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Student engagement in English 101 at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Laura McIntosh Orr
University of Tennessee

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Laura McIntosh Orr entitled "Student engagement in English 101 at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

<div align="right">Mary Jo Reiff, Major Professor</div>

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

<div align="right">Accepted for the Council:</div>

<div align="right"><u>Carolyn R. Hodges</u></div>

<div align="right">Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School</div>

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Michael Keene

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Russel Hirst

                                     Accepted for the Council:

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                                     Carolyn R. Hodges
                                     Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

Student Engagement in English 101 at the University of Tennessee – Knoxville

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee – Knoxville

Laura McIntosh Orr
May 2009

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family, for encouraging my love of reading and writing; for their patience throughout the process of earning this degree; and most importantly, for their unwavering support, generosity, understanding, and love.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank all those who helped me complete my Master of Arts degree in English. Thank you, Dr. Mary Jo Reiff, for serving as my thesis director and contributing your time, expertise and invaluable assistance throughout this project. Thank you also to Dr. Michael Keene and Dr. Russell Hirst for your guidance during the research and writing process and for serving on my committee.

I would also like to thank the instructors who took the time to participate in this thesis study despite their hectic schedules and the person who made sense of the numbers, Cynthia Hackney of the Statistical Consulting Center.

Thanks also are due to Bruce and to my friends, for their patience with my elucubration and stress, and for their steadfast love and encouragement.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between student engagement and teaching techniques in English 101 courses at the University of Tennessee - Knoxville. Specifically, the main goals of this study were to determine which techniques are most related to engagement, and whether students and instructors consider the same techniques to be beneficial. Student and instructor surveys were collected from approximately 215 students and nine teachers.

Student responses to multiple choice questions have revealed that student engagement is most closely associated with variables related to course organization, feedback and assessment, active learning techniques, and institutional involvement. Additionally, students and instructors mostly agree about the effectiveness of student engagement techniques, with the exception of detailed feedback, which students rate more highly, and use of computer communication, which instructors rate more highly.

Furthermore, short answer responses show students and instructors concur that active learning methods and selection of interesting paper topics are techniques currently used to engage students. Students and instructors agree that use of active learning techniques will increase in the future, and instructors also report that they will incorporate more technology in the course. Significantly, the results also demonstrated that many students consider themselves engaged in English 101.

Implications for composition pedagogy are provided as well as suggestions for future research.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

As an instructor of First-Year Composition (FYC), I often find myself wondering how to make composition relevant to my students' lives. Establishing this relevance can be a challenge since FYC is a general education requirement and, as a result, instructors often encounter students' apathy or frustration. Consequently, many of my conversations with other instructors focus on how to keep students interested and involved in our courses. We discuss our experiences with new techniques, such as blogging, and constantly reevaluate our teaching methodology to help promote student success. Most college-level instructors would agree that students who are motivated and interested in a course are more likely to come to class prepared, to make better grades on assignments, and to pass the class; however, the methods most likely to increase these behaviors are less clear. For all of these reasons, I became interested in research on student engagement in higher education. I soon discovered that although much of the research on student engagement applies to FYC, no studies specifically examined the topic of how to increase engagement in FYC. Therefore, I designed a study based on survey research to find out what techniques FYC instructors could implement to promote student engagement and success.

Defining Student Engagement

The causes and effects of student engagement are studied in an ever-growing body of literature; yet, as Bowen (2005) argues, the definition of student engagement is somewhat nebulous: "Despite this emerging emphasis [on student engagement], explicit

consensus about what we actually mean by engagement … is lacking" (4). For instance, Kuh (2003) defines student engagement as "the time and energy students devote to educationally sound activities inside and outside the classroom" (25). Elsewhere, Carini, Kuh, and Klein (2006) explain, "The premise [of student engagement] is deceptively simple, perhaps self-evident: The more students study or practice a subject, the more they tend to learn about it. Likewise, the more students practice and get feedback on their writing, analyzing, or problem solving, the more adept they should become" (2).

Bowen (2005) offers a more precise definition: he contends that the definitions of student engagement found in the literature consist of four major elements. For Bowen, the most fundamental component of student engagement is "student engagement with the learning process" via active learning. Braxton, Milem, and Sullivan (2000) define active learning as "any activity that involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing"; pedagogies of active learning include class discussion, cooperative learning, debates, or role playing (571). The three other major components of Bowen's definition of student engagement are as follows: engagement with the subject matter, engagement with multidisciplinary contexts, and engagement with the human condition as a whole, "especially in its social, cultural, and civic dimensions" (4). Therefore, student engagement means eliciting effective academic behaviors, interest in the subject matter, and thought about broader contexts and implications.

Engagement and Academic Performance

The study of student engagement has been of interest since the 1970s, when Astin (1975) and Tinto (1974) published groundbreaking studies of students' interactions with

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the college environment. In 1975, Astin began work on a longitudinal study of student persistence that resulted in his theory of student development. Astin's (1984) theory claims that student involvement, defined as the amount of physical and psychological energy the students invest in their educational experience, is a crucial factor contributing to student persistence (Berger and Milem). Astin primarily relies on behavioral definitions of involvement, such as participation in academic and co-curricular activities, and interaction with peers, faculty, and administration, rather than subjective measures (Ullah and Wilson). Tinto (1974, 1993) has also emphasized the need to better understand the relationship between involvement and persistence. He developed and refined an Interactionalist Model of Student Departure, which focuses on the role of student involvement in student decisions to leave a university, and suggests that student engagement contributes to learning, retention, and a quality undergraduate experience (Umbach and Wawrzynski).

According to the literature, increasing students' academically effective behaviors and interests can have important short- and long-term rewards for both students and institutions. Astin (1993) argues that student involvement "enhance[s] almost all aspects of learning and academic performance" (Umbach and Wawrzynski). More recently, Carini, Kuh, and Klein (2006) have claimed that "student engagement is linked positively to desirable learning outcomes such as critical thinking and grades" (23). These benefits of student engagement are evident throughout students' college careers: Kuh and colleagues (2008) found that student engagement positively affects grades for both freshmen and seniors in college (555). Furthermore, as Braxton, Milem, and Sullivan emphasize, "the classroom functions as a gateway for student involvement in the

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academic and social communities of a college" (570). Therefore, it should come as no surprise that student engagement in the classroom "leads to greater integration in the social and academic systems of the college and promotes institutional commitment" (Berger and Milem 644). For all of these reasons, student engagement is also related to student retention.

Engagement and Retention

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is the most popular survey instrument for assessing student engagement; it is also widely used as a way of gauging the overall quality of education at an institution – in 2008, 769 institutions participated in NSSE ("Promoting Engagement" 3). A study conducted by Hughes and Pace (2003) used NSSE to survey 169 freshmen at Humboldt State University to examine the link between student engagement and persistence and found that "Although the number of students who withdrew is rather small, the differences in [student engagement] of the freshmen who were still attending and those who had withdrawn were substantial … For those who withdrew, the level of engagement was always lower" (1). Based on this data, Hughes and Pace conclude that studying student retention is a "worthwhile application" of student engagement instruments and research (15).

A larger study of student engagement and retention conducted by Kuh and colleagues (2008), found even more striking results. They merged student data for 6,193 students from eighteen U.S. colleges and universities to examine the relationships between student engagement, grades, and persistence. The study found that student engagement affects "persistence to the second year at the same institution, even after

controlling for a host of pre-college characteristics and other variables linked with these outcomes, such as merit aid and parental education. Equally important, the effects of engagement are generally in the same positive direction for students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds" (555). Furthermore, Kuh and colleagues (2008) note that though increased student engagement benefits all students, the effects are even larger for lower ability students and students of color compared with White students (555). The additional benefits of student engagement for underprepared students have also been mentioned in Cruce, Wolniak, Seifert, and Pascarella (2006), who used survey and demographic data from 3,895 students at twenty-three institutions to examine the effects of student engagement. According to their study, "good practices have a compensatory effect for those students who enter college below the average on a particular measure of cognitive ability or orientation to learning" (379). Therefore, addressing issues of student engagement should be a priority because engagement has significant academic benefits – in terms of grades and retention - for students across a wide range of skill levels and demographic groups.

Engagement and Life Skills

Furthermore, student engagement is important for increasing students' life skills because "students who are involved in educationally productive activities in college are developing habits of the mind and heart that enlarge their capacity for continuous learning and personal development" (Carini, Kuh, and Klein 2). As Lee Shulman (2002) suggests in his taxonomy entitled Shulman's Table of Learning, "Learning begins with student engagement, which in turn leads to knowledge and understanding" (38). In turn,

understanding leads to action, critical reflection, judgment, and, ultimately, the development of commitments: "In commitment, we become capable of professing our understandings and our values, our faith and our love, our skepticism and our doubts, internalizing those attributes and making them integral to our identities. These commitments, in turn, make new engagements possible – and even necessary" (38). In other words, Shulman asserts that student engagement is part of a cyclical process of learning that will enrich the student throughout his or her lifetime. Thus, student gains in critical thinking and educationally productive practices are not only associated with greater degrees of success and persistence within their institutions, but student engagement can contribute to lifelong learning.

FYC Pedagogy and Issues of Engagement

FYC instructors have also long emphasized the importance of the student experience in the classroom, involvement with the writing process, active learning techniques, and applications of course content to broader contexts. Moreover, many of the variables (including group work, class discussion, and student-instructor interaction) shown to promote student engagement are also highlighted in FYC pedagogy. In the 1970s, as Astin and Tinto were researching student engagement, composition pedagogy was heavily influenced by the expressionist movement. Both student engagement and expressionist pedagogy promote students' responsibility and control over their learning. Expressionists such as Donald Murray and Peter Elbow envisioned a student-centered writing classroom with less focus on the authority of the teacher and more on the voices of the students, teaching writing as a means of reaching personal truths and creating

broader implications and connections. Murray considered his classroom to be a writing community that consisted of the "interaction of teacher and students, writers and readers" (Burnham 24). Consequently, expressionist pedagogies such as journaling, freewriting, cooperative learning, peer-editing, and class discussion began to occupy a larger place in the composition classroom. Instructors began to make composition more accessible and interesting to students by focusing on students' effective writing behaviors (such as prewriting, drafting, and revising) and placing greater emphasis on exploration of the self rather than grammatical correctness. Expressionist pedagogy's focus on effective writing behaviors, individual voice, cooperative learning, and broader implications mirror the four main components of student engagement: active learning, interest in the subject matter, and connections to other disciplines and the human condition.

Other pedagogies that focus on student engagement include what Richard Fulkerson (2005) classifies as "Social Theories and Critical/Cultural Studies Approaches" (659). According to Fulkerson, these approaches primarily focus on "systemic cultural injustices inflicted by dominant societal groups and dominant discourses on those with less power, and upon the empowering possibilities of rhetoric if students are educated to 'read' carefully and 'resist' the social texts that help keep some groups subordinated" (659). These "Social Theories and Critical/Cultural Studies Approaches" are similar to expressionism because they also emphasize a student-centered methodology and often focus on process rather than product. However, their reasons for focusing on these techniques are very different from those of expressionism: the main goal of expressionism is to emphasize individual voice, whereas Critical and Cultural Studies Approaches attempt to engage students in the critique of culture and society. For

example, feminist pedagogy, which emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, focuses on the recognition and renunciation of a sexist and patriarchal contemporary society. For feminists, student-centered and process approaches are ways of resisting traditional, patriarchal, lecture-based pedagogies. Clearly, Critical and Cultural Studies Approaches and student engagement pedagogy share a strong focus on engaging students through critically considering their active role as public citizens.

