Different Racial Formations” 85). Among this population about “5 % say their parents have a Bachelor’s degree” and “fewer than 15% report their parents have some college or an Associate’s degree” (“Racial Formations” 86). Thus, in the fall of 2009, Inoue reports “86.1% of regularly admitted, first year API students were designated as needing remediation” (“Racial Formations” 86).
were 19% higher than the earnings of those with a bachelor’s degree ($54,700), and the median earnings of those with a bachelor’s degree were 57% higher than the earnings of high school completers ($34,900) (“Condition of Education” 213).

Thus, while improvement has been made in the last thirty years, these statistics demonstrate that college completion rates for students of color (especially African American and Latinx students) and students who speak English as an additional language are lagging. As Oliveri, et al. demonstrate, graduation rates differ by ethnic/racial subgroup, with 35% of Asian and 29% of White students graduating from two-year institutions within three years completion time and lower rates among Black (24%) and Hispanic (34%) students (“After Admissions”). Similarly, in four-year institutions, a higher percentage of Asian (73%) and White (64%) students graduated within six years completion time, with lower rates reported among Black (40%) and Hispanic (54%) students (Snyder, et al.). And the number of these racial/ethnic and multilingual students is growing. For example, between 2000 and 2018, Hispanic enrollment increased by 164% (from 111,000 to 292,000 students), and Black enrollment increased by 101% (“Condition of Education” 135). “Second-generation” Americans—children born to immigrant parents in the U.S., make up almost 20% of all college students in the U.S. (“Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education”). And, in the fall of 2018, degree-granting postsecondary institutions enrolled 567,000 international (nonresident alien) undergraduate students, an increase of 38% between 2000 and 2010 and by 42% between 2010 and 2018 (“Condition of Education” 135). These numbers clearly estimate that 1) we have work to do to

---

3 I have purposely chosen to refer to multilingual students in American colleges and universities as students who speak English as an additional language (EAL) rather than English Language Learners (ELLs), English Second Language (ESL) students or L2 learners because all of these descriptors place English as the primary or target language while implicitly devaluing students’ home or heritage languages.
achieve equity in college degree attainment and 2) the number of diverse students—be it racial/ethnic, linguistic, or international—is only going to increase.

And the majority of these students will end up in a one- or two-semester writing course that most colleges and universities offer. First-Year Composition (FYC), as I will refer to it here⁴, may be considered one of the first markers on the way to undergraduate success. A 2017 study by Garrett et al. found a strong relationship between students passing FYC and attaining their baccalaureate degrees. In the university the researchers examined, students who earned a C or less in FYC had a 17% graduation rate as compared to students who passed the class with a B- or higher, who had a 53% graduation rate (96). One possible explanatory factor for this finding is that “personal attention and low student/teacher ratios are key factors in college student retention” and these factors are typical of FYC classes (“First-Year Writing” 2). Pegeen Reichert Powell argues that “The unique context of the writing classroom” is a “prime site for retention efforts” given its functions “as an interface between students’ past and future educational experiences, as an introduction to the discourse practices of higher education, and as one of the only universal requirements at most institutions” (669).

In addition to its near universality, FYC classes typically include one or more high-impact practices (HIPs). Empirical research on HIPs suggest that “[t]hey are associated with unusually positive effects on a variety of learning and persistence outcomes” (Kuh et al. 15). The term HIP comes out of George Kuh’s work analyzing National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data (Matzen and McConnell). “By reverse-engineering” students’ self-reported “key

⁴ There is movement to change First-Year Composition to First-Year Writing (FYW). USF continues to use FYC to refer to the two-semester writing course sequence required for all students as part of general education, unless they place out through some mechanism. Thus, I will use FYC throughout this dissertation, with the exception of when a source specifically uses FYW or another term.
areas in which their engagement in learning and learning itself increases and is more meaningful…” Kuh identified multiple “High-Impact Practices,” including first-year seminars and experiences, learning communities/linked course, writing- and inquiry- intensive course, collaborative assignments and projects, and undergraduate research” (Matzen and McConnell). Many of these factors, of course, are present in FYC, thus making FYC a prime place for interventions that support students underrepresented in higher education.

Finally, recent research in Writing Studies has begun to examine FYC courses from a social justice standpoint, aiming to reduce equity gaps between student demographic groups. Scholars such as Mya Poe, Asao Inoue, and Norbert Elliot ask, “How can we ensure that writing assessment leads to the advancement of opportunity” for all students (4; emphasis in original). Poe and co-authors use the term “advancement of opportunity” as a way of identifying “opportunity structures” (Merton; Gamson and Meyer) and “actionable outcomes in educational contexts” (Poe et al.). Writing assessment has been used as a bludgeon to sort and gatekeep students for far too long, so I welcome the idea of transforming its purpose. Inoue argues that assessment is one area where opportunity structures can be opened up; decoupling feedback and grades can provide students with the specific instruction they need without the demotivating factor of low grades. In other words, the assessment practices in FYC courses may provide a space for creating a more equitable and optimal environment that helps underrepresented

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5 While I am retaining FYC to refer to the specific course sequence, I have chosen to use Writing Studies, versus Composition or Composition Studies to refer to the discipline that situates this study. Horner offers two arguments for “renaming composition ‘writing studies’: first, “as a way to incorporate consideration of the full range of writing practices, in and out of school and at all levels and places, into composition scholars’ conception of writing” (citing Bazerman, “Case for Writing Studies as Major Discipline”) and second, “as an alternative to, or at least a new direction for, undergraduate pedagogy and curricula” e.g. the “Writing About Writing” (WAW) approach developed by Downs and Wardle (Horner 40). In 2010, the National Research Center designated “Rhetoric and Composition/Writing Studies” as an Emerging Field in the Classification for Instructional Programs (CIP) codes (Phelps & Ackerman).
students succeed, by allowing students who arrive in college without the Standard Edited American English (SEAE) of the academy, a supportive classroom where their writing is not penalized for “failing” to demonstrate SEAE.

**Purpose of Study**

In *Labor-Based Grading Contracts: Building Equity and Inclusion in the Compassionate Writing Classroom*, Writing Studies scholar Asao Inoue explains the “assessment ecology” he uses in his writing classrooms, which is focused around what he terms *labor-based* grading contracts. While the literature review in the next chapter will delve more deeply into grading contracts, I will briefly describe here Inoue’s labor-based grading contracts here to frame and ground the work of this dissertation project. In contrast to the more common “unilateral” grading contracts popularized by Peter Elbow and Jane Danielewicz in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s, in which students are guaranteed a “B” in return for a specified amount of work but are still judged by “quality” in order to earn an “A,” Inoue takes an explicitly Marxist approach that focuses (almost) exclusively on the work or *labor* produced by the students. In his own words, Inoue explains that “a labor-based grading contract is essentially a set of social agreements with the entire class about how final course grades will be determined for everyone” (*Labor-Based* 130).

In Inoue’s classrooms, all assignments have explicit process directions that outline students’ anticipated labor step by step, including estimated task times. Students keep *labor logs*, although Inoue does not grade students on the number of hours of labor students track each week⁶. Students write weekly reflections on their learning and labor. Inoue also tracks what he

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⁶ Inoue tells students at the beginning of the semester that he does not grade students on the number of hours logged each week because he wants students “to use the logs honestly and as a way to reflect upon their labor as practices” and does not want them to be “too tempted to fudge their numbers” (*Labor-Based* 154).
calls “accountability behaviors”: attendance, on-time assignment submission, etc. At mid-terms, Inoue renegotiates the contract with his students, and students who want to earn an A must “do more labor,” most of which must benefit the class community in some way (*Labor-Based* 137). Finally, it is worth noting that in Inoue’s composition classes, he includes an explicit focus on the idea that “a [single] standard of academic English is a myth, a reification” (163) with the goal of educating students about the “racial implicit biases in language practices” (*Labor-Based* 164). Inoue’s work theorizes labor-based grading contracts as one strand of antiracist assessment ecologies. I was more interested in labor-based grading contracts as a formative assessment practice that might allow all students, but especially historically excluded students, to achieve A’s and B’s, and leave my courses with a positive identity of themselves as writers. Thus, the study recounted in this dissertation implemented labor-based grading contracts *without* an explicitly antiracist or “linguistic justice” curriculum, and in Chapter 6 I discuss the implications of using labor-based grading contracts without such a curriculum.

The guiding purpose for this descriptive, exploratory research is to determine the effects of labor-based grading contracts on students whose historical exclusion results in their current day underrepresentation in higher education. A key component of this study is the emphasis on the student’s own perceptions and feelings about their use. As part of a program of research to determine whether labor-based grading contracts result in more successful outcomes (defined as achieving passing grades) in First-Year Composition courses, this research begins by investigating the variables of labor-based grading contracts in a purposive sample of multilingual7 FYC sections at an R1 university. This foundational research will be used to

7 I went back and forth multiple times over whether to use the term “linguistically diverse” or “multilingual” for this study. While linguistically diverse is more inclusive of the varieties of English spoken by students in today’s classrooms, because the specific student sections in the study (see Chapter 3) were populated
identify the variables present in labor-based grading contract assessment ecologies, focusing on the following: demographics and written language characteristics; student motivation; “ecological”\textsuperscript{8} variables; and academic performance measures.

**Research Questions**

While the specific research questions I developed do not directly ask questions about race or linguistic diversity, they were formulated within the wider context I describe above. As I describe in Chapter 3: Methods and Methodologies, the specific sections of FYC that I chose for my sample student population were sections where at least half of the students were international students. These research questions are broad enough to be asked in various institutional and demographic conditions. Specifically, I ask the following questions:

- How do labor-based grading contracts affect students’ motivation and attitudes toward writing?
- How do labor-based grading contracts affect student perceptions of instructor feedback?
- How do students perform on academic performance measures in an FYC class that uses labor-based grading contracts?

Taken together, these questions provide a heuristic for other researchers to follow. In her comprehensive review of the “Legacy of Grading Contracts,” Michelle Cowan concludes That “as a field, composition could use more comparative, large-scale studies of grading contracts” (“Conclusion”):

\textsuperscript{8} “Ecological” variables are the factors present in a labor-based grading contract assessment “ecology” (to quote Inoue) or system. See Chapter 3: Methods and Methodologies for a fuller description.
Most scholarship on grading contracts in composition focuses on individual case studies of particular contract implementations along with the occasional survey of students in those classes. This information is useful for instructors developing their own grading contracts, but it does not reveal much about how grading contracts impact students academically or emotionally compared to other grading schemes.

While pragmatic considerations limited this study from being large scale, this mixed methods study uses questionnaire data, focus group interviews, student reflections, and academic performance measures such as final course grades to “unpack the variables” of labor-based grading contracts, and in doing so, provides an important exploratory and descriptive view of labor-based grading contracts in one local setting.

*Researcher Positionality*

Lincoln and Guba write, “reflexivity forces us to come to terms not only with our choice of research problem and with those with whom we engage in the research process, but with ourselves and with the multiple identities that represent the fluid self in the research setting” (283). As a person of color, my selves are indeed fluid. And my personal background shapes how I see the world. Both my parents were educators. In particular, having originally trained as a primary school teacher in Great Britain, my mother worked with family literacy programs for most of my childhood and adolescence. I saw Ruby Payne\(^9\) speak in my early twenties and discussed her work on poverty with my mother. My father is a White American of German and Swedish ancestry (first generation on his father’s Swedish side and second generation on his

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\(^9\) Ruby Payne and her “Framework for Understanding Poverty” was popular in-service education in K-12 in the early 2000’s, in the context of President George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind policy. Subsequently, critics have accused Payne’s work as class-based essentializing, examples of “deficit thinking” and being un-peer-reviewed (Bomer et al., “Miseducating Teachers about the Poor”). Payne created her own publishing company, Aha! Press, and self-published her work.
mother’s) and my mother a “Black” Jamaican\textsuperscript{10} with mixed British, French, and possibly Portuguese ancestry. Growing up in the 1980’s and 1990’s in a small town in Florida, where the majority of the middle class was White, was a lonely place to be different. Other than my younger brother, I did not meet another mixed-race child until middle school; a frequent question I received was “What are you?” as if I might be an extra-terrestrial. This outsider feeling has been central to my empathy for others and the marginalized. On the other hand, since I am not visibly raced as Black, I have been spared the racism that other Black Americans continue to endure. Additionally, coming from a middle-class home with two highly educated parents (my mother earned a Master’s degree in Human Development and my father has an Ed.D. in Education), I grew up surrounded by books and speaking and writing “Standard” English.

My professional background includes teaching Developmental Writing for Hillsborough Community College during and after earning my Master of Arts in Teaching in English Education at the University of South Florida. Between this personal and professional background, when I arrived at USF in the fall of 2017 for the program in Rhetoric and Composition, I rather prided myself on being a stickler for grammar, mechanics, and formatting. (Maybe even looking down a little at some of my graduate student colleagues who did not have the same level of formal instruction with these issues.) I figured if a student’s English (composition) teacher wasn’t going to teach grammar and formatting—who the heck was??

Thus, in my first read of Asao Inoue’s work I was surprised by his critique of much composition

\textsuperscript{10} I won’t go into this in great detail, since it is at best tangential to my topic/purpose, but I put Black in quotes because in the “Out of many, one people” context of Jamaica, Jamaicans with similar backgrounds to my mother were just...Jamaican. There were also “White Jamaicans” and “Chinese Jamaicans,” but the emphasis was always on being Jamaican. The lighter skinned (and often relatively better off socio-economically) were more likely to attend private schools. Many of the educated students of my mother’s generation left Jamaica to become doctors and lawyers in places like Canada, Great Britain, and the United States. In fact, I’ll allow myself one more aside to say that my mother’s choice to train as a teacher (and a primary teacher at that) was looked down upon by many of her peers. And it was not until my mother left Jamaica that she suddenly “became” Black.
instruction as “penalizing” students. I had been looking at my instruction as emancipatory for students—a way to access the rewards of education (including the “advancement” to the clearly more economically secure middle- and upper-class life).

This perspective has led me to wrestle with the work of Inoue and some other linguistic justice advocates. While I whole-heartedly believe in their goals, and the structural arguments of race and racism being social constructs with deeply wounding material effects, I still find myself wondering if I would go as far as stating that the way we teach Composition is “racist.” And furthermore, even if it is racist, what do we teach in the classroom instead? What about the students who want to learn these things? Do we ignore “standardized” grammar and mechanics?

Gubala, Larson, and Melonçon, in their study of (non-writing focused) professionals’ perceptions of writers’ errors, confirmed previous research that writing errors do bother professionals (278). The authors argue that while we [instructors/WPAs] have “a responsibility to acknowledge students’ own languages and to provide opportunities for them to learn how to counter what could be considered unjust language practices in the work-place (280; emphasis added), we also want students to “succeed in their careers,” and that, “as the data presented here suggest, rely in part on grammar correctness” (280).

Inoue has argued that instructors who “think [they] know best” about what their students “need to know about communication and writing,” who feel comfortable enough to “dictate the standard for such practices,” are, in fact, “enacting a White racial habitus that has been one major way schools and society have perpetuated White language supremacy” (Labor-Based 276-277; emphasis in original). Well…maybe. I am willing to ‘buy’ Lynn Worsham’s argument (that Joyce Olewski Inman and Rebecca A. Powell present in “Interchanges”) that “educational ideologies developed in response to dominant pedagogies ‘do not (and cannot) recognize the
extent to which their authority is based in dominant pedagogy and contributes to its legitimacy’’
(Worsham 222 qtd. in Inman and Powell, “Interchanges” 156). In other words, maybe I am so
steeped in the dominant ideology that I cannot see beyond it. In a recent talk on “Compassion
and Equity in Literacy Classrooms,” Inoue noted that he “had the benefit of not having standard
English as [his] home language.” He described the “ongoing trauma and brainwashing” he
experienced in schools, the feeling of “having [his] tongue held.” While I can appreciate Inoue’s
stance because it is his own, I cannot speak or share the same experience.

My mother corrected my grammar since as far back as I can remember (and never did I
feel demeaned). My main 7th grade Language Arts teacher arrived midway in the fall semester
after our ‘cool’ teacher, who had a couch in her classroom and let us do whatever we wanted,
disappeared one day. My peers and I did not like Mrs. W, but I did learn an awful lot about
grammar and mechanics that year. Later, in high school, I took Writing I and II and AP
Language and Composition with my all-time favorite teacher, Mrs. Jameson. So, no, I do not
know what the experience of having your home language demeaned in school on a daily basis is
like. It would probably make me strident, too. Absent that, I am left with the pragmatic questions
of what one does teach in a writing class if it’s not to teach toward the “correctness” of the
“Language of Wider Communication.”

Language is related to labor-based writing contracts because my aim for labor-based
grading contracts is to allow students with varying proficiencies in SEAE to succeed in FYC
classrooms. Students’ home languages should absolutely be valued both outside and inside the
classroom, and, as a field, Writing Studies should work with scholars in Applied Linguistics to
challenge the idea that there is such a thing as “standardized” English in the first place. We

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should look for ways to encourage students to value their own language, to welcome it into our classrooms, and help students find ways to use it with rhetorical effectiveness whatever their situation or context, but we need to teach students the rules and the practices of standardized English at the same time. Myles Horton, an American educator active in the Civil Rights Movement noted he had a “two-eyed” philosophy of education:

You have to build a program that will deal with things as they are now and as they ought to be at the same time. They go together, the “is” and the “ought.” …You have to start where people are, because their growth is going to be from there. … [but] I already have in mind a philosophy of where I’d like to see people moving …I don’t separate two ways of looking. (The Long Haul 131)

We can do these two things at the same time; it is not one thing or another.

I come to this research cognizant of my own positionality and potential biases. In Feminist Rhetorical Practices, Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch articulate a concept they refer to as strategic contemplation. Advocating a self-reflexive approach, they emphasize the necessity of “pay[ing] attention to how lived experiences shape our perspectives as researchers and those of our research subjects” (22). My positionality, as I’ve described above, very much shapes my perspective as a researcher, and as a teacher. This feminist orientation has helped me merge my positionality with the research questions I described above to explore how labor-based grading contracts may allow for these critical “opportunities for advancement” for underrepresented students. Perhaps for this reason, as I will discuss further in the next chapter, instead of adopting Critical Race Theory as the critical lens to frame this study, I have focused more on ideas of translanguaging, “academic language and literacy,” and linguistic injustice and how these concepts may be connected to labor-based grading contracts. As Mya Poe, Asao
Inoue, and Nobert Elliot point out in the introduction to their edited collection *Writing Assessment, Social Justice, and the Advancement of Opportunity*: “writing assessment best serves students when justice is taken as the ultimate aim of assessment; once adopted, that aim advances assessment as a principled way to create individual opportunity through identification of opportunity structures” (5). Thus, by focusing on issues of language and literacy as a grounding focus of just assessment opportunities, I was able to maintain my primary interest and concern with student’s own languages, the need to expand assessment practices, and the ongoing double bind, of sorts, of preparing students to write in a myriad of future situations in their civic and professional lives.

**Overview of Chapters**

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 presents a review of the relevant literature, focusing on the slices of literature from a variety of academic disciplines that my work draws from. The literature review examines historical literacy work and its connection to the literacy and translingual work of today. I also review the history of grading contracts research—specifically about efficacy, motivation, and feedback—before looking at the move to antiracist assessment and labor-based contract grading. Finally, I touch on the critical theories that undergird this dissertation. Chapter 3 explicates the methods and methodology of the study. I approached this exploratory study using mixed-methods to collect empirical data on students experiences and perceptions of labor-based grading contracts and their motivation and writing beliefs. This quantitative data was importantly supplemented by qualitative data collected from a variety of sources, including two focus group interviews I conducted at the end of the semester. The mixed methods approach worked synergistically to focus on student perspectives.
Due to the large amount of data I collected, the results and discussion are presented in three separate chapters. Chapter 4 presents the results of the quantitative and qualitative data and shows some of the nuance to students’ feelings and perceptions. Students were generally positive about the labor-based grading contract, although there was some drop off between the October and December survey administrations. Students were most unhappy with the amount of work they had to complete to earn an A. On the other hand, students were very happy with instructor feedback. In terms of motivation, writing attitudes and beliefs, the most change occurred in students’ self-concept and attitudes toward writing, while writing beliefs proved hardest to change. In comparison to the students in classes that did not use labor-based grading contracts, grading contract students showed positive attitude change toward writing and their confidence and enjoyment of writing.

Chapter 5 discusses the results from Chapter 4, focusing on students’ experiences, thus achieving one of the main goals of this study to highlight student perceptions. Chapter 6 outlines implications of this research and includes a brief conclusion to the study. Chapter 6 highlights things such as the valuable changes to students’ reception to instructor feedback, but also the potential pitfalls of labor-based grading contracts if they are implemented without care and consideration of the local context. Chapter 6 also includes a discussion of implementing labor-based grading contracts without an explicitly antiracist or linguistic justice curriculum.

Given today’s increasing diversity and global interconnectedness, it is imperative that those of us working in higher education acknowledge the structural barriers that have historically (but also presently) excluded certain student groups from higher education, whether that exclusion was due to race/ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, or national origin. As the statistics in the introduction to this chapter highlight, college persistence and graduation rates for
students of color and English as additional language speakers continue to lag behind their White (and Asian) and monolingual peers. One barrier to college success is some students’ lack of fluency in Standard Edited American English (SEAE). Students bring a rich linguistic diversity to our classrooms, whether that is in the form of African American Vernacular English or other regional dialects, World Englishes, or other home languages. Despite a history of advocating for students’ “rights” to their own language, much more work in the field of Composition/Writing Studies remains to be done. We need to find ways to celebrate students’ home languages, not just outside, but also inside our writing classrooms, while also acknowledging that society still expects college graduates to enter the workforce with a working knowledge of SEAE. Labor-based grading contracts have been advanced by Inoue and other scholars as one way to address inequity in the college writing classroom. While Inoue’s work provides sound theoretical grounding for labor-based contract grading, his highly abstract theorizing also makes it harder for labor-based grading contracts to be adopted by the large force of contingent faculty that teach the majority of First-Year Composition courses today. On the other hand, empirical research, as well as research that focuses on students’ perspectives is necessary before we adopt labor-based grading contracts as the “gold standard” in antiracist assessment.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

As the descriptive information regarding college completion rates presented in the introduction demonstrate, access to the specific opportunity of graduating with a bachelor’s degree has not been distributed fairly amongst student demographic groups. As suggested by Mya Poe, Asao B. Inoue, and Norbert Elliot in *Writing Assessment, Social Justice, and the Advancement of Opportunity*, social justice theory “shift[s] the focus from the potential harm done by writing assessment to a more expansive view of the possibilities of writing assessment” (4). Drawing on work by John Rawls and Iris Marion Young, Poe et al. argue that writing assessment research must include fairness as a foundational element on par with validity and reliability. Elliot explains, “the aim of fairness [‘conceived as the structuring of opportunity’] unifies foundational measurement concepts of validity and reliability into a framework of principled inquiry organized to achieve an ethical outcome” (“Theory” sec. 1.0). My hope is that assessment, because of its omnipresence in education, can work toward fairness and equity by opening “opportunities for advancement.”

I begin this literature review by going back to the historical literacy work done by scholars such as Shirley Bryce Heath and linguist William Labov. From there I trace the history of grading contracts, including some of the critiques of grading in general that led to the expanded usage of grading or learning contracts. I then look at Inoue’s trajectory and his development of *labor-based* grading contracts. In the penultimate section, I briefly discuss some
of the critical theories that inform my work, before concluding by reflecting on how my orientation as a feminist researcher and scholar has informed this research.

**Historical Literacy Work**

Shirley Bryce Heath was one of the first researchers to investigate connections between students’ home and school lives when she published *Ways with Words* in 1983. Using an ethnographic approach, Heath studied two communities (one White and one Black)—Roadville and Trackton—textile mill communities in the central Piedmont Carolinas. Heath contrasted the daily lives and communication practices of the children from the two communities with that of the children and institutions in the nearby town of Laurenceville. Heath noted that the historical introduction of schools in the area was due, in part, to the “townspeople want[ing] to transmit their own values to the mill people, removing their ‘country’ attitudes, unacceptable speech habits, and slovenly ways” (22). Focusing on “culture as learned behavior and on language habits as part of that shared learning,” Heath demonstrated the ties between language, power, and social norms (11).

These social norms are connected to the historical norms and values that developed in the first couple centuries of the United States. Scholars such as Lester Faigley have argued that “from the early national period through most of the nineteenth century, literacy was associated with Protestant and nationalistic values” (“Judging Writing, Judging Selves” 411). Composition scholars have traced the history of “freshman composition” to Harvard in the early 1870’s when, under the leadership of Adams Sherman Hill, and in the era of opening admission to White men from a larger range of socioeconomic classes, Harvard began requiring Composition “to remedy students’ English language and literary knowledge so as to prepare them for arguably more ‘advanced’ and cultured subjects such as English Literature” (Ruiz 93). Indeed, linguists as far
back as the 1960’s were establishing African American Vernacular English (AAVE) as simply one of a number of English dialects, no better or worse, than “standard” English. William Labov in 1969 made the connection between language and the “civilizing” effect of schooling. In “The Logic of Non-Standard English,” Labov argued against “the deficit theory of educational psychologists who see the language of black children as inadequate for learning and logical thinking” (“Introduction” xvi). This “deficit theory” was presented against the backdrop of a majority White public, many of whom still believed that African Americans’ intelligence was lesser than that of Whites’. This view had been promogulated by scholars in the early 20th century who claimed to provide “scientific evidence” that “proved” Blacks’ unequal cognitive abilities, such as G.O. Ferguson’s 1916 *Psychology of the Negro*.

In the context of the public debate about Black’s intelligence, college admissions had opened up and a backlash against open admissions quickly followed. Inoue and others have pointed to the “literacy crises” that cyclically pull public attention to reading and writing instruction in the United States. Inoue argues that these “literacy crises” respond “to various political exigencies of the time, mostly the presence of people in schools who were not there before, or who weren’t noticed before” (*Labor-Based* 273). In 1991, John Trimbur made this argument in “Literacy and the Discourse of Crisis,” arguing that “literacy crises are always strategic” (286). Specifically, Trimbur argued that the American “literacy crisis” of the 1970’s was a repeat of earlier “crises” such as those identified during the “common-school crusade of 1840 to 1870” and the “rise of progressive education from 1890 to 1920” (286). Trimbur argued that schooling in both these periods “concentrated middle-class fears of loss of status, downward mobility, and the prospect of sinking into the working class or urban poor” (293). In other words, “schooled literacy emerged…as both a means to regulate popular literacy and a social marker to
divide the literate from the illiterate, the worthy poor from the unworthy, ‘us’ from ‘them’” (291). Trimbur concluded that in all of these “crises,” it was not “deteriorating educational standards or the needs of a new high-tech postindustrial economy that have put literacy in crisis,” so much as literacy being appropriated by an educationally stratified society and the “the wider meritocratic order of a credentialed society” (294). Thus, while literacy has been held as “liberatory”—think of the laws against teaching slaves to read before the American Civil War or Paulo Frierie’s *Pedagogy for the Oppressed*—literacy has equally been seen as enculturating—a way to assimilate a population. As Cynthia Selfe pointed out in 1999, “literacy is always a political act as well as an educational effort” (“Technology and Liter” 424).

The background of this historical literacy work is important to contextualize *The Students’ Rights to their Own Language* resolution of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in 1974, which provided a turning point for Composition Studies. Geneva Smitherman traces the early roots of STROL to linguists in the 1950’s and 1960’s, especially Donald J. Llyod who, in 1953, wrote an article arguing for a composition course centered around linguistics, and explicitly supporting language-minoritized students: “We seek to enrich, not correct…By respecting their traditions and the people they from whom they come, we teach them to respect and to hold tight to what they have as they reach for more” (Lloyd, “English Composition” 42 qtd. in Smitherman, “CCCC’s Role” 62). Smitherman marks Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination in 1968, occurring during the 1968 CCCC convention, as a watershed moment for composition. That December, CCCC published an issue co-edited by Ernece B. Kelly, a Black compositionist who had critiqued CCCC for its exclusionary attitude towards Blacks and African American Vernacular English (AAVE). In a first for CCCC, the
December 1968 issue had four articles written by African Americans (Smitherman, “CCCC’s Role” 63).

Growing out of these early roots, in the fall of 1971, Smitherman and a few other CCCC’s members formed a select committee, charged with drafting a policy resolution on students’ language. The Students’ Right to Their Own Language resolution and an accompanying background document had three “broad” goals:

1. to heighten consciousness of language attitudes;
2. to promote the value of linguistic diversity; and
3. to convey facts and information about language and language variation that would enable instructors to teach their non-traditional students—and ultimately all students—more effectively. (Smitherman 67)

While CCCC voted to adopt STROL in 1974, the National Council of Teachers for English (NCTE), technically the umbrella professional organization that CCCC was/is part of, never did adopt an equally robust statement. During the three years the CCCC’s language policy committee drafted STROL they also worked with the NCTE to pass a similar resolution. Instead, in 1974 NCTE passed a “watered-down version,” which “carefully bypassed the label Students’ Rights,” and continued to call for students to learn “the conventions of what has been called written edited American English” (Smitherman 77). Since NCTE is the arm of the organization that trains new (K-12) English teachers, if NCTE had adopted a similarly strong resolution, generations of teachers might have brought a robust defense of students’ rights to their own languages and, consequentially, inclusive pedagogies into their classrooms long before this last decade.
STROL was widely debated at first, but generally accepted by CCCC members as the 1970’s wore on. In 1976, Smitherman and two other STROL committee members formed a new group “charged with assembling, for publication, practical classroom assignments, activities, lectures and teaching units that would show and tell how to apply the philosophy of the Students’ Right resolution to the day-to-day experience of teaching and learning” (Smitherman 72). However, when the committee submitted its work in 1980, CCCC leadership decided not to publish the resources, which Smitherman attributes “in great measure to the changed national climate of the 1980s” (Smitherman 72). Toward the mid-1990’s, CCCC’s members of color began agitating louder for better inclusion and representation. Jacqueline Jones Royster, for example, called on CCCC’s to “construct paradigms that permit us to engage in better practices in cross-boundary discourse, whether we are teaching, researching writing, or talking with Others, whoever those Others happen to be” (37-38). As the discussion of students’ language rights is taken up again in this most recent decade, it is important to understand that these arguments have a long history.