As a result of these and other groundbreaking movements in FYC, today's composition classroom relies on numerous methods that have been shown to impact student engagement. Griffith (1996) discusses these techniques, including consistent contact with faculty through one-to-one conferences, small class sizes which encourage interaction with faculty and peers, an emphasis on group work and peer editing, and student-centered pedagogy techniques which break down some of the distance between faculty and students (4-7). Further, he argues that FYC programs promote effective techniques for increasing student engagement and thereby facilitate student retention efforts. Kuh (2003) also emphasizes the writing-intensive course's role in facilitating student engagement: "The more pages students write, the more pages faculty members have to read and give feedback about. And the more of that we do, the more likely it is that students will make appointments during office hours to talk with us about that feedback" (28). Moreover, not only do the structure and course design of FYC classes have important impacts, but the very act of writing has been shown to positively influence student engagement.

Writing Intensive Courses and Engagement

Richard Light (2003) surveyed 365 undergraduate students at Harvard University about their levels of engagement in their courses and found striking results: "The relationship between the amount of writing for a course and students' level of engagement – whether engagement is measured by time spent on the course, or the intellectual challenge it presents, or students' level of interest in it – is stronger than the relationship between students' engagement and any other course characteristic" (28). Additionally, Light found, students spend more time working on writing in courses that require several shorter formal writing assignments rather than one longer assignment: "Students spend about 40 percent more time on average – twelve hours per week as opposed to less than nine hours when asked to do four five-page papers than when asked to write one twenty-page piece" (29). Thus, the amount of time spent engaged with the course content is dependent not only upon the amount of writing, but upon the structure of assignments, as well.

The importance of writing-intensive courses has also been underscored by the National Survey of Student Engagement. Recently, NSSE collaborated with The Council of Writing Program Administrators to develop a supplemental set of questions examining how writing is taught and how students approach writing assignments. In 2008, these supplemental questions were given to 23,000 students attending 82 U.S. colleges and Universities. The results revealed that "The amount of writing was positively correlated with engagement, i.e., the more students wrote, the more they engaged in active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching experiences, and deep learning" (21). Moreover, the survey found that extensive, intellectually stimulating

writing assignments result in increased levels of critical thinking activities such as analysis, synthesis, and integration of ideas from various sources, as well as increased concern with interaction with course content both inside and outside the classroom. Furthermore, students who engaged in challenging writing activities "reported greater personal, social, practical, and academic learning and development" ("Promoting Engagement" 22). Evidently, writing-intensive courses such as FYC can have significant positive impact on student engagement.

Focus and Contributions of the Current Study

FYC is the ideal site to study student engagement because it is required for the majority of incoming freshmen, and the relationship between first year experiences and retention is well-known. According to Trotter and Roberts, "The literature has consistently declared the first year to be the most critical in shaping persistence decisions and plays a formative role in influencing student attitudes and approaches to learning" (372). Because students in FYC are enrolled in the course to fulfill a requirement, and not necessarily because of an interest in the subject matter, finding ways of increasing student engagement is particularly important. Additionally, the smaller class size in FYC offers a unique opportunity to study student-instructor interactions, as well as to examine the effects of more time-consuming student engagement techniques, such as frequent, detailed feedback from instructors.

Although elements of course design, technique, and emphasis of FYC are closely tied to pedagogies of student engagement, I have not been able to find any studies of student engagement within FYC courses. Most research on writing and student

engagement draws results from writing-intensive courses throughout the university curriculum. The one article I have discovered that explicitly relates FYC and student engagement (Griffith 1996) relies entirely upon anecdotal evidence to support its claims. Quantitative data about effective techniques for increasing student engagement in FYC courses is virtually non-existent.

Therefore, the present study uses surveys of English 101 students and instructors at the University of Tennessee - Knoxville to discover what specific qualities of students, instructors, and course design positively influence student engagement. The primary research questions to be addressed are: 1) What specific techniques can instructors use to increase levels of student engagement? and 2) Do students and instructors consider the same techniques to be useful in increasing engagement? By providing some answers to these questions, this study hopes to contribute to instructors' knowledge of ways to increase student engagement in English 101 in order to help students have a more educational and meaningful first year experience, and to have a positive impact on first-year student retention. As well, it seeks to contribute to a larger body of professional literature regarding variables affecting student engagement.

CHAPTER 2 – BACKGROUND AND METHODS

Instructors try many different techniques to keep students involved in their courses, from class discussion, to group work, to multimedia components, but it is difficult to know which techniques are most useful. Therefore, studies that examine the effects of a variety of techniques are important. Kuh and colleagues (2008) draw attention to the importance of research in student engagement pedagogy when he observes that student engagement is the result of "both the time and energy students invest in educationally purposeful activities and the effort institutions devote to using effective educational practices" (542). As mentioned in Chapter 1, First-Year Composition (FYC) is an ideal site to study and promote student engagement, but no empirical studies have focused upon this topic. Although several studies exist that examine what techniques contribute to student engagement, none of these studies is specific to FYC. None of these studies examines the difference between what techniques students and teachers consider effective, either. Therefore, the current study uses surveys of students and instructors to determine which techniques are most useful for increasing student engagement in English 101, and whether students and instructors consider the same techniques to be effective.

Discussion of Variables

Researchers have set the stage for this study by identifying a variety of factors related to student engagement. In order to study the relationships between student engagement and a wide variety of instructional techniques, I defined my variables by drawing on the literature on student engagement, as well as the related fields of retention

and active learning. Because this study is focused on widely applicable techniques of student engagement, it does not take into account personal characteristics of the instructor, although studies such as Freedman, Anderman, and Jensen (2007) suggest that instructors' enthusiasm, friendliness, and helpfulness can also contribute to students' participation and sense of belonging in class. This study examines the relationships between student engagement and student-instructor interaction; active learning techniques like class discussion and group work; elements of class structure, such as attendance policy and organization; feedback and assessment; use of technology; institutional involvement; and demographic characteristics.

Student-Instructor Interaction

The first variable of interest in this study, students' interaction with faculty members, is one of the most commonly researched variables related to student engagement. Tinto's (1987) theory suggested that student motivation is related to students' perceived relationships with faculty. More recent research has demonstrated the influence of faculty member interaction on persistence and academic achievement. Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) observe that several studies have found a "strong association of both formal and informal faculty contact to enhanced student learning. These interactions influenced the degree to which students became engaged with faculty and were frequently the best predictors of student persistence" (156). In their study of NSSE data from 42,259 students at 137 institutions, Umbach and Wawrzynski declare that "Course-related [student-faculty] interactions appear to be positively related with student engagement. Additionally, even after including all controls, campuses where

faculty report frequent course-related interactions both first-year and senior students were more challenged and engaged in active and collaborative learning activities" (163). Two specific techniques related to student-instructor interaction are maintaining eye contact with the student, and recognition of the student outside of class. The topic of eye contact is mentioned anecdotally as an effective practice in Gray and Madson's article, "Ten Easy Ways to Engage Your Students," and the Berger and Milem's study includes instructor's greeting the student outside of class as a factor related to student perceptions of institutional support.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, FYC courses provide a particularly interesting opportunity to study student-faculty interaction both inside and outside of class. At the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, FYC courses have a limited enrollment of twenty-three students, which gives students greater access to their instructors. Furthermore, the Composition program at this institution requires all instructors to have conferences with their students outside of the classroom twice per semester: according to the document "Guidelines for the Teaching of Composition at UTK," the purpose of these conferences is to "discuss individualized writing problems and to address particular writing concerns" (1). Since these conferences are a priority, instructors are allowed to cancel up to two weeks of class to schedule these meetings. Therefore, students in FYC at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville are a population well-suited to shed light on the effects of student-instructor interaction on student engagement.

The student survey focuses on several techniques related to student-instructor interaction; it asks questions regarding the frequency of student-instructor meetings and emails, and the timeliness of instructors' responses to emails. It also inquires about the

instructor's recognition of the individual student, including whether the instructor knows the student's name, if the instructor greets the student if they see each other outside of class, and whether the instructor maintains eye contact. Also, both student and instructor surveys examined the degree to which student-instructor interaction outside of class (through conferences or email) was considered important for increasing student engagement. As noted above, most of these issues have been mentioned in the literature. However, questions related to timeliness of email responses and the instructor's knowledge of the student's name were developed for this survey.

Active Learning

Another variable of interest in this study consists of active learning techniques; activities such as debates, group work and class discussion rather than the traditional lecture format have been shown to impact student learning and retention. Braxton, Milem, and Sullivan (2000) focus on the impacts of active learning on student engagement with the course material: "Active learning enhances student knowledge and understanding of course content. Thus, students who frequently encounter active learning in their courses perceive themselves gaining knowledge and understanding from their coursework" (571). Farmer-Dougan and McKinney (2000) specifically focused on the relationship between class discussion, group work, and freshmen student engagement; the study found "A positive correlation between a preference for classes using a discussion format and high engagement," as well as a positive correlation between student engagement and group work. Cooperative learning techniques were also studied by Peterson and Miller (2004), who found that among other benefits, students working in

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small groups experienced increased levels of motivation and student engagement (123). Evidently, active learning activities are related to the student engagement in educationally effective activities and with the subject matter. As noted in Chapter 1, composition instructors since the Expressionist movement have been concerned with student-centered pedagogy, and have embraced group work and class discussion. As Hephzibah Roskelly observes in her article, "The Risky Business of Group Work," the influences of class discussion and group work are pervasive: "All of us compositionists believe in group work… The terms that dominate our collective conversation… - collaboration, peer response, discourse community, shared knowledge – have become symbols for a pedagogical agenda that values talk and activity as learning tools" (123). Since most FYC courses use active learning techniques, examining whether they impact student engagement is of particular value. Therefore, the study asked questions about whether students are required to work in groups or partners, if the instructor leads class discussions in which students are encouraged to participate, and whether the instructor primarily relies upon lecture methods. Additionally, both students and instructors were asked to evaluate the importance of class discussion and group work in encouraging student engagement.

Course Requirements

Questions about course requirements, particularly those related to attendance and organization, were also included in this study. Previous researchers have found that attendance is an important factor in student engagement and persistence. Instructors who enforce attendance policies, either by consistently taking the roll or by requiring daily

assignments or quiz grades, encourage students to remain actively involved and successful in the course. According to Trotter and Roberts (2006), a recent study found that the attendance rate of those students who passed a particular course ranged from 67% to 98%, with an average attendance rate of 88%, while attendance of those who failed ranged from 53% to 92%, with an average rate of 69% (374). Therefore, Trotter and Roberts strongly recommend to instructors that "an ethos of attendance being a requirement should be encouraged" in order to promote student success (382). Other course requirements related to student success are instructor organization, clarity of expectations, and effective use of class time: in fact, these factors are regularly examined on course evaluations at the University of Tennessee; whether these variables are related to student engagement as well is of interest. Numerous questions related to course requirements were included on the student survey; students were asked if the instructor is well-organized, if the instructor holds regular office hours, if class begins and ends on time, if course goals and requirements are clearly explained, and whether the attendance policy is enforced or daily graded assignments are required. Also, both students and instructors were asked whether an enforced attendance policy is useful for increasing student engagement.

Feedback and Assessment

The surveys also examined the extent to which feedback and assessment-related variables affect student engagement. Several researchers have noted the impact of feedback and assessment; for example, Farmer-Dougan and McKinney (2000) surveyed 1,000 students from Illinois State University to determine how students define student engagement. Their results indicate that satisfaction with grade compensation is one of

five main predictors of student engagement. Consequently, clarity and detail of feedback is very important. Trotter and Roberts (2006) claim that "Good assessment will probably have a greater influence on how and what students learn than any other single factor. The evidence suggests the importance of an element of continuous summative assessment beginning early in the term, accompanied by appropriate feedback" (375). Similarly, the University of Tennessee's FYC program guidelines highlight the importance of detailed feedback: "Teachers' comments should address the large-scale or global issues… of the paper as well as local issues... These rhetorical concerns should be addressed through both marginal comments within the paper and a formal summary comment at the end of the paper that describes strengths and weaknesses and makes recommendations for revising or applying suggestions to the next paper ("Guidelines" 4). These guidelines imply that feedback has an important impact on student learning over the course of the semester: instructor comments are expected to help students focus on their strengths and weaknesses as writers, and offer ideas and techniques that students can apply to future essays. One of the reasons that FYC enrollment is limited to twenty-three students is to allow instructors time to adequately provide feedback for each student. Since instructor comments on student essays play an important part in student learning in FYC, studying the effects of feedback and assessment on student engagement is particularly significant. Student surveys examined the timeliness of instructor feedback on both major and minor assignments, and whether instructor feedback is sufficiently detailed and easy to understand. Also, both student and instructor surveys asked whether detailed feedback is helpful in increasing student engagement.

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Use of Technology

Technology-related variables were of interest in this study because research has demonstrated that use of technology in the classroom is related to student engagement. Farmer-Dougan and McKinney (2000) discovered a significant correlation between student engagement and computer use; in fact, computer use levels were one of the five factors that were shown to best predict student engagement. However, Farmer-Dougan and McKinney caution that these results may be interpreted in two ways: "Highly engaged students may have been more likely to enroll in courses that require the use of computers… Conversely, courses that required the use of computers may have forced students to engage in a higher level of participation than non-computer use classes." Laird and Kuh (2005) found more conclusive results during a larger study of technology and student engagement using NSSE data for 60,000 students from more than 420 four-year colleges and universities across the country. Their results revealed that technology is associated with increased levels of several different variables related to student engagement, including academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, and active and collaborative learning (230). The benefits of computer use have also been demonstrated in FYC courses, where blogs, chat, discussion boards, and other computer communication components are playing an increasingly large role. Computer communication is viewed by many as combining the benefits of journaling or freewriting with collaborative learning techniques. For instance, Will Richardson, in his article "Web Logs in the English Classroom: More Than Just Chat" praises blogging as "an easy and inexpensive way to improve instruction, facilitate publishing, build community, involve

different audiences, and provide a lasting record of learning" (42). Furthermore, in their online article "Moving to the Public: Weblogs in the Writing Classroom," Lowe and Williams contend that students prefer computer communication because they "see the web as a public playful place different from the writing spaces they typically work in within the classroom": thus, the most important benefit of technology in FYC may be its potential to increase student engagement. Consequently, student surveys asked whether instructors use Blackboard to post announcements or materials, and whether the course involves computer communication components such as online discussion boards, blogs, chat, or wikis. Additionally, both students and instructors were asked whether these computer communication components are useful for increasing student engagement.

Institutional Involvement

Active involvement with campus life was another variable included in this study, since involvement has been shown to increase student engagement. For example, Berger and Milem (1999) studied student socialization into campus academic and social systems. They observe that "students are more likely to be satisfied with their education and feel a sense of loyalty to their institution if the institution promotes active involvement on the part of students in campus life and learning" (644). Furthermore, their results indicate that students who are involved in campus activities are more likely to persist. Therefore, Berger and Milem suggest that "it is important to identify [noninvolved students] very early in their first year and try to get them to become involved with some aspect of campus life, academic or social" (659). Consequently, student surveys ask if the instructor encourages students to get involved in Knoxville and/or the University of

Tennessee community, and both student and instructor surveys ask whether advising students to get involved in these communities is important for student engagement.

Demographic Characteristics and Student Success Measures

The last category of variables included in this study consists of student demographic characteristics and student success variables such as standardized test scores and high school GPA. As Eimers and Pike (1997) observe, students' previous academic achievement has often been related to academic success and persistence. In order to separate the effects of entering abilities from the results of student engagement techniques, students' SAT-Verbal or ACT-English scores, as well as their high school GPA, are of interest in this study. Additionally, research on student engagement and persistence has occasionally found interaction effects with gender and student engagement techniques. For example, Nora et al. (1996) found that the relationship between the students' nonclassroom interactions with their professors and persistence was significant only for females. A similar interaction effect with gender was found by Ullah and Wilson (2007) whose results revealed that cooperative learning and positive relationships with peers positively affects female students' academic achievement, but negatively impacts male students' academic success. Consequently, gender was included in the demographic variables for this survey. Also, to determine whether the sample of English 101 students was representative of freshmen at the university, students were asked whether their status was new freshman, returning student, or transfer student.

Description of Population

Clearly, FYC is an ideal site to study a wide variety of variables related to student engagement, since many of the techniques studied in the literature are frequently applied in FYC courses. At the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, FYC consists of English 101 and English 102, which are normally taken in sequence during the fall and spring of freshman year. English 101 was chosen for the purposes of this research, primarily because this study was conducted during a fall semester, and this study focuses on first-time freshmen enrolled in FYC courses. Although several sections of English 102 are also taught during fall semesters, these students either have entered the university with credit for English 101 (via advanced placement testing or transfer credit) or are required to retake English 102. Because very few traditional first-time freshmen are enrolled in these courses, English 102 sections were not included in the sample population. English 101 students are generally representative of freshmen at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, although it is important to note that students who have excellent scores on the SAT or ACT (equal to or above 680 verbal on the SAT and equal to or above 29 English on the ACT) are eligible to take an honors English course. Therefore, the English 101 population may not be representative of the highest performing students.

I did not ask instructors and students at other institutions to participate because of the time constraints on the research. Applying to conduct human research and each college and managing and compiling student and instructor surveys and data would have been an insurmountable task in the limited time available to complete this study. Consequently, I chose to limit this research to the University of Tennessee. While its student and instructor population is not as diverse as those of some institutions, the

university is sufficiently large and varied to provide reliable information for the purposes of this study. According to the University of Tennessee – Knoxville's 2007 – 2008 *Fact Book*, which was compiled one year before this study took place, there were 21,133 undergraduate students at the institution. Of those undergraduates, 5,895 were freshmen. The breakdown of ethnicities is as follows: 84.6% white, 9.5% African-American, 2.7% Asian, 1.8 % Hispanic, .3% American Indian, and 1.1% not reported (1). Approximately 130-140 sections of English 101 are offered in fall semesters at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, and each section contains approximately 23 students – a large enough number to provide for sufficient sample for this survey.

Rationale for Survey Method

The survey method was chosen for this research for several reasons. Surveys provide a noninvasive method of collecting data from a diverse sample of students, and they allow for relatively easy and speedy data collection, which was an important factor due to the time constraints of this study. Furthermore, the anonymity of the survey method allows students and instructors to potentially be more honest in their opinions. Research has demonstrated the appropriateness of using survey instruments to study student engagement, as well: a prime example is the NSSE, which has had its reliability and validity strongly supported by numerous studies.

Although surveys are useful and appropriate means of collecting student engagement data, it is important to note that they also have their limitations. Some respondents give unreliable answers due to misinterpreting or misreading the questions. Others may circle the same response every time because they are uninterested. Some

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respondents may skip questions or not reach the end of the survey. During analysis, responses that are left blank are not calculated, and the margin of standard error reported for results helps account for bogus responses.

Paper surveys were chosen rather than web-based surveys in order to increase student response rate. Students are more likely to complete a paper survey, particularly if it is immediately in front of them in class. Sax, Gilmartin, and Bryant (2003) examined student response rates in web and paper surveys. They note that "most studies have shown that paper and pencil surveys elicit a higher response rate among college students than do online surveys" (411). Their study of 4,498 freshmen at fourteen institutions revealed that students' participation in paper based surveys was significantly more likely than in web-based surveys, even when multiple reminders were sent to remind students to complete the online survey (417). If students are asked to complete an optional online survey outside of class, students would be more likely to forget or choose not to complete it.

Description of Survey Instrument and Procedure

Since one of the main research questions for this study concerned whether students and instructors consider the same techniques to be effective in increasing student engagement, both students and instructors were asked to complete surveys. Due to the limited class time available for collecting data, surveys were designed to take 10-15 minutes to complete. The brevity of the surveys has an additional benefit, because longer surveys may be less accurate since the respondents might become tired or impatient and less careful with their answers. In order to keep the survey instruments short, the majority

of the survey was multiple choice format; however, two short answer questions were also included in order to solicit more detailed opinions. For ease of administration, as well as data collection, Scantron sheets were distributed along with student surveys.

Student surveys recorded demographic characteristics, and measured the frequency and quality of the major variables discussed above: instructor interaction, active learning techniques, elements of course organization, use of technology, and involvement with the university community. Both student and instructor surveys also solicited opinions about the helpfulness of these techniques. An additional question was added to both student and instructor surveys that asked whether frequency of writing assignments positively influences student engagement. Furthermore, both surveys' short answer questions asked what techniques are currently used to increase student engagement, and what additional techniques of student engagement would improve the course. These surveys were administered within the last three weeks of class, which allowed the students time to be familiar with the instructor's methods and with the course, and to experience multiple encounters with the instructor both inside and outside of class.

A random sample of twenty-six sections, approximately twenty percent of available English 101 courses, was selected to participate in this study. Instructors of the randomly selected sections received survey materials in their departmental mailboxes. These materials consisted of a cover letter requesting their participation in the study (Appendix A.1) as well as an envelope containing the survey materials. Each envelope contained one instructor information sheet (Appendix B.1), one instructor survey (Appendix C.1), twenty-three student information sheets with accompanying surveys

(Appendix B.2 and C.2), and twenty-three Scantron sheets for students to record answers

to their multiple choice questions.