When these issues of language and race resurfaced in the late 1990’s, it was at first sporadic. Catherine Prendergast’s 1998 article, “Race: The Absent Presence in Composition Studies,” was one of these late 20th century texts in Composition Studies to address race. Referring back to Heath’s Ways With Words, in her introduction, Prendergast notes that she can never keep straight which community—Roadville or Trackton—is the Black town versus the White town: “I have come to think of this extra effort I have to go through to locate race in…Words as emblematic of my experience reading much of the scholarship in composition studies where race seems to function as an absent presence” (36). Prendergast argues that “the relationship of race to the composing process is seldom fully explored. Instead, race becomes
subsumed into the powerful tropes of ‘basic writer,’ ‘stranger’ to the academy, or the trope of the
generalized, marginalized ‘other.’” (36). Prendergast encouraged scholars in Composition/
Writing Studies “to recognize that our rhetoric is one which continually inscribes our students as
foreigners…The present challenge for compositionists is to develop theorizations of race that do
not reinscribe people of color as either foreign or invisible, nor leave whiteness
uninvestigated…” (51). Prendergast made this call more than twenty years ago, but advocates of
social justice are still making many of the same arguments.

So, while some scholars in Writing Studies have enthusiastically endorsed STROL and
its premise, until very recently the majority of college-level writing instructors had affirmed
STROL without actually changing their pedagogy or assessment practices. For example, in a
more recent review of the WPA: Writing Program Administration journal, Cassie Wright found
“not a single WPA article between 1978-1999 engages, tacitly or otherwise, with SRTOL…Given
SRTOL’s adoption four years prior to WPA’s inaugural issue in 1978, its absence in the
journal’s early years is worth noting” (Wright 120). The “invisibility” of race is something we’ll
look at again below and in the Critical Theories section of this literature review. It is also
important to note that even as I move throughout the dissertation turning attention to issues of
motivation and student perceptions of labor-based grading contracts, this background of
students’ rights to their own languages underpins the entire study.

**History of Grading Contracts**

This section of the literature review briefly reviews one history of grading contracts,
focusing on the dimensions of grading contract assessment that will be discussed later in the
dissertation. While there is increasing discussion and awareness of the history of grading
contracts, I will leave that to other scholars\textsuperscript{12}. My focus here is on the historical, and accompanying theoretical developments, that led to labor-based grading contracts.

In the 1960’s college writing instructors began pushing back against the Current Traditional Rhetoric (CTR) that had been widespread in American colleges and universities since the late nineteenth century. Scholars from the U.S. and Great Britain, who gathered together at the Dartmouth Conference of 1966, pushed back against the formalistic and prescriptive strictures of CTR with its emphasis on sentence level grammar and mechanics and the five-paragraph theme. These scholars, called expressivists, promoted “process” over “product” (Murray, Elbow) and encouraged students to find their voice and their own Truth through “the process of discovery” (Murray, “Teaching Writing” 5). Most writing teachers at the time had been trained in literature, specifically through the New Critical approach of examining and dissecting literature via close reading; thus, the approach to teaching writing at the time involved examining student writing as a finished piece of literature. Instead, Murray, and others like him, advocated teaching writing as a process of constant revision, and argued: “We have to respect the student, not for his product, not for the paper we call literature by giving it a grade, but for the search for truth in which he is engaged” (Murray, “Teaching Writing” 5). Students’ own writing became the “texts” of these expressivist classrooms and “anti-textbooks” such as Elbow’s 1973 Writing Without Teachers and Murray’s 1968 A Writer Teaches Writing (reprinted in 1985) replaced the formalist handbooks of preceding generations.

By the late 1970’s cognitive theories of writing had emerged as well. Cognitive theories of writing were used by scholars such as Sondra Perl and Andrea Lunsford “to compare the

\textsuperscript{12} See Cowan, “A Legacy of Contract Grading for Composition” for an excellent overview of grading contract history.
composing strategies of good and poor writers” (Flower and Hayes, 290). In “Cognitive Development and the Basic Writer,” Lunsford argued that basic writers “have problems drawing inferences or forming concepts based on what they have read” (302). Perhaps the most famous of the scholars interested in basic writing in this era was Mina Shaughnessy, whose 1977 *Errors and Expectations*\(^\text{13}\) provided a new, more sympathetic perspective of the “basic writer” as colleges and universities struggled to adjust to open admissions policies.

The 1980’s brought about the “Social Turn” in rhetoric and composition as scholars like Patricia Bizzell critiqued Flower and Hayes as being too “inner-directed”—theorists who saw the structure of language-learning and thinking processes as universal, fundamental structures of thought and language that can be taught—unlike outer-directed theorists who posited that thinking and language use can never occur free of a social context that conditions them (391). Picking up on James Kinneavy’s 1971 *A Theory of Discourse*, social constructionists like Bizzell and David Bartholomae argued that writing is inherently political in nature and that writers are each a part of a particular community of dialogue, or discourse community, with an assumed set of principles and a distinct language of its own. Both Bizzell and Bartholomae called for “the kind of pedagogy that would foster responsible inspection of the politically loaded hidden curriculum in composition class” (Bizzell, “Cognition” 407-408). Bartholomae’s influential 1985 article, “Inventing the University” argued that “The student has to invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language” (624) “by successive approximations” (634) into the academic discourses of the university. These theories of writing, which considered the social and

\(^{13}\) Scholars such as Tessa Brown in “What Else Do We Know? Translingualism and the History of SRTOL as Threshold Concepts in Our Field,” have pointed out that the focus on Shaughnessy in Writing Studies’ historiographies “whitewashes” the important work that African American scholars like Geneva Smitherman were producing at the same time.
political implications of writing, provided the precursive stage for the work that Inoue and others take up in the early 2000’s.

The historical theoretical development reviewed above provides the context for how grading contracts developed. Elbow had experimented with using grading contracts with his Introduction to Literature Classes at MIT as far back as 1971. Even as early as 1967, English professors like W.E. Coles, Jr. of Amherst College were writing about courses without grades. In his article, “The Teaching of Writing as Writing,” Coles commented, “Although I keep a record of each student's progress through the term, I place no grades on individual papers, and I ban grades as a possible source of conversation” (112). Absent grades, professors like Elbow and Coles moved the classroom conversation from grades to the learning process, which aligned with the expressivists’ emphasis on self-expression and “process over product.”

English and writing instructors adopted what they termed “learning contracts” during the 1970’s and 1980’s. Frequently, individual assignments were not graded and instead, students submitted work for what amounted to completion credit, sometimes with a “revise and resubmit” policy that allowed students to redo major assignments that fail to meet the minimal threshold of acceptable work (e.g., Knapp; Leahy). At the end of the semester, assuming students had adequately completed the work stipulated in the contract, students received the letter grade that they contracted for.

Learning contracts were not exclusive to the field of Composition. In the early 1970’s, some entire colleges began experimenting with “learning contracts” (Barlow). Nancy Avakian, a professor at Empire State College in New York, in “A Guide to Writing Learning Contracts” written in 1974 explained, “The learning contract specifies the learning activities to be undertaken, the duration of the study, the criteria by which the work is to be evaluated, and the
amount of credit to be assigned.” Similarly, R.M. Barlow, a philosophy professor at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, published “An Experiment with Learning Contracts” in the *Journal of Higher Education* in 1974, in which he discussed the results of an (informal) study of his own ethics class using learning contracts as compared to previous iterations of the class he taught with traditional grading. Barlow reported many positive benefits of learning contracts including students’ increased acceptance of responsibility, motivation, uptake of learning resources, and “competency attainment,” as well as improved student-teacher rapport (447-448). Barlow concluded: “The level of commitment was significantly more pronounced among students in the contract experiment than among previous students” (446). This early research on the learning benefits of contract grading was part of why their use became more widespread.

In the mid-to-late 1990’s, teachers like Peter Elbow and Jane Danielewicz began to popularize grading contracts’ use in FYC classes. Professional groups such as the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) endorsed these sorts of alternative assessment procedures. As Steven Tchudi argued in the introduction to the 1997 NCTE monograph *Alternatives to Student Writing*, “[traditional] grading does not communicate any feedback but only pins a judgment onto the student, reducing his or her work to a single letter or number without providing any useful information” (xiii). Danielewicz and Elbow’s “Unilateral Grading Contract,” published in 2009, popularized their “hybrid” grading contract that required students to submit an end-of-semester writing portfolio, consisting of students’ selected and revised work from the semester, with the original drafts attached, and reflective pieces on their chosen revisions and writing process.

In the literature published on using grading contracts in college writing classrooms, in addition to learning gains (which were often noted anecdotally and only occasionally reported
based on empirical study), instructors typically offered the following reasons for adopting grading contracts: to promote student engagement, motivation, and autonomy, and to avoid negative student-teacher interactions. Elbow and Danielewicz made these arguments in “Unilateral,” asserting that grading contracts promote students’ self-efficacy and autonomy by fulfilling four goals:

- increasing students’ chances with success;
- using instructional strategies that show students how to succeed;
- giving students control over their outcomes in class;
- using effective feedback to help students achieve success. (1–2)

While they designed their “Unilateral Grading Contract” with student learning in mind, the scholarship they produced about grading contracts was anecdotal and also, importantly, missing students’ own perspectives, which contributed to my own emphasis on student perspectives.

In addition to self-efficacy, instructors have also posited that grading contracts increases student agency. In a 1976 article, “Contract Menu Grading,” Clarice Stasz summarized 50 years of research on grading “across many courses, samples and research procedures,” arguing that the “consistency of findings” in this research leads to the following conclusions: “grades not only fail to prove themselves as useful motivators, they may contribute to behavior many educators would question as being valuable outcomes of learning, e.g., dishonesty, rigidity, and conformity” (52). Alfie Kohn has argued that “extrinsic” rewards (e.g., grades) negatively affect students’ intrinsic motivation (“Case Against Grades”). Meanwhile, many instructors also note that removing grades encourages students’ “risk-taking” in their writing (e.g., Blackstock and
Many teachers find that negative teacher-student interactions circulate around grades. In a chapter on “Personal vs. Staff Grading,” Paul Diederich discussed his relief upon arriving at the University of Chicago and finding that student grades for his course would be entirely dependent on a final examination. During this semester Diederich found that “since the students knew as well as I that grades on these practice papers would have no effect on the official grade…. what they valued more highly than grades were tips on what they were doing well or badly” (20). Believing that “noticing and praising whatever a student does well improves writing more than any kind or amount of correction of what he does badly” (20). Diederich noted the near impossibility of giving students positive feedback but low grades: “Just try writing several favorable comments on a paper and then giving it a grade of D” (21). Elbow concurs, noting that teachers tend to feel obliged “to write comments to justify [student] grades” even if “these [comments] are often not the comment we would make if we were just trying to help the student write better” (Elbow, “Ranking, Evaluating, and Liking” 3).

Inoue has indicated that avoiding negative student-teacher interactions was one of his initial motivations for moving away from traditional assessment: “[Traditional grades] ruined my relationship with [students’] writing and even with them. In most cases, my grades ruined their relationship with their own writing” (Labor-Based 52). Other instructors, including Elbow, point out that students become more fixated on making the corrections teachers suggest, instead of evaluating the feedback for themselves. Elbow writes, “The worst part of grades is that they make students obey us without carefully thinking about the merits of what we say” (“Ranking, Evaluating, and Liking” 8). Problematically, this system sets up instructors to become copy
editors while students cede control over their own writing. Instructors have also pointed out that students pay more attention to grades than feedback and that by “uncoupling” feedback from grading, students may use it more effectively: “Since motivation is key to learning and practicing, contract grading pays off, especially for those students who see themselves as poor to average writers, but who are quite willing to work hard for a grade” (Reichert 66).

Problems with Grades

Another reason teachers have explored using grading contracts is the unreliability of grades. In a landmark study by Paul Diederich and his colleagues at the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and published by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) in 1974, researchers found that identical student papers could receive every grade from A - F when scored by different teachers (6). This replicated the results of two studies from the 1930’s that demonstrated grading’s subjectivity and unreliability (Bell; Dexter).

More recent studies by Arnetha Ball in the 1990’s found that African-American and European-American teachers scored student papers differently. Ball proposed that “writing assessment is a part of the power culture that exists in educational institutions” (“Expanding the Dialogue on Culture” 170) and, furthermore, that “there is a need to include the voices of more teachers from diverse backgrounds in discussions concerning writing assessment” (“Expanding” 171). Ball found that the while the European-American and African American teachers all gave the “highest ratings to the texts written by the European-American student, moderate ratings to African-American students, and their lowest ratings to Hispanic-American writers” (178). The variability in grades on the same papers by different instructors points to a real problem in assessment.
In their chapter on “Formative Assessment in Higher Education,” Jönsson and Eriksson note that:

When assessing student work, teachers look for indicators of quality (i.e., criteria) and only if student performance corresponds to the teacher’s notion of quality, will she/he reward the performance with high grades or any other expression of judgment. Consequently, if the students do not share the teacher’s notion of quality, they are not likely to succeed – at least not in terms of being high-performing. A distinctive feature of qualities is that they are not static, but depend on values that may change over time and/or differ between cultures and contexts (158; emphasis added)

In other words, teachers’ understanding of “quality” is highly individualized. Students’ writing may be rewarded (or punished) based on how close (or far) their writing is from the instructor’s invisible rubric of quality. It is notable that even the field of composition as a whole, has had a difficult time describing what “quality” writing looks like. In his 1984 article, “Holisticism,” Edward White points out the lack of agreement “except among the uninformed” about what, if any, separable subskills exist in writing; it is extremely difficult to obtain reliable analytics scores, since there is so little professional consensus about sub-skills…” (407). It would seem that if Writing Studies’ scholars and instructors cannot agree on writing “quality” than there is little objectivity in writing assessment.

It is no wonder, with all of the uncertainty and unreliability surrounding grading systems, that grading contracts emerged as an alternative option. Grading contracts are alternatives to traditional grading which emphasize student learning as opposed to achieving specific letter grades. What Inoue (and others) have brought to grading contracts, and assessment generally, is an explicit consideration of race/ethnicity and linguistic diversity. Picking up on Prendergast’s
“absent presence” of race, Inoue and Mya Poe’s co-edited collection, *Race and Writing Assessment*, published in 2012, was nationally recognized by Writing Studies’ scholars for advancing the importance of analyzing assessment results by demographic factors such as race and ethnicity.

**Labor-Based Grading Contracts**

Labor-based grading contracts are designed to assess students based on their labors in the class, as opposed to the “quality” of their writing. Developed by Inoue as an alternative to Danielewicz and Elbow’s “unilateral” grading contract, the goal of this type of assessment is to remove the comparison of students’ writing to the invisible norm of White, middle-class writing and enable linguistically diverse students to access the entire range of grades in a class. In Danielewicz and Elbow’s grading contract model, the grading contract specifies the amount of work required to earn a B, but an A is still determined by the instructor’s subjective evaluation of the “quality” of the students’ work. Danielewicz and Elbow use B as the default grade students earn for successfully completing the terms of the contract (attendance, timely work submissions, number of drafts, etc.) and then use admittedly “fuzzy” qualities for work that is better enough to receive an A.

Inoue argues that leaving this final determination between a B and an A to the instructor’s subjective discretion is unfair. Inoue’s labor-based grading contract addresses the problematic structural issues present when students’ writing is judged as deficient because of a student’s linguistic background, be it race/ethnicity, home language, or socioeconomic status. He explains that not “everyone’s labor is not equal in this system”:

A multilingual student working 10 hours on an essay may not meet the minimum standard for a passing essay, yet a White, middle-class student, who was raised in a
monolingual English home, might spend five hours on the same essay, achieving a pass and moving on. Because the teacher’s judgments of quality are what determines whether any draft is acceptable or not in the system, some students may still not be able to achieve a high grade, even if they desire to and are willing to work extra hard. (emphasis added) (Labor-Based 68).

Inoue’s solution is to take what he refers to as a Marxist approach and rely on labor or student effort in his grading contracts. In Labor-Based, Inoue explains that all of his class assignments have “labor instructions” broken down into three parts: “a brief description of the assignment, a statement of the purpose and goals of the labor, and a step-by-step process for completing the labor” (133). He adds that he “de-emphasize[s] product in the description by documenting carefully the labor process… by… provid[ing] my expectations for their [students’] labor along several dimensions”:

- The process of the assignment (what chronological steps are involved in the labor?)
- Time on tasks/steps (how many minutes does each step in the process take?)
- Quantity (how many words need to be produced or read in the step?)
- Due date/time and method of submission for the products of the labor (when, how, and where is the product of the labor submitted for use in the course?)

(Labor-Based 133)

Inoue argues that labor-based grading contracts offer instructors a chance to establish an assessment ecology that focuses on instructor feedback and student labor and accountability rather than one in which instructors’ qualitative judgements rank student papers on an unseen rubric of Whiteness.
Reviewing the scholarship on Whiteness, especially that of Timothy Barnett, Sara Ahmed’s phenomenological approach to Whiteness, and Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus*, Inoue (Labor-Based) identifies the following traits or “habits of Whiteness,” noting that “these structures construct whiteness as invisible and appealing to fairness through alleged objectivity” (Inoue, “Friday Plenary Address” 145):

- an unseen, naturalized, orientation to the world;
- hyperindividualism;
- a stance of neutrality, objectivity, and apolitically;
- an individualized, rational, controlled self;
- a focus on rule-governed, contractual relationships;
- a focus on clarity, order, and control (Labor-Based 28)

This reinforces what Ball found in her 1991 dissertation (Organizational Patterns), in which she concluded that “teachers seem to prefer that students write exposition in academic, literacy- based organizational patterns,” scoring these texts higher than the “texts written in oral-based patterns (narrative interspersion and circumlocution),” revealing composition teachers’ bias that “oral-based literacy is impoverished compared to objectified exposition” (188).

Inoue points out that two of these dispositions, hyperindividualism and “the primacy of the rational, controlled self” reflect what Faigley (Fragments of Rationality) found in his discussion of teacher feedback to student writing in Coles and Vopat’s What Makes Writing Good. For the majority of teachers, the answer to what makes writing good was “Writing that exhibited a strong, authentic, honest voice” (Antiracist 49). Inoue argues that as “textual markers” these traits appear as “strength, authenticity, and honesty...a self-reliant voice that is focused on itself as a cool, rational, thinking self in the writing and in its reading of writer’s own
experiences or ideas” (Antiracist 49-50). While these characteristics are not “bad qualities in writing,” Inoue asserts that these traits are “linked to whiteness and this link often has uneven racist consequences in classroom writing assessments” (Antiracist 50). Using a labor-based grading contract, Inoue was able to continue to teach writing conventions and emphasize feedback on student writing (versus letter grades) without penalizing students for “non-standard” writing.

Inoue argues it is unfair for students who come from linguistic, ethnic, or socioeconomic backgrounds to be penalized for failing to reach these accepted standards of college level writing. He explains that he is not suggesting writing teachers “dumb down” or neglect to teach the Standard Edited American English (SEAE) of the university; however, he does not want those students “graded against that dominant [White] habitus when they [write] in ways that do not match the dispositions in it” and wants these linguistically diverse students to make their exploratory attempts in this unfamiliar discourse community to do so without “consequences to their grade” (Antiracist 128).

Inoue’s labor-based grading contracts are a way for him to invoke antiracist assessment ecologies. As Michael Reisch contends in the Routledge International Handbook of Social Justice, social justice theory asks us to "address fundamental questions about human nature and social relationships; about the distribution of resources, power, status, rights, access, and opportunities; and about how decisions regarding this distribution are made” (1 qtd. in Poe & Inoue). Poe, Inoue, & Elliot (2018) link classroom assessment practices to social justice, asking “how can we ensure that writing assessment leads to the advancement of opportunity?” (4). Inoue explains that social justice writing assessment projects:
Make people’s lives better, give them equitable opportunities, expand boundaries, question the authoritative and hegemonic, not simply give some students a few more opportunities, or a second-class status, even though that status is better than the third-class one they are accustomed to. (Labor-Based 63)

If we want underrepresented students to be treated equitably—not equally—then we have to implement assessment systems that do not foreclose student success based on “judgements of quality.” Instead of students being blocked from their goal of earning A’s, labor-based grading contracts remove instructors’ problematic notions of writing quality from the assessment ecology. By piloting a version of labor-based writing contracts that addresses inequities in assessment, my study is designed to offer instructors guidance on translating Inoue’s more abstract ideas into concrete course designs.

Despite the generally positive reaction to labor-based grading contracts by those of us active in national conversations about Writing Studies, a few scholars—such as Ellen C. Carrillo—have begun to critique aspects of these grading contracts. Carrillo considers the “single standard of labor implicit” (11) in Inoue’s labor directions for written assignments. Carrillo puts forth that Inoue is relying on a student who is “somewhat of a fiction; an idealized, able-bodied, neurotypical student” (56). Contrasting Inoue’s argument in Labor-Based Grading Contracts that “One hour of labor is worth one hour of labor, regardless of the kind of labor you are engaged in during that hour” (Inoue, Labor-Based 131 qtd in Carrillo 11), Carillo asserts that

When labor is quantified in this way, though, labor-based contract grading inaccurately assumes that labor is a neutral measure—or at least that it is less inequitable a measure than quality. The suggestion is that because labor is more easily quantifiable than quality, labor offers a more equitable form of assessment. (11)
Carillo makes the point that students with different abilities, whether they be physical, mental, or emotional, may actually be harmed by labor-based grading contracts, especially in regard to required attendance and on-time work submission policies. In contrast to labor-based grading contracts, Carillo offers “engagement-based grading contracts,” which “offer a range of ways that students might engage with the course” (56). Carillo’s work is important; labor-based grading contracts have become increasingly popular in the last few years and widely adopted by writing instructors. While labor-based grading contracts do offer a theoretically compelling alternative to traditional assessment, no one thing offers an absolute solution to structural inequities.

**Critical Theories**

A variety of critical theories inform my work. I have already alluded to some of this theoretical work in my discussion of Historical Literacy Work. Here, I recognize three of these critical theories: Critical Pedagogy, Critical Race Theory, and Raciolinguistics. While these theories are not used explicitly in my dissertation study, they provide important guiding frameworks that have helped to direct my work.

In *When Students Have Power*, Ira Shor explains that in critical pedagogy:

teachers don’t stop being authorities or academic experts, but they deploy their power and knowledge as democratic authorities who question the status quo and negotiate the curriculum rather than as authoritarian educators who unilaterally make the rules and lecture on preset subject matter. (56)

A critical pedagogue is someone who fosters agency and empowers learners, often through explicit collaboration and negotiation with students. Critical pedagogy traces its roots back to Brazilian Marxist-educator Paolo Freire whose *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* recounted his
work with Brazilian peasant farmers using literacy as a tool for emancipation. One feature of critical pedagogy is its critique of existing power relations and its strive toward social justice.

Closely related to critical pedagogy is Critical Race Theory (CRT). Originally developed by African American legal scholar Derrick Bell, and some of his former students and associates, CRT is “a collection of critical stances against the existing legal order from a race-based point of view” (Brooks). Bell and other legal scholars such as Richard Delgado and Kimberlé Crenshaw were attempting to explain why the gains of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960’s had not only been subsequently impeded, but, in fact, eroded in the 1980’s (Delgado and Stefanic). Drawing on Kimberlé Crenshaw’s work on CRT in education, Tara J. Yosso explains that CRT “challenges claims that the educational system offers objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity. A critical race praxis … questions approaches to schooling that pretend to be neutral or standardized while implicitly privileging White, US-born, monolingual, English-speaking students” (7). Inoue’s antiracist assessment ecologies implicitly draw from CRT. In my discussion and implications chapters, I use CRT as an interpretive framework because CRT is a framework that moves people toward social justice ends.

Finally, the newly defined field of raciolinguistics provides another important way of looking at standard English. As noted above, from the 1960’s onward, linguists have viewed “standard” English as only one of a variety of Englishes in common use. In standard English ideologies, no language dialect is superior, but what is often considered “standard” is directly connected to the social group in power. In a series of articles written between 2012 and 2017, Bethany Davila tackles the “indexicality” of standard English and its link to race and class. Davila bases her arguments on her studies of (White) composition instructors reading anonymous student papers and the comments the instructors make during interviews. She notes,
“there is not one example of instructors noting a positive feature in the text as an indexical for African American students….they never considered the possibility of grammatical difference being dialectal difference, even when they stated that those grammatical differences (read as errors) specifically signal African American students (“Indexicality” 192). Here’s the thing though—composition teachers are not trained to do so. While my discussion of STROL above hints that composition might have joined with the sociolinguists of the 1960’s (Smitherman), instead, in the last 50 years the fields have grown independently. Graduate students in most Composition/Writing Studies programs don’t take a single applied linguistics or language diversity course. Without a background in socio- or Applied Linguistics, without implicit or explicit knowledge of AAVE, how could FYC instructors possibly recognize it in students’ writing?

What I find more concerning from Davila’s research is her argument, taken up by raciolinguists, that “because indexicality is bidirectional, instructors are more likely to perceive discursive difference as an error if they believe that the author is an African American or as a mistake if they believe that the author is White” (Davila “Indexicality” 198). In this way, “reverse indexicality works to justify existing stereotypes” (“Indexicality” 198). “Even though there is no inherent link between race and dialect, when one dialect is both ‘read’ as White and deemed more acceptable than other dialects, it becomes raced in the reader’s mind and perpetuates Whiteness (Davila “Indexicality” 199). Flores and Rosa explain that

The ideological construction and value of standardized language practices are anchored in what we term raciolinguistic ideologies that conflate certain racialized bodies with linguistic deficiency unrelated to any objective linguistic practices. That is, raciolinguistic ideologies produce racialized speaking subjects who are constructed as linguistically
deviant even when engaging in linguistic practices positioned as normative or innovative when produced by privileged white subjects. (Flores and Rosa 150)

In other words, raciolinguistic scholars assert that “race” can override perceptions of the speaker/writer’s language, so even if the speaker is using “standard” language the “white ear” hears grammatical “errors” (Paris and Alim, “What Are We Seeking”).

Laura Greenfield, in her chapter, “The ‘Standard English’ Fairy Tale,” states it most explicitly:

Black people are not discriminated against because some speak a variety of Ebonics—rather, I argue, Ebonics is stigmatized because it is spoken primarily by Black people. It is its association with a particular people and history that has compelled people to stigmatize it. Our attitudes toward language, it appears, are often steeped in our assumptions about the bodies of the speakers. We assume an essential connection—language as inherently tied to the body. In other words, language varieties—like people—are subject to racialization. (50)

This is the perspective Inoue endorses, especially in articles such as “Theorizing Failure,” in which he states: “Writing failure stems from irreconcilable differences between expectations of White, middle-class literacies in school and the raced, cultured, classed, and gendered home literacies that learners attempt to use in school” (331). Davila concurs: “underrepresented students may be held at a distance from academia due to their language use and due to the fact that there are no allowable identities that are linked to standardness and representative of their various social groups (“Indexicality” 199). For Inoue, then, labor-based grading contracts offer an alternative assessment ecology where judgements of “quality” are removed and, theoretically,
linguistically diverse students (be that due to AAVE, EAL, or socioeconomic class) are able to earn A’s.

In 1992, Robert Phillipson established English “linguistic imperialism” as the “dominance of English—asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural (material: institutions, financial allocations) and cultural (immaterial/ideological: attitudes, pedagogical principles) inequalities between English and other languages” (Linguistic Imperialism 47 qtd. in Gomes 206). Recently, scholars such as Inoue and April Baker-Bell directly connect linguistic imperialism to racial violence. Pointing out, as Baker-Bell does in her introduction to Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy, that “Eric Garner……used standard English—‘I cannot breathe’… [but that] didn’t keep him from being killed by a police officer” (31). The arguments made by raciolinguistic scholars I find increasingly persuasive. However, I would not go so far as to argue that writing instructors should “never” tell their students to use SEAE as scholars like Vershawn Ashanti Young have done (“Conf. for ATLA”).