The information sheets informed survey participants that the purpose of the

research was to study "what features of First-Year Composition help students feel

involved in the classroom, interested in learning, and positive about their experiences," as

well as whether students and instructors considered the same techniques important, and

that their input would improve knowledge about methods for teaching FYC. Participants

were assured that there were no significant risks of participating in the survey, and that

their responses would remain anonymous. Furthermore, student participants were

informed that their responses would not be reported to their instructors and would not

impact their grade in the course; similarly, instructor participants were notified that the

survey would not affect evaluations of their teaching performance or their position in the

program. Of the twenty-six randomly selected sections, thirteen sections returned

completed packets, for a total of 9 instructors and 215 students.[1]

Once the surveys were returned, the University of Tennessee's Digital Media

Services transferred the data from the students' multiple choice answer sheets into an

Excel spreadsheet. Students' multiple choice answer sheets were transferred to SPSS

statistics software. Relationships between the variables and student engagement were

determined using correlations, t-tests, and analyses of variance. Students' short answer

responses were coded into main categories and entered into an Excel spreadsheet. For

instructor surveys, both multiple choice and short answer responses were entered into

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[1] Because these sections were randomly selected, and most FYC instructors teach more than one section of the course, it is likely that some instructors elected not to fill out the survey instrument twice.

Excel Spreadsheets. The results of the tests performed on instructor and student surveys

are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3 – ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The student and instructor surveys have provided useful and interesting answers to the two main research questions for this study, 1) What specific techniques can instructors use to increase levels of student engagement? and, 2) Do students and instructors consider the same techniques to be useful in increasing engagement? Student responses to multiple choice questions have revealed that student engagement is most closely associated with variables related to course organization, feedback and assessment, active learning techniques, and institutional involvement. In particular, the items regarding detail and clarity of instructor feedback, instructor eye contact, clear explanation of course goals and requirements, instructor encouragement to get involved with the institution, the instructor's greeting the student outside of class, and the use of active learning techniques such as class discussion and group work are closely related to student engagement.

For the most part, students and instructors agree about student engagement techniques. This study has also shown that with the exception of detailed feedback, which students rate more highly, and use of computer communication, which instructors rate more highly, students and instructors share similar opinions about the usefulness of student engagement techniques. Furthermore, short answer responses show students and instructors agree that active learning techniques and selection of interesting paper topics are techniques currently used to engage students; however, students were more likely to respond that interesting reading assignments keep them engaged, whereas instructors were more likely to respond that technology and daily graded assignments are used to

increase engagement. The study also revealed that students and instructors would like to have more group work in the course, and instructors are particularly interested in adding technology and multimedia. Surprisingly, the study also showed that many students consider themselves involved and interested in English 101, and that they recognize instructors' efforts to keep them engaged.

Are the Samples Representative of the University of Tennessee?

Demographic Characteristics

Of the 215 students who completed the survey, 44.2% were male and 54.9% were female. This is moderately representative of the freshman class at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville: as of Fall 2007, 50.6% of the freshmen were male and 49.4% female (*UT Fact Book* 1). Of the student respondents, 94.9% were new freshmen, 2.8% were returning students, and 1.4% were transfer students. This is not representative of the freshman class, of whom 73.8% were new freshmen, and 26.2% were transfer or returning students (*UT Fact Book* 1). The most likely reason for this discrepancy is that the majority of transfer students are not required to take FYC if they have previously earned credit for the course.

For the nine instructors who completed surveys, the number of years teaching First-Year Composition ranged from one to twenty-five years, with an average number of eight years. Five instructors (55%) were male, while four (45%) were female. Four instructors (45%) were ranked as lecturers, while five (55%) were graduate teaching associates. This is moderately representative of instructors teaching composition at the University of Tennessee, where approximately 60% of FYC instructors are female, and

47% are ranked as lecturers, while 53% are ranked as graduate teaching associates ("Faculty and Staff").

Previous Academic Achievement

The survey also gathered data related to previous academic achievement: High school GPA, SAT-Verbal score, and ACT-English score. One may compare the High School GPA of this sample with that of the freshman class as a whole. The vast majority of respondents (62.8%) had high school GPAs in the range of 3.5-4.0, which is representative of the freshmen class at the University of Tennessee - Knoxville: in 2007, the average high school GPA for first-time freshmen was 3.61, with 63.6% of students reporting a GPA in the range of 3.5-4.0 (*UT Fact Book* 15). Since the University of Tennessee *Fact Book* only lists composite scores for the SAT and ACT, it is not possible to precisely compare the scores of the sample with those of the student population. However, it may be noted that respondents scored in the upper middle range on both tests: of students reporting SAT-Verbal scores, 61.7% scored in the range of 549-649, and of students reporting ACT-English scores, 48.4% scored in the range of 24-28. Overall, both student and instructor samples were moderately representative of the population at the University of Tennessee, with the exception of student status variables.

How Were the Data Analyzed?

In order to determine which teaching techniques were associated with student engagement, a series of questions for measuring student engagement was included in the

student survey. These items, questions 36 through 45[2], were selected from student engagement literature, as well as from the National Survey of Student Engagement, and measured students' attendance, preparation, participation in the class, interests in the course, and attitude about the course. For purposes of analysis, students' answers on these questions were combined into one scale, Total Engagement. The Total Engagement scale was normally distributed (in other words, the majority of students had middle range scores on the scale, with fewer students scoring at the high and low ends of the scale). The reliability of the scale was .80, a moderately large reliability, which indicates that the separate questions on the Total Engagement scale measure one general construct, engagement. (A low reliability would indicate that the questions on this scale were not related to one another, and were not measuring a common factor.)

In order to examine teaching techniques and engagement, appropriate analyses were run to find out the relationship between each question and the Total Engagement Scale. Items required different analyses depending upon the number and type of their answer choices. Question 4 required a t-test because there were only two possible answers, (male and female); questions 1-3, 5, 20-24, and 33-35 required an analysis of variance (ANOVA), and questions 6-19 and 25-32 used correlations. Items with correlations above .400 were considered moderately strong; correlations between .200 - .400 were considered moderate; correlations lower than .200 were considered weak (p = .01). Because only nine instructors completed surveys, it is not possible to determine statistical significance among their answers. Instead, frequency analyses were conducted

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[2] Items 46 and 48 were originally intended to measure student engagement, as well; however, they were discarded since the Likert scale on these items was not comparable to those of the other items (i.e. the answer choices for these items were numbers of hours and letter grades, which were not compatible with the strongly agree to strongly disagree format of the other questions).

to show the pattern of responses, and generalizations were made from the data. Student and instructor short answer responses were coded into categories using key terms, such as "group work" or "freewriting," and the frequencies of the terms were analyzed.

Do Demographic and Student Success Variables Relate to Engagement?

Student demographic characteristics of gender and student status were not significantly related to student engagement. These results do not support some previous studies, such as Ullah and Wilson (2007) that have found gender to be a factor in student engagement. Although student status was primarily included to determine representativeness of the sample, it is useful to note that student status is not related to engagement, either: in other words, new freshmen, returning students, and transfer students do not have significantly different levels of engagement.

Previous academic achievement, including high school GPA, and SAT-Verbal and ACT English scores, was not significantly related to student engagement. This finding means that a student who performs better in high school is no more likely to be engaged than a student who does not perform as well. One reason for this finding might be that there was very little variation on responses to each of these questions: almost all students scored in the upper-middle range on the achievement tests, and the majority of students had high school GPAs in the top two ranges. For this sample, the lack of lowest test scores and GPAs is probably due to selective admissions criteria at the university, whereas the lack of highest test scores is likely due to top performing students' enrolling in honors FYC sections. The fact that these demographic criteria are not significantly related to student engagement might be considered a good thing: since one population is

no more likely to be engaged than another, more of the differences in engagement may be accounted for by instructors' techniques in the classroom.

Which Instructional Techniques Are Associated with Student Engagement?

The analyses revealed that the variables of course organization, feedback and assessment, active learning techniques, and institutional involvement were most related to student engagement. Although not every question in these categories was relevant, most of the items in these categories were strongly associated with student engagement. Conversely, student-instructor interaction and computer components categories had fewer and less significant relationships with engagement.

Course Requirements

Several factors related to course requirements were significantly related to student engagement. Of this category, the question "Course goals and requirements are clearly explained" had the strongest correlation with student engagement, at .451. Of course, since this is a correlation, it is not possible to know whether clear explanations of course goals and requirements encourage students to be more engaged in the course, or if engaged students pay closer attention to course goals and requirements: either explanation would make sense. Two other items in this category, "My instructor is well-organized," and "My instructor begins and ends class on time," were modestly correlated with engagement (at .378 and .210, respectively). These three items, clear explanations, organization, and effective use of class time, are currently used on FYC course

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evaluations at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville. The results of this survey support their inclusion on this course quality measure, since these items are associated with higher levels of student engagement and performance in class.

However, whether the instructor holds regular office hours is not significantly associated with student engagement. There are several possible explanations for this finding: one reason may be that almost all students reported that their instructors do hold consistent office hours; therefore, there may not have been enough "No" or "I don't know" responses to obtain a significant finding. Other explanations might include that students at all engagement levels are aware of the existence of the instructor's office hours: a more important question might be whether students make use of instructors' office hours.

Interestingly, the existence of an enforced attendance policy and/or daily graded assignments is not significantly related to student engagement. Perhaps this is because students' presence in the classroom alone is not a guarantee of engagement with the course. This finding does not support claims by researchers, such as Gray and Madson (2007), who believe that enforced attendance methods increase engagement. However, these results do not necessarily contradict claims that attendance policies contribute to grades, learning, or success in class: this outcome simply means that there is no significant relationship with student engagement. Thus, for the overall category of course requirements, instructor organization, clear explanation of goals and requirements, and efficient use of class time are associated with increased levels of student engagement, whereas regular office hours and enforced attendance are not.

Feedback and Assessment

On the entire survey, the item most strongly related to student engagement was "My instructor's feedback goes into enough detail," which has a moderately strong correlation of .481. Another item, "My instructor's feedback is easy to understand," also had a moderately strong correlation of .411. Apparently, the detail and clarity of instructor feedback are both associated with engagement: again, these correlations may have different interpretations. One possible interpretation would be that detail and clarity of instructors' feedback encourages students to remain engaged and interested in the course; another interpretation would be that highly engaged students care more about feedback, and are more likely to rate instructors' feedback as detailed and clear. In either case, any instructors who do not provide students with feedback on assignments and class work, but simply assign a letter grade, would be less likely to have engaged students. These results support claims of previous researchers, such as Trotter and Roberts (2006), who assert that "Good assessment will probably have a greater influence on how and what students learn than any other single factor" (375).

Although items regarding detailed and comprehensible feedback strongly correlated with student engagement, timeliness of feedback on major or minor assignments is not significantly related. Questions regarding how many class meetings instructors take to return minor or major graded assignments did not have a relationship to student engagement. Students who receive essays or homework assignments six or more days after they were turned in are no more likely to be engaged than students who receive items the next day. Clearly, the important question regarding instructors'

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feedback is not "When is it returned?" but "How much detail is given?" or "How clearly is it explained?"

Institutional Involvement

      Instructor encouragement for students to get involved with in the local and institutional community had a moderately strong correlation with student engagement, at .401. This supports previous studies, such as Berger and Milem (1999), which have found student involvement in the university community increases students' engagement. Perhaps instructors suggest activities that are relevant to the coursework, thereby increasing students' engagement, or maybe participation in the institution increases engagement in general. Conversely, it is possible that engaged students are more likely to recognize instructors' attempts to increase their involvement in university life.