Young has persuasively made the case that writing instructors should teach code-meshing (mixing all one’s linguistic resources—or codes—in writing) as opposed to code-switching, which advocated for students to use “standard” English in professional contexts, and their home language in informal contexts. Young has argued that “the code-switching approach implies a racist, segregationist response to the language habits of African Americans,” which thus excludes AAVE speakers from “public and professional discourse” (3); whereas code-meshing enables students to “compose livelier, more rhetorically effective prose, while developing a confident racial self-concept” (“Introduction” 9). Similarly, Paris and Alim ask what might happen if “the goal of teaching and learning with youth of color was not ultimately to see how closely students
could perform White middle-class norms but to explore, honor, extend, and problematize their heritage and community practices” (“What Are We Seeking” 86). Other translingual pedagogies and practices might prove a beneficial way forward as well. However, these questions are not what my dissertation set out to study. Instead, the theories discussed above have provided guiding frameworks to this project, as opposed to being directly applied. As I discuss in the Implications and Conclusion chapter, the next step of this project will necessarily invoke CRT and other critical theories to better understand student and faculty perceptions about labor-based grading contracts.

**Reflections on the Literature Review**

Finally, I approach this dissertation as a feminist researcher and scholar. As Rosenberg and Howes explain, to be a feminist researcher the “research subject need not be explicitly about gender or gender issues” (“Listening to Research” 80). In Chapter Three it becomes evident that while I asked students to self-identify their gender(s), gender was only one of many demographic variables I engaged with. Rosenberg and Howes go on to state, “the defining issue of feminist methodologies occurs through larger practices of meaning-making,” in other words, “the practice of feminist methodology is an ontological one; it relates to the ways in which we conceptualize research questions worth exploring and how we assign value to data or artifacts” (80). It is through the lens of feminist scholarship that I identified the lack of student voices in the empirical research to date on labor-based grading contracts. This was a primary concern that led me toward an exploratory investigation into student perspectives on labor-based contract grading; we cannot simply impose labor-based grading contracts on students without gathering feedback from the students being assessed by them.
Another key principle of feminist research is methodological reflexivity that “challenges the norm of objectivity that assumes that the subject and object of research can be separated” (Fonow and Cook 2213 qtd. in McKee and Porter 154). As the first chapter demonstrated, I am committed to self-reflexivity and disclosure, and I use my embodied experience to ground my perspective. Rosenberg and Howes assert that “one of the most significant turns in feminist methodological intervention has been the recognition of the researcher’s influence on her research: the always-already presence of her shadow, which impacts all of the work we do to varying degrees” (77). Thus, I acknowledge that my experience as a “native” speaker of Standard Edited American English surely restricts my perspective on the necessity of SEAE or the potential negative impacts of teaching students toward SEAE.

In “Feminist Methodology” Golombisky asserts that “feminist methodology is not so much a specific method as it is a shared commitment to ‘a politics of care and social justice’” (Connell 857; Golombisky 172). As Royster and Kirsch point out, as feminist scholars:

We face the challenge of gathering data with a consideration of multiple viewpoints, balancing the viewpoints that emerge, and then coming to interpretations of this enriched landscape that are substantive, fair, and respectful…It also requires…a willingness to consider more than one set of possibilities and to forestall coming to closure too quickly.

(139)

As will become clear in Chapters 4 and onward, some of the data I collected provided surprises, but I remained open to the stories the data holds.

Related to the “consideration of multiple viewpoints,” Krista Ratcliffe has offered the theory of “rhetorical listening,” which is useful for my adoption here. In her
introduction to *Rhetorical listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness*, Ratcliffe explains that

*Rhetorical listening* signifies a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture. Defined more particularly as a code of cross-cultural conduct, *rhetorical listening* signifies a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in cross-cultural exchanges. (1)

Rhetorical listening offers a shifting perspective that brings forth frequently/previoustly silenced voices and has become an important part of feminist methodologies.

In addition, Ratcliffe offers “eavesdropping” as “an ethical tactic for resisting the invisibility of a gendered whiteness in scholarly discourses within rhetoric and composition studies” (101). Ratcliffe traces the etymological roots of eavesdropping to “a Middle English definition of eavesdropper suggesting ‘one who stands on the eavesdrop [the spot where water drops from the eaves] in order to listen to conversations inside the house’ (Random House)” (105). From there Ratcliffe puts forth eavesdropping as “a rhetorical tactic of purposely positioning oneself on the edge of one's own knowing so as to overhear and learn from others” and, I would add, from oneself (105). While the example above relies on overhearing, Ratcliffe argues eavesdropping is also a method for reading scholarship: “When I am reading a scholarly text on an unfamiliar subject, perhaps I should approach the text by trying to weave the edges of my knowledge into the article's claims” (106). I have done the best that I can to read the scholarship on White language supremacy “from the eaves.”

To quote again from Royster and Kirsch, I am interested in “enhancing our understanding of how language works in people’s lives” (18). And as writing instructors and program administrators, it is important for us to listen to students directly as we examine student language
use at home and in the classroom. We need to hear from students as we consider whether or not labor-based grading contracts make sense in our particular local contexts. Thus, extending the work of Inoue (Antiracist, “Grading Contracts,” “Friday Plenary,” Labor-Based), I will connect the idea of “opportunities for advancement” (Poe et al.) in this project back to actionable, pedagogical implications designed to improve writing course outcomes for underrepresented students.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND METHODOLOGIES

Introduction

The methodological orientation and methods described in this chapter build out of issues described in the previous chapter. As discussed in the literature review, students from various demographic sub-groups (e.g., certain racial/ethnic backgrounds, multilingual and/or linguistically diverse, and low socio-economic status) persist in college and attain bachelors’ degrees at much lower rates than their (White, monolingual, and high to middle socio-economic status) peers. The guiding purpose for this descriptive, exploratory research is to determine the effects of labor-based grading contracts on these historically excluded students and whether labor-based grading contracts could help these students be more academically successful (defined as achieving a passing grade) in first-year composition courses. The Institute for Educational Sciences defines exploratory research as “examin[ing] relationships among important constructs in education and learning to establish logical connections that may form the basis for future interventions or strategies to improve education outcomes” (“Common Guidelines” 9).

Writing assessments are never neutral. As David Slomp asserts in his framing article to a 2016 special issue of the Journal of Writing Assessment dedicated to “A Theory of Ethics for Writing Assessment,” “Whether by intention or by fact of their implementation, all such [writing assessment] programs have an effect on the individuals and systems to which they connected” (“Sources of Evidence and the Standards”). Current research in assessment and labor-based grading contracts have not yet engaged with key questions and concerns, specifically from
students’ perspectives. Thus, in this chapter I put forward more specific, key questions that my study attempts to answer.

**Research Questions**

As indicated in the introduction, I ask the following questions: How do labor-based grading contracts affect students’ motivation and attitudes toward writing? How do labor-based grading contracts affect student perceptions of instructor feedback? And how do students perform on academic performance measures in an FYC class that uses labor-based grading contracts? This chapter presents the research design, including sample selection, pilot study, data collection, and data analysis of my mixed-methods research project. Survey instruments appear as Appendices.

This study was exempt under USF IRB guidelines as a programmatic evaluation study.

**Methodology**

In this study, I use a critical methodology that examines data from the perspective of “power, control, and social justice” (Hesse-Biber 12). As an ideological orientation, critical methodology guided my research process and design, specifically through my choice to focus on students’ perspectives. I also bring the lens of a feminist scholar to this research. In “Is There a Feminist Method?” Harding argued that the researcher must be “placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter…. That is, the race, class, culture, and gender assumptions of the researcher her/himself must be placed within the frame of the picture that she/he paints.” Thus, I included an extensive positionality statement in Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

After reviewing research in Writing Studies and writing assessment, I found that few of the more recent studies on grading contracts have used an empirical design that can be replicated and extended. Inoue, himself, has called on other scholars to conduct quantitative research on
labor-based grading contracts. As I discuss in the Mixed Methods Approach section below, I have chosen to combine quantitative data and analysis with a qualitative approach that “features a disciplined reverence for the validity of various people’s lived experience” (Broad, “Reflection on A Role for Qualitative Inquiry”).

Variables are features, often malleable, that can be measured, manipulated, and controlled for. Mislevy defines a variable model as being “situated”: “The meanings of person, task, and performance variables in the model are co-defined and arise from the particular people, situations, and interactions that constitute the application” (“Sociocognitive Foundations”). Thus, this study is descriptive and exploratory in order to construct a variable model of labor-based grading assessment ecologies. As Elliot notes, “Creation of a variable model of writing, disaggregated by student group, would also be an important research aim that would support both the assessment and occasions for structuring opportunity to learn” (“A Theory” sec. 4.3.2). Identifying the variables in a labor-based grading contract assessment ecology allows future researchers to design instruments and research protocols that better target key areas of interest.

Answering Inoue’s call to research, my research investigates student attitudes towards and perceptions of labor-based grading contracts in multilingual FYC sections at an R1 university. This foundational research will be used to identify and test the variables present in labor-based grading contract assessment ecologies. As defined in the Common Guidelines for Education Research and Development (IES et al.), foundational research contributes to core knowledge of teaching and learning by providing the fundamental knowledge that may contribute to improved learning and other relevant education outcomes. Studies of this type seek to test, develop, or refine theories of
teaching or learning and may develop innovations in methodologies and/or technologies that will influence and inform research and development in different contexts. (9)

Foundational research also allows for variable modeling.

**Methods**

*Variable Modeling*

The majority of the data I collected was gathered through survey responses, but I also conducted two semi-structured focus group interviews with a total of 8 students in the two grading contract sections taught by someone other than myself, and an end of semester interview with both instructors, individually. As foundational research, the variables my research explores are demographics and written language characteristics, student motivation, ecological variables, and academic performance measures. These variables are shown in Figure 1 below.

*Figure 3.1 Labor-Based Contract Grading Variables*

The first variable, demographics and language background, stems from the issue of fairness brought forth by Inoue, Elliot, Poe, and others. As part of a critical methodology, identifying differential validity, or the evidence of validity for all groups and subgroups, is key (AERA et al.).

The second variable, motivation and writing attitudes, is important because of insights from educational psychology. Drawing on the work of Alfred Bandura, researchers such as Barry J. Zimmerman, Frank Pajares, and Roger Bruning and colleagues have examined the correlation between writing and self-efficacy. More recently, scholars such as Charles MacArthur and
colleagues have demonstrated the correlation between self-efficacy, motivation, and academic achievement. For students who have been academically unsuccessful in the past, the burden of those experiences carries on into the First-Year Composition classroom. Furthermore, for those students who are multilingual, or linguistically diverse in other ways, corrective written feedback, especially when combined with low grades, can lead them to believe there is something deeply “wrong” with their own language. Giving the survey related to writing attitudes and motivation to all students in the study (including those in the non-grading contract sections), I was able to compare student responses in an attempt to identify if the labor-based grading contract had any positive correlation to students’ internal beliefs and motivation.

The third variable, student attitudes toward and perceptions of the labor-based grading contract, provides the central focus of this investigation. This terminology stems from Inoue’s “antiracist assessment ecologies.” For Inoue, “antiracist writing assessment ecologies” are “a complex political system of people, environments, actions, and relations of power that produce consciously understood relationships between and among people and their environments that help students problematize their existential writing assessment situations, which in turn changes or (re)creates the ecology so that it is fairer, more livable, and sustainable for everyone” (Antiracist 82). In other words, under antiracist assessment conditions students who might have failed under a more traditional or standard assessment system have more opportunities to succeed. I used Inoue’s work from Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies and Labor-Based Grading Contracts to identify the sub-variables present in a labor-based grading contract assessment system and develop questions about them (see Instrument 3, discussed below).

The final variable is Academic Performance Measurements. As Iman and Powell point out in “In the Absence of Grades,” even in a labor-based grading contract assessment system,
students still retain a desire for grades. Regardless of how much their writing “improves” over the course of the semester or what sort of positive feedback or increasing confidence they may have in their own writing, at the end of the day students, particularly those at an R1 institutions, are invested in their final grades. And, of course, so is university administration. Completing a study of labor-based grading contracts without any attention to academic performance would thus be incomplete. These variables and the methods used to measure them are more fully described in the study design section of this chapter.

A Mixed Methods Approach

My research uses a mixed methods approach involving quantitative and qualitative methods. A mixed methods approach is important for several reasons. Firstly, it increases the methodological rigor and reliability of the study design by allowing for complementarity (Hesse-Biber 4). Complementarity reveals the depth of student perceptions from multiple angles. As Hesse-Biber argues, “qualitative data [can] illuminate the meaning of statistical results by adding a narrative understanding to quantitative research findings” (6), and this mixed methods approach often creates a “synergistic effect” (5). Secondly, as Greene et al. note, “the results from one method…help develop or inform the other method” (259). That process can be seen in my discussion of creating Instrument 4, focus group interview questions, based on results of the Instrument 3, a survey that asks students about their perceptions of the labor-based grading contract.

Study Design

The goal in all this data collection was to hear from the students themselves: What are their perceptions of labor-based grading contracts and instructor feedback? How does assessment using labor-based grading contracts affect their attitudes toward writing and their
beliefs about their writing identities? I followed an emergent design (Creswell), where I collected the qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously. Based on my literature review and the pilot study (discussed below), I created the following data collection and analysis plan:

*Table 3.1 Study Design*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable 1</th>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instrument 1:</strong> Background Survey to Capture Student Characteristics.</td>
<td>Student Demographic and Language Background</td>
<td>First two weeks of class via Qualtrics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: Student Demographic and Language Background Survey (Larson)</td>
<td>Instrument 1:</td>
<td>• Descriptive statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subgroup breakdown (if possible)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instrument 2:</strong> Motivation/Writing Attitudes Survey.</td>
<td>Student Motivation/ Writing Attitudes</td>
<td>First two weeks of class AND last week of class via Qualtrics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: SWAS, Wright et al. (2019)</td>
<td>Instrument 2:</td>
<td>• Descriptive statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instrument 3:</strong> Ecological Variables of Contract Grading Survey.</td>
<td>Student Perceptions (of Ecological Variables of Contract Grading)</td>
<td>Instrument 3:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: Larson questions.</td>
<td>Instrument 3:</td>
<td>• Descriptive statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Given during the two weeks after midterm AND last week of class via Qualtrics.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instrument 4:</strong> Perception Focus Group Interview.</td>
<td>Instrument 4:</td>
<td>Instrument 4:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: Larson questions. (designed to investigate why students gave the answers they did on above survey)</td>
<td>One – two weeks after Instrument 3, administered via Microsoft Teams</td>
<td>• Transcription of interviews, with qualitative coding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.1 Study Design (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument 5:</th>
<th>Instrument 5:</th>
<th>Instrument 5:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student responses to reflection questions</td>
<td>Collected throughout the semester, particular at the end of each of three Projects via Canvas</td>
<td>Qualitative coding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument 6:</th>
<th>Instrument 7:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Final Course Grades (Canvas)</td>
<td>Instructor scores on final project submissions (Projects 1, 2, &amp; 3) (USF Writes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable 4</th>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Performance Measures</td>
<td>End of semester</td>
<td>Instruments 6 and 7:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Descriptive statistics and independent t-tests to compare course grade means</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The various instruments of this project allowed me to gather different types of information. Specifically, Instrument 2, the *Self-Beliefs, Writing Beliefs, and Attitudes Survey* (SWAS), allowed me to learn how a larger group of FYC students felt about writing identities and beliefs and Instrument 3, the *Perceptions of Ecological Variables Study* (PEVS), provided quantifiable data about students’ perceptions of labor-based grading contracts. While Instrument 4, semi-structured focus group interview questions, allowed me to probe student responses to the labor-based grading contract for more depth and nuance. The written reflection questions, Instrument 5, provided additional qualitative data, but also allowed instructors to “check in” with students throughout the semester and address student concerns. Finally, gathering rubric scores and final course grades, Instruments 6 and 7, respectively, allowed me to compare students’ average performance measures between the grading contract students and the non-grading contract students. As many of the previous studies on grading contracts do not examine performance indicators\(^\text{14}\) this was important information to gather, particularly for those who

\(^{14}\) Inoue’s 2012 chapter “Grading Contracts: Assessing Their Effectiveness on Different Racial Formations” is a notable exception.
might be skeptical about the impact of labor-based grading contracts on students’ writing performance.

The quantitative data I collected was analyzed with descriptive and, where sample sizes were greater than 30, so that a Gaussian distribution could be assumed, inferential statistics were applied (see Table 3.1). O’Dwyer and Bernauer note that one purpose of descriptive analysis is to “identify attributes, characteristics, or phenomena that may be experimentally manipulated in subsequent research efforts” (161). These concepts are explored in Chapter 4: Results. As a foundational and descriptive study, my data analysis investigated “possible causal relationships using non-experimental data” (O’Dwyer and Bernauer 157). Specifically, I was looking for the possible relationships between labor-based grading contracts and student attitudes toward writing, instructor feedback, and their own learning. Through questionnaires, focus group interviews, and academic performance measures, I was able to create a model for future data-driven research on labor-based grading contracts (see Chapter 4).

**Pilot Study**

Pilot studies are a common practice in many disciplines since they allow researchers to pilot ideas or test research protocols. Polit, Beck, and Hungler note that the pilot study allows researchers to conduct a “small scale version, or trial run, done in preparation for the major study” (467). Additionally, Van Teijligen and Hundley argue, “well-designed and well-conducted pilot studies can inform us about the best research process and occasionally about likely outcomes.” As my interest in the idea of labor-based writing contracts grew, I wanted to use Inoue’s materials to gauge initial student reactions. The pilot revealed important areas that needed adjustments to better meet the needs of students, as well as to afford instructors the opportunity to consider this approach as it aligned with their own pedagogy.
In spring 2020, I conducted a pilot study (n = 16) using a single ENC 1101-INTO class section (my own section) as a case study to develop the materials that would frame my larger study. I adapted Inoue’s “Grading Contract for First-Year Writing” (Labor-Based). During the semester I gathered data informally, asking students to reflect about their perceptions of the grading contract in free-writes and end-of-semester reflection questions. I used this feedback as I revised the grading contract for the fall semester.

**Developing the Grading Contract**

Surprisingly, one of the most difficult aspects of this project was figuring out how to adapt Inoue’s grading contract for my own classroom setting. Inoue has made his grading contracts and related materials, such as an Excel time-tracking log, accessible to other instructors and academics. Nonetheless, I spent many hours staring at the grading contract he includes in *Labor-Based Grading Contracts* and searching online for what others had done in their grading contract classrooms, trying to figure out how the labor-based grading contract would work on a pragmatic level in the classroom.

In his grading contract, Inoue explains that the grade of B (3.1) depends primarily on behavior and labor. Have you shown responsible effort and consistency in our class? Have you done what was asked of you in the spirit it was asked? Higher grades than the default, the grades of **3.4, 3.7, or 4.0**, however, require more labor that helps or supports the class in its mutual discussions and examinations of rhetoric or the myths of education, literacy, and identity. (*Labor-Based* 333) (emphasis in original)

Inoue’s grading contract has six elements listed under “ways to improve your grade”: writing two *Extra Précis-Responses*, two *Labor Journal Essays*; completing *A Bigger Project* for any of
the original projects; three formal Extra Assessments, *A lesson/activity/handout*, and *Some other labor that benefits the class (Labor-Based 333-34)*. I modified some of the additional labor tasks Inoue includes in his grading contract and added a couple of additional options specific to our ENC 1101 curriculum.

However, because I wanted to make as few changes as possible to USF-Tampa’s newly revised ENC 1101 curriculum, I was hesitant to add additional assignments. The new curriculum was highly scaffolded and labor intensive as written. I chose to keep a 15-point rubric for the smaller, scaffolded assignments that were part of this revised curriculum. However, I found that several students fixated on the scores they received on the rubric instead of the feedback they received. Determining whether a particular discussion post merited 13 points (*Meets Expectations*) vs. 14 points (*Great*) still seemed very subjective to me. For example, to earn either 13 or 12 points (*Meets Expectations*), the rubric identified the following performance expectations: *The submission meets some assignment expectations, demonstrates emerging critical thinking, and/or fulfills some of the expected conventions of university-level writing. The submission requires general development.* While the language of this rubric was chosen explicitly to “anchor” the point values to specific statements (and enable instructors to discriminate between scored submissions without having to write extensive feedback justifying the score point), it is necessarily subjective for an instructor to determine whether a student response “demonstrates creative and critical thinking” (Exceptional, 15 points) versus only “demonstrates critical thinking” (Great, 14 points) or “demonstrates emerging critical thinking” (Meets Expectations, 13 or 12 points).

This point was made particularly salient to me after I had a student ask me why she had received an 11 (*Requires Development*) on one of the first discussion posts. In reviewing her
post, I realized that hers had been one of the first posts I graded and by the time I had graded several more discussion posts, I had unconsciously adjusted my expectations. In looking at her post this second time, I realized most likely I would now have scored it a 13 or 14. This incident reaffirmed my belief in using grading contract assessment systems over individually scored/judged assignments. Thus, one takeaway from the pilot study was the tension between a point valued rubric and a grading contract assessment ecology. Without moving completely away from the rubric, students remained focused on the points they were earning.

In his grading contract, Inoue also includes a chart that “breakdowns” the main components of earning various final letter grades. I created something similar for my own class for the pilot study that, in hindsight, was overly complicated for both students and me. (See Appendix D). Unfortunately, in practice, I found it even more “fuzzy” and subjective to use this chart, even compared to traditional grading. The very logical first question when looking at the above table is what happens if students have different “levels” for the different criteria; for example, if a student met the “A” criteria for Participation, Collaboration, # of Late Assignments and # of Missed Assignments, but, say, had 4 absences. Four absences would put the student in the D category.

While Inoue’s grading contract lists participation and collaboration as part of the general requirements for success in the class, he does not include them as separate categories in his “Breakdown” chart. I added these two categories to my “Breakdown” chart since I wanted a way to measure every aspect of their class performance that would affect their final grade. I used the word “infractions”15 as part of the criteria for these categories but remained uncomfortable with the negative connotation. I mentioned my discomfort to students the first week of class but

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15 As in students will have “fewer than 3 minor infractions; no major infractions.”
explained I hadn’t found a better word, and I didn’t expect I would encounter any “infractions” in either participation or collaboration that semester. And I never did mark down any infractions, although once or twice I wondered if I should have for the occasional INTO student who appeared to be mainly looking at his phone during a collaborative activity. As it turned out, spring 2020 became the first of our “COVID semesters.” In March, students left for spring break about the same time the university decided to shut down campus operations and switch to remote learning for the rest of the semester. Thus, absences and tardiness became things that no longer existed.

Another significant change I made to the study design was to add a category to the Breakdown of Main Components for students who “consistently” scored 14 and 15 points on the individual tasks. I called this the “Exceptional Work Products” provision (see Appendix X) and it allowed me to give additional grade “bumps” to the A/A+ students without requiring them to do more than one other additional labor task. This formed the basis for an “Exemplary Labor Clause” I added to the pilot study grading contract. I explained the clause as follows:

If by our final meeting conference (end of semester), you miss no classes (participate in all activities), have no late, missed, or ignored assignments, and do not use a gimme\textsuperscript{16}, then you will earn an extra .4 (equal to one item on the contract) to your final course grade. This rule is meant to reward those students who engage in all the labor of the course in the fullest spirit asked of them and demonstrate themselves to be exemplary class citizens.

\textsuperscript{16} The “gimme” clause I also borrowed from Inoue’s contract. Basically, as I interpreted it, the gimme clause allowed students to “excuse” a late or missing assignment. As I conferenced with students over the semester, I developed the following guideline: a gimme excuses 4 late, or 2 missing and 2 late, or 3 missing and 1 late assignment. Because students ended up turning in so many assignments late or not at all (at least partially due to the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic and our abrupt switch to remote learning, the gimme became a way for me allow students who might otherwise not have qualified for the “B” requirements to still earn a “B.”
However, as will be discussed later in Chapter 4, the addition of this “Exemplary Labor Clause” may have been what actually satisfied the monolingual White students; in other words, I now question whether all students would have reported a positive disposition to labor-based grading contract at the end of the semester without that clause.

While most students in the pilot study had initial reactions ranging from openness to excitement about the idea of the grading contract, I had two monolingual (White) women students who both expressed concern at the beginning of the semester. These students initially perceived the labor-based grading contract as unfair to students with conventionally higher-level writing ability. As one stated: “As of now I am still kind of skeptical about this class…I am glad that nothing is officially graded but still somewhat confused as to why we can only get a ’B’ without doing extra outside the class requirements.” However, by the end of the semester, all students who completed the final reflection, including these two monolingual students, expressed overall satisfaction with the labor-based grading contract. The student quoted above had this to say in her final reflection:

At the beginning of the semester, I was not happy with the grading contract. Now, I am happy with the grading contract since it was easy to understand and plan my time around completing assignments so as to receive a good grade.

At times during the pilot study, I had found myself questioning whether a labor-based grading contract worked in an R1 university setting; however, through students’ end-of-semester feedback, I discovered that the vast majority of students preferred the labor-based grading contract over traditional assessment systems. This encouraged me to continue with the project. The feedback also influenced the design of the Perceptions of Ecological Variables Survey,
which was administered to students in the grading contract sections mid- and end-of-semester in fall 2020.

Mid-semester of the pilot study my students and I reviewed the contract and made some changes stemming from both student concerns and my own. Most significantly I collapsed Inoue’s categories of “Late/Incomplete Work,” “Missed,” and “Ignored” assignments. Inoue defines “Late/Incomplete Work” as “any work or document due that is turned in AFTER the due date/time BUT within 48 hours of the deadline” (332). “Missed Work,” on the other hand, is explained as “late work [submitted] AFTER the 48 hours stipulated in Late/Incomplete Work…which is a more serious mark against your grading contract” (332). His final category, “Ignored Work,” is explained as “I have no record of you doing it or turning it in” and he notes that “accumulating any ‘ignored work’ will keep you from meeting our contract expectations” (332). Collapsing these categories was a suggestion that I made to the class, and they agreed to. I found that I had a hard time remembering the difference between “Late” and “Missed” and “Ignored.” It also meant that as I tracked assignment submission in Canvas I had to remember to go in and move tallies from “Ignored” to “Missed” as students turned in work that was more than 48 hours late, but was eventually turned in, nonetheless. In our revised contract, we determined “Late” meant any assignment submitted more than 5 minutes passed the 11:59 pm submission time while “Missed” meant any assignment not submitted. The “Ignored” category was eliminated.

In the fall, I used the insights from the pilot study as I revised my grading contract. Knowing I would be teaching an asynchronous, online class, it was actually easier to create my grade breakdown chart since I knew I didn’t need to take into account attendance. See Appendix E for the chart I developed.
Inoue argues that “if judged on their own terms,” grading contract “effectiveness” can be measured by “1) the quantity of work produced, 2) the quality of writing produced in class, and 3) student reactions to and acceptance of the contract itself” (“Racial Formations” 82). I focused on the third aspect of effectiveness, “student reactions to and acceptance of the contract itself” as I designed the full study for the fall. The pilot helped me to see that labor-based grading contract could be beneficial in an R1 environment, at least in classes where the majority of students are multilingual. In the remainder of this chapter, I describe the full study with an explanation of how participants were chosen and then the process of conducting the study.

Participants

Student Sample

Following the pilot study, I used a purposive sample of 114 students in six FYC class sections at my own institution. Fall 2020, the FYC program offered six sections of ENC 1101-INTO, with 19 students in each, totaling the 114 students, evenly divided between students who took the course under traditional assessment conditions and those who were assessed using the grading contract. Fifty-seven students were in classes which used grading contracts and 57 were in the non-grading contract sections.

Despite the fact that the University of South Florida has a relatively diverse student body with 52% of students identifying as White at the Tampa campus (“Pocket Fact Book”), in the

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17 INTO discussed below

18 Twenty-one percent of Tampa students identify as Hispanic, 10.5% as African American, and 8% Asian—the remaining students self-identify as multiracial (“Pocket Fact Book”). Additionally, ten percent of students at the Tampa campus are international students, from 65 different countries, with the largest number of students coming from India, China, Brazil, Vietnam, Columbia, and Saudi Arabia, respectively (“Student Headcount”).
past three years of teaching FYC at USF-Tampa, I had never had more than three African American students in one class section. This spurred me to look for other demographics that might also be linguistically diverse. I chose to use “INTO” sections of ENC 1101. INTO-USF is a public-private partnership between the University of South Florida and INTO, a private corporation that “specializes in preparing [international] students for undergraduate and postgraduate study in the UK and the US” (“INTO USF 2020-21”). At USF-Tampa, a certain number of ENC 1101 sections (the first of our two course FYC sequence) reserve half of the seats (n = 9) for INTO students. The rest of the seats may be selected by any undergraduate student. The curriculum and instruction are the same for “regular” ENC 1101 sections and these “special” sections. The FYC program does not provide any additional training to instructors teaching ENC 1101-INTO for the first time. While this model guarantees that at least half of the students in the class are EAL international students, in practice many of the non-INTO students are also multilingual, perhaps having arrived in the U.S. at some point during their childhood or adolescence. For instance, this spring two of my “regularly” placed students were both young women from Bolivia. My background in K-12 Language Arts education was focused on English Language Learners (ELL), and as a first-generation American on my mother’s side, I have always been positively pre-disposed to immigrants and the immigrant experience. For all of these reasons, I elected to carry out my study in these linguistically diverse sections of ENC 1101.