Active Learning

      Active learning techniques, including class discussion and group work, were moderately correlated with student engagement. Of these items, the strongest correlation with student engagement was "My instructor leads class discussions in which students are encouraged to respond" (.355). The other items in this category, "My instructor primarily lectures without allowing student responses," and "My instructor asks students to work in small groups or partners for this class" also had moderate correlations (-.220 and .207 respectively).[3] Interestingly, the item related to class discussions is more significantly

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[3] The negative direction of the correlation on the lecture item is accounted for by the fact that this item is reverse scored: in other words, students who agreed that their instructors primarily lecture would be expected to have significantly lower engagement scores.

related to student engagement than the similar item about frequency of lectures. Also, class discussions are more strongly related to student engagement than group work. It may be that class discussions are more stimulating and interesting for students than some group work assignments.

Student-Instructor Interaction

Of student-instructor interaction variables, the one most strongly associated with student engagement was "My instructor makes eye contact with students"; this item had a moderately strong correlation of .471. This is a particularly interesting result: although good eye contact is an important skill for communication, I had only found anecdotal support for the connection between eye contact and student engagement. Apparently, instructor-student eye contact has a stronger relationship with student engagement than do any course requirements, active learning techniques, or institutional engagement. In fact, the only variable more strongly associated with student engagement is detailed feedback on assignments. The reasons for this finding are not clear: it is possible that instructor eye contact encourages students to be more engaged in class. Conversely, it may be true that engaged students are most likely to report eye contact, perhaps because the most interested and involved students receive the most instructor attention and recognition. Of course, a combination of these two explanations is possible, as well.

Another significant result occurred for the item "My instructor greets me if we see each other outside of class": students who answered "Yes" to this question were significantly more highly engaged than students who answered either "No" or "I don't know." However, there was no significant difference in engagement between students

who answered "No" and those who answered "I don't know." It may be that students who receive recognition and a greeting from their instructor outside of class are more likely to be engaged in class, although it is possible that more engaged students would be more likely to encounter and greet their instructors outside of class, as well.

There were also several student-teacher interaction questions that did not have significant relationships with student engagement. The other item measuring recognition of students, "My instructor knows my name," was not significantly related with student engagement. The most likely reason for this is that almost all students responded "yes" to this question, therefore there were not enough other responses to have statistical significance. Another surprising result is that frequency of contact with the instructor in person or through emails was not related to student engagement. One might reason that more engaged students would have more frequent contact with instructors, but that does not appear to be the case. Perhaps the reason for this is that these questions do not take into account the subject of the meetings or emails. In other words, students might contact the instructor to explain absences, ask for advice on assignments, or other issues that are unrelated to engagement. Also, the timeliness of instructors' responses to emails did not appear to be significantly related to student engagement. This finding is not surprising, considering that the frequency of emails was not related to student engagement, either.

Computer Components

Of items related to use of technology, one item had a modest correlation: "My instructor uses Blackboard to post announcements or materials" (.222). However, instructors' use of computer communications components such as online discussion

boards, blogs, chat, or wikis was not related to student engagement. This is a surprising

finding, since many instructors choose to use computer communications components for

the purpose of engaging students. Furthermore, this finding does not support the majority

of research which has found that technology is highly associated with student

engagement. For example, this outcome contradicts Farmer-Dougan and McKinney's

study (2000), which found that technology was a strong predictor of student engagement.

It is possible that these conflicting results are due to the specific questions asked about

technology: this section of the study only examined the use of Blackboard and computer

communications components, and does not include other online resources and

instructional activities that may be more interesting to students, such as social networking

websites or PowerPoint. Additionally, the computer communications item combines

several forms of computer communications which may have different effects of student

engagement: for example, discussion boards may engage students differently than blogs.

What Techniques Do Students Consider Most Helpful?

The survey not only correlated instructors' techniques with students' levels of

engagement, but it also asked students their opinions about the helpfulness of several

variables for increasing engagement. All items were considered on a Likert scale from

Very Helpful, 1, to Very Unhelpful, 5. The average for all items fell on the upper half of

the scale, between 1 and 3 (i.e. students predominantly ranked items as "Very Helpful,"

"Helpful," or "Neither helpful nor unhelpful"). Although these items do not have a very

large range of values (the range of scores was from 1.57 to 2.84), it is possible to rank

these items in order of students' views of their importance by examining the average

score assigned to each item. The items ranked from most to least important were: "Detailed feedback on assignments"; "Student-teacher interaction"; "Class discussion"; "Frequent writing assignments"; "Small group work"; "Enforced attendance policy"; "Being encouraged to get involved in the UT and/or Knoxville community"; and "Computer components."

One intriguing finding is that detailed feedback on assignments is, in students' views, the most important factor for "keeping [them] actively involved and interested in … class." It is somewhat surprising that feedback on assignments is more important for engaging students than student-instructor interactions outside of class or active learning techniques, yet this result reinforces the value of detailed, comprehensible feedback observed in the first section of the student survey. Moreover, this finding supports the claims of previous research on feedback and reinforces the focus on feedback and assessment found in the University of Tennessee's FYC program guidelines.

Overall, students' rankings of the importance of these items fall in a similar pattern as the results in the first section of the survey. Detailed feedback, student-teacher interaction, and active learning techniques are more valuable for engagement, and attendance policy and computer components variables were less important. The only variable that has changed position is the institutional involvement item, which had a moderately strong correlation with student engagement on the first section of the survey, yet is not considered as important as the other items. It may be that students do not recognize the impact encouragement to become involved in the institution has on their engagement. On the other hand, this finding may provide evidence for the interpretation that institutional involvement does not promote student engagement, but students who are

already more engaged perceive their instructors to be more encouraging of institutional involvement.

It is also useful to note that the frequent writing assignments item is fourth on the list of importance. Apparently, most students find detailed feedback on assignments significantly more important for engagement than frequency of writing assignments. This makes sense if one considers that frequent writing assignments do not necessarily mean interesting or engaging writing assignments. It is important to note that this finding does not imply that students do not become engaged in FYC through writing assignments, but that frequency of assignments is not the primary determinant of engagement.

Do Instructors Consider the Same Techniques Important?

Instructors asked about the importance of the same engagement techniques ranked the items differently. Instructors' mean values for these items fell between 1.33 and 2.7, which means that on average, instructors consider these techniques to be slightly more important than students do. However, instructors' opinions on which techniques are most important differ significantly from students'. From greatest to least impact on engagement, instructors ranked the items: "student-instructor interaction"; "class discussion"; "small group work"; "frequent writing assignments"; "enforced attendance policy"; "detailed feedback on assignments"; "computer components"; and "encouragement to get involved in the UT and/or Knoxville community."

The most striking difference between students' and instructors' opinions is on the item "detailed feedback on assignments": students rank this item first, at 1.57, whereas instructors rank this item sixth, at 2.11. In fact, of the nine instructors who responded to

this survey, three of them ranked detailed feedback as "neither helpful nor unhelpful."

This finding is particularly surprising given the prominence of detailed feedback in correlations with student engagement behaviors and in student opinions: this item was ranked highest on both of these measures. Evidently, instructors underestimate the importance of detailed feedback in student engagement.

Another important finding regards students' and instructors' opinions on computer components: although this item occupies a similar place on both students' and instructors' lists (eighth and seventh, respectively), this item contains the largest discrepancy in terms of average value assigned. Students score this item at 2.84, whereas instructors rank it at 2.22. In other words, instructors see this item as more important than students do for increasing student engagement. Instructors often consider incorporating computer components into their classrooms as a way of increasing student engagement, yet based on the correlations between this item and engagement as well as students' opinions on the subject, it may be that instructors would be better served to spend their time working with other student engagement techniques.

What Engagement Techniques Are Instructors Currently Using?

One of the short answer questions asked both students and instructors what techniques are currently used to increase student engagement in their English 101 classes. It is interesting to observe that instructors and students agree that active learning and selection of paper topics are important techniques currently used to engaging students. The differences between students' and instructors' reports are fascinating, as well: instructors were more likely to report that technology and daily graded assignments are

used to increase engagement, whereas students were more likely to respond that interesting reading assignments are used to keep them engaged.

Active Learning

Instructors primarily report using active learning techniques to increase student engagement. The number one instructor response of engagement techniques they currently use was group work – this answer was given by six instructors. The second most popular answer was in-class discussions, which was mentioned by four instructors. One instructor emphasizes the importance of class discussion for keeping students engaged: "Discussion usually is an important component of everyday class. I frequently challenge students to defend and expand their opinions, keeping them in a constantly ongoing dialogue with each other and the classroom texts." Another instructor reports using a variety of active learning techniques: "I routinely encourage ordinary class discussion… I ask many questions, often have students write down thoughts, then enjoy whatever discussion may follow. My classes are occasionally 'argument/debate' oriented, and small-group oriented occasionally. [For example,] we had impromptu debates one day, McCainites vs. Obamans right before the election." Clearly, instructors consider a variety of active learning techniques beneficial for student engagement.

The importance of these different active learning techniques is reinforced by student responses of what currently engages them in English 101: the largest number of students, sixty-one, mentioned that in-class discussions keep them engaged in class. According to one student, "My instructor is good at discussing things with the class. She always trys [sic] to involve the students, which is much more interesting and fun than being lectured." Another student echoes, "Active discussion kept me interested in class."

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The second most popular answer from students was that group work is used to increase their engagement (thirty-six responses): as one student wrote, "We do a lot of group work so we communicate and get involved with our classmates." Additionally, eight students reported that debates keep them engaged in class. One wrote, "By talking about previous assignments and engaging in debates, I have become more interested and involved." Eight other responses observed that peer review is a technique used to increasing engagement.

Most students report that a variety of active learning methods are used in class; for instance, one student's response shows the benefits of combining several of these techniques: "[My instructor] tries to get us involved by generating a discussion… and by making us think outside the box. He also allows us to do group work in order to get more involved with the discussion." These results reinforce the findings from the first section of the student survey that showed significant correlations between active learning and student engagement, as well as student and instructor opinions of helpful techniques in the classroom. Additionally, these findings provide support for previous research that has shown strong connections between active learning techniques and student engagement.

Technology

Another important engagement technique instructors currently use is technology, such as PowerPoint, discussion boards, blogs, and online activities. Instructors reported using computer components to enliven discussions about how and why students write. For example, one instructor observed:

We maintain blogs, and I try to make use of information/knowledge students

may have a facility with. For instance, we might look at an article in our

reader on blog culture, but then I'll pair it with a discussion of [a] social

networking site and what it says about us that we need to record our lives…

It's not the same as a diary but it fits the 'new' into an 'old' discussion about

the meaning inherent in writing.

Yet another instructor reports an innovative use of technology to increase interest in class

discussion: "I have students post discussion questions to Blackboard for selected readings

(they sign up to be a part of discussion groups responsible for the questions for a given

unit in the class). Students aren't required to answer the questions online; I put them in

PowerPoint slides, and use them as discussion starters in class." Of instructor responses,

there are five references to technology use. Technology is also mentioned by students as

a way they are engaged, but is not as large a proportion of student responses: there are

nine references to discussion board, six for online resources; five for YouTube; four for

PowerPoint, and three about blogs. As a point of reference, these numbers might be

compared to the sixty-one students who mention class discussion, or the thirty-six who

say that group work is used to increase their engagement. Thus, although several students

mention technology, they believe that active learning methods are more important for

increasing their engagement.

Instructors may see technology as more conducive to student engagement than do

students, but students certainly recognize the utility of technology. One student observes

how technology can be used to demonstrate research skills and provide examples: "We

used our computers in class to research sometimes. [My instructor] always uses

PowerPoint with lots of visuals which was good." The use of computer components to

supplement instruction is echoed by another student: "[My instructor] uses the internet and Blackboard during class and we follow along on our computers." Clearly both students and instructors' responses reveal that technology is currently used in the FYC classroom to increase student engagement, particularly in conjunction with class discussion. These results are somewhat surprising considering that student engagement was not related to computer components on the first section of the study, and that both students and instructors rate technology as less important than most other techniques of student engagement. One possible reason for this difference is that the survey items asked about Blackboard and computer communication components such as discussion board and blogs, but the survey does not mention the use of technology to supplement classroom instruction, which appears to be the focus of short answer responses. However, these short answer responses do support the finding that instructors rank the importance of computer components more highly than students do.

Course Requirements

Several instructors also agree that daily grades are important for keeping students actively involved. For instance, instructors report using daily pop quizzes, journals, in-class writing assignments, and other activities to promote attendance and participation. One instructor writes, "I do not actively enforce attendance because I feel that a better way for me to judge participation… is by having some type of assignment that is due each day (in-class writing, group work, reading response, etc.)." On the other hand, very few students mentioned daily grades as a method that instructors use to promote engagement: two students referred to reading quizzes, two more talked about daily

writing; four mentioned freewriting, and three referred to informal daily assignments. Although one student mentioned the role that daily grades play in engagement, stating "We do quite a few small in-class assignments that keep me focused on whatever the subject matter is that day," evidently most students do not interpret daily grades as a method of increasing engagement. This result supports the finding from the first section of the survey that there was no significant correlation between student engagement and daily graded assignments; however, it contradicts suggestions by researchers who suggest that daily accountability increases student engagement. The difference between students' and instructors' opinions on this subject may be accounted for by differing interpretations of the term engagement: it is possible that students think of engagement as interest in a subject, whereas instructors may think of engagement in terms of eliciting effective academic behaviors, as well.

Reading and Writing Assignments

This short answer question revealed much more information about the importance of reading and writing assignments in promoting student engagement. For instance, both students and instructors agree that selection of paper topics is essential. Three instructors report that they select paper topics about current events and other topics relevant to students' lives: for instance, one instructor states, "Inclusion of contemporary culture (TV, ipods, etc) can help engage the student." Three additional responses mention that instructors allow students to choose their own paper topics in order to increase engagement. One instructor writes, "For writing assignments, I give students some freedom, allowing them to choose ads, topics, etc., that interest them. I believe this helps

them take an active interest in their papers and the workshops leading up to the papers."

Another instructor emphasizes that student selection of paper topics may change students' relationships with writing: "[I] incorporate their interests – show them that in writing they can do what they want. Empowerment, basically." Students agree that selection of paper topics is used to promote engagement. Twenty students mentioned feeling engaged by relevant and contemporary issues, or, as one student terms it: "Assignments dealing with issues that affect us and our age group." A student observes: "The instructor uses many controversial issues of today to influence our writing which helps keep me interested." Additionally, eight students reported feeling engaged when they are allowed to choose their own paper topics. According to one student, "[My instructor] lets us choose what we write about for the most part. This keeps us interested in what we are writting [sic] about, and we still learn the material." Another student wrote, "The paper assignments were … interesting to the point of me actually enjoying writing them." Clearly, both students and instructor recognize the importance of essay topics in increasing engagement.

However, only one instructor observed that assigned readings are used to increase engagement. Contrastingly, twenty-one students reported that interesting reading selections keep them engaged in class. As one student remarked, "The readings are chosen to grab our attention and make us think." It is surprising that more students than instructors recognized the value of reading assignments for increasing engagement.

On a related note, eleven students reported that completing written responses to the readings encourage their engagement with the course: obviously, choosing interesting readings that encourage student reflection is important. These findings about the

importance of reading and writing assignments are interesting in light of the fact that students and instructors did not rank "frequency of writing assignments" very highly on the scale of helpfulness. These narrative comments appear to provide support for the earlier suggestion that frequency of writing assignments is less important: instead, students and instructors emphasize the role of choice of subject in encouraging student engagement.

Another interesting point is that neither students nor instructors mentioned detailed feedback as a technique that is currently used to encourage engagement. This is particularly surprising considering not only the importance placed upon detailed feedback on other sections of the survey, but also the fact that several other aspects of writing assignments were mentioned. Despite this strange omission, it appears that students and instructors agree on most of the techniques that are currently being used to increase engagement. Instructors place a relatively greater amount of importance on technology and daily assignments, while students focus more on reading assignments: however, both students and instructors agree that active learning, technology, and reading and writing assignments are currently used to increase engagement.

What Engagement Techniques Should Be Implemented in the Future?

Students and instructors were also asked what techniques they would recommend instructors incorporate in English 101 in order to increase student engagement. There were fewer responses to this category for both students and instructors, but the suggestions from both students and instructors primarily related to two variables: active learning and technology.

Active Learning

Their most common suggestion from students is that they would like more in-class group work (seventeen responses). Several students also suggested implementing other active learning techniques, such as debates (five responses), and more class discussion (six responses). Although both a large number of students and instructors report that these techniques are currently used in the classroom, students would like these techniques to play an even greater part in classroom instruction. Instructors also suggested that they would like to incorporate more active learning techniques, though active learning techniques were instructors' second most common response. Instructors report that they would like to incorporate a wide range of active learning techniques, including presentations, debates, in-class group work, and service learning projects. Instructors have dynamic ideas for increasing participation: one instructor writes, "I would like to do more with individual or group presentations, and I've been kicking around the idea of trying out some Oxford-style debates." Clearly, teachers and students would both like to see more active learning techniques incorporated in the classroom: these results support the importance of active learning techniques found in other sections of this study.

Technology

For this question, the most common response from instructors was that they are considering implementing more technology in the classroom. Four instructors mentioned adding multimedia components, two respondents mentioned specific online resources they would like to use in their classrooms - namely Facebook and online discussion

boards. One instructor remarks, "I'm willing to get more technical, 'visual,' in class. In literature classes I make more use of the 'smart' technologies … than in composition classes; but I'm interested in bringing more computer technology to my comp classes." Some instructors are more cautious about implementing technology: "I have been wary of trying Blackboard discussion boards, because I have seen those to be unsuccessful. However, I am willing to give online resources a try in the future." Similarly, another instructor worries about that technology might actually decrease participation: "I struggle with technology incorporation. My students love it, I've come to rely on it, but it can be so distracting for students… You cannot stop students from surfing the web..." Certainly technology presents problems for the FYC instructor, but most instructors indicate that they will incorporate more multimedia in their courses in the future.

Interestingly, very few students reported that increasing technology in the classroom would help student engagement; in fact, out of all responses, only three students mentioned increasing technology through online discussion boards, PowerPoint, or blogs. This shows that student interest in increasing technology in the classroom is minimal, a very unsettling finding given that increasing technology was instructors' primary plan for increasing student engagement. Yet this disconnect between instructors' and students' opinions of technology has been observed throughout this study: computer use was not related to student engagement, and students reported that computer components were the least important of various engagement techniques, whereas instructors ranked that item as slightly more important. Perhaps the idea of implementing technology in the classroom is less novel to students, who have been using computers and online resources for most of their academic careers.

Currently Satisfied

The most surprising finding on this item was that the majority of students reported being satisfied with their engagement in their current course. Twenty-one students specifically reported feeling engaged (this number does not count students who wrote "I don't know" or left the field blank). Instead, students wrote comments such as, "I think the activities we do now are appropriately planned to keep students interested," and, "Every activity and assignment has made me feel involved and interested." In fact, satisfaction with the current course was the most common answer of students who responded to this question. This certainly indicates that instructors are on the right track with the diverse methods they currently use to engage students.

CHAPTER 4 – IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The results of the student and instructor surveys revealed interesting answers to the research questions for this study. The student surveys revealed that the most effective techniques for increasing student engagement were eye contact, clear and detailed feedback on assignments, active learning methods, institutional involvement, and certain aspects of course organization. This study also found that students and instructors agree on the effectiveness of most engagement techniques, with the exception of technology, which instructors rank more highly, and detailed feedback, which students rank more highly. Furthermore, short answer questions showed that active learning, reading and writing assignments, and daily grades are currently used to engage students, and that more active learning and technology techniques will be incorporated in the future. Remarkably, this study also found that many students report currently feeling engaged in English 101.

First-Year Composition courses are uniquely able to meet the needs of students by implementing the most effective student engagement techniques from this study. Due to its small class size, the more time-consuming techniques such as detailed feedback and active learning methods are feasible. Moreover, using effective engagement techniques in FYC is particularly important since it functions as an introduction to academic discourse and to students' other courses; engaged students may gain greater command of course material and be more likely to retain their knowledge and skills from FYC. Additionally, since FYC is required for most students, it functions as a gateway to the academic and social communities of the institution, and engaged students may feel more successfully

integrated into university life. For all of these reasons, it is essential for composition instructors to be aware of student engagement research and to incorporate effective student engagement pedagogy into their courses.

Implications for Composition Pedagogy

The results of this study suggest several implications for composition pedagogy. First of all, instructors must realize the importance of clear, detailed feedback on student assignments. Detailed and clear feedback is strongly related to student engagement, yet students rate detailed feedback significantly more highly than instructors do. This finding suggests that instructors should realize that students do pay attention to their comments, and that instructors' comments have the potential to motivate the student to succeed on future assignments, and to become more involved and interested in the class. As Brooke Horvath points out in "The Components of Written Response: A Practical Synthesis of Current Views," "the evaluator's role as motivator is crucial, for it is in this role that the instructor speaks as the students' sincere (if somewhat artificial) friend, applauding their successes, empathizing with their difficulties, urging them to look forward to the effects certain remediations will have on their work, setting goals to strive toward, encouraging risk-taking, fostering the desire to write more and to write better" (248). Consequently, formative comments that treat a paper as part of an ongoing process of revision and learning are more helpful to students that those that simply judge the successfulness of a finished product. Formative comments offer suggestions for future writing as well as encouragement: as Horvath writes, "formative responses assist the betterment of writing largely by creating an atmosphere conducive to learning" (248). This study supports the

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role of formative feedback, since clear, detailed feedback on student essays is highly associated with student involvement with the course, and is, according to students, the most important technique for increasing engagement.

The results of this study also reinforce composition pedagogy's focus on active learning techniques such as group work, peer review, and class discussion. The results of this study indicate that active learning techniques are correlated with student engagement, and that students and instructors believe active learning techniques as helpful and would like to increase their use in the future. Since the 1960s, composition pedagogy has increasingly highlighted the importance of collaborative learning, group work, and class discussion. In 1984, Kenneth Bruffee noted the increasing importance of collaborative learning in his well-known article "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind.'" Bruffee observes that collaborative learning changes the way students think as well as the way that they write; therefore, composition courses "must involve engaging students in conversation among themselves at as many points in both the writing and the reading process as possible" (422). Furthermore, Bruffee argues that collaborative learning activities allow students to practice the discourse of their disciplines and to gain experience communicating with a peer group. However, he mentions that simply placing students in groups without guidance or preparation is not effective; instead, instructors must "create and maintain a demanding environment that makes collaboration… a genuine part of students' educational development" (434). The results of this study support the opinions of Bruffee and other scholars who emphasize the importance of collaboration and active learning techniques in the composition classroom.