Instructor Recruitment

In the fall of 2020, the study involved two experienced First-Year Composition instructors at USF-Tampa (and myself), who each taught one section of ENC 1101-INTO using the labor-based grading contract. Lisa Melonçon, as dissertation chair, oversaw the project while I collected data and answered instructor questions. In June Dr. Melonçon and I met virtually with
Dr. Jill Martiniuk, a Visiting Instructor entering her third year at USF, and Yulia Nekrashevi
ch, a third year PhD student in Rhetoric & Composition (who also completed her MA in Rhet/Comp
in the USF English department), and both instructors agreed to participate in the study. Thus,
there were a total of 57 students in the grading contract sections at the beginning of the semester.
That number shrunk to 44 who were still officially enrolled and actively participating in their
classes at the end of the semester.

**Variable 1 Student Demographic and Language Background**

*Instrument 1: Background Survey to Capture Student Characteristics*

All sections were given a survey I designed called the Demographic and Language
Background Survey (DLBS) that asks students to self-identify their gender, race/ethnicity, first
language, and comfort level composing in English and other languages, as well as questions that,
when grouped together, give at least an approximation of the student’s socio-economic status
(SES).

I used a variety of sources to design the Demographic and Language Background Survey
(DLBS) that asks students to self-identify demographic information and details about the
languages they write in (see Appendix A). The DLBS was administered through Qualtrics during
the first two weeks of classes. The DLBS asks students to self-identify their gender,
race/ethnicity, disability status, age (range), academic standing (i.e., first-year, sophomore, etc.),
and whether the student is a transfer student and/or INTO student. Additionally, I asked students
if either parent had earned a bachelor’s degree, whether they had received a Pell Grant, and
whether they were employed. Using these three questions, I hoped to approximate a student’s
socio-economic status. I chose not to ask students about their sexual orientation as the literature
review did not indicate that subgroup analysis by sexual orientation would provide additional insights.

For the race/ethnicity categories, I began by basing the categories I used with those on the U.S. Census Bureau. For the past several decades the Census Bureau has used five racial categories: White; Black or African American; American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (“About Race”). The 1997 Office of Management and Budget (OMB) standards on race and ethnicity allowed individuals to select more than one racial/ethnic category (“About Race”). Because USF has a large population of students from the Middle East\(^{19}\), I also included the category “Middle Eastern or North African” since the 1101-INTO sections I had taught in the past often had a majority of students from the Middle East. This category was discussed at the “Census Forum on Ethnic Groups from the Middle East and North Africa” in 2015, which resulted in the decision to add the category to the 2020 census\(^{20}\) (Jones). I chose to list these categories alphabetically instead of in the order listed here because I did not want to privilege White and Black as the primary racial categories. I collapsed race and ethnicity into one question, as suggested by the ACPA Standards for Demographic Questions (Moody et al.); thus, I also included an option for Hispanic or Latinx. I chose the term Latinx as opposed to Latino or Latina/o to reject masculine and gender binaries (“Assessment Toolbox: Demographics”). I also included options for “Multiracial,” “Prefer not to answer,” and “An

\(^{19}\) USF had 844 students from countries considered Middle Eastern or North African, for a total of 1.9% of the student population in March 2020. According to the World Atlas, 19 countries are generally considered to be part of the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region, with an additional 16 countries that are sometimes included (e.g., Turkey, Afghanistan, Sudan). The students I included in my count came from both lists of countries. https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-are-the-mena-countries.html

\(^{20}\) Former President Trump’s administration decided against including the MENA designation as part of the 2020 census; thus, the Race and Ethnic categories for the 2020 census were the same as the 2010 census; however, White Americans were able to list an ethnicity for the first time and examples on the Census form included Lebanese and Egyptian (Wang).
identity not listed, self-identify,” based on the University of Arizona’s “Assessment Toolbox: Demographics,” which gives suggestions for creating “inclusive and functional demographic” questions. The “Demographic Turning Points for the United States” report by the U.S. Census Bureau projects that the number of individuals self-identifying as multiracial will grow from 2.6% in 2016 to 6.2% in 2060 (Vespa et al. 7).

In my desire to be inclusive, I included five gender categories: “Woman,” “Man,” “Transgender,” “Non-binary,” and “Genderqueer or gender nonconforming”; in addition to “An identity not listed, self-identify…” and “Prefer not to answer.” As I discuss in the Limitations section at the end of this chapter, having this many gender categories was probably unnecessary. Lastly, students were asked a series of questions about what language(s) they use, based partially on Jonathon Hall’s survey in “Language Background and the College Writing Course.” Using a drop-down menu of over 20 common languages (with an option for writing in other languages), students were asked to identify their first language, the language they write most fluently in, any other languages in which they write proficiently, and how comfortable they were writing in English versus other languages. Taken together, I hoped the answers to these questions would provide a rich source of data for sub-group analysis.

The DBLS collected 111 recorded responses. Of those, four had section numbers, but no names, and three had no identifying data whatsoever. That left 95 responses; however, some of those were duplicated responses. I was left with 83 unduplicated responses.

**Variable 2 Student Motivation/Writing Attitudes**

*Instrument 2: Motivation/Writing Attitudes Survey*

All sections also took the *Self-Beliefs, Writing Beliefs, and Attitudes Survey (SWAS)—* designed and tested by Wright et al. in 2019—at both the beginning and end-of-semester.
Using Qualtrics, I administered the SWAS to all students during the first two weeks of the fall 2020 semester. Wright et al. designed this survey for “monitoring students' motivation towards writing, as well as identifying variables that mediate student achievement” with a goal of “propos[ing] a model of writing motivation for adolescents” (65). Since the original SWAS was designed for adolescents, I made minor revisions in diction to make the instrument more appropriate to post-secondary students such as changing “I don’t get good grades in writing because I’m just not smart enough” to “I do not get high grades in writing because I am just not intelligent enough” or “When writing a paper, it’s easy for me to decide what goes 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and so on” to “When writing a paper, it is easy for me to decide on an organizational structure” (Wright et al.; Larson Modified SWAS). Students in all sections retook this same survey again the last week of the semester (before exam week). By collecting this data from all six 1101-INTO sections, I hoped to be able to describe and analyze student attitudes toward writing from those in grading contract sections versus traditional assessment sections, as well as the individual changes in writing attitudes that students make over the course of the semester. Forty-three of 114 students completed the SWAS in the fall and 46 completed it at the end of the semester. I extended the completion deadline in August for one week. At that time Qualtrics had only collected 36 responses, 35 of which were complete, and 31 of which had identifying information. I ended up revising the formatting of the SWAS so that statements appeared 10 at a time. I called this Version 2 and collected an additional eight responses this way.
Variable 3: Student Perceptions (of Ecological Variables of Contract Grading)

Instrument 3: Ecological Variables of Contract Grading Survey

Starting from a series of reflections questions from Inoue (Labor-Based), I designed a survey that asked students their perceptions of – what I am terming (following Inoue) – the ecological variables in labor-based grading contract assessment systems (see Appendix C). In his 2015 book, Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies, Inoue outlines seven elements of an antiracist writing assessment ecology: power, people, purpose, processes, parts, products, and place. I used these variables, in addition to three other elements Inoue discusses in his 2019 follow up, Labor-Based Grading Contracts: Building Equity and Inclusion in the Compassionate Writing Classroom: use-value, exchange-value, and worth, to create a twenty-item survey. I created two items for each of the 10 elements and students ranked their responses to these using a 6-point Likert scale (from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) (see Figures 3.3 and 3.4 below). After selected statements, students were asked, through an optional follow up, to explain their response and/or provide examples. This probing technique enabled a sort of “asynchronous interview” (St.Amant & Melonçon 349). While I collected student responses to the DLBS and
SWAS for students in all six of the ENC 1101-INTO sections, the PEVS was distributed only to students in the three grading contract sections.

The responses to this survey framed the construction of Instrument 4, the questions for the semi-structured focus group interviews (see below). The probing questions also enabled me to gather qualitative data without the logistical hurdles of setting up multiple individual student interviews. For the first administration of the PEVS (mid-semester), the survey was embedded in *USF Writes*, USF’s proprietary peer and self-review platform, attached to the Project 2 Expository Overview - Self Review assignment that was due Oct 25. One issue that Dr. Melonçon and I discussed was whether students should be required to take the survey before they could submit their assignment. Ultimately, Dr. Melonçon and I decided it would be unethical to force students to participate in the survey before they could submit their assignment. However, this most likely reduced the number of respondents.

*Figure 3.3 Ecological Variables*
Instrument 4: Perception Focus Group Interviews

Krueger and Casey define the focus group as a “carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (5). Using focus groups instead of individual interviews, I was able to “gain additional insights from the dialog and interaction between participants” (Geiser 2). It was important that the focus group interviews centered around students’ perspectives. Morgan notes that in focus groups “participants interaction among themselves replaces their interaction with the interviewer, leading to a greater emphasis on participants’ points of view” (18).

I wrote a series of questions based on my initial analysis of the PEVS; I looked for statements from the PEVS where students had the most divergent responses. I also considered my beliefs about what were the most important research questions in the study. Eventually, I
determined the following categories for questions: initial/general impressions, fairness, risk-taking/learning, writing identity/motivation, and ending questions.

I emailed the two instructors asking them to forward a message to their classes asking for volunteers to participate in the focus groups. Since it was a busy time toward the end of the semester, I asked the instructors to consider offering participation in the focus groups as an additional opportunity for a “labor bump.” Ten students signed up and eight students participated; five students were from Professor Nekrashevich’s class and three were from Dr. Martiniuk’s section\textsuperscript{21}. The interviews were conducted on Wed, Dec. 2 and Mon, Dec 7. Due to Covid-19, the focus groups were conducted virtually via Zoom and transcribed by Otter.ai. Each focus group included students with a variety of race/ethnicity, gender, and language backgrounds.

I wrote a script following Breen’s approach, which provided students with a welcome, my own introduction, an overview of the research and the establishment of ground rules. Before the interviews, I returned to the DBLS results from August to ensure that all the volunteers had completed it then. The three students who had not, I emailed them a link to the DBLS (after reactivating it). They all complied. Thus, I was able to obtain the demographic information I needed.

Tables 3.2 and 3.3 present both self-reported demographic data and Canvas course information (major) from the students who participated in the two focus group interviews. All names are pseudonyms.

\textsuperscript{21} I excluded the students from the section of 1101-INTO that I taught that semester to avoid conflict of interest.
Table 3.2 Participants – Focus Group Interview #1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Place of Birth/Residence</th>
<th>1st Language</th>
<th>Other Languages</th>
<th>Class Standing</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ivan</td>
<td>Germany/Tampa</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>Serbian, English, French</td>
<td>First-Year</td>
<td>Mathematics (INTO)</td>
<td>Nekrashevich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cristina</td>
<td>Brazil/Tampa</td>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>First-Year</td>
<td>Psychology (INTO)</td>
<td>Martiniuk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hakim</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia/Tampa</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>First-Year, INTO Pathway¹</td>
<td>Pre-Business (INTO)</td>
<td>Nekrashevich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logan</td>
<td>Florida/Tampa</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Economics/ Biomedical Sciences</td>
<td>Nekrashevich</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3 Participants – Focus Group Interview #2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Place of Birth/Residence</th>
<th>1st Language</th>
<th>Other Languages</th>
<th>Class Standing</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kaisa</td>
<td>Finland/Tampa</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>English, Swedish, German</td>
<td>First-Year</td>
<td>Pre-Marketing (INTO)</td>
<td>Martiniuk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>Bahamas (Long Island)/Tampa</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>First-year</td>
<td>Pre-Exercise Science (INTO)</td>
<td>Nekrashevich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derek</td>
<td>Virginia (lived in Germany)/Tampa</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>First-Year</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>Nekrashevich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esteban</td>
<td>Peru/Peru</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>First-year, INTO Pathway</td>
<td>Pre-Business (INTO)</td>
<td>Martiniuk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

²² The students who have (INTO) under the major sub-heading are students participating in the INTO program for additional resources and support. This is a different (less-intense) level of support than the INTO Pathway program Hakim is part of. The Pathway program “combine[s] intensive English language study, academic skills development, and academic coursework” in order to “ease an international student's transition to a new country…and introduce courses required for their intended major” (“About”; “Pathways”).
These tables help contextualize the opinions shared by the focus group participants discussed in Chapter 5. The qualitative data drawn from these focus group interviews can be analyzed with more nuance by considering these demographic factors.

*Instrument 5: Student Responses to Reflection Questions*

During the first week of classes, students in the grading contract sections were introduced to the labor-based grading contract as a syllabus addendum. Based largely on Inoue’s example grading contract in *Labor-Based*, I revised the contract based on my observations of the pilot study this spring. The grading contract was shared with students as a *commentable* Google doc (similar to the majority of other readings in the ENC 1101 curriculum at USF). Students in the grading contract sections were also given supplemental information about grades and grading, including “The Case Against Grades” by Alfie Kohn to review. Students discussed this extra-curricular content and their responses in a discussion post. In week 3, students submitted a one–two paragraph written response to the prompt:

- How do you feel about the labor-based grading contract so far?
- Why do you feel this way?
- What are some concerns you might have?
- Do you have any suggestions for changes to the contract?

My students’ responses were very favorable, as were those of the other two instructors. Additionally, at the end of each of the three major projects students responded to reflection questions about the grading contract approach such as:

- How did the labor-based grading contract affect the work you produced AND your attitude toward the work you produced?
• How has the labor-based grading contract affected your response to instructor feedback?

What effect did the labor-based grading contract have on your learning?

• What — if any — concerns about the labor-based grading contract do you have?

Student responses were recorded in Canvas and downloaded after the fall semester ended. Responses were downloaded and copied into excel files where I coded their responses (see Chapter 4). As a measurement of labor, I examined course grades from all section and instructor scores on final drafts collected in USF Writes (discussed further below).

**Variable 4: Academic Performance Measures**

**Instrument 6: Final Course Grades (Canvas)**

In the spring, Dr. Melonçon facilitated the retrieval of the course grade distributions for students in all six sections. As part of the academic performance measures, course grades and students’ final semester GPAs allowed me to compare the average course grade and pass rates of students in the grading contract sections versus those in the regular assessment sections.

*Figure 3.5 Academic Performance Measure Variables*
Instrument 7: Instructor Scores on Final Project Submissions

During the spring 2021 semester, I collected each student’s four criteria scores for each of the three projects in ENC 1101 that instructors assigned in the platform USF Writes. USF Writes is a “digital, instructional tool that enhances writing pedagogy in first year composition (FYC) and professional and technical communication (PTC) by providing a robust formative feedback platform that works in tandem with other tools and technologies” (“USF Writes”). The final draft of each of the three major assignments was scored with a 40-point rubric with four criteria. All three projects maintained two of the categories for all three projects (“integration of content” and “knowledge of conventions”), whereas the other two criteria were specifically tied two each project. So, for the Literacy Narrative, Project 1, the first two criteria were “the introduction and thesis” and “the structured narrative.” Each criterion was evaluated on the same 15-point scale, ranging from Exceptional to Zero/No Submission (see Appendix F). The purpose of identifying students’ sub-task scores was to compare averages between the grading contract and non-grading contract sections. One concern that skeptics of grading contract assessment systems may have is whether or not students’ writing “improves” over the course of the semesters. As the discussion in the literature review showed, there are multiple reasons one might question the validity of writing “improvement.” Nonetheless, I was looking to identify possible differences between students’ scores between the grading contract and non-grading contract sections.

Limitations

The major limitations of this study had to do with the sampling plan and time. To complete sub-group analysis and factor analysis, I needed at least 30 students per sub-group, in order to follow Roscoe’s rule that “sample sizes smaller than 30 are to be avoided because they
cannot assure the benefits of the central limit theorem” (156-157). However, the total of 57 students in the three grading contract sections diminished on survey administrations, and I was unable to analyze the data beyond gender and whether or not students reported being multilingual. While this foundational study may be generalizable to other First-Year Composition classes at USF, the sample size precludes its generalizability to other institutions. Repeating the study with a much larger student sample would allow demographic subgroup analysis, as well as establish greater reliability and more robust validity of the study’s findings. With more time and resources available, I could also have conducted individual interviews, which might have more deeply explored some of the ideas expressed during the focus group interviews. Finally, the logistical constraints of completing this dissertation within an academic year forced me to preclude the review of purposively selected students’ final drafts of at least two of the ENC 1101 projects, which would have allowed me to compare instructors’ scores to those of independent raters.

While I had a better than 30% response rate to the questionnaires, because of the small overall sample size, every response was precious. In hindsight, the Demographic and Language Background Survey (DLBS) I created was too long. I likely did not need all the languages I listed: all of the languages from the “Tools for Identifying All English Learners” chapter of the English Learner Toolkit (OELA). I should have listed perhaps the five most common languages with an other/write in option. The other language related questions, such as “Which statement best describes your writing background?” were questions I included from Hall’s survey (“Language Background”). I found these questions deeply intriguing but, in hindsight, they did not have direct relevance to what I needed to know to perform sub-group analysis. As I describe below, the combination of the 30+ question DLBS and the 20-item SWAS was likely
overwhelming to students at the beginning of the semester and contributed to the lower response rate. In addition, in my desire to be inclusive, I had listed five different gender options—in addition to “prefer not to identify” and a “self-identify” option. All student respondents chose either Man or Woman when responding to the gender question, so I assume listing Man, Woman, and Transgender/Non-binary or Man/Woman and “self-identify” would have been both adequately inclusive and more efficient.

I also learned that formatting the surveys was important. Forty-three of 114 students completed the SWAS in the fall (and 46 completed it at the end of the semester). I extended the completion deadline in August for one week. At that time Qualtrics had only collected 36 responses, 35 of which were complete, and 31 of which had identifying information. I used a matrix design in Qualtrics for the SWAS and belatedly realized that by having all 30 statements in one matrix/question, students seemed overwhelmed. I revised the formatting of the SWAS so that statements appeared five at a time, with the Likert categories atop of each statement. I also added a progress bar so students could see how far into the survey they were. I called this version SWAS Version 2 and collected an additional eight responses this way. I used this reformatted version of the SWAS again at the end of the semester. There is a tension between validity and reliability, on the one hand, and feasibility and efficiency, on the other. The SWAS was very reliable as it had been field tested by Wright et al., unfortunately, it was probably too long.

Finally, timing was important. Because I rushed to finish creating the DBLS (and set up the SWAS) at the end of the summer, I was contacting instructors the Sunday before classes started asking for the credentials so that I could embed the surveys into their Canvas courses. In hindsight, I should have had the surveys set up and linked—minimally—by the Friday before classes, ideally an entire week before classes, so students could have taken the survey before the
semester began, when they, presumably, had more time. I ended up having to extend the window for the surveys twice because I wanted more responses. The survey link in Canvas took students to the DBLS first, and since this survey was already 30+ questions, I had many students who followed the link to the SWAS—open it up—and close it back down.

I had fewer issues with the Perceptions of Ecological Variables Survey (PEVS). However, one problem that did occur was that there was only one opportunity for students to take the survey and as soon as they clicked away from it the survey was inaccessible. I had one student who emailed me to let me know she did not see the survey. The USF Writes programmers were able to reset her survey, but I believe that without this issue at least a few other students might have taken the survey. Since this issue happened to at least one student, I had the programmers reset the survey for all students who had not submitted it and sent a message to students letting them know they could still take the survey if they so desired.

In hindsight, in the full study I tried to collect too much data from too few students. At the beginning of the semester, I felt like I was nagging the instructors to nag their students to take surveys for me. I had this same problem at the end of the semester getting the grading contract students to retake both the SWAS and the PEVS and the non-grading contract students to take the SWAS. At least for those students, I was able to ask instructors to offer extra credit to students who took the survey. One instructor did that and his section had the highest response rate. This was a lightbulb moment in itself; had I included taking the surveys as an option for a “labor bump” on the actual grading contract, I imagine I would have had a much higher response rate. Toward the end of the semester, I asked the grading contract instructors to offer a labor bump for students to participate in the focus group interviews and was able to get enough participants this way.
As I analyzed the focus group transcripts, I realized that students were conflating the instructor feedback they received with their individual instructors—and not with the labor-based grading contract. For instance, in this exchange I had with “Jose,” he expresses this opinion:

Jose: maybe like the grading contract like don't influence on the feedback

Me: Okay, so I'm hearing you say then that you think the feedback wouldn't really change from the instructor. Whether or not you had to labor based grading contract.

Jose: Yes. (12/7/20, 48:33-49:00)

When I returned, then, to the questions I asked in the PEVS, I realized the wording of the questions about instructor feedback\textsuperscript{23} were not specific enough to tease out whether students’ responses were due to the labor-based grading contract or because of the individual instructor.

Were I to undertake this study again, I would change the things discussed in this section.

Nevertheless, this project provides valuable insights into students’ perspectives on labor-based grading contracts.

Summary

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the underlying foundation of my dissertation project is to explore what instructors and institutions can do to help marginalized students be more successful, specifically through labor-based grading contracts as an anti-racist assessment ecology (Inoue).

A methodological approach that both centers the experience of students’ and evaluates labor-based grading contracts empirically provides important evidence. White, Elliot, and

\textsuperscript{23} Q3: The grading contract has allowed me to have positive interactions with my instructor; Q9: I am satisfied with the writing feedback I receive from my instructor.
Peckham (156-157) quote Raul Sánchez from “Outside the Text: Retheorizing Empiricism and Identity” that “a theory of writing might re-imagine empiricism as simultaneously a producer and recipient of theoretical knowledge” (238) so that empiricism becomes a way of “looking at things in a systematic way and then making statements about them” (239). The research project presented here takes up these calls.

In summary, my critical methodological approach examines four variables in the labor-based grading contract assessment ecology: demographics and language background, students’ writing attitudes and motivation, their perceptions of labor-based grading contracts, and academic performance indicators. Using mixed methods, I was able to combine statistical analysis of survey data with qualitative data analysis from probing survey questions, reflection questions, and focus group interviews. In the next chapter, I present the findings of the project. Chapter 5: Discussion presents analyzes these findings with a focus on student perspectives.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

Recall from Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology, that this study was organized around four variables (see Fig. 4.1 below). For each of these variables, one or more instruments was used to collect data (see Table 3.1 in Chapter 3). Instruments 1, 2, and 3 were surveys. The third survey, Perception of Ecological and Labor Variables (PEVS), elicited both qualitative and quantitative data. The other surveys collected only quantitative data. For the quantitative data, due to the small sample size, I was only able to perform descriptive statistics in SPSS, with the exception of an independent t-test comparing the final course grade means of the two sample groups (contract grading and non-contract grading). I coded the qualitative data looking for positive, negative, and neutral associations. This chapter details the results of the seven instruments. Discussion and interpretation of the results occurs in Chapter 5: Discussion and Chapter 6: Implications and Conclusions. I first present the quantitative results, following the organization of the four variables described in Chapter 3 (see Fig. 4.1). I then include a brief discussion of the qualitative results, before concluding with a summary.

Figure 4.1 Variables in Contract Grading: A Student Model

Variable 1: Demographics and Language Background
Table 4.1 Demographic Information from Demographic Language and Background Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Contract Grading</th>
<th>Non-Contract Grading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Students</strong></td>
<td>N = 85</td>
<td>n = 44</td>
<td>n = 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>51.8%</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>n = 43</td>
<td>n = 22</td>
<td>n = 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50.6%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>n = 42</td>
<td>n = 22</td>
<td>n = 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>49.4%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American or Black</td>
<td>N = 1</td>
<td>n = 1</td>
<td>n = 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American or Asian</td>
<td>N = 22</td>
<td>n = 10</td>
<td>n = 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latinx</td>
<td>N = 15</td>
<td>n = 10</td>
<td>n = 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern or North African</td>
<td>N = 12</td>
<td>n = 4</td>
<td>n = 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>N = 22</td>
<td>n = 15</td>
<td>n = 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>N = 10</td>
<td>n = 4</td>
<td>n = 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>N = 3</td>
<td>n = 0</td>
<td>n = 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Class Year</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Year</td>
<td>N = 72</td>
<td>n = 32</td>
<td>n = 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>84.7%</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td>97.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>N = 9</td>
<td>n = 8</td>
<td>n = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>N = 3</td>
<td>n = 3</td>
<td>n = 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>N = 1</td>
<td>n = 1</td>
<td>n = 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.1 Demographic Information from Demographic Language and Background Survey (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Contract Grading</th>
<th>Non-Contract Grading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Full/Part Time</td>
<td>N = 84</td>
<td>n = 44</td>
<td>n = 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time Student (12 or more credits)</td>
<td>N = 78</td>
<td>n = 41</td>
<td>n = 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time Student (Fewer than 12 credits)</td>
<td>N = 6</td>
<td>n = 3</td>
<td>n = 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Transfer</td>
<td>N = 85</td>
<td>n = 44</td>
<td>n = 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N = 3</td>
<td>n = 3</td>
<td>n = 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>N = 82</td>
<td>n = 41</td>
<td>n = 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>96.5%</td>
<td>93.2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Age</td>
<td>N = 84</td>
<td>n = 44</td>
<td>n = 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 18</td>
<td>N = 12</td>
<td>n = 5</td>
<td>n = 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 18</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 - 22</td>
<td>N = 72</td>
<td>n = 39</td>
<td>n = 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 - 22</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
<td>88.6%</td>
<td>82.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Disability</td>
<td>N = 84</td>
<td>n = 43</td>
<td>n = 31</td>
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<td>N = 1</td>
<td>n = 1</td>
<td>n = 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>N = 79</td>
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<td>n = 38</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>95.3%</td>
<td>92.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>N = 4</td>
<td>n = 1</td>
<td>n = 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. INTO</td>
<td>N = 84</td>
<td>n = 44</td>
<td>n = 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N = 47</td>
<td>n = 26</td>
<td>n = 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>59.1%</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>N = 35</td>
<td>n = 17</td>
<td>n = 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>N = 2</td>
<td>n = 1</td>
<td>n = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.1 provides the demographic information from students who took the *Demographic Language and Background Survey* (DLBS). This information demonstrates the wide diversity of students, especially as it pertains to students’ home languages and language use.

The two highest racial/ethnic groups were Asian American/Asian and White, both at 25.9%. There were two more Asian students in the non-contract grading sections than the contract grading sections, but twice as many white students in the contract grading section versus non-contract grading sections. Hispanic/Latinx students came in next at 17.6% (n = 15), again with twice as many Hispanic/Latinx students in the contract grading sections. Middle

| Table 4.1 Demographic Information from Demographic Language and Background Survey (cont.) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                                | Total       | Contract Grading | Non-Contract Grading |
| 9. Pell Grant                  | N = 80      | n = 44           | n = 38               |
| Yes                             | N = 12      | n = 5            | n = 7                |
|                                 | 15%         | 11.4%            | 18.4%                |
| No                              | N = 46      | n = 28           | n = 18               |
|                                 | 57.5%       | 63.6%            | 47.4%                |
| I don’t know                    | N = 21      | n = 8            | n = 13               |
|                                 | 26.3%       | 18.2%            | 34.2%                |
| Prefer not to answer            | N = 1       | n = 1            | n = 0                |
|                                 | 1.3%        | 2.3%             | 0%                   |
| 10. Employment                 | N = 80      | n = 42           | n = 38               |
| Yes, < 20 hrs per week         | N = 5       | n = 5            | n = 0                |
|                                 | 6.3%        | 11.4%            | 0%                   |
| Yes, ≥ 20 hrs per week         | N = 5       | n = 2            | n = 3                |
|                                 | 6.3%        | 4.5%             | 7.3%                 |
| No                              | N = 68      | n = 34           | n = 34               |
|                                 | 85%         | 77.3%            | 89.5%                |
| Prefer not to answer            | N = 2       | n = 1            | n = 1                |
|                                 | 2.5%        | 2.3%             | 2.6%                 |

Table 4.1 provides the demographic information from students who took the *Demographic Language and Background Survey* (DLBS). This information demonstrates the wide diversity of students, especially as it pertains to students’ home languages and language use.

The two highest racial/ethnic groups were Asian American/Asian and White, both at 25.9%. There were two more Asian students in the non-contract grading sections than the contract grading sections, but twice as many white students in the contract grading section versus non-contract grading sections. Hispanic/Latinx students came in next at 17.6% (n = 15), again with twice as many Hispanic/Latinx students in the contract grading sections. Middle
Eastern/North African students came in next at 14.1% (n = 12), followed by Multiracial students 11.8% (n = 10). Only 1 student identified as solely African American/Black; although, several of the Multiracial students checked African American/Black in addition to one or more other Race/Ethnicities. Three students selected “prefer not to answer.”

Nearly 85% of students were first-year students (n = 72). Nine students were sophomores, three students were juniors, and one was a senior. Interestingly, the contract grading sections had the greater diversity in class standing: eight of the nine sophomores, the three juniors, and one senior were all enrolled in contract grading sections. Just under 93% of students were full time (n = 78). This percentage was similar in both contract grading and non-contract grading sections. Nearly 97% of students were not transfer students (n = 82), and again, the three transfer students were all enrolled in the contract grading sections. About 86% of students were between the ages of 18 – 22, with the other approximately 14% under 18. No students reported being over 22 years of age. Only one student disclosed they had a disability, with an additional four students who chose “prefer not to answer.”

One question asked students to self-identify if they were INTO students. As discussed in the relevant section of Chapter 3, in the specially designated “INTO sections” of ENC 1101, half of the seats are reserved specifically for INTO “Pathways” program students. The Pathways program “is a one or two semester undergraduate or graduate program designed to ease an international student's transition to a new country, improve English skills and introduce courses required for their intended major” (“About INTO USF”). The Pathways program allows students who do not meet criteria for direct admit to USF to begin earning course credit while receiving English language support based on their TOEFL or other scores. In the years I have been an English graduate student at USF, the English department has not provided differentiated
curriculum or specialized instructor training; The only accommodation is grouping INTO students together in these “INTO” sections of ENC 1101. Eighty-four students responded to the INTO question on the DLBS. Forty-seven students responded “yes” they were INTO students while 35 students responded “no.”

Most students did not work, 85% (n = 68). Ten students reported they were employed, evenly split between students who worked over and students who worked under 20 hours per week. International students typically cannot work in the U.S, so it is unsurprising that most students did not work. Additionally, due to Covid-19 the vast majority of USF classes were offered fully remotely in fall 2020; a number of international students remained in their home countries while taking classes that particular semester. Fifteen percent, or 12 students, reported they received federal Pell grants. About 58% of students stated they did not receive Pell grants, with another approximately 26% of students answering, “I don’t know” (and one student selecting “prefer not to answer”).

Table 4.2 reports the language background information from the DLBS24. A total of 83 students responded to these questions. Approximately 46% of students identified English as their first language. Arabic was the next most popular first language at nearly 16% (n = 13), followed by Portuguese (~11%, n = 9) and Spanish (~10%, n = 8). When asked about their primary written language, 48 students, or nearly 59%, reported English, with Portuguese at 10% (n = 8) and Arabic at nearly 9% (n = 7). Thus, for some of the students who identified a language other than English as their first language, they now identify English as their primary written language.

24 The complete DLBS survey is reproduced in Appendix A.
### Table 4.2 Language Information from the Demographic Language and Background Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Contract Grading</th>
<th>Non-Contract Grading</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Contract Grading</th>
<th>Non-Contract Grading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Students</strong></td>
<td>N = 83</td>
<td>n = 43</td>
<td>n = 40</td>
<td>N = 83</td>
<td>n = 43</td>
<td>n = 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>51.8%</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>51.8%</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Language</strong></td>
<td>N = 83</td>
<td>n = 43</td>
<td>n = 40</td>
<td>N = 7</td>
<td>n = 2</td>
<td>n = 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>45.8%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>69.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>N = 13</td>
<td>n = 3</td>
<td>n = 10</td>
<td>N = 7</td>
<td>n = 2</td>
<td>n = 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>N = 5</td>
<td>n = 2</td>
<td>n = 3</td>
<td>N = 2</td>
<td>n = 2</td>
<td>n = 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindi/Hindustani</td>
<td>N = 1</td>
<td>n = 1</td>
<td>n = 0</td>
<td>N = 0</td>
<td>n = 0</td>
<td>n = 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>N = 2</td>
<td>n = 2</td>
<td>n = 0</td>
<td>N = 2</td>
<td>n = 2</td>
<td>n = 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>N = 1</td>
<td>n = 1</td>
<td>n = 0</td>
<td>N = 1</td>
<td>n = 1</td>
<td>n = 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>N = 9</td>
<td>n = 6</td>
<td>n = 3</td>
<td>N = 8</td>
<td>n = 6</td>
<td>n = 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 21 and 22, shown in Tables 4.3 and 4.4, were adapted from a survey developed by Jonathan Hall (“Language Background”). Both questions gave students a series of five statements and asked students to select the statement that best matched their experience.

Question 21 asked students about their educational background. Students could pick answers ranging from “My schooling was never in a language other than English” to “I can read a high-school level text and write a high-school level essay in a language other than English.” Nearly 50% of the total sample group selected the second statement listed above, suggesting they were fully bilingual. For the contract grading group, just over 50% selected this answer, while in the non-contract grading group, 44.7% selected this statement. Nearly twice as many students (n = 7) indicated they had an English-only educational background in the contract grading group versus the non-contract grading group (n = 3), but overall, this group represented only 12.3% of the sample population. Another 25.9% (n = 21) selected that they had “studied a language other than English only as a foreign language.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schooling</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>My schooling was never in a language other than English</th>
<th>I studied a language other than English only as a foreign language.</th>
<th>I can read and write a language other than English at a simple level but had little or no formal schooling in it.</th>
<th>My schooling was in a language other than English for several years, but today I could not write a high school level text in it.</th>
<th>I can read a high school level text and write a high school level essay in a language other than English.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monolingual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>N = 81</td>
<td>N = 10</td>
<td>N = 21</td>
<td>N = 7</td>
<td>N = 4</td>
<td>N = 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract Grading</td>
<td>N = 43</td>
<td>n = 7</td>
<td>n = 9</td>
<td>n = 3</td>
<td>n = 2</td>
<td>n = 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>53.1%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Contract Grading</td>
<td>N = 38</td>
<td>n = 3</td>
<td>n = 12</td>
<td>n = 4</td>
<td>n = 2</td>
<td>n = 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46.9%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.4 Written Language Fluency from the Demographic Language and Background Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schooling</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>English is the only language in which I write.</th>
<th>I use a language other than English in some writing situations, but I am not able to write in this language fluently.</th>
<th>I write in a language other than English fluently, but am more comfortable in English.</th>
<th>I am equally comfortable writing in English and another language.</th>
<th>I am more comfortable writing in another language than I am writing in English.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monolingual</td>
<td>Fully Bilingual</td>
<td>More Fluent in L1</td>
<td>Monolingual</td>
<td>Fully Bilingual</td>
<td>More Fluent in L1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>N = 79</td>
<td>N = 26</td>
<td>N = 10</td>
<td>N = 12</td>
<td>N = 16</td>
<td>N = 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract Grading</td>
<td>N = 43</td>
<td>n = 14</td>
<td>n = 2</td>
<td>n = 7</td>
<td>n = 7</td>
<td>n = 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Contract Grading</td>
<td>N = 36</td>
<td>n = 12</td>
<td>n = 8</td>
<td>n = 5</td>
<td>n = 9</td>
<td>n = 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The remaining approximately 13% of students (n = 11) identified either that they could read and write a language other than English despite having had “little or no formal schooling” in this language or that their schooling was in this other language “for several years,” but they did not have high school level fluency in it.

**Variable 2: Self-Beliefs, Writing Beliefs, and Attitudes Survey**

All students in the study sample, both those in the contract grading and non-contract grading sections, took the *Self-Beliefs, Writing Beliefs, and Attitudes Survey* (SWAS) twice during the semester, during the first and last weeks of the semester. After matching the pre- and post- surveys, 15 students took both administrations of the SWAS, eight in the grading contract sections and seven in the non-grading contract sections. Students selected a response from the 4-item Likert scale ranging from *A lot like me* (=4) to *Very different from me* (=1). Four items were reverse coded (Q1 – 3, and Q15) due to the negative wording of the statements, such as Q1 “I wish we wrote less in school.” Thus, the higher the number, the more positive the association. Wright et al.’s goal was to create a writing motivation model that “aligns with current theories of motivation” (68). In their initial validation of the survey design, they split the student sample (n = 509) into two groups in order “to conduct both exploratory (EFA) and confirmatory factor analyses (CFA),” aiming to “construct a model with strong psychometric and theoretical validity” (69). Wright et al. propose a three-factor model: *attitudes toward writing*, *beliefs about writing*, and *beliefs about self as a writer*. They further delineate *beliefs about self as a writer* into two sub-factors: *self-efficacy* and *self-concept* (69). Thus, in the analysis below, I present these four factors one by one: *writing attitudes*, *writing beliefs*, *self-concept*, and *self-efficacy*. 
Writing Attitudes

Wright et al. follow Mathewson in differentiating motivation and attitude by stating, “attitude describes prominent feelings and evaluative beliefs about a topic” (Wright et al. 67). Specifically, writing attitudes are understood as “students’ pre-dispositions toward writing” (Wright et al. 75). However, in contrast to earlier conceptions (e.g., Ekholm et al.), Wright et al. argue that “attitude is a separate construct from students’ beliefs toward writing and themselves as writers,” and thus warrants inclusion in their proposed writing model as a separate factor (74).

Nine statements made up the writing attitudes questions of the SWAS, as can be seen in Table 4.5. The “pre” results showed that the non-contract grading sections, for whatever reason, had higher response averages than the contract grading sections. However, when looking at the change over time, for four of the nine items, the contract grading students showed greater change, as measured by the change in mean (see Table 4.6). For instance, question (Q) 13, “Overall, I have positive feelings about writing,” had a 0.43 change in mean in the non-contract grading sections, but a 1.00 change in mean for the contract grading sections. Similarly, Q’s 25, 28, and 29, “I like writing long papers at school,” “Writing can be very enjoyable,” and “I like to write,” respectively, showed a greater change in mean for the contract grading sections. In fact, for Q25 and Q29, the non-contract grading sections had a negative difference in means between the pre- and post-survey results.
Table 4.5 Self-Beliefs, Writing Beliefs, and Attitudes Survey – Writing Attitudes Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>August Administration</th>
<th>December Administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contract Grading (n = 8)</td>
<td>Non-Contract Grading (n = 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1. I wish we wrote less in school.*</td>
<td>2.38 (.106)</td>
<td>2.57 (.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3. I do not like having to revise my paper.*</td>
<td>2.25 (.104)</td>
<td>2.29 (.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4. I would rather write a short story than an academic essay.</td>
<td>2.63 (.52)</td>
<td>2.71 (.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q13. Overall, I have positive feelings about writing.</td>
<td>2.38 (.74)</td>
<td>3.00 (1.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q17. I think it would be fun to be an author who writes books.</td>
<td>1.50 (.54)</td>
<td>2.00 (1.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q24. I think I would enjoy a career in journalism.</td>
<td>1.75 (.89)</td>
<td>2.14 (1.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q25. I like writing long papers at school.</td>
<td>1.25 (.46)</td>
<td>2.14 (1.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q28. Writing can be very enjoyable.</td>
<td>2.50 (.54)</td>
<td>3.43 (.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q29. I like to write.</td>
<td>2.25 (.46)</td>
<td>3.14 (1.07)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Items were reverse coded.
The seven writing beliefs questions of the SWAS showed the smallest change in pre- and post-administrations (see Table 4.8). Table 4.7 (below) shows the results of the pre-and post-administrations for both student groups. Both the contract grading and non-contract grading groups had no change in mean for the statement “Finishing every writing assignment is very important to me.” A modest positive increase was demonstrated for both groups for Q9 “Writing helps me to learn” (0.12 and 0.14 for the contract grading and non-contract grading groups, respectively) and Q23 “I would like to become an even better writer than I already am” (0.13 and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Change in Mean</th>
<th>Change in SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1. I wish we wrote less in school.*</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3. I do not like having to revise my paper.*</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>-0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4. I would rather write a short story than an academic essay.</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>+0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q13. Overall, I have positive feelings about writing.</td>
<td>+1.00</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q17. I think it would be fun to be an author who writes books.</td>
<td>+0.75</td>
<td>+0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q24. I think I would enjoy a career in journalism.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q25. I like writing long papers at school.</td>
<td>+0.25</td>
<td>+0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q28. Writing can be very enjoyable.</td>
<td>+0.75</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q29. I like to write.</td>
<td>+0.36</td>
<td>+0.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Items were reverse coded.

**Writing Beliefs**

The seven writing beliefs questions of the SWAS showed the smallest change in pre- and post-administrations (see Table 4.8). Table 4.7 (below) shows the results of the pre-and post-administrations for both student groups. Both the contract grading and non-contract grading groups had no change in mean for the statement “Finishing every writing assignment is very important to me.” A modest positive increase was demonstrated for both groups for Q9 “Writing helps me to learn” (0.12 and 0.14 for the contract grading and non-contract grading groups, respectively) and Q23 “I would like to become an even better writer than I already am” (0.13 and
0.14). For Q26 “I feel most successful if I see that my writing has really improved,” there was a much larger increase in mean for the non-contract grading group (0.43) versus the contract grading group (0.13). On the other hand, for Q19 “I believe it is very important to be a successful writer” the contract grading group had an increase in mean of 0.50 versus 0.14 for the non-contract grading group.

Table 4.7 Self-Beliefs, Writing Beliefs, and Attitudes Survey – Writing Beliefs Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>August Administration</th>
<th>December Administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contract Grading n = 8</td>
<td>Non-Contract Grading n = 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7. I enjoy proofreading my writing to make sure the words I have written are spelled correctly.</td>
<td>3.00 .93</td>
<td>2.86 1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9. Writing helps me learn.</td>
<td>3.38 .77</td>
<td>3.57 .78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q18. I do not mind when an instructor asks me to revise my writing.</td>
<td>3.00 1.20</td>
<td>3.29 .95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q19. I believe it is very important to be a successful writer.</td>
<td>3.13 .64</td>
<td>3.43 .98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q22. Finishing every writing assignment is very important to me.</td>
<td>3.63 .52</td>
<td>3.86 .38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q23. I would like to become an even better writer than I already am.</td>
<td>3.50 .71</td>
<td>3.86 .38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q26. I feel most successful if I see that my writing has really improved.</td>
<td>3.50 .93</td>
<td>3.57 .54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.8 Self-Beliefs, Writing Beliefs, and Attitudes Survey – Writing Beliefs Items – Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Change in Mean</th>
<th>Change in SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q7. I enjoy proofreading my writing to make sure the words I have written are spelled correctly.</td>
<td>+0.13</td>
<td>+0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9. Writing helps me learn.</td>
<td>+0.12</td>
<td>+0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q18. I do not mind when an instructor asks me to revise my writing.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q19. I believe it is very important to be a successful writer.</td>
<td>+0.50</td>
<td>+0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q22. Finishing every writing assignment is very important to me.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q23. I would like to become an even better writer than I already am.</td>
<td>+0.13</td>
<td>+0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q26. I feel most successful if I see that my writing has really improved.</td>
<td>+0.13</td>
<td>+0.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Self-Concept**

The eight self-concept items showed more improvement in the contract grading sections (see Table 4.10). Table 4.9 shows the results of both pre- and post-administrations for both student groups. Except for Q5 “When writing it is easy for me to think of the right words,” the other statements all saw a bigger increase in mean in the contract grading section. Particularly of note are statements six and eight, which both saw positive increases for the contract grading groups but decreases in the non-contract grading students. For Q6 “When my class is asked to write something for class, such as a research paper, an essay, a lab report, or a creative piece,
mine is one of the best” and Q8 “I feel confident in my overall writing abilities,” the contract grading sections increased 0.75 and 0.25, respectively, while the non-contract grading sections had a decrease in mean of -0.14 and -0.29, respectively.

Table 4.9 Self-Beliefs, Writing Beliefs, and Attitudes Survey – Self-Concept Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>August Administration</th>
<th>December Administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q2. I do not get high grades in writing because I am just not intelligent enough.*</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract Grading n = 8</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Contract Grading n = 7</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5. When writing it is easy for me to think of the right words.</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6. When my class is asked to write something for class, such as a research paper, an essay, a lab report, or a creative piece, mine is one of the best.</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8. I feel confident in my overall writing abilities.</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q12. In comparison to other academic subjects, I am best at writing.</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q14. When I write a paper, it is easy for me to come up with ideas.</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q21. I am confident in writing for many purposes (persuade, inform, entertain, or express) in various academic forms (research papers, essays, or creative writing).</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q30. I can write successful papers because writing is easy for me.</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Items were reverse coded.
Table 4.10 Self-Beliefs, Writing Beliefs, and Attitudes Survey – Self-Concept Items – Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Change in Mean</th>
<th>Change in SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q2. I do not get high grades in writing because I am just not intelligent enough.*</td>
<td>-0.50</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5. When writing it is easy for me to think of the right words.</td>
<td>+0.13</td>
<td>+0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6. When my class is asked to write something for class, such as a research paper, an essay, a lab report, or a creative piece, mine is one of the best.</td>
<td>+0.75</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8. I feel confident in my overall writing abilities.</td>
<td>+0.25</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q12. In comparison to other academic subjects, I am best at writing.</td>
<td>+0.25</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q14. When I write a paper, it is easy for me to come up with ideas.</td>
<td>+0.50</td>
<td>+0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q21. I am confident in writing for many purposes (persuade, inform, entertain, or express) in various academic forms (research papers, essays, or creative writing).</td>
<td>+0.63</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q30. I can write successful papers because writing is easy for me.</td>
<td>+0.88</td>
<td>+0.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Items were reverse coded.

**Self-Efficacy**

The six self-efficacy items showed a more even split between the contract grading and non-contract grading sections (see Table 4.12). Table 4.11 shows the results of both pre-and post-administrations for both student groups. Q11, Q20, and Q27, shown in Table 4.12, all demonstrated greater change in means for the contract grading sections. In Q11 “I feel confident
sharing my writing with my peers,” students in the contract grading section had a 0.75 increase in mean, versus 0.43 for the non-contract grading students. Similarly, Q20 “I know that I will do well in writing this year” and Q27 “When I get a high grade on a paper, it is because I put in a lot of effort,” showed an increase in mean of 0.62 and 0.37 for the contract grading groups versus a 0.28 increase and a 0.14 decrease for the non-contract grading groups. It is also interesting to note that comparing the beginning semester means of the two groups, students in the contract grading sections identified more strongly with the Q15 statement “When I get a high grade on a writing assignment, it is because I got lucky” than did the students in the non-contract grading sections. Although, with a mean of 1.75 for the contract grading group (and 1.57 for the non-contract grading group), these statements were less strongly agreed with than many of the other items.

Table 4.11 Self-Beliefs, Writing Beliefs, and Attitudes Survey – Self-Efficacy Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>August Administration</th>
<th>December Administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contract Grading n=8</td>
<td>Non-Contract Grading n=7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q10. When writing a paper, it is easy for me to decide on an organizational structure.</td>
<td>2.63 (SD: 1.19)</td>
<td>3.00 (SD: 1.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q11. I feel confident sharing my writing with my peers.</td>
<td>2.13 (SD: .99)</td>
<td>3.00 (SD: 1.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q15. When I get a high grade on a writing assignment, it is because I got lucky.</td>
<td>1.75 (SD: .71)</td>
<td>1.57 (SD: .79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q16. When I am proofreading, it is easy for me to catch my mistakes.</td>
<td>2.88 (SD: .84)</td>
<td>3.14 (SD: .90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q20. I know that I will do well in writing this year.</td>
<td>2.88 (SD: .64)</td>
<td>3.43 (SD: .79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q27. When I get a high grade on a paper, it is because I put in a lot of effort.</td>
<td>3.63 (SD: .52)</td>
<td>4.00 (SD: 0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.12 Self-Beliefs, Writing Beliefs, and Attitudes Survey – Self-Efficacy Items – Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Change in Mean</th>
<th>Change in SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q10. When writing a paper, it is easy for me to decide on an organizational structure.</td>
<td>+0.37</td>
<td>-0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q11. I feel confident sharing my writing with my peers.</td>
<td>+0.75</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q15. When I get a high grade on a writing assignment, it is because I got lucky.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q16. When I am proofreading, it is easy for me to catch my mistakes.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q20. I know that I will do well in writing this year.</td>
<td>+0.62</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q27. When I get a high grade on a paper, it is because I put in a lot of effort.</td>
<td>+0.37</td>
<td>-0.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Variable 3: Perceptions of Ecological Variables

The Perceptions of Ecological Variables Survey (PEVS) was only given to the students in the contract grading sections, since it asked specifically about their perceptions and experiences with the labor-based grading contract system. It was administered first in late October and then again in December during the last week of the semester. The questions were split between asking students about their perceptions of the grading contract itself (Q1 – 14) and questions that asked students about their perceptions of the labor involved in the class (Q15 – 20). Table 4.13 provides the complete quantitative results for the PEVS.
Table 4.13 Perceptions and Ecological Variable Survey Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>October Administration</th>
<th>December Administration</th>
<th>Change in Mean</th>
<th>Change in SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The first set of questions asks you about your perceptions of the grading contract.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I believe the grading contract has created a fair grading environment.</td>
<td>5.00 (.853)</td>
<td>5.17 (.937)</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. My classmates and I are able to negotiate aspects of the contract with our instructor.</td>
<td>4.83 (.937)</td>
<td>5.08 (.900)</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>-0.937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The grading contract has allowed me to have positive interactions with my instructor.</td>
<td>5.17 (.835)</td>
<td>5.25 (.754)</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-0.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The grading contract has allowed me to have positive interactions with my peers.</td>
<td>4.67 (.888)</td>
<td>4.67 (.778)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I understand why my instructor is using a grading contract in order to meet the stated course objectives.</td>
<td>5.00 (.853)</td>
<td>5.17 (.835)</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-0.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I understand that my instructor is using a grading contract in order to provide new writing experiences that we have negotiated together.</td>
<td>5.08 (.900)</td>
<td>5.08 (.793)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I understand how my final grade will be calculated based on the grading contract.</td>
<td>5.25 (.866)</td>
<td>5.00 (1.206)</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The grading contract has allowed me to take risks in my writing.</td>
<td>4.75 (1.215)</td>
<td>5.00 (.953)</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>-0.262</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.13 Perceptions and Ecological Variable Survey Items (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>9. I am satisfied with the writing feedback I receive from my instructor.</th>
<th>5.25</th>
<th>.754</th>
<th>5.33</th>
<th>.778</th>
<th>.08</th>
<th>.024</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10. I am satisfied with the writing feedback I received from my peers.</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>.866</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>.793</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-0.073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The grading contract has allowed me to learn valuable writing processes.</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>.793</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>.900</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. The grading contract has allowed me to produce valuable writing products.</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>.669</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1.044</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>.375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. My work in this class has allowed me to envision writing in new ways.</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>.739</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>.793</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. My work in this class has allowed me to form an identity as a writer.</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>.669</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>.937</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.268</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second set of questions asks you about your perceptions of the labor involved in this class.

<p>| 15. The labor I am engaged with in this class is of overall value to me. | 5.08  | .793  | 5.00  | 1.044 | -0.08 | .251 |
| 16. I am increasingly aware of the types and amount of labor it takes for me to produce successful writing. | 5.08  | .699  | 5.08  | .793  | 0    | .094 |
| 17. I believe the grading contract has increased my overall opportunities to learn. | 5.00  | .739  | 4.83  | 1.267 | -0.17 | 2.006 |
| 18. I believe the experience of learning within a grading contract system will be useful to me in my future coursework. | 5.25  | .754  | 4.50  | 1.382 | -0.75 | .628 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>1st Qu.</th>
<th>3rd Qu.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19. I am satisfied with the amount of labor required to earn the contracted grade I identified in the course.</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>.793</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>1.505</td>
<td>-0.34</td>
<td>.707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I am satisfied with the types of labor required to earn the contracted grade I identified in the course.</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>1.165</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>.937</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.228</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In four of the five labor questions, students had a negative change in their mean response, and for the fifth question (“I am increasing aware of the types and amount of labor it takes for me to produce successful writing”), the mean stayed the same (see Table 4.13).25

For three of the 20 items, the mean stayed the same in both survey administrations. In 10 of the 20 items the mean increased, indicating more positive agreement. For seven of the 20 items, the mean decreased (Q7, Q12, Q15, Q17, Q18, Q19, and Q20; see Table 4.13). I suspect that some of the item means decreased because certain individuals ended up unhappy at the end of the semester, and not because students overall were less satisfied; the higher standard deviations (demonstrating more variability in student responses) for the December administrations suggests this. In the first survey administration, the standard deviation of all but two items (Q8 “The grading contract allows me to take risks” and Q20 “I am satisfied with the type of labor to get my contracted grade”) was less than 1.0. In fact, 17 of the 18 remaining items had standard deviations less than 0.9, which indicates that students were in much more agreement in their responses. This can be seen in the range of each item as well. Recall that the PEVS was scored on a 6-point Likert scale with 1 being Very Strongly Disagree and 6 being Very Strongly Agree. For all but 2 items, (Q8 and Q20), the range was only from 4 - 6. Whereas, in the December administration the ranges varied from 4 – 6 to 1 – 6, with half of the items with a minimum score of 3 or less. I suspect that three students who did poorly in the class and were unhappy with their final grade blamed the grading contract for this and that changed their opinion of the grading contract.

25 For both the SWAS and PEVS, I had planned to use a paired sample t-Test for each question item, in which the students were surveyed before and after the instructional intervention. However, the sample sizes under 30 did not allow for inferential statistics.
Variable 4: Academic Performance Measures

Instructor Rubric Scores

The instructor rubric scores are important because they reflect how instructors perceive the various aspects of students’ final papers. Considering the PEVS scores from above (based on student perceptions) in context with the instructor’s perceptions of student papers provides additional insights into students’ self-assessment.

Students completed three projects in ENC 1101 in fall 2020. All three projects went through a multi-draft writing and revising process. Project 1 asked students to write a Literacy Narrative. Project 2 used the concept of discourse communities to explore expository writing. Students identified a discourse community they were interested in and found three examples of this discourse communities’ written communication. In their P2 paper, students presented the three written excerpts and evaluated the effectiveness of the discourse communities’ written communication was. In the final project, after learning about concepts such as code switching, code meshing, and rhetorical moves, students selected three of their own pieces of written communication, ideally for different audiences/in different genres, and then evaluated their own writing. Students turned in an outline, a first draft, a revision plan, and a final draft for all three projects. Students also participated in peer review for Project 2.

Instructors evaluated students’ papers in the USF Writes software platform. In this platform, instructors had the opportunity to see each student’s paper with rubric boxes attached to each of the four areas of the rubric. Each rubric box included the accompanying rubric text by hovering the cursor over the letter of the rubric (e.g., E for Excellent; G for Great). During the fall 2020 semester the rubric “levels” were indicated by a letter abbreviation instead of a scale number. When I analyzed the instructor rubric scores, I converted the categories to a 1 – 6
scale with 1 indicating Unsatisfactory and 6 indicating Excellent. Importantly, instructors did not assign grades in *USF Writes*. Instead, grades were recorded in Canvas, the LMS used by USF. In trainings, instructors were encouraged to grade students holistically, as opposed to assigning each rubric score a specific number of points that could be converted into a numerical grade.

The fourth area of the rubric was always “knowledge of conventions,” which had to do with grammar, mechanics, and formatting. The other three categories were specific to each project, although the first category typically had to do with the introduction and thesis statement or “answer” to the writing prompt. Not all instructors indicated the specific rubric score for all students. For instance, one of the instructors in a non-contract grading section did not include specific rubric scores for any of their students for Project 1. Sometimes instructors would give some or most but not all of the rubric scores for each student. And, of course, not all students submitted final drafts for all three projects. Consequently, in Table 4.1, the number of scores for each rubric category for each project varies.
Table 4.14 Instructor Rubric Scores for Contract Grading and Non-Contract Grading (N = 70)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Students</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Contract Grading</th>
<th>Non-Contract Grading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Project 1</td>
<td>N = 70</td>
<td>N = 41</td>
<td>N = 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction and Thesis</td>
<td>n = 66</td>
<td>n = 41</td>
<td>n = 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M = 4.88</td>
<td>M = 4.51</td>
<td>M = 5.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD = 1.398</td>
<td>SD = 1.57</td>
<td>SD = .77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range = 1, 6</td>
<td>Range = 1, 6</td>
<td>Range = 3, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Structured Narrative</td>
<td>n = 70</td>
<td>n = 40</td>
<td>n = 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M = 5.33</td>
<td>M = 4.97</td>
<td>M = 5.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD = .97</td>
<td>SD = 1.097</td>
<td>SD = .48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range = 2, 6</td>
<td>Range = 2, 6</td>
<td>Range = 4, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of Content</td>
<td>n = 67</td>
<td>n = 41</td>
<td>n = 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M = 5.21</td>
<td>M = 5.17</td>
<td>M = 5.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD = .81</td>
<td>SD = .89</td>
<td>SD = .67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range = 3, 6</td>
<td>Range = 3, 6</td>
<td>Range = 4, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Conventions</td>
<td>n = 64</td>
<td>n = 41</td>
<td>n = 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M = 4.95</td>
<td>M = 4.44</td>
<td>M = 5.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD = 1.39</td>
<td>SD = 1.43</td>
<td>SD = .63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range = 2, 6</td>
<td>Range = 2, 6</td>
<td>Range = 3, 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.14 Instructor Rubric Scores for Contract Grading and Non-Contract Grading (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Contract Grading</th>
<th>Non-Contract Grading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Students</td>
<td>N = 76</td>
<td>N = 37</td>
<td>N = 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Project 2</td>
<td>N = 76</td>
<td>N = 37</td>
<td>N = 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction and Answer</td>
<td>n = 76</td>
<td>n = 37</td>
<td>n = 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M = 4.96</td>
<td>M = 4.84</td>
<td>M = 5.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD = 1.051</td>
<td>SD = 1.214</td>
<td>SD = .870</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range = 3, 6</td>
<td>Range = 3, 6</td>
<td>Range = 3, 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse Community and</td>
<td>n = 75</td>
<td>n = 35</td>
<td>n = 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarly Source</td>
<td>M = 4.81</td>
<td>M = 4.80</td>
<td>M = 4.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD = 1.249</td>
<td>SD = 1.451</td>
<td>SD = 1.059</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range = 1, 6</td>
<td>Range = 1, 6</td>
<td>Range = 2, 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Text</td>
<td>n = 76</td>
<td>n = 36</td>
<td>n = 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M = 4.47</td>
<td>M = 4.42</td>
<td>M = 4.53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD = 1.629</td>
<td>SD = 1.697</td>
<td>SD = 1.585</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range = 1, 6</td>
<td>Range = 1, 6</td>
<td>Range = 1, 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Conventions</td>
<td>n = 72</td>
<td>n = 36</td>
<td>n = 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M = 4.49</td>
<td>M = 4.61</td>
<td>M = 4.36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD = 1.384</td>
<td>SD = 1.337</td>
<td>SD = 1.437</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range = 1, 6</td>
<td>Range = 1, 6</td>
<td>Range = 1, 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.14 Instructor Rubric Scores for Contract Grading and Non-Contract Grading (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Students</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Contract Grading</th>
<th>Non-Contract Grading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Project 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction and Answer</td>
<td>N = 77</td>
<td>M = 4.96</td>
<td>M = 4.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 77</td>
<td>M = 4.96</td>
<td>M = 4.97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD = 1.197</td>
<td>SD = 1.260</td>
<td>SD = 1.142</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range = 1, 6</td>
<td>Range = 3, 6</td>
<td>Range = 1, 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text and Evaluation</td>
<td>n = 76</td>
<td>M = 4.99</td>
<td>M = 5.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 39</td>
<td>M = 4.92</td>
<td>M = 998</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD = 1.216</td>
<td>SD = 1.403</td>
<td>SD = 1.110</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range = 1, 6</td>
<td>Range = 1, 6</td>
<td>Range = 1, 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
<td>n = 77</td>
<td>M = 4.91</td>
<td>M = 4.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 40</td>
<td>M = 4.95</td>
<td>M = 4.86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD = 1.227</td>
<td>SD = 1.339</td>
<td>SD = 1.110</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range = 1, 6</td>
<td>Range = 2, 6</td>
<td>Range = 1, 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Conventions</td>
<td>n = 74</td>
<td>M = 4.62</td>
<td>M = 4.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 40</td>
<td>M = 4.70</td>
<td>M = 4.53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD = 1.155</td>
<td>SD = 1.114</td>
<td>SD = 1.212</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range = 1, 6</td>
<td>Range = 3, 6</td>
<td>Range = 1, 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For most of the rubric categories, the mean score was higher in the non-contract grading section; this was true for all categories in Project 1. For Project 1 the range of scores given by
instructors was more restricted in the non-contract grading sections. For instance, in the first two rubric categories, *Introduction and Thesis* and *The Structured Narrative*, instructors in the contract grading sections used scores ranging from 1 to 6 (Introduction) or 2 to 6 (Narrative); whereas, in the non-contract grading sections instructor scores ranged from 3 to 6 (Introduction) and 4 to 6 (Narrative). The lowest scores (1, 2, 3) were not used at all by the non-contract grading instructors for the *Narrative* and *Integration of Content* categories. It would appear, then, that the non-contract grading instructors evaluated their students’ performance in acceptable ranges, while the contract grading instructors viewed their students’ performance as more varied. This supposition can also be seen comparing the standard deviations of the contract grading and non-contract grading student scores. The standard deviation for all four categories in Project 1 ranged from .48 (Narrative) to .77 (Introduction) for the non-contract grading sections. Meanwhile, for the contract grading sections, the standard deviations ranged from .89 (Integration) to 1.57 (Introduction).