One of the most central activities of composition pedagogy, developing reading and writing assignments, is important for keeping students engaged. Short answer responses revealed that choosing relevant topics for students to consider or allowing students to choose their own topics are useful engagement techniques. Additionally, it is useful to note students report being engaged by interesting reading assignments. These findings agree with researchers such as Carolyn Matalene, whose 1992 article "Experience as Evidence: Teaching Students to Write Honestly and Knowledgeably about Public Issues" highlights the importance of designing assignments that allow students to draw upon their own experiences. According to Matalene, students often have difficulty writing argumentative essays: they believe that they must not use their own experience, but write in rigid, impersonal generalizations. Instead, instructors must empower students as writers by allowing them to build upon personal knowledge rather than pretending that a line exists between public and private writing. After all, Matalene argues, "making one's own experiences or inside information into purposeful communication for an audience of peers is surely closer to the actual nature of producing academic discourse than is writing about someone else's topic and manipulating their information" (186). Matalene's opinions are closely tied to the findings from this study, which suggest that assignments which are relevant to students' lives are more likely to promote engagement, and therefore learning. It may be helpful for FYC instructors to solicit student opinions about which readings from the course were most interesting, and which writing assignments engaged students most, so that their reading and writing assignments can become even more attractive to students.

Another important implication for composition pedagogy relates to use of technology in FYC courses, since the use of computer communications components was not related to student engagement, and instructors rated computer components significantly more highly than did students. This study reveals that instructors must question their uses of technology in the classroom, echoing Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe's important 1991 article, "The Rhetoric of Technology and the Electronic Writing Class." Hawisher and Selfe claim that composition instructors have been willing to unconditionally embrace technology without considering its potential problems. According to Hawisher and Selfe, technology can perpetuate "traditional notions of education that permeate our culture at its most basic level: teachers talk, students listen; teachers' contributions are privileged; students respond in predictable, teacher-pleasing ways" (129). Furthermore, they observe that technology can decrease student engagement, taking up class time that could be used more productively, and even preempting student-instructor interaction. The findings from this study support Hawisher and Selfe's assertion that composition instructors must make informed decisions about using technology in the classroom, rather than uncritically embracing these methods. Although technology may be useful for other purposes in English 101, the results of this study suggest that it is not one of the most important techniques for student engagement.

Additionally, many of the findings from this study suggest the continued emphasis on small class size and student-teacher ratios in FYC. Small class sizes are conducive to many of the techniques that engage students the most, such as instructor eye contact, detailed and understandable feedback, greeting students outside of class, and active learning techniques. In fact, many of these techniques would by difficult, if not

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impossible, to use with larger class sizes. This result backs up a recommendation from the National Council of Teachers of English which suggests that no more than twenty students should be permitted in any writing class because "in sections larger than twenty, teachers cannot possibly give student writing the immediate and individual response necessary for growth and improvement" ("Statement on Class Size"). FYC instructors' abilities to provide recognition, support, and constructive criticism to individual students mean that English 101 has the potential to engage freshmen in a way that no other, larger, class could duplicate.

Significantly, the results of this study show that many students in FYC courses are engaged. The most common student answer to the second short answer question about future techniques was that students currently feel involved. This finding, coupled with the fact that students and instructors agree on the helpfulness of most techniques, indicates that FYC instructors are on the right track when it comes to determining which techniques are most beneficial for students. Therefore, one of the most important recommendations of this study is that instructors should continue to seek student input, experiment with techniques, and pay attention to research on student engagement pedagogy, because FYC instructors have a vital role to play in preparing students for their academic careers.

Possibilities for Further Research

The results of this study have implications not only for FYC instructors, but also for researchers in the areas of writing-intensive courses, student engagement, and higher education. Several of the most interesting engagement techniques discussed in this study,

including reading assignments, writing assignments, and feedback suggest possibilities

for future research. The purposes of this study required brief student and instructor

surveys that included a wide range of techniques; therefore, only certain facets of these

topics were included. For instance, the surveys asked about the importance of frequency

of writing assignments, as well as the frequency and detail of feedback, but many other

aspects of these topics may be important for engagement. Future studies might focus

more on what aspects of writing assignments and topics engage students, such as length

of assignment, detail of assignment sheet, genre of writing assignment, etc. Also, future

research might determine whether topics in the literature on responding to student

writing, such as format of feedback, positive or negative tone, marking of errors, and

other variables are related to student engagement.

Also, future studies might further examine use of technology in the FYC

classroom, especially why students and instructors had such different opinions about its

utility as a student engagement technique. Part of the differences in students' and

instructors' opinions about technology may be related to students' habitual use of

computers. It is also possible that students may see computer communication

components, such as those mentioned in the multiple choice items, as part of everyday

life, and therefore outside the realm of academia. Also, it is important to note that this

study limited discussion of technology to computer communications, but instructors

describe their use of technology in conjunction with instructional techniques: they use

technology to stimulate class discussion or to illustrate points. It is possible that students

are engaged by technology in ways that were not examined in this study, such as through

production of multimedia, use of technology in classroom instruction, or use of

computers for writing and research. Future studies may examine the impacts on student engagement achieved by a variety of uses of technology.

Future research might also consider experimental designs that would shed more light on the causes and effects of student engagement. Since the current study relied upon survey research and correlations and analyses of variance, it is not possible to determine whether student engagement increases the likelihood of reporting certain techniques, or whether certain techniques increase engagement. Future research might, for instance, measure engagement at the beginning of the semester in order to have data for comparison, or might examine student engagement after certain instructional methods were used to determine the impact of those techniques on engagement. Different study designs could potentially shed more light on the relationships between student engagement and FYC pedagogy.

Limitations

One of the most important limitations of this study is due to the fact that the survey was only given to students and instructors at one institution, the University of Tennessee – Knoxville. Consequently, this study may not be generalizable to other institutions with dissimilar populations. Future studies should attempt to study students and instructors at several institutions so that the resulting data would be useful for more FYC instructors. Also, future studies would benefit from including a larger proportion of students and instructors in their samples. Since only about half of instructors who were contacted administered this survey, it may be that instructors who care most about student engagement are the ones who self-selected to participate. Therefore, it is possible that this

sample population reflects students who are more likely to be engaged. Additionally, the fact that very few instructors responded to this study meant that instructor data could not be statistically significant; consequently, only patterns could be observed. Future studies might contact all FYC instructors in a department with a letter early in the semester, asking them to participate in the study, thereby possibly garnering more participants and increasing the significance of the resulting data.

Also, future researchers might improve upon the design of the study by clarifying the definition of student engagement. The terms "interested and involved" which were used to explain student engagement on both the surveys and information sheets did not encompass the full definition of engagement, which also includes the concepts of increasing effective academic behaviors, applying knowledge and skills from this course to other contexts, and thinking about the human condition. It is possible that students and instructors interpreted this term differently, and therefore considered different techniques beneficial. Future studies should expand the definitions of student engagement, both in the explanations to students and instructors and in the survey items used to determine engagement.

Conclusion

This study supports previous research about the importance of student engagement pedagogies such as active learning techniques, feedback and assessment, and course organization; the results also suggest questions for future studies of engagement through technology, reading and writing assignments, and student-instructor interaction in FYC. Equally importantly, this study suggests that many students are currently

engaged in English 101, and that instructors are mostly on the right track when it comes to determining which instructional methods engage students.

These results are important because, as Braxton, Milem, and Sullivan noted, the classroom "functions as a gateway for student involvement in the academic and social communities of a college" (570); this is particularly true of FYC courses, where students learn research and writing techniques that will transfer to their other courses, and become acculturated and involved in their institutions. Through the small class size and student-instructor ratio, instructors have greater opportunities to give students individual attention and use a wide variety of instructional techniques. Therefore, FYC instructors can potentially increase students' involvement in their courses, interest and retention of the subject matter, and investment in their institutions through the use of effective student engagement pedagogies.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LETTER

Appendix A.1
Instructor Cover Letter

October 27, 2008

Dear Composition Instructor,

I am writing to request your participation in a survey of English 101 students and instructors. The purpose of this survey is to research what specific qualities of student-instructor interaction and course design positively influence student engagement and interest in English 101. Your participation in this survey will contribute to instructors' knowledge of ways to increase student engagement in English 101, helping students to have a more educational and meaningful first year experience.

Your course section has been randomly selected to receive a request to participate. The survey is completely anonymous: neither you nor your students will be asked any identifying information. The information collected in this survey will not have any effect on evaluations of your teaching performance or your position in the program. This survey is voluntary, and should take no more than 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

Enclosed in this envelope you will find one instructor survey and twenty-three student surveys. Please distribute these surveys to students at the beginning or end of class, and simultaneously read and complete the instructor survey. Please return completed surveys in this envelope to the Composition office at 311 McClung Tower before Friday, November 21.

If you have any questions about the survey or procedures, please contact: Laura Orr (lorr3@utk.edu) or Dr. Mary Jo Reiff (mreiff@utk.edu). Thank you very much for your time in helping me with this project.

Sincerely,

Laura Orr

APPENDIX B: INFORMATION SHEETS

Appendix B.1
Instructor Information Sheet

INSTRUCTOR INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE
AND INFORMATION SHEET

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a study that involves human research. The purpose of this research project is to learn about the techniques instructors use to enhance students' experiences in English 101. We want to know what features of first-year composition help students feel involved in the classroom, interested in learning, and positive about their first-year composition experiences. We also want to know if there are any differences between what students perceive as helpful techniques and what instructors consider good teaching practices for increasing student involvement.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

Should you choose to participate, we would like you to fill out this survey. It should take about 10-15 minutes. With your participation in this study, you will give researchers permission to use data collected from this survey for purposes of the research project.

RISKS

There are no significant risks involved in this study. In order to preserve your confidentiality, these surveys will remain completely anonymous. None of the information we gather in this survey will have any effect on evaluations of your teaching performance or your position in the program.

BENEFITS

Since the goal of the study is to increase knowledge about writing and to determine best methods for teaching first-year composition, your participation in this research project will give you an opportunity to help improve both scholars' understanding of teaching writing and the quality of first-year writing instruction. Should you choose to participate, you will not only contribute information about your experiences in teaching English 101, you will also contribute your ideas and opinions about how writing is taught, and that information can have a direct impact on future writing instruction at the University of Tennessee and beyond.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or procedures, you may contact the project's principal researchers: Dr. Mary Jo Reiff (310 McClung Tower/ mreiff@utk.edu/ 865.974.6936) or Laura Orr (311 McClung Tower/lorr3@utk.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at 865.974.3466.