Surprisingly, for Projects 2 and 3, the final rubric category, *Knowledge of Conventions*, the contract grading sections had higher means then the non-contract grading sections. The Project 2 mean was 4.61 for the contract grading sections versus 4.36 and the Project 3 mean was 4.70 for the contract grading sections versus 4.53 for the non-contract grading sections. While the standard deviations for Project 1 were demonstrably lower in the non-contract grading sections, that was not the case for Projects 2 and 3. In Project 2, in the *Conventions* category, the standard deviation was 1.34 for the contract grading and 1.44 for the non-contract grading, with instructors in both groups using the full range of 1 to 6 scores. Overall, in Project 2 the standard deviations ranged from 1.21 (Introduction) to 1.70 (Direct Text) for the contract grading sections.
and .87 (Introduction) to 1.59 (Direct Text) for the non-contract grading sections. This demonstrates the high variation in instructor scores.

For Project 3, the contract grading instructors also had a higher mean in the third rubric category: Connections (4.95 versus 4.86 in the non-contract grading sections). In this final project the contract grading instructors also only used rubric scores of 3 to 6 in the Conventions category, while the non-contract grading instructors used the full range of 1 to 6.

**Final Course Grades**

The final course grades are where the quantitative results get very interesting. The assumption that most instructors and administrators may make is that students in a course with labor-based grading contracts would have higher averages or earn more A’s. Some people are wary of contract gradings because they think that the contract grading will inflate student grades. In fact, the results of the final grades analysis demonstrate the opposite: the mean final grade for the contract grading sections was 8.33, while the mean final grade for the non-contract grading sections was 10.13 (approximately B versus A-). Equally interesting, in the contract grading sections 8.9% of students failed with an F (no students received Ds). And 51.1% earned grades ranging from A+ to A-. 13.3 % earned C to C- and the rest, 26.6%, earned grades from B- to B+. In contrast, the non-contract grading sections had only 4.4 % (n = 2) students fail with either a D- or F, and a full 80.4% of students received A- to A+ grades. A graphic representation demonstrates the difference most vividly.
Figure 4.2 Histogram Showing Range of Final Grades—Contract Grading Sections \((n = 45)\)

![Histogram](image)

Mean = 6.33  
Std. Dev. = 3.464  
\(N = 45\)

Figure 4.3 Histogram Showing Range of Final Grades—Non-Contract Grading Sections \((n = 46)\)

![Histogram](image)

Mean = 10.13  
Std. Dev. = 2.331  
\(N = 46\)
While the grades in the contract grading sections are still skewed “high,” the grade distribution is closer to a Gaussian distribution (or “normal” bell curve). The final grades were the one piece of quantitative data I was able to use inferential statistics on. The mean for the contract grading sections was as follows: $M = 8.33, SD = 3.46$. The mean for the non-contract grading section was as follows: $M = 10.13$. Using an independent sample t-Test, in which no student in one group no student in one group appeared in the other, I found there was a statistically significance difference between the two groups ($t(89) = -2.89, p < .001$).

**Summary of Findings**

The two study population groups—contract grading and non-contract grading—were remarkably similar in size and gender. They were somewhat similar in racial/ethnic make-up, although the contract grading sections had twice as many White students. All racial/ethnic groups listed on the Demographics and Language Background Survey (DLBS) were represented in the study; however, only one student identified solely as African American/Black (a few students selected African American/Black and one or more other racial/ethnic categories). The vast majority of students were first-year students; however, the contract grading sections had more variation in class standing. Approximately 50% of students in the study identified English as their first language, while close to 60% of students reported that English was the language they were most proficient in writing.

The SWAS, adapted from Wright et al.’s 2019 published study, was taken by 15 students for both the pre- and post- administrations. Wright et al. classified the survey items by four factors: *writing attitudes*, *writing beliefs*, *self-concept*, and *self-efficacy* (the last two falling under the larger category *beliefs about self as a writer*). I compared the means and standard deviations of these four question groupings for the contract grading and non-contract grading.
sections. Writing beliefs had the smallest change in mean for the contract grading students. Writing attitudes and self-efficacy showed greater mean change for the contract grading students versus non-contract grading. The self-concept questions showed a large change in mean for the contract grading students and a decrease in mean for several individual items for the non-contract grading students.

The Perceptions of Ecological Variables Survey (PEVS) was only taken by the contract grading sections, as it asked about labor-based grading contracts specifically. Students took the PEVS in late October and again during the last week of classes. Rated on a 1 to 6 Likert scale where 1 indicated *Very Strongly Disagree* and 6 indicated *Very Strongly Agree*, the higher the score, the more positively the student responded to the item. According to the survey results, students felt more positive about the contract grading at the first administration in October. In the second survey administration, the mean score decreased for approximately half of the items. In particular, the last five questions asked students about the labor in the grading contract assessment system. In four of these five questions, the mean decreased. However, the larger standard deviations suggests that students were more varied in their final evaluation of labor-based grading contracts.

For the academic performance measures, a larger sample size was obtained, as instructor rubric scores and final grades were pulled directly from online systems. On average, for all three projects, the non-contract grading instructors rated their students more highly than the contract grading instructors. The final grades showed a statistically significant difference between the non-contract grading and contract grading grades. The non-contract grading grades “averaged” nearly one letter grade higher.

All of these results will be contextualized and discussed further in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

In my discussion, I take the some of the most important findings from Chapter 4 and put them into a discussion with the qualitative data from students and existing literature. I take this approach to better contextualize the data from the perspectives of students, and to highlight some of the most important findings. This chapter is organized by providing a student perspectives framework starting with a discussion about how students perceive grades and satisfaction and then proceeding to provide insights into the three research questions I posed at the start of this project: How do labor-based grading contracts affect students’ motivation and attitudes toward writing, including specific discussions of fairness and labor; How do labor-based grading contracts affect student perceptions of instructor feedback; and how do students perform on academic performance measures in a multilingual FYC class that uses labor-based grading contracts? The chapter concludes with a summary of the discussion.

Perceptions of Grades

One goal of this project was to track students’ perceptions over the course of the semester and gather opinions of the labor-based grading contract. One of the first assignments was crucial to establish a baseline of students’ overall perception of grades (see Appendix G for the assignment description). Understanding the students’ perceptions of grades is necessary to

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26 Refer to Chapter 3 for the full methodology and reminders of what data was collected.
determine how they may react or approach or ultimately believe in the idea of labor-based grading contracts.

Overall, students identified grades as being stressful and producing negative mental health effects in their reported comments, although I did not formally investigate this through any study instrument. As one student put it: “Many students who are constantly pressured for perfect grades, can go through school without ever enjoying their time there.”27 Others mentioned how pressured students are more likely to “pick an easier assignment or ones they feel most confident in, instead of what they are interested in learning or pushing their maximum potential.” Students broadly supported the idea of being educated in a system with more focus on learning versus letter grades. In addition to feelings of stress, anxiety, and lowered self-esteem, some students discussed potentially tragic consequences; one international student even included a story about a childhood friend who took his own life “just simply because of grades”—when the friend did not become the valedictorian of his Chinese high school.

Students recognized that society conditioned them to react to grades this way. Another international student pointed out: “when you graduate from high school and looking for admission in universities, the first thing you are considering about is your grades…you will provide [universities with] your grades which make them decide if you deserve to study or not” (4A). The student’s choice of diction “deserve” is interesting because it implies a value judgement about self-worth. Likely, one of the reasons that grades and grading causes students the sort of stress, depression, and anxiety discussed above is this link between self-worth and grades.

Inman and Powell reported similar findings in “In the Absence of Grades: Dissonance and Desire in Course-Contract Classrooms,” noting, “In many ways, our study confirms Soliday

27 I have used representative quotes throughout this chapter.
and Trainor’s argument that “regulation is so omnipresent in education now that students may expect to be regulated (145)” (“Absence” 48). A student in the beginning of semester remarked: “…the grading system keeps us in line and on track of our goals” (3C). The emphasis on “keeping us in line” reflects a view of grades performing a disciplining function. Inman and Powell go further, arguing that “regulation is more than an expectation on the part of students but has also morphed into an affective need due to this conditioning” (48). A few students in the grading contract sections made statements that appear to support this argument, such as this student: “I have some concerns about whether I will perform as well in this course as I would a traditional one since I was highly motivated by grades throughout High School.”

Inman and Powell found that in the write-in follow up options to their survey, students reflected ambivalence about the absence of grades. Students “sound[ed] two notes, an appreciation for the freedom associated with a lack of grades and a yearning for the grades themselves; in other words, dissonance” (“Absence” 39). They argue, then that “the dissonance between appreciating the learning from a process made possible by the absence of grades and yearning for that same grade illustrates the ways grades have worked as affective carriers in our institutions and classrooms” (“Absence” 40). Students in this study also reflected that ambivalence, with one student commenting: “I think I do better when I can see a grade so I know how my work was received. The grade of ‘complete’ only means that I did the assignment correctly, not that I did it well or poorly.” Another student stated:

Yes the grading system is needed. As a student you should always know where you are in terms of academics, this will encourage growth and teaches students a lot of lessons
for example; time management, discipline and organization. These are things that
would not just help a student for school but also for life.28

On the other hand, many students appreciated the freedom from grades and grade induced
anxiety: “I did not feel stressed by the grade that I wanted to achieve but rather enjoyed the
writing process and made the best out of it.” The range of responses reveal that students are not a
monolith, and so deep engagement with students and their perspectives is necessary if Writing
Studies is to responsibly move forward with labor-based grading contracts.

Satisfaction

Before I turn to my specific research questions, we should begin by considering student
“satisfaction,” as it relates to the course and labor-based writing contracts. These student
perceptions, much like their attitudes toward grades, are key to contextualizing some of the other
data from the study. That is, while satisfaction is not defined specifically in educational
psychology, it is one of the “affective components” of learning. Alice S. Horning, drawing on
Stephen Krashen’s (Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning) “affective
filter,” notes this includes “all of the learner’s feelings, motivation, and sense of self as they play
a role in the learner’s ability to master the material under study” (“Climate” 65). Krashen, a
linguist known for his work in adult second language acquisition, asserts that a second language
learner must not only “understand” the input they are hearing, but “must also, in a sense, be
‘open’ to it” (21). Krashen borrows the term affective filter from Dulay and Burt who conceived
of a “socio-affective filter” that refers to attitudinal factors that affect learning, such as anxiety.
Students with a strong affective filter or “mental block” (Krashen, “Din in the Head” 43) will be

28 I have reproduced the spacing this student used.
unable to learn as much. Students who strongly dislike labor-based grading contracts are likely to have a higher affective filter—a mental block. Thus, it is worth considering student satisfaction as a key component of assessment practices.

One way I worked to understand student satisfaction was by having them complete a final written reflection of their course. Table 5.1 shows the percent of positive, negative and neutral responses among the students, with a representative example comment for each type of response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coded Response</th>
<th>Percent of responses w/this code</th>
<th>Example Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>78% (n = 25)</td>
<td>It generated a sort of intrinsic value that I carried throughout the course, and I feel like by making the learning a goal in and of itself, that fosters more of a connection to the material that I experienced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>9% (n = 3)</td>
<td>It made me care less about this class in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>13% (n = 4)</td>
<td>The labor based grading did not have a huge effect on my learning considering I still aimed to complete assignments expected of me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notice that in this sample fewer than 10% of students wrote a negative response at the end of the semester.

Reviewing the survey data, students appeared reasonably satisfied with labor-based grading contracts in the October. Most item responses (n = 12) were > 5.0, which corresponds to Strongly Agree or better. In December, the overall satisfaction actually increased: fourteen of the twenty items had responses of 5.0 or above. However, the items where the mean response dropped (as compared to the October means), are worth examining closely. In October, the items with the highest means (all 5.25) were Q’s 7, 9 & 18, as seen in Table 5.2.
Table 5.2 Quantitative Data from Select Survey Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>October Administration</th>
<th>December Administration</th>
<th>Change in Mean</th>
<th>Change in SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. I understand how my final grade will be calculated based on the grading contract.</td>
<td>5.25 0.87</td>
<td>5.00 1.21</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I am satisfied with the writing feedback I receive from my instructor.</td>
<td>5.25 0.75</td>
<td>5.33 0.78</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I believe the experience of learning within a grading contract system will be useful to me in my future coursework.</td>
<td>5.25 0.75</td>
<td>4.50 1.48</td>
<td>-0.75</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in Table 5.2, in December, the mean for Q7 dropped from 5.25 to 5.0, so still fairly strong agreement. For Q9 the mean rose from 5.25 to 5.33 (I will discuss students’ responses to instructor feedback separately, below, in discussion of the second research question). However, in Q18 the mean dropped from 5.25 to 4.50. This 0.75 drop in mean was the largest change for any one item between October and December.

Perhaps the answer to “why did so many students change their response to the item the labor-based grading contract will be useful to me in the future between October and December” can be found, in part, in a discussion the first focus group had about whether they would recommend a writing course with a labor-based grading contract to a friend. In the second focus group, the four students all indicated yes, they would recommend such a course. However, in the first focus group, student responses were more diverse. Cristina, who remained the most enthusiastic toward grading contracts in the group overall, responded yes, unequivocally, because “it leaves you…less afraid to write, especially if it’s your first time in university [or] college writing big papers.” Having less anxiety about writing tracks with several other anecdotal reports from instructors who use grading contracts (Hassencahl; Taylor; Danielewicz and Elbow). On the other hand, Logan, who was generally positive about grading contracts, said it would depend on the particular subject of the course. He didn’t “know if [it] could necessarily be
applied to every subject per se and still make sure that the students [were] getting what they need to out of the course.” Nonetheless, he added, “as far as a writing field I would highly recommend a friend doing it…from my personal experience…I really enjoyed it.” Ivan, who also chimed in for this part of the discussion, noted that a labor-based grading contract may not be “as useful for already confident” or “solid” writers. In contrast, in Carrillo’s *Hidden Inequalities*, she points out the “ableist” assumptions inherent in Inoue’s labor-based grading contracts as it relates to time. Quoting Tara Wood “Crippling Time in the Composition Classroom,” Carillo argues that labor-based grading contracts “may contribute to or unproductively exacerbate anxiety” around the “normative, compulsory time frames” (270 qtd. in Carillo 59).

Finally, issues of student satisfaction cannot be separated from student learning. That is, we do want students to be satisfied with pedagogical practices in our classrooms, but most importantly, we need those practices to advance their opportunities to learn. The student responses to Q17 “I believe the grading contract has increased my overall opportunities to learn” demonstrate that “satisfaction” is much more nuanced than Writing Studies has previously discussed. One of the three students who selected *Agree* in October changed their responses to *Strongly Disagree*, and one of the six students who had selected *Strongly Agree* in October changed their response to *Disagree*. Question 17 did have a follow up/write-in option; however, only two students wrote in responses: 1) “I definitely agree. It has allowed me to actually enjoy learning more” and 2) [I agree] “because I practiced what I learned with the labor bumps.” Helpfully, the student whose response changed from *Strongly Agree* to *Disagree* participated in a focus group interview. Derek explained that while he thought overall the labor-based grading contract experience was positive and could see how it could be particularly helpful for
international students, personally, he found himself waiting until the last minute to turn in assignments, which he attributed to the lack of pressure from the grading contract.

*Figure 5.1 PEVS Oct. – Dec. Response Change for Q17*

**Q17 I believe the grading contract has increased my overall opportunities to learn.**

![Pie chart showing response change for Q17 in October and December]

In summary, there appears to be some disconnect between what students reported on their end of semester reflections (overwhelmingly positive) compared to the quantitative PEVS scores, which showed that satisfaction decreased on several items. It’s possible that had more students taken the PEVS in both October and December, the quantitative results might have more closely aligned with the final reflection comments—or, vice versa, if more students had completed the final reflections, the ratio of positive comments would have been lower. Either way, we clearly need more research in this area.

**Motivation and Attitudes**

“*Because the labor-based grading contract has been giving me motivation, I felt like I have become more productive and responsible with my grades and learning process.*”

“*It is hard to doo great. It is easy to do average.*” (sic)
In thinking through the ramifications of using labor-based writing contracts, starting with the student’s feeling and perceptions about grades and their general satisfaction, is useful in contextualizing the first research question: *How do labor-based grading contracts affect students’ motivation and attitudes toward writing?* Situating issues of motivation and attitudes about writing alongside general attitudes about grades and grading approaches, allows Writing Studies to gain deeper insights into our own pedagogical practices. I will explore each of the following concepts below: motivation, attitudes toward writing, fairness, and labor.

Latif (“Unresolved Issues”) notes writing motivation is a complex “area characterized by a wide variance in conceptualizing and measuring a number of its key constructs” (7). Wright et al. concur, asserting that motivation is “complex [and] multifaceted” given that it “includes the internal and external forces that influence an individual’s decision to engage in and persist through tasks” (66). They define writing motivation as “the variety of reasons a student chooses to engage in or avoid writing tasks” (SWAS Admin), further noting that writing motivation “can vary by discipline, situation or developmental state” (Wright et al. 66).

Beginning from Conradi, Jang, and McKenna’s “framework of interrelated motivational constructs” Wright et al. considered two wide-ranging affective constructs (pre-dispositions and beliefs) which affect students’ motivation (66-67). According to Wright et al.’s literature review, “scholars have found that students’ motivation to write is highly influenced by attitude” (67). In her 2015 dissertation, *Students’ Attitudes Toward and Valuation of First-Year Composition as Predictors of Students’ English 101 Success*, Strickland concurs, noting that research by Cox (2009), Martinez, Kock, and Cass (2011), and Tinberg and Nadeau (2010) suggests that students with favorable attitudes toward FYC are less likely to resist
instruction, less likely to have writing anxiety, and more likely to have higher writing self-efficacy than students who dislike FYC. (62)

Ennis defines thinking dispositions as “reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do” (1), while Perkins et al. argue that those dispositions can be learned (288). Strickland thus concludes that “one approach to increasing students’ FYC success is to encourage students’ adoption of positive attitudes toward FYC and adoption of helpful thinking dispositions” (118).

It is useful at this point to return to Wright et al.’s proposed model of writing motivation to see how these constructs are related:

*Figure 5.2 Wright et al. Proposed Model of Writing Motivation*

Wright et al. define “beliefs about self as a writer” as “the students’ beliefs about themselves as a writer and their writing abilities” (survey appendix). Wright et al. found in analyzing the results of their surveys that writing attitude “is a separate construct from students’ beliefs towards writing and themselves as writers” (78). Wright et al. further break down “beliefs about self as a writer” into self-concept and self-efficacy (75). Bandura’s 1977 publication of “Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change” introduced the construct of self-efficacy.
Pajares elaborates that “efficacy beliefs help determine how much effort people will expend on an activity, how long they will persevere when confronting obstacles, and how resilient they will prove in the face of adverse situations” (“Self-Efficacy Beliefs in Academic Settings” 544).

Pajares also notes that self-concept is less specific than self-efficacy: “Self-concept judgments can be domain specific but are not task specific. Compared to self-efficacy judgments, they are more global and less context dependent” (561). Pajares (“Self-Efficacy Beliefs, Motivation, and Achievement”) argues that ‘judgements of self-worth’ are also included within self-concept (cited in Wright et al. 67).

Self-efficacy is also related to confidence, which Bandura (“Self-Efficacy”) refers to as a more “colloquial” term than self-efficacy, which he defines “in its specificity regarding a particular task or skill, as well as the affirmation that one can actually perform or attain with regard to that task or skill” (qtd. in Kriner 52). Wright et al. report that a number of studies have found that students with high levels of self-efficacy “performed better on writing outcomes” (65).

Returning now to my first research question: How do labor-based grading contracts affect students’ motivation and attitudes toward writing? Students’ qualitative responses to this research question generated some of the most positive responses. Students (mainly) expressed their attitudes toward writing, motivation, and self-confidence all improved. However, two very different reactions to the labor-based grading contract occurred in relation to issues of motivation and affect. The majority of students found grading contracts to be motivating—particularly due to the reduced stress or anxiety of writing for a specific grade: “I think the labor-based grading contract allowed me to learn for my benefit and allowed me to grow as an English student and become a better writer. I loved that I did not feel the pressure of maintaining a certain grade.”
Looking specifically at the *Self-Beliefs, Writing Beliefs, and Attitudes Survey* (SWAS), neither the contract grading nor non-contract grading groups showed a particularly positive orientation to writing at the beginning of the semester administration. For example, on Q13 “Overall, I have positive feelings about writing” students in the grading contract group had a mean of 2.38 on a 4-point Likert scale of 1 (*Very Different from Me*) to 4 (*A Lot Like Me*).

As discussed in the previous chapter, beliefs about writing proved to be the most “stubborn” concept or factor for the labor-based grading contract sections. The amount of mean change\(^{29}\) was 1.01 for the writing beliefs items. As can be seen in Table 5.3, the “intervention” of ENC 1101 led to considerable change for both the contract grading and non-contract grading sections, with slightly more change in the contract grading sections.

*Table 5.3 SWAS Change in Mean from Aug. to Dec.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Contract Grading</th>
<th>Non-Contract Grading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Concept</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>2.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Attitudes</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Beliefs</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>2.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Change</td>
<td>10.63</td>
<td>9.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the SWAS, the contract grading sections had the most change in self-concept. All eight of the statements that addressed self-concept showed a positive mean increase.\(^{30}\)

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\(^{29}\) I calculated “change” by adding the individual mean changes for each item, regardless of whether the mean change was negative or positive.

\(^{30}\) Table 4.10 (see Chapter 4) lists the change in mean for the contract grading sections for Q2 “I do not get high grades in writing because I am just not intelligent enough” as -0.50. I count this as a positive change because Q2 was one of the three reverse-coded statements.
Attitudes toward writing showed the second highest change in mean for the contract grading sections (it was the most change for the non-contract grading sections). Several statements from this factor deserve discussion. Q28 “Writing can be very enjoyable” showed a mean increase of 0.75 for the contract grading sections but only a 0.14 increase for the non-contract grading sections. Similarly, for Q29 “I like to write” the contract grading students had a 0.36 increase while the non-contract grading sections had a decrease of 0.14. To reiterate, the students in the traditional assessment system actually decreased in how much they “liked” writing. Similarly, for Q25 “I like writing long papers at school” the mean for the grading contract students increased a modest 0.25 but decreased by 0.28 for in the non-contract grading sections. In other words, students in the non-contract grading sections ended their ENC 1101 class disliking “writing long papers” more than they started the semester.

Confidence in one’s writing is another aspect of the writing motivational construct. Ling et al. note that “students who are confident in writing are more likely to focus on mastering writing tasks, find writing satisfying, and see writing as a meaningful task” while students without confidence in their writing “appear to be more likely to avoid writing and do not enjoy it or find it satisfying” (Ling et al. 10). Several students made comments about how the labor-based grading contract increased their confidence: “…I feel also more confident because I’ve tried the new techniques, and I apply these techniques on other classes and I got high grades. So, the composition, or the contract makes me more confident in writing.” In a reflection, a student wrote:

I think it [labor-based contract grading] encourages students to learn and progress instead of working to achieve a grade. Many times before, my classmates along with myself have
worried about ‘grades,’ rather than the work. Often, some persons feel as if they are not smart if they are not getting an ‘A’ or ‘B.’

The SWAS also asked students about confidence. For example, in a self-concept categorized question, Q8 “I feel confident in my overall writing abilities,” the grading contract sections’ mean increased by 0.25; whereas the non-contract grading sections had a decrease in mean of 0.29—over 0.5 change between the contract grading and non-contract grading sections. Q20 “I know that I will do well in writing this year,” a self-efficacy tagged item, showed a remarkable 0.62 mean increase for the contract grading students versus 0.28 for the non-contract grading. The final statement (a self-concept item), Q30 “I can write successful papers because writing is easy for me,” showed a mean increase of 0.88 versus a 0.29 increase for the non-contract grading students.

Interestingly, the particular items that the non-contract grading sections showed more change than the contract grading sections tended to be statements about very concrete examples. For example, for Q5 “When writing it is easy for me to think of the right words,” the contract grading section increased by 0.13 while the non-contract grading section increased by 0.57 or Q7 “I enjoy proofreading my writing to make sure the words I have written are spelled correctly,” a writing belief item. For Q7 the contract grading section mean increased by 0.13 while the non-contract grading changed by 0.85. For Q16 “When I am proofreading, it is easy for me to catch my mistakes,” the contract grading sections had no change in mean, while the non-contract grading had a mean increase of 0.15. Lastly, for Q26 “I feel most successful if I see that my writing has really improved,” a writing beliefs statement, the contract grading students’ mean increased only 0.13 as compared to the non-contract grading students whose mean response
increased 0.43. This indicates that the contract grading students are not defining success by “writing improvement.”

On the other hand, a small, but significant minority of students found the grading contract de-motivating and/or that they found it stressful to not know where they “stood” in terms of their letter grades. In the end of semester reflection, in response to the question “what effect did the labor-based grading contract have on your learning?”, one student explicitly stated, “The Labor Based grading made me less motivated to do what I needed to do.” For the students who reported feeling less motivated by labor-based contract grading, they often reported that they found traditional grading as being motivating: “…when I was a high school student, I got motivation when I compared my grade with my friends because my score was lower than him. So, sometimes the grading system motivates people to make more efforts.” Another student reported, “Personally I think that the grading system…helps you and challenges you to be the best academic student that you can be.”

Given the importance of motivation to writing outcomes and achievement, my findings provide important context for the field. Specifically, the fact that students variously found labor-based contract grading to be motivating and de-motivating, means that instructors who wish to adopt labor-based grading contracts for improving students’ attitudes and motivation toward writing cannot just assume that grading contracts result in universal positives. Furthermore, as we’ll see below, students had important things to say about fairness and labor.

**Fairness**

“I think it's important to point out on this interview...how difficult it is to define if this labor base contract is fair or not” (Cristina)\(^{31}\)

\(^{31}\) When a quote I have used as a section epigraph is from a focus group interview, I have labeled it with the pseudonym of the student participant. Unidentified student quotes were taken from student reflections and probing survey questions.
Cristina’s quote sufficiently sums up the focus group discussion of fairness. Students had a lot to say about fairness. First, was it fair to them, as individual students, to have their final grades be determined by the labor-based grading contract? Some students thought this was fair, and it was fine to require the three additional labor “bumps.” As one student wrote, “I believe that this form of assessment appropriately granted me the grades I deserve for the effort I put in.” Others disagreed and objected to having to complete additional work on top of the already assignment-heavy curriculum: “The course has a lot of work so it’s not a good thing to see all of our work equal to B grade at the end of the semester!”

Students also discussed whether it was fair to be graded on work completion instead of the quality of the work they turned in. As Hakim commented in the focus group, “when I was reviewing my peers—my peers’ final projects I found that they just didn't care about the format or the structure, or the paragraphs, in general. So, I believe [if it was] graded, it will be better.” Cristina acknowledged that it might not be “fair” that some students turn in work with minimal effort. But she astutely pointed out that “there are [other] people that put a lot of effort on the project, but they maybe are not a good writer—they maybe—they didn't actually understand, or they didn't get it, but they tried, they tried a lot, and they deserve to get a [good] grade.” Another student commented at the end of the semester, “[it is fair] Because it give a chance for all the students to have the same opportunities even if they have a not so strong background.”

What I did not see from these responses was the “annoyance or disapproval” Spidell and Thelin reported in their students who were used to receiving A’s: “We witnessed this elitist notion of high-performing students who expressed resentment of a democratic system of grading offered to every student in their learning community” (44). Ivan acknowledged that the grading contract might “solve…inequalities,” nevertheless, he continued, “…I don't feel [that just
because] …it solves these inequalities that it makes grading fair” (Ivan). Notice that in this discussion Hakim, Cristina and Ivan are international students with varying perspectives on fairness. While Logan, a monolingual American student, comes in on the side of expanding opportunities:

*I think that grading overall is completely subjective. I think it really depends on how it's used, you know...I think that overall grading...doesn't necessarily have to be fair...I'd like to think, you know, if you can measure fairness, that [it] should be as fair as possible...but I think it's almost impossible to make [it] completely fair.*

Logan concluded, “but I don't think it's really important either way to worry about what other people are getting.”

Inoue defines fairness as “student agency and control within assessment ecologies” in “Writing Assessment as the Conditions for Translingual Approaches.” He asserts that “assessments must feel fair” since fairness is not “something a writing assessment is or can be inherently” (121). In addition to rejecting a “single standard” for writing, he elaborates five ways that directed self-placement and grading contracts “create particular conditions of fairness” (131). Fairness

- is constructed by respecting students’ choices and labor (132)
- is created by replacing ranking and grades with listening to and negotiating important decisions with students (132)
- is constructed by student participation and control over how course grades are determined (132)

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32 In the body of this text, I have used italics to indicate student comments that were spoken aloud in the focus group interviews.
comes from not ranking but from considering language performances on more critical terms that embrace failure as places of negotiation, discussion, and potential. (133)

I concur that in terms of fairness the best we can do for students is help them to feel that conditions in a classroom are fair. The rest of Inoue’s bullet points are highly abstract and could be difficult for instructors to implement.

In a paper co-authored by an instructor and an undergraduate student at the College of the Holy Cross, the writers explore “both undergraduate understandings of fairness in the context of contract grading as well as the teacher-student relationship” in a summer bridge writing course (Reardon and Guardado-Menjivar). Guardado-Menjivar, the former undergraduate student, took Reardon’s writing course in 2016, and served as Reardon’s “writing fellow” in 2018. During the summer semester Guardado-Menjivar first took Reardon’s class, 50% of the students in the class thought that contract grading was unfair.33 Guardado-Menjivar explains that, to her, “a grade is fair if the professor offers clear criteria upon which an assignment will be evaluated.” Reardon noted that while she had “classroom conversations about what strong writing looked like” her original grading contract “did not specific what needed to be done to earn” grades above a B. After adopting labor-based contract grading and discussing the course with Guardado-Menjivar, Reardon “now includes large and small group discussions…about what constitutes effort and writing labor in college.” This narrative connects with students’ comments about fairness in my study.

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33 The authors point out that Reardon did not adopt labor-based grading contracts until summer 2018.
Labor

“I feel I do so much already and wish that was just graded instead”

One thing that many students who were unsatisfied with grading contract talked about is *how* much work there was to do. As one student said in October: “I feel like the work I am doing means nothing to my grade and the only way to raise my grade is to do extra work even though there is so much already expected of us.” Admittedly, that particular semester (fall 2020), the ENC 1101 workload was pretty intense. In fact, in the spring semester a number of required things (quizzes, discussion posts) were eliminated from the course. So, one point to consider is if there had been less required work, would students have been more open to doing the labor bumps? I will discuss this more in Chapter 6: Implications and Conclusions as one thing instructors will need to consider is how much autonomy they have over their FYC curriculum. Instructors need to have the flexibility to make changes in order to leave room for “adding back in” optional labor bumps.

Students were reasonably satisfied by labor-based grading contract mid-semester when they took the first survey specifically about their experiences with labor-based grading contracts (PEVS). However, by the time we got to the end of the semester some students strongly did not like the labor aspect of the grading contract. There was a wider variation in standard deviation, but on four of the five labor-related questions, the mean went down. I will look closely at the last two labor questions here.

Figure 5.3 shows the percent responses for October and December for Q19. In October, responses ranged from *Agree* to *Very Strongly Agree*. However, in December, two students changed their responses to *Disagree* and *Very Strongly Disagree*. (And one additional student changed their response in the opposite direction to *Very Strongly Agree.*) Students were more
concerned by the *amount* of labor required; versus the *types* of labor they were asked to complete.

*Figure 5.3 PEVS Oct. – Dec. Response Change for Q19*

Q19 I am satisfied with the *amount* of labor required to earn the contracted grade I identified in the course.

As can be seen in Figure 5.4, in October one student selected *Very Strongly Disagree* to the question about the type of labor required. Whereas, in December, students’ responses ranged from *Agree* to *Very Strongly Agree*. The mean score for Q20 did drop from 4.92 to 4.83, largely because the ratio of *Strongly Agree* to *Very Strongly Agree* essentially traded places between the October to December PEVS administrations.
Q20 I am satisfied with the types of labor required to earn the contracted grade I identified in the course.

This section examined students’ reactions to labor-based contract grading as related to motivation and attitudes. While the majority of students reacted positively to the labor-based grading contract, a minority of students reported they found the grading contracts to be demotivating. The students who found the labor-based grading contract motivating often cited increased confidence in their writing as a reason. Students’ attitudes toward writing also were largely positive. Significantly, a number of SWAS statements regarding writing attitudes showed large mean increases between the October and December administrations, while the non-contract grading students actually decreased on the same statements. Student attitudes toward fairness and labor were also discussed. Students considered fairness in the following ways: were labor-based grading contracts fair to them as individuals (as in having their work evaluated this way) and was their an unfair amount of work.
Instructor Feedback

“I pay more attention because the feedback is the only way that I can know if I did my best or not.” (Hakim)

The second research question looked specifically at students’ perceptions of instructor feedback: How do labor-based grading contracts affect student perceptions of instructor feedback? In this section I will look at feedback, broadly, before discussing the specifics of negotiating with an instructor. Students held very positive orientations toward their instructors’ feedback. Turning first to the PEVS, Q9 “I am satisfied with the writing feedback I receive from my instructor” provides a starting point for this discussion. In October the mean response to this question was 5.25, and it increased to 5.33 in December. For both administrations, student responses ranged from Agree to Very Strongly Agree, with the preponderance of responses in Strongly Agree to Very Strongly Agree. In October the Strongly Agree/Very Strongly Agree split was 5/5. In December that changed to 4/6, so an additional response in the Very Strongly Agree category. As a student commented on the end of semester reflection, “I took the Instructor’s feedback much more seriously than I would have if we did not have the labor-based grading contract.”

In the end of semester reflections students reported a variety of reasons why they felt positively about instructor feedback. Students reported the feedback felt “more personal.” One student commented, “the feedback felt less copy-paste like as if I violated a part of a rubric, and more like a person’s advice on how to better your messaging.” Another reported, “[It is] making me more honest because I am not afraid of saying the wrong thing and it consequently affecting my grade.” Students appeared to feel that their instructors were more caring: “The contract has made me realize that the feedback from my instructor is meant to genuinely help improve the quality of my writing, instead of stating what I could have done better to meet curriculum
guidelines that would have gotten a certain box ticked off.” And students reported the grading contract allowed them to take the feedback they received with “a more open-minded attitude.”

Other PEVS questions enrich the evidence provided by the survey findings. For instance, Q3 “The grading contract has allowed me to have positive interactions with my instructor” had a mean of 5.17 on the October administration and increased modestly to 5.25 in December. Again, recall that five on the Likert scale indicated Strongly Agree and six indicated Very Strongly Agree. Student responses seemed to indicate that students found their teachers more approachable, possibly as a result of the instructor using a labor-based grading contract: “You can talk to your teacher, and they can let you know like if you need to work on anything.”

Writing Studies has not researched student response to instructor feedback with quite the same attention as has been done in second language writing (SLW). Nonetheless, in “Students’ Reactions to Teacher Comments,” Richard Straub found that students preferred instructor comments or feedback that “offered some direction for improvement but asserted only moderate control over the writing” (112). Nancy Sommers, in her foundational article, “Responding to Student Writing,” concluded that “the key to successful commenting is to have what is said in the comments and what is done in the classroom mutually reinforce and enrich each other” (155). The labor-based grading contract approach decentralizes the instructor as the best and only judge of student writing, so it makes sense that in this sort of assessment ecology, students would be more receptive to instructor feedback.

**Negotiation**

“*Working together with my instructor was something new to me which I have not experienced in high school.*”

In addition, to instructor feedback generally, a key component of students’ affective response to instructors is negotiation. Teacher/scholars from Ira Shor to Jerry Farber have argued
that negotiating with students is a perquisite for distributing teachers’ authority to the students. In their 2005 study, Spidell and Thelin presaged Inoue in arguing that student negotiation is a priority for contract grading assessment. And in an “Interchanges” response to Inman and Powell’s “Absence” article, Albracht et al. suggest that teacher/student negotiation of the grading contract is a “crucial step for navigating and validating students’ affective response and accounting for previous schooling experiences” (146). However, the results of my study seemed to indicate that negotiation was not a priority for this particular sample of students.

The grading contract in this study was presented to students unilaterally. At least two instructors adjusted the number of allowable late and missing assignments toward the end of the semester, which was particularly important to do given the number and frequency of small assignments in the fall 2020’s ENC 1101 course. In fact, I purposefully kept the allowed number of late/missing assignments low in the original contract, so that I could later “negotiate” with the students and make it more flexible. The process of negotiation was one thing that changed in moving to the virtual environment. In the pilot study, I was able to have real discussions with students where they questioned the grading contract, and I could explain my rationales/reasons/motivations. Then, in real time, I could make adjustments/negotiations to the grading contract.

All three contract grading instructors did allow students to suggest additional labor bumps. In the focus group interviews, a student noted how an additional labor bump was added, but otherwise the students reported they had not needed to negotiate with their instructor:

*I didn't ever email my teacher to ask, you know, something could be changed or whatnot.*

*But I feel like the option is definitely there and like I would get a response and we'd be*
able to work something out, which I thought if I needed to have something changed or wanted to. It was nice. (Derek)

Students in today’s educational settings have become “consumers” of education, and perhaps because of this, the students in my study did not seem to expect or even desire negotiating with their instructors. Logan commented “there's [already] so many options for additional labor assignments to try to boost our grade,” so didn’t feel negotiating with his instructor was necessary. He did think, however, that if he’d needed to, he would “be welcome to do so.” Q2 of the PEVS “My classmates and I are able to negotiate aspects of the contract with our instructor” supports these sentiments. It had a mean response of 4.83 in October that increased in December to 5.08. Of all the results I’ve discussed in this chapter, students’ responses to instructor feedback were the most unabashedly enthusiastic.

**Academic Performance Measures**

*I think we put a lot of weight in grades, though we actually shouldn't...our future is based on a grade. Entering college...is based on a grade—everything is based on the grade—and we are not a number.* (Cristina)

My final research question asked: *How do students perform on academic performance measures in an FYC class that uses labor-based grading contracts?* Specifically, I looked at two types of assessment data: 1) the individual rubric scores instructors gave students on their final paper draft and 2) students’ final course grades (as reported in Canvas). Because I discussed the individual rubric scores in the previous chapter, here I will focus on students’ final grades. I did not look at the final *paper* grades because instructors were directed to take into consideration students’ participation and effort for the project as a whole, which was partially demonstrated by students’ response to a reflection activity for each project. The reflection activity asked students to identify things such as how they read (i.e., *Did they reread? Annotate? Listen to the audio*
version of the readings?), how much collaboration they engaged in during the project, and whether or not they attended the extra credit “workshops” offered by the FYC program.

Perhaps the most surprising finding of the study was the distribution of final grades. Some skeptics of contract-grading have posited that such an assessment system will lead to grade inflation. However, some prior research does suggest that final grades in grading contract assessment systems will be more widely distributive, as compared to traditionally graded classrooms. For instance, in a study by Glenda Potts, “A Simple Alternative to Grading,” Potts implemented grading contracts in nine of her own composition, literature, and creative writing classes, comprising a total of 188 students over five semesters, from summer 2007 to summer 2008. Interestingly, Potts calculated grades for each section using both a traditional letter grade system and the grading contract. This allowed her to calculate a final traditional grade for each student, which she then compared to the student’s final contract grade. Potts found that out of 188 students, 30 of the final grades (or approximately 16%) “awarded using the contract grading system differed slightly from those that would have been awarded in a traditional holistic system” (35). Just over 35% of the students whose grades differed received a lower grade because they did not complete the additional labor (assignment) required to earn an A or B (35). Of the remaining 19 students with different final grades, the grades were “all within 3.8 points of the traditional grade that they would have received…[thus] all less than one-half a letter grade…and 13 of the 19 were within…2.5 points of the traditional grade they would have received” (35). So, 10% of the students received grades slightly higher under the traditional assessment system, all of which were “less than one-half a letter grade,” while 6% of students earned lower grades under the grading contract system (35).
With 51% of students earning an A as their final grade in the grading contract sections, compared to the 80% of students in non-contract grading sections, it would appear that contract grading has a much closer to a Gaussian or “normal” distribution as seen in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4 Final Grade Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Contract Grading</th>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Contract Grading</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n = 45</td>
<td></td>
<td>n = 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A+ to A-</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
<td>n = 23</td>
<td>80.4%</td>
<td>n = 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+ to B-</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>n = 12</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>n = 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+ to C-</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>n = 6</td>
<td></td>
<td>n = 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+ to D-</td>
<td></td>
<td>n = 0</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>n = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>n = 4</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>n = 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The considerations of what labor means and how it impacts students is one that my data shows are complex and needs more research. I will discuss these implications further in the next chapter.

Conclusion

“I felt that I'm felt almost like less judgmental of myself as a writer, and it made me kind of, I would say just less stress and less anxious about writing itself.” (Logan)

In this chapter I have discussed the importance of the qualitative (and quantitative) results, with specific attention to issues of motivation, attitudes toward fairness, labor, and instructor feedback, and academic performance measures. Considering these areas together, we can learn a lot about student attitudes and perceptions of the writing classroom and the role of labor-based writing contracts in that classroom. Since so much of the existing scholarship in Writing Studies on labor-based writing contracts does not focus on students and their attitudes
and perceptions, the findings (Chapter 4) and this subsequent discussion offers Writing Studies, particularly those teaching and administering FYC programs, much information to consider.

Students reported they found grades *both* motivating and stressful. They were concerned about whether it was fair to not have their work graded on a scale or in comparison to the work of their peers. They did not like how much labor was required to earn an A. And, surprisingly, fewer students in the grading contract sections earned A’s and B’s than the students in the traditionally assessed classrooms. Despite all this, fewer than 10% of the final course reflections reported negative orientations toward grading contracts. And labor-based grading contracts clearly do something that makes students more receptive to instructor feedback.

The final chapter details the main implications for Writing Studies and posits additional research questions for the next phase of looking at labor-based writing contracts from a student perspective.
CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This dissertation examined labor-based grading contracts in the context of multilingual First-Year Composition (FYC) sections. While the study is not wholly generalizable, the study design is one that can be replicated, but more so, the design of the study was such that it prioritized the experiences and voices of students. As an exploratory study, the results provide important information for Writing Studies to consider. Beyond scholar, beyond researcher, I am first and foremost a teacher. And so, it as a teacher that I frame these implications. What to teach? How to teach? How to assess? How to do so in ways that open up the most “advancement for opportunity” for students historically excluded from higher education? I entered into this dissertation thinking that labor-based grading contracts were the answer. I’m no longer sure that is the case. Student perceptions helped me to realize that there are definite benefits to labor-based contract grading but for them to achieve the promise of an equitable and anti-racist form of assessment, much care needs to be taken with their implementation. This chapter highlights the main implications to be considered if an instructor or a program administrator is contemplating a change to labor based grading contracts:

- Need To Be Implemented with an Awareness of Students’ Affect
- Have Positive Effects on Instructor Feedback
- May Have Harmful Consequences for Students of Color
- Require Teacher Training and Support
- Can Be Implemented Without an Antiracist Curriculum
Need To Be Implemented with an Awareness of Students’ Affect

As noted in Chapter 5, student affect is a key aspect of course design and considerations of assessment measures. In my study, student affect came to the forefront in noteworthy ways in feelings about grades, work, and instructor feedback. Psychological research demonstrates that learning takes place when students lower their “affective filters” (Krashen). Citing Bandura, Driscoll et al. explain self-efficacy as “the relationship between a student’s beliefs about his capability and the likelihood that he will take steps needed to achieve the goal” (sec. IV). Logically, then, students who are dissatisfied, frustrated, or angered by the labor-based grading contract assessment system are not in a prime condition for learning to take place.

During the pilot study, under my initial labor-based grading contract, the students who were most resistant to the contract were White, monolingual (and, as it happened, female) students. They became more supportive of the contract when I implemented the “Exemplary Labor Clause,” which “rewarded” them for turning in “A” work throughout the semester. Depending on an instructor’s goals, and their commitment to removing Standard Edited American English (SEAE) judgements from evaluation, the exemplary labor clause may defeat the purpose of labor-based grading contract in the first place. But I mention it because it did seem to work in this R1 context. In the pilot study, every student who turned in a final reflection reported feeling positive about the grading contracts at the end of the semester. In the fall 2020 study, resistance to the grading contract was reported by both White, monolingual American students as well as multiethnic/multiracial, English as an Additional Language, international students. I would still state the majority—about 70%—of students were reasonably satisfied with the labor-based grading contracts. Some of the specific concerns that caused students’ dissatisfaction may be addressed with simple changes, discussed below. Medina and Walker
argue that “rather than viewing student resistance to grading contracts negatively” instructors should use critical pedagogy to view resistance as “a site to begin an inquiry into the ways in which students have internalized the dominant cultural narratives of grades, technologies, and instructors…” (52).

The grading contract seems to have made the biggest impact on students’ attitudes toward writing and their self-concept. In her dissertation, Students’ Attitudes Toward and Valuation of First-Year Composition (FYC) as Predictors of Students’ English 101 Success, Whitney L. Strickland found that, as opposed to valuation, students’ attitude is “more closely related to students’ FYC success” (115). So perhaps it is not as concerning that students did not respond to the “do you value” question (see Chapter 5) quite as strongly at the end of the semester as they did halfway through. For FYC instructors, this change in writing attitudes may be significant because one of most important goals for many FYC instructors is to increase students’ enjoyment of the writing process. In my own experience, I have had many students report in their literacy narratives that they learned to hate writing (and reading) in middle, and especially, high school. Thus, this might be reason enough to try labor-based contract grading, presuming instructors have the flexibility at their institution to do so.

Student Perceptions of Grades

We cannot ignore students’ feelings about grades. For the vast majority of students, grades are simply part of the superstructure of education: you perform a task, you earn a grade. As one student noted in the beginning of semester grading discussion: “The reason students focus more on grading is because, throughout all their education, all they have known is grades.” Even when students have mixed feelings about grades or can articulate critiques of the traditional assessment system (which many of the students in the labor-based grading contract sections did),
some students maintain an affective desire for grades. A few students reported they found grades motivating and/or questioned how they would know how well they were doing without grades. A number of students also questioned the fairness of students earning full credit for assignments where students might have completed the work with minimal effort. The relationship between grades, student perceptions, and student affect has to be considered when implementing labor based grading contracts. Moreover, in addition to grades, student affect as seen in motivation and efficacy are also important to consider thoughtfully and deliberately.

Tracking their “Grades”

Students who didn’t like the grading contract also reported feelings of anxiety when they could not see themselves ranked on the traditional A to F grading scale. It’s certainly debatable whether, nationally, one of our instructional goals should be to help students critically reflect on their attachment to traditional grades, but regardless, this was a frequently reported concern. One approach to mitigate this concern might be to utilize point-based grading in the learning management system (as opposed to turning all assignments into complete/incomplete grades). Perhaps all major assignments could be “graded” on a 10-point scale. Because 10 points naturally corresponds with the 100-point grading scale, students would be able to intuit if their work was A “quality” (10/10), B “quality” (9/10), and so on. This would also allow instructors to account for work that was actually incomplete (e.g., a student responded to four out of five questions), instead of having to use the “incomplete” mark for work that was not submitted at all. These assignments would be set up in the LMS to “not count towards grade,” and simply serve as a reference marker for students. I have done something similar in traditionally assessed classes with a multi-draft paper by using a rubric to indicate where I think students’ intermediate/rough draft would fall if I were giving that paper a letter grade, but then give them completion credit in
the gradebook. Students specifically reported not liking that they only received written feedback for major writing assignments, so the above approach could be reserved for major writing assignments only, while all other evaluated classwork was graded complete/incomplete.

Too Much Work

A consistent complaint was that too much work was required to earn an A. I am sympathetic to this concern given that the curriculum that particular semester was so “busy” that the workload was dramatically reduced for the following spring semester. Thus, building assignments within a labor-based grading contract framework from scratch may be able to address this concern. After teaching a class for a semester or two, most instructors have a reasonably good idea of what a standard workload is for a given course at their specific institution. I would suggest considering what percentage of this work would be necessary for students to earn a B grade? For example, a course that requires multi-stage drafting of three projects, might eliminate the Peer Review component or intermediate draft of one or more of the projects. Alternatively, the B grade may require fewer sources and a shorter minimum page requirement. That way, students who contract for A grades, are more likely to view the B requirements as standard and the additional A requirements as reasonable (and not unfair). I have not yet the opportunity to implement a version like this myself, so my suggestion here is based on supposition rather than empirical evidence. This is one area for further research.

Spread Out Deadlines

This may be the easiest item to fix. A concern that students in the focus group interviews brought forth was the feeling that they had to rush and complete the additional labor tasks at the end of the semester. This was partly due to the set up in the Canvas gradebook. Early in the semester I created specific due dates for the Labor Log reflections, spread out three times over
the semester. The other additional tasks went without specific deadlines for most of the semester, since I wanted students to have the flexibility to turn them in throughout the semester. However, even though the other instructors and myself reminded students about these tasks in one-on-one conferences and announcements, without a specific due date the tasks did not show up under students’ “To Do” list in Canvas. Most students at our institution rely heavily on this “To Do” list. Making sure that the additional labor tasks have specific due dates spread out over the semester (and set up before the semester begins) could help students to not wait until the end of the semester to scramble to complete the required additional labor tasks.

Future research in Writing Studies needs to consider these questions in relation to the issue of student affect and labor-based grading contracts:

- What is the effect of including something like the “exemplary labor clause”?
- Are there differences in students’ affective responses to labor-based grading correlated to specific demographics? Race/ethnicity? Gender? English language background?
- Are there differences in students’ affective responses to labor-based grading based on varied institutional settings? Bachelor’s only institutions? R1s? Two-year colleges?

**Developmental writing classes?**

**Have Positive Effects on Instructor Feedback**

The reception to instructor feedback appears to be the most clearly defined and unambiguous benefit of the labor-based grading contracts. There were zero negative comments in reflections, survey questions, or the focus group interviews related to instructor feedback. However, it is not possible to know whether this was strictly due to the grading contract. Some of the students voiced the idea themselves that they thought they would have still received the
same good feedback and accepted it willingly because of the particular instructor they had. Regardless, students’ ratings of instructor feedback were consistently high over the semester. Psychological research, such as that done by Martinez, Kock, and Cass in 2011, found that students’ perceptions of their instructors affected students’ success in FYC classes by decreasing writing anxiety and increasing writing self-efficacy, which resulted in improved FYC performance. Students’ positive reception of instructor feedback thus may help students reach their goals.

Labor-based grading contracts appeared to affect student perceptions of instructor feedback in two main ways: 1) by making students more receptive to feedback in general and 2) by shifting students’ focus from attaining specific letter grades to improving learning. What made students so receptive to instructor feedback? How much of this receptiveness is due to the contract itself? Was any of it due to framing the initial conversations around labor-based grading contracts with the research about grades? Students readily admitted that grades made them (or their peers) stressed, anxious, and risk adverse. Was it about not having to be afraid to try new things?

**May Have Harmful Consequences for Students of Color**

In the specific context of an R1 university, at least one with a notable history of grade inflation in FYC, this study found that labor-based contract grading resulted in fewer students passing with an A. In a community college setting, and/or a Developmental Writing classroom perhaps the overall pass rates would improve, but this study cannot answer this question.

Ellen C. Carillo reviews Inoue’s published empirical accounts in “Grading Contracts: Assessing Their Effectiveness on Different Racial Formations” and *Labor-Based Grading*
"Contracts" in her recently published text: *The Hidden Inequities in Labor-Based Contract Grading*. In *Labor-Based Grading Contracts*, Inoue argues:

In standards-based, conventionally graded ecologies, the time required to meet some standard usually remains invisible because it isn’t technically what the teacher is asking for. They are asking for quality, but what that means in reality for many students of color and multilingual students is more time than their White, middle-class peers. (222)

However, in the specific class of fourteen students he discusses in this account, Inoue notes that the students of color recorded “an average of almost 2 hours more labor each week” than their White peers (*Labor-Based* 251). And furthermore, that “All three of the lowest grades in the course were given to students of color, the two Black students and a Latino” (160). Inoue explains that of the two Black male students in the course, one dropped a few weeks into the semester and the other finished “with a 2.1 [C], but did not complete a labor log,” which Inoue attributes to the student having “other priorities or issues in his life that kept him from doing more labor in the course” (*Labor-Based* 160). Referring to statistics from Education Trust, Inoue notes that “the gap between White and Black student graduation rates has widened” (Nichols et al. 1 qtd. in *Labor-Based* 160). Inoue posits additional factors that might have influenced these two students could include “stereotype threat” (Steele; Steele et al.) or “other social pressures and microaggressions in and outside of our classroom that I just couldn’t see or hear,” concluding “sometimes our assessment ecologies are not enough” (160).

If a core purpose of labor-based grading contracts is creating *fair* environments, then Carillo is right to ask “why that extra labor is necessary”:
Students of color are supposed to benefit from these contracts, but the data Inoue provides don’t bear that out as students of color are doing roughly two more hours of labor per week than their White classmates but not earning anything in return for that labor. (*Hidden Inequities* 52-53).

The experience of one of my students that fall semester may be illustrative of the potential problems with basing grades on “accountability behaviors.” Luis was the type of student that grading contracts might be made for. He had grown up in Florida, possibly as an English as an Additional Language speaker—a Puerto Rican flag was in the backdrop of his dorm room. His writing skills in English were weaker than some, perhaps most noticeably in his seemingly idiosyncratic capitalizations. In the beginning of semester Labor-Based Grading Discussion he wrote:

> In the video, “Why perfect grades don’t matter “, it states that grades cause anxiety, stress, and other mental illnesses. I believe this to the full extent because I get stressed and anxious and sometimes sad when I try my hardest on an assignment and I see a “C”, it makes me tend to feel like I am average or not good enough.

The labor-based grading contract should have been ideal for this type of student, but Luis ended up being my one student to officially withdraw from the course that semester.

Luis did turn in the final draft of the first project, but shortly thereafter his work submission became increasingly inconsistent. We met a few times over Microsoft Teams, and I’ll admit to not being terribly endeared by his (in my perception) “can you do me a favor” attitude. Regardless, he quickly racked up many more late and missing assignment submissions than “allowed” by the grading contract. Although the contract allowed students to “make up” for
late/missing work by completing additional “labor bump” tasks, the amount of work he would have needed to earn a C must have seemed insurmountable, and he withdrew right before the Withdrawal deadline. I felt badly about this because in a traditionally assessed classroom he probably would have slid by with a B-to C-.34

As Poe et al. write, “writing assessment best serves students when justice is taken as the ultimate aim of assessment; once adopted, that aim advances assessment as a principled way to create individual opportunity through identification of opportunity structures” (4-5). We need to ask ourselves if labor-based grading contracts, at least in certain situations, are harming the students we want to support. Future research in Writing Studies needs to consider these questions in relation to the issue of students of color and labor-based grading contracts:

- Close analysis of withdrawal and failure rates of students in labor-based grading contract classrooms, analyzed by demographic subgroups.
- What policies might better support students of color, as well as differently abled students? Half-credit for late assignments? Less stringent attendance policies?
- How much labor do students of color do in comparison to their White peers?
- How much does the amount of labor students do vary with students from different socioeconomic backgrounds?