STUDENT INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE
AND INFORMATION SHEET

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a study that involves human research. The purpose of this research project is to learn about first-year students' experiences in English 101. We want to know what features of first-year composition help students feel involved in the classroom, interested in learning, and positive about their experiences. The purpose of this type of research is to help teachers and scholars learn more about what keeps students interested and involved in the classroom and to help instructors improve the teaching they do in courses like English 101 and English 102.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

Should you choose to participate, we would like you to fill out this survey. It is completely anonymous, and should take about 10-15 minutes. With your participation in this study, you will give researchers permission to use data collected from this survey for purposes of the research project.

RISKS

There are no significant risks involved in this study. In order to preserve your confidentiality, these surveys will remain completely anonymous. None of the information we gather in this survey will be shared with your teacher, nor will it have any effect on your grade in this course.

BENEFITS

Since the goal of the study is to increase knowledge about writing and to determine best methods for teaching first-year composition, your participation in this research project will give you an opportunity to help improve both scholars' understanding of teaching writing and the quality of first-year writing instruction. Should you choose to participate, you will not only contribute information about your experiences in English 101, you will also contribute your ideas and opinions about how writing is taught, and that information can have a direct impact on future writing instruction at the University of Tennessee and beyond.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or procedures, you may contact the project's principal researchers: Dr. Mary Jo Reiff (310 McClung Tower/ mreiff@utk.edu/ 865.974.6936) or Laura Orr (311 McClung Tower/lorr3@utk.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at 865.974.3466.

APPENDIX C: SURVEYS

Appendix C.1
Instructor Survey

<center>**Instructor Survey**</center>

This survey is part of a research project studying what features of first year composition help students feel involved in the classroom, interested in learning, and positive about their experiences. We hope you will be willing to help us with this project by filling out this survey. Your participation is completely voluntary. By completing this survey, you are giving us permission to use the information that you provide us here, but your personal identity will remain anonymous. The information you provide here will be used only for this study, and will not affect evaluations of your teaching performance or your position in the program.

1. **How many years have you been teaching English 101?** _____

2. **What is your gender?** _____ male _____ female

3. **Check one:** I am a _____ lecturer _____ GTA

Please place a check in the appropriate box:

How important are each of these items in keeping students actively involved and interested in your class?

	Very Helpful	Helpful	Neither helpful nor unhelpful	Unhelpful	Very Unhelpful	N/A
Class discussion						
Small group work						
Computer components (blogs, discussion boards, chat, etc)						
Student-teacher interaction outside of class (conferences, emails)						
Detailed feedback on assignments						
Enforced attendance policy						
Frequent writing assignments						
Encouraging students to get involved in the UT and/or Knoxville community						

Please answer the following questions:

1. What methods do you currently use to increase students' active involvement, participation, and engagement in your class?

2. What methods would you like to try in your classes to increase students' active involvement, participation, and engagement?

Student Survey

This survey is part of a research project studying what features of first year composition help students feel involved in the classroom, interested in learning, and positive about their experiences. We hope you will be willing to help us with this project by filling out this survey. Your participation is completely voluntary. By completing this survey, you are giving us permission to use the information that you provide us here, but your personal identity will remain anonymous. None of the information we gather in this survey will be shared with your teacher, nor will it have any effect on your grade in this course.

For the following questions, please choose the best answer and completely fill in the corresponding bubble on the answer sheet.

1. What was your high school GPA?
    A) 1.9 or less   **B)** 2.0 - 2.5   **C)** 2.5 - 3.0 **D)** 3.0 - 3.5 **E)** 3.5 - 4.0

2. What was your SAT Verbal score?
    A) 449 or less   **B)** 450-549   **C)** 549-649 **D)** 650 or above **E)** Not applicable

3. What was your ACT-English score?
    A) 18 or less   **B)** 19 – 23   **C)** 24- 28   **D)** 29 or above   **E)** Not applicable

4. What is your gender?
    A) Male   **B)** Female

5. Which best describes your student status?
    A) New freshman   **B)** Returning student   **C)** Transfer student

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6. My instructor is well-organized.
    A) Always   **B)** Usually   **C)** Sometimes   **D)** Rarely   **E)** Never

7. My instructor begins and ends class on time.
    A) Always   **B)** Usually   **C)** Sometimes   **D)** Rarely   **E)** Never

8. Course goals and requirements are clearly explained.
    A) Always   **B)** Usually   **C)** Sometimes   **D)** Rarely   **E)** Never

9. My instructor asks students to work in small groups or partners for this class.
    A) Always   **B)** Usually   **C)** Sometimes   **D)** Rarely   **E)** Never

10. My instructor primarily lectures without allowing student responses.
    A) Always   **B)** Usually   **C)** Sometimes   **D)** Rarely   **E)** Never

11. My instructor leads class discussions in which students are encouraged to respond.
    A) Always   **B)** Usually   **C)** Sometimes   **D)** Rarely   **E)** Never

12. My instructor has an attendance policy that is enforced.
      A) Always   **B)** Usually   **C)** Sometimes   **D)** Rarely   **E)** Never

13. My instructor requires daily graded assignments such as classwork, quizzes, or homework.
      A) Always   **B)** Usually   **C)** Sometimes   **D)** Rarely   **E)** Never

14. My instructor encourages me to get involved in Knoxville and/or the UT community.
      A) Always   **B)** Usually   **C)** Sometimes   **D)** Rarely   **E)** Never

15. My instructor makes eye contact with students
      A) Always   **B)** Usually   **C)** Sometimes   **D)** Rarely   **E)** Never

16. My instructor's feedback goes into enough detail.
      A) Always   **B)** Usually   **C)** Sometimes   **D)** Rarely   **E)** Never

17. My instructor's feedback is easy to understand.
      A) Always   **B)** Usually   **C)** Sometimes   **D)** Rarely   **E)** Never

18. My instructor uses Blackboard to post announcements or materials.
      A) Always   **B)** Usually   **C)** Sometimes   **D)** Rarely   **E)** Never

19. My instructor requires computer communication such as online discussion boards, blogs, chat, or wikis.
      A) Always   **B)** Usually   **C)** Sometimes   **D)** Rarely   **E)** Never

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20. How many times this semester have you met with the instructor outside of class to discuss classwork (not counting mandatory conferences)?
      A) Never   **B)** 1-2 times   **C)** 3-4 times   **D)** 5-6 times   **E)** 7 or more times

21. How many times this semester have you emailed your instructor to discuss classwork?

      A) Never   **B)** 1-2 times   **C)** 3-4 times   **D)** 5-6 times   **E)** 7 or more times

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22. How many total weekdays (including weekend days) does it take for your instructor to answer your emails?
      A) 1 or fewer days **B)** 2-3 days **C)** 4-5 days **D)** 6 or more days **E)** not applicable

23. How many class meetings does it take for your instructor to return minor graded assignments (such as homework, quizzes, or in-class work)?
      A) 1 or fewer days **B)** 2-3 days **C)** 4-5 days **D)** 6 or more days **E)** not applicable

24. How many class meetings does it take for your instructor to return major graded assignments (such as essays)?
      A) 1 or fewer days **B)** 2-3 days **C)** 4-5 days **D)** 6 or more days **E)** not applicable

How important are each of these items in keeping you actively involved and interested in your class?

25. Class discussion
A) Very helpful **B)** Helpful **C)** Neither helpful nor unhelpful **D)** Unhelpful **E)** Very unhelpful

26. Small group work
A) Very helpful **B)** Helpful **C)** Neither helpful nor unhelpful **D)** Unhelpful **E)** Very unhelpful

27. Computer components (blogs, discussion boards, chat, etc)
A) Very helpful **B)** Helpful **C)** Neither helpful nor unhelpful **D)** Unhelpful **E)** Very unhelpful

28. Student-teacher interaction outside of class (conferences, emails)
A) Very helpful **B)** Helpful **C)** Neither helpful nor unhelpful **D)** Unhelpful **E)** Very unhelpful

29. Detailed feedback on assignments
A) Very helpful **B)** Helpful **C)** Neither helpful nor unhelpful **D)** Unhelpful **E)** Very unhelpful

30. Enforced attendance policy
A) Very helpful **B)** Helpful **C)** Neither helpful nor unhelpful **D)** Unhelpful **E)** Very unhelpful

31. Frequent writing assignments
A) Very helpful **B)** Helpful **C)** Neither helpful nor unhelpful **D)** Unhelpful **E)** Very unhelpful

32. Being encouraged to get involved in the UT and/or Knoxville community
A) Very helpful **B)** Helpful **C)** Neither helpful nor unhelpful **D)** Unhelpful **E)** Very unhelpful

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33. My instructor knows my name.
      A) Yes   **B)** No   **C)** I don't know

34. My instructor has regular office hours.
      A) Yes   **B)** No   **C)** I don't know

35. My instructor greets me if we see each other outside of class.
      A) Yes   **B)** No   **C)** I don't know

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36. I skip coming to this class when I could have attended.
      A) Always   **B)** Usually   **C)** Sometimes   **D)** Rarely   **E)** Never

37. I come to this class unprepared.
      A) Always   **B)** Usually   **C)** Sometimes   **D)** Rarely   **E)** Never

38. I contribute to class discussions.
      A) Always   **B)** Usually   **C)** Sometimes   **D)** Rarely   **E)** Never

39. I pay attention in class.
      A) Always   **B)** Usually   **C)** Sometimes   **D)** Rarely   **E)** Never

40. I have a positive attitude about this class.
   A) Always   **B)** Usually   **C)** Sometimes   **D)** Rarely   **E)** Never

41. I discuss interesting ideas or techniques from this class with friends or family members.
   A) Always   **B)** Usually   **C)** Sometimes   **D)** Rarely   **E)** Never

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42. This class is more interesting than my other courses.
A) Strongly agree   **B)** Agree   **C)** Neither agree nor disagree   **D)** Disagree   **E)** Strongly disagree

43. This class is more helpful to me than my other courses.
A) Strongly agree   **B)** Agree   **C)** Neither agree nor disagree   **D)** Disagree   **E)** Strongly disagree

44. This class is more personally rewarding than my other courses.
A) Strongly agree   **B)** Agree   **C)** Neither agree nor disagree   **D)** Disagree   **E)** Strongly disagree

45. It is important academically for me to succeed in this class.
A) Strongly agree   **B)** Agree   **C)** Neither agree nor disagree   **D)** Disagree   **E)** Strongly disagree

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46. How many hours per week do you spend studying and working for this class?
   A) less than1 hour   **B)** 1-2 hours   **C)** 3-4 hours   **D)** More than 4 hours

47. How likely are you to reenroll in this institution next semester?
   A) 100%   **B)** 75%   **C)** 50%   **D)** 25%   **E)** 0%

48. What is your average grade on assignments so far in this class?
   A) A   **B)** B   **C)** C   **D)** D   **E)** E

Please use the space below to answer the following questions:

1) What activities or assignments does your instructor use to make you interested and involved in this class?

2) What activities or assignments would make you feel more involved and interested in this class?

VITA

Laura McIntosh Orr was born in Charlotte, NC, on October 30, 1984. She was raised in Charlotte, NC, and graduated from South Mecklenburg High School in 2003. From there, she went to Western Carolina University and received a B.A. in English Literature and a B.S. in Psychology in 2007. Orr received her M.A. in English in 2009 from the University of Tennessee – Knoxville.