Require Teacher Training and Support

One aspect of the material that must be attended to is the labor conditions of the instructors teaching First-Year Composition. American Association of University Professors (AAUP) data from 2016 on the academic labor force shows the following:

34 In a course with over 100 different graded discussion posts, quizzes, and assignments, having 10-15 late/missing assignments would not, inevitably, have earned a failing grade.
• 29% tenured or tenure track;
• 17% full-time, non-tenure-track (FT NTT);
• 40% part time; and
• 14% graduate students (AAUP “Data” 6)

The AAUP definition of contingent faculty includes “part-time faculty, full-time faculty outside tenure lines, and graduate student employees” (Curtis and Jacobe 6 qtd. in Melonçon et al. 9).

The numbers are even worse when one focuses specifically on FYC/FYW. In a study conducted by Melonçon et al., the authors surveyed 168 Technical and Professional Communication (TPC) and 145 FYC instructors (Mechenbier et al. 23). They found that nearly 65% of the surveyed faculty were in one-year (potentially renewable) appointments, pointing out the concern that for contingent faculty on such short contracts there is intense pressure to “teach for the evaluations” (30). They argue that “many contingent faculty…fear student evaluations because they are the primary factor in reappointment” (51) and point out that “as all instructors are aware, comments on student evaluations often correlate to student satisfaction with their grades” (51). Student evaluations, of course, are of questionable validity (e.g., Kreitzer and Sweet-Cushman; Uttl, et al.; Subtirelu).

Additionally, despite the popular conception that “anyone” can teach writing, there are clear and substantiated benefits of FYC instructors with advanced study of Writing Studies or Rhetoric & Composition. Personally, I found that careful study of Inoue’s Labor-Based Grading Contracts was not sufficient preparation for me to implement labor-based grading contracts on my own. Instructors without a background in composition theory (much less the historical materialist epistemology Inoue draws heavily from) may not be able to wade through Inoue’s
highly theoretical work. Without a background in Writing Studies/Rhetoric & Composition, FYC instructors are likely to continue traditional assessment practices.

Given the high percentage of variously contingent faculty teaching FYC, this poses a problem for wide-spread implementation of labor-based grading contracts. Implementing a labor-based grading contract for the first time is not for the faint-at-heart. I would not suggest it for new Graduate Teaching Assistants or first-time instructors. I experienced moderate to high levels of anxiety for most of the semester of the pilot study. The two instructors who worked with me in fall 2020 seemed to have a much easier time, which I attribute mainly to having me as mentor and guide to the labor-based grading contract process. I was able to hand them a reasonably effective grading contract based on my experience in the pilot study. I provided an orientation before the semester began, where I outlined the grading contract and offered perspective on problems and questions they might anticipate. I answered their questions by email, text, and phone throughout the semester. This kind of professional support is necessary for instructors experimenting with labor-based grading contracts for the first time.

Ongoing professional development is clearly needed if instructors want to use labor-based grading contracts. In an MLA report from 2007, at doctoral/research institutions, barely 3% of FYC/FYW courses were taught by full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty. While another 23% were taught by full-time, non-tenure-track faculty, the remaining approximately 74% were taught by GTAs (43%) and part-time faculty (31%) (*Education in the Balance*). The majority of these programs offer at least a one – or two-semester practicum course in teaching FYW/FYC. The topic of FYC instructor preparation within graduate English departments is a topic for another dissertation (or several), so I will simply point out here that while the teaching practicum course might be an ideal place to start training instructors on alternative grading
strategies, the practicum is often stretched thin trying to cover the many and myriad topics related to teaching FYC (pedagogy, composition/writing process theory, classroom “management,” and/or the specific curriculum the FYC program is teaching that semester). And these topics float above the competing demands of the different demographics that take FYC/FYW teaching practicum courses—first-year MFA’s or MA’s in their early twenties who may have just graduated with their BA’s the previous semester to PhD students who may have some, none, or vast teaching experience in different instructional settings.

Rather than teaching new instructors specifically to implement labor-based grading contracts, a practicum-based approach might focus on some version of critical language awareness (CLA) or translingualism and translingual pedagogies, as well as alternative assessment/“ungrading” methods. Additionally, as I suggested in the Literature Review, perhaps Rhetoric & Composition programs should offer courses in Applied Linguistics as it relates to teaching composition. Implementing a labor-based grading contract, I would suggest be offered as an option—and probably not for first semester GTA’s. This should begin with a summer orientation that walks instructors through the theory and pragmatics of the approach and then shows them how to adjust the gradebook in their learning management system. For the first month, I would suggest a weekly workshop or “lunch and learn” where the instructors could meet together with a facilitator to discuss strategies and student concerns. This could then taper off into biweekly then monthly meetings. Monthly workshops for experienced instructors would be beneficial to exchange ideas and troubleshoot specific issues. This would need to be supported by the FYC (and English) department.

What this sort of professional development model does not address is the large number of adjunct instructors who teach FYC. A 2017 report by the Teachers of English in the Two-Year
College Association (TYCA) determined that “40% of the nation’s postsecondary English” teachers teach at two-year colleges (Calhoon-Dillahunt, et al. 10). They quote the Center for Community College Student Engagement that “found that 70% of these faculty were contingent or adjunct hires, and this part-time work force taught 58% of classes” (“Contingent Commitments” 3 qtd. in Calhoon-Dillahunt, et al. 10). Many of these instructors put together “full-time” teaching loads by teaching courses at multiple institutions and are often paid far less than a living wage (Melonçon, et al.). Without paid professional development it is unethical to require adjuncts (or other non-tenure-track instructors) to participate in professional development (PD), even if the goal of the PD is supporting social justice goals for students.

In addition, as discussed above, one of the most repeated student complaints was the amount of work. To alleviate the issue of “too much work,” instructors using labor-based grading contracts need the autonomy to build assignments and schedules around the additional labor “bump” assignments. Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), adjunct instructors, and even many Visiting Instructors, work in programs with distributed syllabi and may not have the autonomy to make such curricular changes. First-Year Composition programs may encourage instructors to adopt labor-based grading contracts, but without programmatic support, or at least, approval, it is unlikely individual instructors will be successful.

It is also worth noting here that FYC instructors are overwhelmingly White. Melonçon et al.’s survey participants were 70% female and 93% “identified as Caucasian” (“Introduction” 24). In a 2020 report on adjunct faculty, the American Federation of Teachers reported that 77.7% of adjunct faculty were “White, non-Hispanic” (1). Similarly, a 2020 AAUP report found that, nationally, fewer than 13% of full-time faculty are from underrepresented minorities, “despite making up 32.6% of the U.S. population” (“IPEDS Data” 9). If we want to increase the
number of people of color teaching writing courses, then we cannot set them up for failure by advocating labor-based grading contracts as the only, or even the best way to promote social justice aims. Sherri Craig, an assistant professor of professional and technical writing at Virginia Tech, explicates these dangers loudly in her essay “Contract Grading Ain’t It” in the 2021 special issue of the *WPA: Writing Program Administration* journal on Black Lives Matter and Anti-Racist Projects:

> Contract grading might make my colleagues feel good and ease the guilty burden of using practices with deep white supremacist origins in other areas of their courses, but it felt like a trap to me.

> …The department wanted me, a pre-tenure Black woman, to tell my students, most of whom were white, that grades were oppressive and inherently racist. (146)

We can’t just uncritically accept labor-based grading contract as being the answer to racist writing curriculums.

Ellen Carillo notes related issues incorporating feminist teaching practices in a *non-* Women’s and Gender Studies classroom. Carillo compares her experiences teaching a literature class on “Women and Literature” versus an “Intro to Critical Theory” class. She found that the students in her Women and Literature class “rejected [her] teaching practices” because she “did not take on the authoritative role [her] students expected” (“‘Feminist’ Teaching” 32). She warns instructors not to overlook “the importance of what students bring to the classroom, including their different assumptions about what it means to teach and to learn, and related to that, their assumptions about the student-teacher relationship” (39).
For teachers of color, additional consideration should be given to the possible reception of implementing an alternative assessment system. Medina and Walker argue that “grading contracts should be evaluated up against the consequences for students, and in our case in particular, the intended and unintended consequences for instructors and students of color” (52). Medina found that after switching to a semester long research project grading contract, he received lower teacher evaluation ratings and more negative comments than ever before.

It is difficult to analyze students’ reactions to non-White racialized instructors and labor-based grading contracts in my study data; both Dr. Martiniuk and Miss Nekrashevich are white. And while I identify as Black/a Person of Color, and am visibly raced as non-white, my relatively fairer skin, cisgender, heteronormative appearance, and fluent use of “Standardized” English, a result of my middle-class home language, certainly accord me privileges that other instructors of color may not receive.

The student’s perceptions should be seriously considered. Not all students like labor-based grading contracts. More students need to be reached and researched. As noted above, in addition to replicating or extending this study with a much larger sample of students, one area for follow up research is whether the instructor’s race/ethnicity and gender affect students’ perceptions of grading contracts.

**Should Be Considered in Light of Teachers’ Instructional Goals**

For instructors whose goals are simply to remove the potentially penalizing factor of traditional grading on historically excluded students, then labor-based contract grading is certainly one avenue worth exploring. Although, as I noted above, serious consideration should be given to the effects of using “accountability behaviors” such as attendance and on-time work submission as key components of student grades. In her dissertation study on labor-based
contract grading, Schwarz concludes that “as contract grading continues to increase in
popularity, teachers wanting to employ it ethically will need to lean into” the “contradictions” of
increasing student agency while teachers still remain the ultimate arbiter of A performance (78).
She advises instructors:

If you are worried about using time as a determining factor in distinguishing
between A and B students, then don’t use deadlines or markers of timeliness. If
you are worried about the different number of labored hours it takes for students
to complete assignments, then don’t use labor logs. If you are worried about
absences being unfair, if your institution allows, then do not have attendance
requirements. (Schwarz 78)

As discussed above, labor-based grading contracts appear to have definite advantages on
improving students’ self-concept and attitudes toward writing, as well as their reception of
instructor feedback, so that might be sufficient reason for adoption. The crucial task is for
instructors to be reflective of their own instructional goals.

That sort of reflexivity requires both time and job security—if you’re spending your time
trying to figure how many courses you’ll have next semester—if you’ll have any courses next
semester—you likely have neither the time, nor the affective reserve to deeply consider your
students, your relationship with students, or your pedagogy; you’re simply trying to stay afloat.
Program directors like Inoue, who have the luxury of teaching one (maybe two) course(s) a
semester (or year), are having very different material experiences than the vast majority of FYC
instructors. They have a level of privilege that instructors teaching 4/4 or 5/5 loads—or adjuncts
cobbling together a full-time teaching load at multiple institutions—do not have.
Future research in Writing Studies needs to consider these questions in relation to the issues of teacher training, support, and implementation of labor-based grading contracts:

- What aspects of labor-based grading contracts can be easily replicated and implemented for instructors in variously contingent contract situations?
- What kinds of training and support best aid instructors new to labor-based grading contracts?
- How does instructors’ race/ethnicity/gender/language affect students’ responses to grading contracts?
- What are the effects of labor-based grading contracts on instructors’ student evaluations?

**Can Be Implemented Without an Antiracist Curriculum**

Social justice, like most things in life, operates across a scale. Some proponents of antiracist approaches argue that without changing the rest of the assessment ecology, labor-based contract grading does not go far enough (Baker-Bell; Albracht et al.). As Albracht et al. point out in their “Interchanges” response to Inman and Powell, “an automatic link between all forms of contract grading and social justice does not exist” (147). In her dissertation, Schwarz argues, labor-based grading contracts are not inherently anti-oppressive or antiracist: “while they usually don’t include high-stakes assessment situations, teachers may not be thinking through what assignments they are assessing (and, thus, valuing) and how those assessments play out in ways other than grades (e.g., feedback or peer-review sessions that reinforce white language supremacy)” (72). However, in a workshop on using labor-based contract grading at two-year colleges, I had the opportunity to ask Asao Inoue directly whether he thought labor-based contract grading supports social justice goals without an antiracist curriculum. Inoue replied affirmatively, stating, “What makes it antiracist is the orientation of the teacher and the ecology”
(“Compassion and Equity”). He offered the example of a teacher of 11th/12th grade English classes in Lancaster, England whose department experimented with using labor-based grading contract for high-performing students in order to reduce student anxiety. Inoue concluded that he hopes that, minimally, teachers “don’t punish risk” (which is good for all learners) and allow students to “use their [own] language boldly” and “make their own decisions about it” (“Compassion and Equity”).

Certainly, in my discussion of implementing the labor-based grading contracts with the other two instructors using them as part of my study, while we discussed how this alternative assessment ecology would not “penalize” language minoritized students (especially important in multilingual sections of FYC), we did not discuss the ways in which commonly perceived “good writing” or “academic writing” reflects White, middle-class ways of using language. I tend to agree that as a field, we should be moving toward exploring the social construction of language hierarchies and the material consequences that result, but the evidence from this study supports the conclusion that labor-based grading contract have positive effects on student self-concept and attitudes toward writing without using an explicitly antiracist curriculum.

These are empirically verifiable questions and future research in Writing Studies needs to consider these questions in relation to the issue of antiracist curriculum and pedagogies:

- What are the differences in students’ perceptions and experiences of labor-based grading contracts with and without exposure to an antiracist or linguistic justice curriculum?
- In class sections where an explicitly antiracist/linguistic justice curriculum is used—do students of color and EAL speakers have statistically significant differences in their affective responses, when compared to their White (and monolingual) peers?
What sort of opinions and perspectives do students of color and EAL speakers have about their home language, its connection to their identity—especially as students or writers—their desire (or lack thereof) to learn rules of Standardized Edited American English, and their confidence they can achieve proficiency writing SEAE?

**Conclusions**

“I'm not really sure if I'm a better writer than before. But I definitely think that my mindset has changed in a way that before I was thinking about how can I improve my grade...now it's more like, how can I improve my writing? And I think that thinking this way just made me instantly better writer.” (Ivan)

I entered this dissertation feeling on the outside looking in. I would like to stand with Inoue, April Baker-Bell, and others in their stringent critiques of the White supremacy inherent in “Standard” English, but philosophically, I’m not sure that I do. I had thought by the end of this dissertation I might have come to some more definitive conclusions; alas, I am still unsettled.

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine critical language awareness, or explore translingualism and translingual pedagogical approaches, but I think this is the direction we need to explore. As I read more on raciolinguistics, I remain open to the possibility that my perspective may change.

Even though I’ve spent a lot of this dissertation explaining why I think we are mistaken to think that labor-based contract grading is the end-all be-all, I do think they may have the potential to open up space for advancement of opportunities for students. However, care has to be taken in how we implement labor-based grading contracts and how we train instructors to use them. And the decision needs to be made in consideration of the local contexts.

As Writing Studies scholars more stridently advocate for antiracist pedagogies and assessment practices, we risk harming the very students we are trying to help—and alienating the students whom we would like to become allies—if we offer up labor-based grading contracts as
a one-size-fits-all solution. In *Hidden Inequities*, Carillo cites Jerry Won Lee in “Beyond Translingual Writing,” who argues, “We need to…[help] students to make decisions that make the most sense for them and, through our assessment practices, evaluate their work on the basis of what the student believes is in the best interest for short-term and long-term goals” pointing out that some students will “wish to focus on developing their proficiency in a standardized variety of English” (188 qtd. in Carillo 62). While I disagree with Inman and Powell’s suggestion that labor-based grading contracts “foist the identity of a writer upon students” and function as “another act of colonization” (“Absence” 49), I do believe, as a field, we need to be careful in our assumption that most students don’t want to learn SEAE. And furthermore, that implementing labor-based grading contracts will remove students’ affective desire for grades.

As we make these decisions as individual instructors, WPAs, and as Writing Studies scholars, we need to center students and their perceptions and experiences. While Writing Studies moves further into its embrace of scholars whose work not only critiques, but also calls for an end to teaching SEAE, we need to be careful that our work toward advancing student opportunities does not become performative. In “A Phenomenology of Whiteness,” Sara Ahmed warns against allowing antiracism to become “a new form of organizational pride” (164). Let us not become the fools waving from the tower window, holding up our grading contracts as evidence of how antiracist we’ve become, while students are still locked out below.
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APPENDICES
Appendix A

Demographic and Language Background Survey

The University of South Florida First-Year Composition (FYC) program is seeking information for program evaluation. This is the first of two surveys we are asking you to take in support of this endeavor. This survey asks background/demographic questions, including questions about your student status, race/ethnicity, and language(s) spoken. Your responses WILL be kept private and secure. We thank you for participating in these surveys for the benefit of current and future students in the FYC program. When you have completed this survey, you will automatically be directed to the second survey, which asks you about Self-Beliefs, Writing Beliefs, and Attitudes. If you have any questions, please contact Kara Larson (kklarson@usf.edu).

Q1 Please provide your last name. This information will be anonymized.

________________________________________________________________

Q2 Please provide your first name. This information will be anonymized.

________________________________________________________________

Q3 Please provide your USF ID number. (Your U-number) This information will be anonymized.

________________________________________________________________

Q4 Please write in the two- or three-digit section number of your ENC 1101 course. This can be found by viewing the course code at the top left of your Canvas course. For instance, if you see ENC1101.093FA20, then your section number is 093. This information will be used strictly to group responses; your individual answers will remain anonymous and unidentifiable.

________________________________________________________________

This first set of questions asks you for basic demographic information.

Q4 What is your academic class standing?

○ First-year

○ Sophomore

○ Junior

○ Senior
Q5 What is your enrollment status?

- Full-time (12 or more credits)
- Part-time (Fewer than 12 credits)

Q6 Are you a transfer student?

- Yes
- No

Q7 Where did you transfer from? ________________________________

Q8 Please select the response which contains your age today.

- Under 18
- 18 - 22
- 23 - 30
- 30 +
- Prefer not to answer

Q9 With which gender do you identify?

- Woman
- Man
☐ Transgender

☐ Non-binary

☐ Genderqueer or gender nonconforming

☐ An identity not listed, self-identify_____________

☐ Prefer not to answer

Skip To: Q10 If With which gender do you identify? = An identity not listed, self-identify

Display This Question:
If With which gender do you identify? = An identity not listed, self-identify

Q10 Please write in your identify__________________________

Q11 With which race/ethnicity do you identify? (Select all that apply)

☐ African American or Black

☐ American Indian or Alaska Native

☐ Asian American or Asian

☐ Hispanic or Latinx

☐ Middle Eastern or North African

☐ Multiracial
☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

☐ White

☐ Prefer not to answer

☐ An identity not listed, self-identify_____________

Skip To: Q12 If With which race/ethnicity do you identify? (Select all that apply) = An identity not listed, self-identify_____________

Display This Question:
   If With which race/ethnicity do you identify? (Select all that apply) = An identity not listed, self-identify_____________

Q11 Please write in your identify_____________

Q12 Do you identify as someone with a disability?
   ○ Yes
   ○ No
   ○ Prefer not to answer

This next set of questions asks you about the language(s) you speak and your language/educational background.

Q13 Are you an INTO student participating in one of the INTO Pathways programs?
   ○ Yes
   ○ No
   ○ Prefer not to answer
Q14 What is the language that you first acquired?

- Arabic
- Bengali
- Burmese
- Cambodian
- Cantonese
- Cape Verdean Creole
- English
- Farsi
- French
- German
- Greek
- Haitian-Creole
- Hindi/Hindustani
- Hmong
- Italian
- Japanese
○ Korean
○ Mandarin
○ Portuguese
○ Punjabi
○ Russian
○ Somali
○ Spanish
○ Telugu
○ Toishanese
○ Urdu
○ Vietnamese
○ Wu

○ Another language(s) not listed: __________

○ Prefer not to answer

Note: Questions 16 and 18 use the same list of languages. I have not repeated the list for each question in this document.
Q15 Another language(s) not listed: __________

Q16 What is your primary (most proficient/fluent) language for written communication? (select one)

Q17 Another language(s) not listed: __________

Q18 In what other languages are you proficient/fluent in writing? (select as many as apply)

Q19 Another language(s) not listed: __________

Q20 Which statement best describes your English Language Learning background?

○ I can read a high-school level text and write a high-school level essay in a language other than English.

○ My schooling was in a language other than English for several years, but today I could not write a high school level text in this language.

○ I can read and write a language other than English at a simple everyday level, but had little or no formal schooling in it.

○ I studied a language other than English only as a foreign language.

○ My schooling was never in a language other than English.
Q21 Which statement best describes your writing background?

- English is the only language in which I write.
- I write in a language other than English fluently, but am more comfortable in English.
- I use a language other than English in some writing situations, but I would not describe myself as able to write in this language fluently.
- I am equally comfortable writing in English and another language.
- I am more comfortable writing in another language than I am writing in English.
- Prefer not to answer

This last set of questions asks about your parents and how you are paying for college.

Q22 Have either of your parent(s) or guardians earned a bachelor’s degree or higher?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

Q23 Did you receive a Federal Pell Grant as part of your financial aid package?

- Yes
- No
- I don’t know
Q24 Are you employed?

- Yes, 20 hours or more each week
- Yes, 19 hours or less each week
- No
- Prefer not to answer

Q26 Is your place of employment on-campus?

- Yes
- No

You have reached the end of the Student Demographic and Language Background Survey. Thank you for your participation. As a reminder, all responses are stored privately and securely. Your individual responses will be anonymized. Pressing the next button will take you to the second and final survey on Self-Beliefs, Writing Beliefs, and Attitudes.
Appendix B

Self-Beliefs, Writing Beliefs, and Attitudes Survey (SWAS)

1. I wish we wrote less in school.
2. I do not get high grades in writing because I am just not intelligent enough.
3. I do not like having to revise my paper.
4. I would rather write a short story than an academic essay.
5. When writing it is easy for me to think of the right words.
6. When my class is asked to write something for class, such as a research paper, an essay, a lab report, or a creative piece, mine is one of the best.
7. I enjoy proofreading my writing to make sure the words I have written are spelled correctly.
8. I feel confident in my overall writing abilities.
9. Writing helps me learn.
10. When writing a paper, it is easy for me to decide on an organizational structure.
11. I feel confident sharing my writing with my peers.
12. In comparison to other academic subjects, I am best at writing.
13. Overall, I have positive feelings about writing.
14. When I write a paper, it is easy for me to come up with ideas.
15. When I get a high grade on a writing assignment, it is because I got lucky.
16. When I am proofreading, it is easy for me to catch my mistakes.
17. I think it would be fun to be an author who writes books.
18. I do not mind when an instructor asks me to revise my writing.
19. I believe it is very important to be a successful writer.
20. I know that I will do well in writing this year.

21. I am confident in writing for many purposes (persuade, inform, entertain, or express) in various academic forms (research papers, essays, or creative writing).

22. Finishing every writing assignment is very important to me.

23. I would like to become an even better writer than I already am.

24. I think I would enjoy a career in journalism.

25. I like writing long papers at school.

26. I feel most successful if I see that my writing has really improved.

27. When I get a high grade on a paper, it is because I put in a lot of effort.

28. Writing can be very enjoyable.

29. I like to write.

30. I can write successful papers because writing is easy for me.

Questions were rated on a 4-point Likert scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A lot like me</td>
<td>A little like me</td>
<td>A little different from me</td>
<td>Very different from me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

Perceptions of Ecological Variables Survey

The first set of questions asks you about your perceptions of the grading contract.

1. I believe the grading contract has created a fair grading environment.
2. My classmates and I are able to negotiate aspects of the contract with our instructor.
3. The grading contract has allowed me to have positive interactions with my instructor.
4. The grading contract has allowed me to have positive interactions with my peers.
5. I understand why my instructor is using a grading contract in order to meet the stated course objectives.
6. I understand that my instructor is using a grading contract in order to provide new writing experiences that we have negotiated together.
7. I understand how my final grade will be calculated based on the grading contract.
8. The grading contract has allowed me to take risks in my writing.
9. I am satisfied with the writing feedback I receive from my instructor.
10. I am satisfied with the writing feedback I received from my peers.
11. The grading contract has allowed me to learn valuable writing processes.
12. The grading contract has allowed me to produce valuable writing products.
13. My work in this class has allowed me to envision writing in new ways.
14. My work in this class has allowed me to form an identity as a writer.

The second set of questions asks you about your perceptions of the labor involved in this class.

15. The labor I am engaged with in this class is of overall value to me.
16. I am increasingly aware of the types and amount of labor it takes for me to produce successful writing.
17. I believe the grading contract has increased my overall opportunities to learn.
18. I believe the experience of learning within a grading contract system will be useful to me in my future coursework.

19. I am satisfied with the amount of labor required to earn the contracted grade I identified in the course.

20. I am satisfied with the types of labor required to earn the contracted grade I identified in the course.

All questions will have this follow up question:

Please tell us more about why you answered this question that way. Please provide some examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Very Strongly Disagree</th>
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<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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## Appendix D

### Breakdown of Main Components from Pilot Study Grading Contract (Spring 2020)

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<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>F</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong># of Absences</strong></td>
<td>1 or less</td>
<td>2 or fewer</td>
<td>3 or fewer</td>
<td>4 or fewer</td>
<td>5 or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tardiness</strong> (under 10 min)/ Leaving Early (under 15 min)</td>
<td>1 – 2 times</td>
<td>2 – 3 times</td>
<td>3 – 4 times</td>
<td>4 – 5 times</td>
<td>5 or more times</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Participation</strong></td>
<td>Fewer than 3 minor infractions; No major infractions</td>
<td>3 - 4 minor infractions; No major infractions</td>
<td>4 - 5 minor infractions; No major infractions</td>
<td>5 – 6 minor infractions; 1 or No major infractions</td>
<td>7 or more minor infractions; 2 or more major infractions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaboration</strong></td>
<td>Fewer than 3 minor infractions; No major infractions</td>
<td>3 - 4 minor infractions; No major infractions</td>
<td>4 - 5 minor infractions; No major infractions</td>
<td>5 – 6 minor infractions; 1 or No major infractions</td>
<td>7 or more minor infractions; 2 or more major infractions</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong># of Late Assigns</strong></td>
<td>2 or fewer</td>
<td>3 or fewer</td>
<td>4 or fewer</td>
<td>5 or fewer</td>
<td>6 or more</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong># of Missed Assigns.</strong></td>
<td>1 or less</td>
<td>2 or fewer</td>
<td>3 or fewer</td>
<td>4 or fewer</td>
<td>5 or more</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong># of Ignored Class/ Homework Assigns.</strong></td>
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<td>1 or fewer</td>
<td>2 or fewer</td>
<td>3 or fewer</td>
<td>4 or more</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Exceptional Work Products</strong></td>
<td>90% or more of rubric scored assignments are at “Exceeds Expectations” or above</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E

Breakdown of Main Components from Grading Contract (Fall 2020)\textsuperscript{35}

<table>
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<tr>
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<th># of Ignored/ Missed Major Assignments (Final Submissions)</th>
<th># of Ignored/ Missing Assignments</th>
<th># of Late Assignments</th>
<th>Additional Labor</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>( \leq 2 )</td>
<td>( \leq 4 )</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>( \leq 2 )</td>
<td>( \leq 4 )</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>( \leq 1 )</td>
<td>( \leq 3 )</td>
<td>( \leq 5 )</td>
<td><em>To move back up a letter grade, you must complete 3 additional labor tasks</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>( \leq 2 )</td>
<td>( \leq 4 )</td>
<td>( \leq 6 )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>( \leq 3 )</td>
<td>5 or more</td>
<td>7 or more</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

***If you fail to meet the threshold standard for any criteria in a given grade bracket, your grade moves down to the lower letter grade. In other words, if you have turned in all Major Assignment Final Submissions, turned in 4 (or fewer) Late Assignments, but have 3 Ignored Assignments, then your grade drops from the B to a C.***

\textsuperscript{35} In consultation with the class, I revised the table on October 26, 2020.
# Appendix F

## 15-point Rubric for Minor Assignments (Spring 2020)

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<th>Exceptional (15)</th>
<th>Great (14)</th>
<th>Meets Expectations (13-12)</th>
<th>Requires Development (11-10)</th>
<th>Significant Development Required (9-5)</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory or Incomplete (4-1)</th>
<th>Zero (0)</th>
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<td>The submission meets and exceeds all assignment expectations, demonstrates creative and critical thinking, and fulfills all expected conventions of university-level writing.</td>
<td>The submission meets most assignment expectations, demonstrates critical thinking, and fulfills most expected conventions of university-level writing. The submission would benefit from minor development.</td>
<td>The submission meets some assignment expectations, demonstrates emerging critical thinking, and/or fulfills some of the expected conventions of university-level writing. The submission requires general development.</td>
<td>The submission meets few assignment expectations, demonstrates limited critical thinking, or fulfills few of the expected conventions of university-level writing. The submission requires significant development.</td>
<td>The submission does not meet the assignment expectations, does not demonstrate university-level thinking, or does not fulfill a significant number of the expected conventions of university-level writing.</td>
<td>No assignment has been submitted.</td>
<td></td>
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Appendix G

Labor-Based Contract Grading Discussion Assignment

Students read Alfie Kohn’s short article “The Case Against Grades” and watch a ~ 3-minute video produced by *The Atlantic magazine*, entitled “Why Perfect Grades Don’t Matter.” Students were asked to summarize the Kohn piece, identify three quotes from it, list three “takeaways” from the video, and choose and respond to one discussion question from a list I had curated. The discussion questions included things like: *How does the grading system effect students? Why do students focus more on grading than learning? Why are students sometimes intimidated by grades? Do you think the grading process needed? Should our success be based on a letter grade?*
## Copyright Permission for Wright, et al. Figure

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<td>Will you be translating?</td>
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<td>Title</td>
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<td>Portions</td>
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